Am I an Entrepreneur? Identity Struggle in the Contemporary Women Entrepreneurship Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research into their identity, women entrepreneurs still struggle to identify themselves as entrepreneurs and encounter role models. This study shows that one explanation for this struggle is misalignment in the discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity. Misalignments and fragmentations in discourses on identity prevent women entrepreneurs from finding discursive material with which to lay solid foundations for the social construction of their identity. By comparing and contrasting the academic discourse with the discourse from interviews with women entrepreneurs between 2012 and 2017, this study provides evidence that the discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity are misaligned. This misalignment may depend on the tendency in academia to address gaps in the literature and devote less attention to revisiting, in new empirical contexts, issues that have been considered in prior studies. This study also highlights several issues that are framed in widely divergent ways in the two discourses. The presence of several such misalignments helps explain current difficulties that women encounter in identifying themselves as entrepreneurs.

KEY WORDS: women entrepreneurship, identity, discourse, misalignment

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1. Introduction

The debate on women entrepreneurship has a long history in the academic literature (e.g., Bowen & Hisrich, 1986; DeCarlo & Lyons, 1979). Numerous scholars have studied issues that relate to women entrepreneurs' identity. Nevertheless, respected media sources such as *The New York Times* still publish articles with titles such as *Why Women Don't See Themselves as Entrepreneurs* (Cain Miller, 2017). The main insights of the aforementioned article are that today's women entrepreneurs (1) feel that they are outside the network of opportunities that are typically accessible to male entrepreneurs, (2) do not see woman entrepreneurs as role models, and (3) lack the emotional support that is necessary to address a venture that is often characterized by loneliness and risk (Cain Miller, 2017). These themes were addressed, at least partially, by academic research almost 20 years ago (e.g., Cromie, 1987; MacNabb, McCoy, Weinreich, & Northover, 1993). But despite the efforts of scholars and female entrepreneur associations, the salient issues for women who are involved in entrepreneurial activities are the same as they were two decades ago.

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After an in-depth review of women entrepreneur identity studies between 2012 and 2017, I observed the following: Scientific articles on the identity of women entrepreneurs seem to be misaligned with the concerns that are raised in *The New York Times* article. To explore this initial observation of academic misalignment, interviews that were conducted with women entrepreneurs between 2012 and 2017 were sought, identified, and analyzed. In these interviews, women entrepreneurs were asked about female entrepreneurship and issues that relate to identity. This analysis confirmed the initial observation of misalignment and led to the definition of the following research questions: How has the academic discourse on the identity of female entrepreneurs been framed in the last five years regarding salient issues from women entrepreneurs' own discourse? Is there a systematic misalignment between women entrepreneurs' discourse and the academic discourse?

The answers to these research questions are relevant in the current scenario of female entrepreneurship. They partially explain the difficulties that women face in identifying themselves as entrepreneurs and finding role models. In fact, in the presence of misaligned and contrasting identity discourses at the individual and institutional levels, identity construction becomes destabilized and precarious (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to investigate the degree of alignment or misalignment between the academic discourse and women entrepreneurs' discourse on issues that relate to women entrepreneurs' identity.

To investigate these research questions, relevant texts were systematically collected and analyzed. These texts, all of which were produced between 2012 and 2017, consisted of academic articles and interviews with women entrepreneurs. All such texts that addressed women entrepreneurs' identity issues were selected. This corpus was analyzed using *Leximancer*, an automated text analytics program. This method led to an unbiased mapping of the concepts and themes that are presented in the corpus and avoided the subjectivity that is associated with human coding (Rooney et al., 2010; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The extracted vocabulary, concepts, and overall themes were then analyzed as the linguistic material through which the identity discourses about women entrepreneurs are constructed

and sustained (Ivanič, 1998). This analysis showed that academic articles differ considerably from interviews with women entrepreneurs in terms of the concepts and themes that they discuss. This finding provides evidence of the misalignment of discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity. Suggestions on the issues that the academic discourse should address to align itself with women entrepreneurs' discourse are offered.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the theoretical framework concerning identity issues in women entrepreneurship literature and the relevance of discourse alignment and misalignment in conditioning women entrepreneurs' social construction of identity. Section 3 describes the data collection and analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the analysis. Section 5 discusses findings and presents the conclusions of the study.

2. Misalignment in Discourses on Women Entrepreneurs' Identity

The debate on the identity of women entrepreneurs has a long history in the academic literature. MacNabb et al. (1993) provides one of the first studies to explicitly address the issue of female identification in the values that characterize the role model of the entrepreneur. Earlier studies of female entrepreneurship were less explicit in addressing identity-related issues. Instead they focused on women entrepreneurs' personal characteristics and motives (Cromie, 1987; DeCarlo & Lyons, 1979).

In the years that followed, the debate on female entrepreneurship grew rapidly at the academic and policy levels (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This debate has increasingly involved the press and the media (e.g., Belk, 2016; Bounds, 2017; Cain Miller, 2017). Given its diffusion, the debate on female entrepreneurship identity can be framed as a discursive field (Snow, 2013). Different groups of actors (women entrepreneurs, scholars, journalists, politicians, etc.) engage in an identity struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) over the definition of woman entrepreneurs' identity, usually challenging or reproducing the archetype of the white male entrepreneur (Essers & Benschop, 2007). For example, women entrepreneurs' identity discourse is designed to create a sense of the self to answer the questions "Who am I?" (or "Who are we?") and "What do I (we) stand for?" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

This necessity for woman entrepreneur to create sense of the self emerges because the entrepreneurship field is characterized by the definition of entrepreneurs as being "intrinsically connected with masculinity" (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004, p. 407).

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it is beneficial to provide an example of this process of gendering entrepreneurship through the reification of certain characteristics that entrepreneurs supposedly require. This characterization causes the marginalization of persons who lack these characteristics. For a more detailed review of studies on this topic, refer to Ahl (2004). A good example is Fournier and Gray's (1999) criticism of the Du Gay studies of entrepreneurship (Du Gay, 1996). Du Gay lists some of the typical characteristics of an entrepreneur, including being competitive, working constantly, and being geographically mobile. This assertion of the typical features of entrepreneurs marginalizes all other men and, of course, women who do not have such attitudes (Bruni et al., 2004). While gendered entrepreneurship has been addressed in many studies over the last few decades, the literature and interviews collected for the period 2012 to 2017 suggest that concerns regarding gendered entrepreneurship remain in the academic discourse and in women entrepreneurs' own discourse (Belk, 2016; Lewis, 2015; Phillips & Knowles, 2012; Stead, 2017).

Given the aforementioned characteristics of today's discourse on female entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs' identity must be constantly redefined. This redefinition involves both individual positioning, or discursive activities through which each individual develops her own (or others') position in categories (female/male entrepreneur), and institutional positioning, whereby the positioning process is reproduced when discursive practices are extended from small groups to the political and cultural levels (Davies & Harré, 1990). The positioning of women entrepreneurs at the institutional level is strongly affected by academic writing about woman entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2004) because this academic writing contributes to the development of "beliefs and possibilities available […] in their social context" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 12). Moreover, academic writing is part of the social practices and institutionalized activities that contribute to defining socially constructed categories that support the social construction of the person (Gergen & Davis, 1985).

In this identity struggle, academic writing is a double-edged sword. Some scholars endorse the importance of academic research into women entrepreneurs to understand how gendered practices and ideas marginalize women entrepreneurs and prevent women from belonging to relevant entrepreneurial social communities (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2014; Stead, 2017). Other scholars have shown that most academic research on entrepreneurship in general and female entrepreneurship in particular actually encourages gender inequality (Ahl, 2004) or makes masculinity invisible, thereby supporting the process of "othering" non-male identity in entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2004). This study shows that there is a third way of considering academic writing in the current context, which is characterized by an ongoing identity struggle over women entrepreneurs' identity.

In fact, one neglected issue regarding the process of social construction of identity is the role of alignment/misalignment of micro- and higher-level discourses (Chreim, 2006). According to the social constructionist view of identity, all different types of identity are community generated and maintained by linguistic or symbolic entities (Ivanič, 1998). At the micro-level of discourse, these linguistic entities can be produced in talk-in-interaction or "concerted social activity pursued through the use of linguistic, sequential and gestural resources" (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 87). In talk-in-interaction, the role of alignment is fundamental in defining the identities of the subjects who are involved because the alignment of discourse provides participants with the framework that lends meaning, sense, and relevance to discursive practices (Zimmerman, 1998). The same relevance of alignment/misalignment of discourse can be found at higher levels of discursive activities. In fact, at the organizational level, the alignment of frames, or the templates that support the understanding of events (Chreim, 2006), leads participants to commit to defining their identity as proposed at the organizational level (Martin, 2002). Participants' identities are shaped by the development of narrative rituals that are based on specifically chosen organizational grammar and vocabularies in which individuals find the frames to understand themselves (Martin, 2002). Finally, also at the institutional level, the alignment of discourse and the supported categories may enhance the institutionalization process with, for ex-

ample, new organizational practices. Alternatively, misalignment could hinder the institutionalization process (Lockett, Wright, & Wild, 2015).

In this study, if the discourses at the individual and academic levels differ in terms of overall concepts and themes, there may be misalignment in the issues that are cited as relevant to the definition of women entrepreneurs' identity. In the presence of misalignments, the definition of women entrepreneurs' identity would be hindered at the micro level (Zimmerman, 1998), but at the higher level, the misalignment of discursive activities would also hint at a struggle among key actors (Chreim, 2006; Lockett et al., 2015), creating obstacles in the definition of women entrepreneurs' identity. In fact, a context where there is misalignment is characterized by turbulent, multifaceted, varying discourses about identity. Accordingly, individuals have no chance to choose a strong enough discourse "backed up by material and social support to offer a powerful grip over the subject" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1167).

Building on this theoretical framework, this study shows that some of the difficulties that women entrepreneurs currently face in finding support and role models for their identity as women entrepreneurs may stem from a systematic misalignment of discourses on the issues surrounding female entrepreneurs' identity. In particular, this study analyzes the alignment/misalignment of discourses, comparing the micro level of individual women entrepreneurs' discourse with the higher-level academic discourse (Ivanič, 1998).

3. Data Collection and Method

To analyze the academic discourse and women entrepreneurs' own discourse on women entrepreneurs' identity, texts that were published between 2012 and 2017 were collected. These texts consist of all interviews (available online) with women entrepreneurs and all relevant academic articles that address identity issues. The Internet was used as a source of empirical data to collect both contemporary and retrospective discursive material from women entrepreneurs. Doing so provides a longitudinal view of women entrepreneurs' discourse (Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Studies have confirmed the relevance of collecting texts that are present on the Internet or social media for discourse

analysis and identity studies (Coupland & Brown, 2004; Zamparini & Lurati, 2017).

The same keyword research strategy was used to align the collection of interviews and academic articles. The keywords were "woman [female] entrepreneur" and "identity." Results were filtered for the period 2012 to 2017. The same research strategy was employed on Google to search for interviews with women entrepreneurs and on Scopus to retrieve academic articles. The search retrieved more than 700 websites on Google and 61 articles on Scopus. After careful revision of the contents, the final corpus of texts consisted of 31 interviews (publicly available online) with women entrepreneurs and 19 scholarly articles that deal with women entrepreneurs' identity. Only the sections of the interviews that relate to identity issues were used. The final corpus of transcripts from these 31 interviews was collated into a document of 9,406 words. To build the corpus of academic articles, the following procedure was used: Given the primary aim of analyzing how the academic discourse on women entrepreneurs' identity is framed in terms of the relevant issues that are addressed and discussed, the theoretical framework and method sections were excluded. Thus, the corpus of academic articles consisted of the abstract, introduction, in which the investigated issues are introduced, and discussion/conclusion, in which evidence and implications are discussed. The final corpus, based on these 19 articles, consisted of a document of 44,280 words. During the analyses, the entire corpus was separated into two sub-samples: (1) interviews with women entrepreneurs who discuss their personal experiences regarding identity-related issues in female entrepreneurship and (2) pertinent sections of academic articles in which similar issues are discussed.

To ensure systematic, reproducible analysis to compare and contrast the two discourses in terms of linguistic entities, the *Leximancer* automated system of content analysis was employed. This system avoids the bias and subjectivity of human coding, and it increases the reproducibility of the analysis by deriving concepts and themes from word frequencies and co-occurrences (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). In the first phase of co-occurrence analysis, the system learns the attributes of linguistic entities. In the second phase, it delineates the relationships among entities and concepts in a reliable,
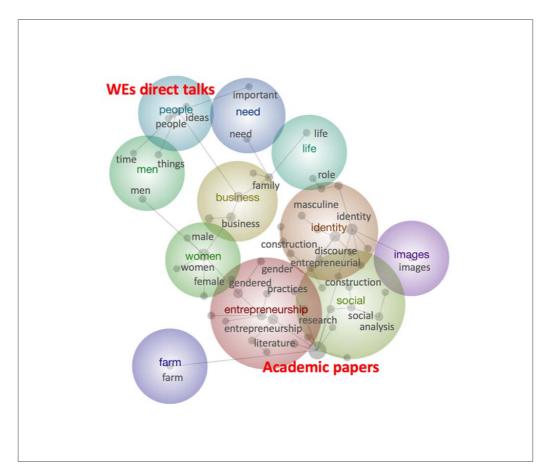
Figure 1. Concept map

reproducible manner (Penn-Edwards, 2010; Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

This method has already been applied in organizational identity studies to extract relevant concepts from interviews with key informants (Purchase, Da Silva Rosa, & Schepis, 2016; Rooney et al., 2010) and conceptually map extensive literature reviews (Cretchley, Rooney, & Gallois, 2010; Wilden, Devinney, & Dowling, 2016). Both these applications were used to analyze and map the concepts that arise from interviews with women entrepreneurs and from the academic literature on women entrepreneurs' identity between 2012 and 2017.

Figure 1 shows the results of the automated mapping of the relevant concepts and higher-level themes that were derived from the clustering of emergent concept groups (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The analysis, which was based on the two sub-samples of the corpus, enables visualization of these sub-samples' positions, or semantic regions, in the overall concept map (see Figure 1). The analysis also enables visualization of the sub-samples' semantic proximity, or distance, in terms of emergent concepts and themes (Rooney et al., 2010).

4. Analysis of Results

The conceptual mapping analysis reveals a clear semantic distance between the two discourses. Their semantic regions are characterized by different concepts and themes. Some of these discrepancies might be caused by differences in the vocabularies that are used

in the interviews with women entrepreneurs and in academic articles. To address this issue, all themes and concepts of the resulting conceptual map were investigated through in-depth analysis of the text excerpts to which they belong. This functionality is provided by the *Leximancer* system. It permits the retrieval and reading of all excerpts from which each concept emerges.

To investigate the possible misalignment between the academic discourse and the discourse by women entrepreneurs, two analyses were conducted: (1) analysis of differences in terms of concepts and themes that characterize the semantic regions that are closest to the two sub-samples of the corpus and (2) analysis of the way in which academic research addresses the concepts and themes that are closest to women entrepreneurs' discourse in terms of semantic distance. The first analysis highlights the overall differences in terms of issues that are considered relevant (based on occurrence and co-occurrence) in the two discourses. The second analysis sheds light on the failure of the academic discourse to address what women entrepreneurs consider the most relevant issues in the construction of their identity.

Careful reading of all excerpts that are linked to the higher-level concepts and themes led to the identification of two themes: *entrepreneurship* and *identity*. These themes are inevitably conditioned by differences in academic articles and the vocabulary used by women entrepreneurs in their direct speech. In fact, these themes, and the underlying concepts, pertain to both discourses. However, they are semantically positioned in the region closest to the academic discourse because these concepts occur and co-occur more frequently in academic articles. Nevertheless, the concepts of entrepreneurship, gender, identity, and role are also present in women entrepreneurs' direct discourse. These two themes display substantial alignment. Therefore, they did not require in-depth analysis.

Between or on the borders of both semantic regions are two overall themes: *women* and *business*. Both themes lie between the two semantic regions. Because they are equally present and are intrinsically related to both discourses (i.e., they could be considered elements of alignment between the two discourses), in-depth analysis and description of the underlying concepts was unnecessary. The themes that required

in-depth analysis are *social*, *images*, and *farm*, in the semantic region closest to the academic discourse, and *people*, *men*, *need*, and *life*, in the semantic region closest to women entrepreneurs' discourse.

4.1. The Social Theme: The Framing of Women Entrepreneurs' Identity Issues at the Social and Institutional Level

The first theme, with its underlying concepts, that emerges only in the academic discourse is the social and institutional level of women entrepreneurs' identity. Between 2012 and 2017, several scholars affirmed that women entrepreneurs' identity strongly depends on the broader social and institutional context. Examples of such assertions are "gender differences in venturing are perpetuated by the ideologies of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity represented in the broader institutional context" (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2016, p. 268) and women entrepreneurs' "sense of self is shaped by the social context" (García & Welter, 2013, p. 392). In addition, the issue of gendered entrepreneurship can be investigated and solved at the social level: "institutional and social contexts influence gender and provide better explanations than 'differences in individual characteristics or pure gender discrimination'" (Richomme-Huet, Vial, & d'Andria, 2013, p. 254). Indeed, it is unlikely that this type of vocabulary in reference to the social dimension of women entrepreneurs' identity would be directly employed by women entrepreneurs in their discourse. Analysis of the texts in the women entrepreneurs' corpus reveals no traces of the *social* theme, nor is this theme expressed using a different vocabulary In the women entrepreneurs' discourse on issues of gender differences, women entrepreneurs express no concerns regarding the social and institutional context. Instead, they directly affirm that specific actors such as financial institutions favor male entrepreneurs or that organizations display a "*man-dominated culture*."

4.2. The Images Theme: The Role of Female and Male Entrepreneurial Stereotypes in Women Entrepreneurs' Identity Construction

In the examination of gendered entrepreneurial identities, some scholars focus their discourse on the presence of female and male entrepreneurial stereotypes (Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Phillips & Knowles, 2012).

The principal idea is that gender differences are socially constructed. Images of women entrepreneurs employ "stereotypes which are often pejorative," and they are linked to the idea of "pinkness" or the so-called "pink-ghetto" of female entrepreneurship (Smith, 2014b, p. 466). In contrast, the masculine entrepreneurial image is constructed with heroic characteristics such as "achievement, dominance, aggression and independence" (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013, p. 889). The employment of stereotyped images is part of the process that maintains the gender system through "constructions of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those divisions (including language, ideology, dress)" (Pettersson & Heldt Cassel, 2014, p. 489).

Analyzing the discourse of women entrepreneurs identifies few traces of concerns among women entrepreneurs about the image implications of being a female entrepreneur. In fact, only one respondent links her entrepreneurial work to her image: "[Entrepreneurial venture] *is going to be your image and is going to determine who you are.*" Besides this statement, there are few indications that image is a relevant issue in women entrepreneurs' discourse. In fact, the issue of stereotypes is framed by women entrepreneurs under the theme of *men* (discussed in section 4.5). Women entrepreneurs are less concerned with stereotypes that are linked to their image as entrepreneurs than with stereotypes that are linked to their possible choice of maternity and their role as mothers.

4.3. The **Farm** *Theme: The Female Entrepreneurship Identity Construction in Farming*

With its tough working conditions of hard labor in the fields, farming has historically been characterized by masculine images and symbols that have created a system of a gendered division of work: "Inside work for women and outside work for men" (Pettersson & Heldt Cassel, 2014, p. 490). This theme, and its underlying concepts, emerges in the academic discourse through studies that depict farm tourism as an area in which new business practices have led to changes with respect to gender-related issues (Pettersson & Heldt Cassel, 2014). Such research is indeed interesting and relevant because it investigates how the introduction of practices from areas such as tourism, which are

characterized by female gender-related activities, can bring about changes in areas that are strongly characterized by masculine symbols. The same issue does not appear in women entrepreneurs' discourses, although some of the interviewed women entrepreneurs work in agri-businesses. The absence of this theme is probably because of the highly specific nature of the topic.

4.4. The **People** *Theme: Searching for People's Opinions and Help and Caring for Others*

The primary theme in women entrepreneurs' discourse on identity is *people*. Careful analysis of the pertinent excerpts that underpin the *people* theme shows that women entrepreneurs consider that their entrepreneurial venture is related to other people in two ways. First, they recognize that they need other people in some entrepreneurial activities such as (1) making decisions "*with some people I trust and who I believe can help find answers or help make decisions*" and (2) asking for others' opinions: "*Don't be frightened to ask people for their help or opinion*"; "*Get the opinion of people around you regularly*" because it is a "*way to gain information which will help you to develop yourself and your company further.*" Second, they perceive that their entrepreneurship activities offer a way to help people. Insights into this issue were gained by analyzing all the excerpts that contain concepts that relate to people. The following are just few examples: "*If my business does well, it will help other people*"; "*I wanted to explore a career* [entrepreneurial] *that would help people and my creativity*"; "*I could also help people who work with me to grow, because if my business grows, the people who work with me will also be able to grow.*"

The term *people* is not employed in the academic vocabulary. Therefore, the presence of the same underlying concepts in the academic corpus was investigated to find traces of women entrepreneurs' need to request opinions or help in decision making. No relevant excerpts were identified. Only Venugopal (2016) analyzes certain aspects of the relationship between women entrepreneurs' decision making and the opinions of others in relation to the intention to expand the entrepreneurial venture. Venugopal (2016, p. 8) proposes the following hypothesis: "The higher the support received from the referent groups, the higher the growth intention." The only other article that addresses the issue of the needs of others simply labels this issue

as "culturally accepted norms of femininity" (Phillips & Knowles, 2012, p. 431). The literature contains no traces of the importance that women entrepreneurs attribute to their role in helping others through their entrepreneurial activities.

4.5. The Men Theme: Men's Privileged Position and Specific Differences between Women and Men

The *men* theme reflects how women entrepreneurs often frame their identities in comparison with male entrepreneurs. This approach is multi-faceted. On the one hand, women entrepreneurs stress the unequal situation of male entrepreneurs who start from a privileged position in terms of opportunities to do business and the family-related identity: "*Normally they are men who have more possibilities because they still earn more. Simple as that.*" In their discourse, women entrepreneurs recognize that in entrepreneurship and in certain jobs, men occupy a prevailing position: "*We were all led by men*"; "*I work a lot with developers, and that is still a world dominated by men.*" Moreover, women entrepreneurs feel pressured by others' expectations about their family life, which is an issue that does not affect men: "*Men don't talk about work-life balance, we do! We have to be a perfect mom, but men don't say perfect dad or perfect anything.*" On the other hand, women entrepreneurs recognize that there are differences between women and men that can affect their working life: "*Men are more into math, and women are more into visuals and communication.*" Women entrepreneurs sometimes underline men's weaknesses, "*Guys are very numbers focused, but many of them miss the big picture,*" and sometimes depict them in a more balanced way, acknowledging male characteristics that could positively affect their entrepreneurial work: "*Women are more concerned, men are braver.*"

Following the conceptual links that were generated by the *Leximancer* analytics algorithm, analysis was conducted to examine the parts of the academic corpus that are linked to the *men* theme. The literature stresses that differences depend on gendered roles and that "the popular ideological conception is that men and women behave differently" (Smith, 2014a, p. 257) but "institutional and social contexts influence gender and provide better explanations than 'differences in individual characteristics or pure gender discrimination'"

(Richomme-Huet et al., 2013, p. 254). Seemingly, the academic literature focuses on the issue of gendered differences that could influence women entrepreneurs' identity. In contrast, the issue of differences seems to be addressed more pragmatically in women entrepreneurs' discourse. Women entrepreneurs express those differences with a critical sensibility, recognizing both flaws and virtues of men in an entrepreneurial context. They do not complain about these differences or the social construction of these differences. Instead, they complain about pragmatic differences in term of opportunities and the positions that men occupy.

Finally, the two discourses on the *men* theme display some misalignments regarding entrepreneurial stereotypes, as pointed out in the *images* theme. In particular, the academic literature focuses more on the stereotypes of the "heroic" male entrepreneur (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013) and the "pinkness" of female entrepreneurs (Smith, 2014b) than on stereotypes that relate to women entrepreneurs' maternity and their role as mothers.

4.6. The Need Theme: Women Entrepreneurs' Specific Needs as Entrepreneurs and as Women

The *need* theme reflects the multi-faceted position of women entrepreneurs regarding several factors. The first factor is what women need to pursue an entrepreneurial venture. For example, one female entrepreneur answers the question about why there are fewer female than male entrepreneurs as follows: "*It's a tough world out there! You need to be eloquent, have perseverance, strength and you need to want to take on responsibility.*" The second factor refers to women's needs. Even if they are involved in an entrepreneurial venture, women still have needs that are linked to their possible family ambitions and daily family activities: "*You love your kids and you have a side passion – it's possible for women to have both. It's a lot of hard work – you need to invest your time, energy and little bit of money.*" They affirm that they do not need to be categorized into male-oriented categories: "*I don't want to be a CEO. I don't need to be called a CEO […] to be leading the company*"; "*You don't need to become like a man in order to be successful.*"

The issue of what women entrepreneurs think that they needed to pursue an entrepreneurial venture is unexplored in the academic literature. Most studies address the issue of female entrepreneurship from

a high-level research perspective. This observation reflects the findings from the concept map and the analysis of the *social* theme, namely the social- and institutional-level factors that influence women entrepreneurs' identity. In contrast, women's attempts to reconcile entrepreneurial and maternal roles receive considerable attention in the academic literature (e.g., Chasserio, Pailot, & Poroli, 2014; Stead, 2017). In particular, a study of "mumpreneurs" (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013) suggests that women entrepreneurs' choice to be mothers and entrepreneurs at the same time is linked to the need to balance income and flexibility to achieve a work-life balance. The third concept that underpins the higher-level *need* theme has several parallels in the academic discourse. In particular, some studies address (1) the difficulties that women entrepreneurs face to become entrepreneurs without conforming to the stereotype of a male entrepreneur (e.g., Chasserio et al., 2014) and (2) women entrepreneurs' willingness not to be "dressed in masculine gear, and being domineering, very loud, very sort of pushy ... trying to be like the men" (Lewis, 2013, p. 260).

4.7. The Life Theme: "Just Go out and Do that" versus a Well-Balanced Work and Family Life

Finally, one theme that is nearest the content of interviews with women entrepreneurs is the *life* theme. Women entrepreneurs talk openly about their lives and about how they link their views on life with their decisions to become female entrepreneurs. Analyzing the text excerpts reveals transparent statements such as "*I don't believe you have to leave something meaningful for generations to remember you. You have one life to live*" and "*We're just human beings at the end of the day, with one life to live. Just go out and do that!*" In contrast, other women entrepreneurs are more concerned with family issues and seek a balance in their lives because they "*want to follow their passion*" and, at the same time, seek to "*have a good family life as well, not let business take over*" their entire lives. They want to "*still save room for family and fun.*" Interviews with women entrepreneurs suggest that their concerns for a well-balanced life in terms of entrepreneurial work are to earn a good income, have quality time to spend with their families, and live a personal life to feel fulfilled: "*I want to be financially independent, but my goal is not to be super rich. I want to have a fulfilled life*"; "*For

women, the biggest challenge is they want to be good mothers and, at the same time, also do something they love in life, work-wise.*" Ultimately, two different discourses emerge regarding *life*. Some women entrepreneurs clearly express their priority to achieve a work-life balance that is linked to their needs as women and sometimes as mother entrepreneurs. Other women entrepreneurs express their primary interest of pursuing their entrepreneurial activities above all else.

An in-depth analysis of the academic literature on work-life balance reveals several clues regarding alignment. First, different scholars address work-life balance (Gherardi, 2015; Lewis, 2013; Richomme-Huet et al., 2013). In particular, there is strong alignment between the concerns expressed by women entrepreneurs in their interviews and the findings of Lewis's (2013, p. 259) study, which highlights the importance of the discourse on work-life balance and the underlying concepts of ensuring a good "quality of life," "not being controlled by the business," "working reasonable hours," and "having time for family and friends." Gherardi (2015, p. 651) also acknowledges that "Female entrepreneurs nurture satisfaction by creating work/family synergies." Richomme-Huet et al. (2013) explore the motivations of mother entrepreneurs and the link to work-life balance. In more general terms, Smith (2014a) suggests that women must face the issue of balancing work, family, and the obligations of entrepreneurial activity. In contrast, no study addresses the alternative "*just go out and do that*" approach to female entrepreneurship. This approach, in some sense, resembles the masculine entrepreneurial approach, which is characterized by a muscular, risk-seeking attitude.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate the degree of alignment or misalignment between the academic discourse and women entrepreneurs' discourse on identity-related issues. Misalignments between discourses in a discursive field hinder identity construction because actors are unable to lay solid foundations for their identity construction in terms of "material and social support" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The presence of misalignments and divergent discourses can partially explain the difficulties that women still face in identifying themselves as female entrepreneurs (Cain Miller, 2017).

In this study, the empirical analysis of discourses was based on analysis of academic articles and interviews with women entrepreneurs. These interviewees talk directly about themselves and the issues that they consider important for women entrepreneurs' work and identity. All discursive materials were produced between 2012 and 2017. The empirical analysis of texts from this time span sheds light on the alignment (or misalignment) and the fragmentation of discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity-related issues.

What emerges from the analyses is that the two levels of discourse (academic and women entrepreneurs') are only partially aligned. Indeed, some misalignments are probably due to the tendency in academia to address gaps in the literature and dedicate less attention to revisiting, in new empirical contexts, issues that have been considered in prior studies. Nonetheless, if previously investigated issues are still considered relevant in the current empirical context, they deserve a certain level of interest from scholars, at least to discuss why, after numerous efforts to address these issues, women entrepreneurs still consider them concerns. The academic tendency to address research gaps is particularly evident in the *farm* theme, which is linked to an explicitly stated aim of filling a research gap (Pettersson & Heldt Cassel, 2014). This tendency is also exemplified in the *social* theme because of the specific need of academic research to investigate women entrepreneurship issues at the social and institutional level, even if women entrepreneurs themselves seem unconcerned with social and institutional factors. Lastly, the *images* theme suggests the presence of some misalignment in academic research. In fact, the academic discourse addresses the relationships between male and female entrepreneurial stereotypes. Instead, women entrepreneurs seem more concerned with the stereotypes that relate to maternity and their role as mothers.

Analyzing the themes that are present in the women entrepreneurs' semantic region reveals four relevant misalignments. (1) The importance that women entrepreneurs attribute to helping others through entrepreneurship is not addressed in the academic literature. (2) Women entrepreneurs display a lack of concern about the social and institutional forces that cause differences between women and men. Instead, they acknowledge certain individual-level characteristics that may cause these differences. This finding may result

from the gendered context in which they work, but it may also suggest a different perception among women entrepreneurs of the origins of differences between female and male entrepreneurs. (3) There is a difference in what women entrepreneurs think is needed by a woman to pursue an entrepreneurial venture. This perception might also depend on the male-oriented entrepreneurship field, but other explanations could be valid. (4) Finally, analysis of the "*Just go out and do that*" approach could be an interesting topic for future research into female entrepreneurship to understand whether this approach reflects impersonation by women entrepreneurs to align with heroic, masculine attitudes, or whether there is an alternative explanation.

To conclude, some remarks regarding the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research are provided. Certain limitations in terms of reproducibility, subjectivity, and bias of human coding activities in qualitative analysis were avoided through automated analysis of the concepts and themes in the corpus of collected texts. Thus, the emergent concepts and themes are completely free from any theoretical preconceptions of the author. Only in the second phase were the themes and underlying concepts investigated in terms of the meaning of the contents. Nevertheless, other limitations do apply to this study. First, given the necessity to refer to a specific time span, the study considered only a small number of interviews with women entrepreneurs because of a reliance on interviews that covered women entrepreneurs' identity and that could be found on the Internet. However, the interviews were representative of the overall discourse of women entrepreneurs on the Internet because all available online discursive material for the period 2012 to 2017 was considered. Second, the analysis was affected by structural differences between the vocabulary in the academic discourse and that of women entrepreneurs. This issue was tackled through in-depth analysis of all texts. Lastly, other actors such as politicians or journalists play a part in the discursive activities that shape women entrepreneurs' identity, so the present study can only partially explain the misalignment of discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity. Future research should address the alignment or misalignment of discourses on women entrepreneurs' identity by employing a more extensive corpus in terms of length and temporal scope. Interesting insights into the dis-

cursive struggle over women entrepreneurs' identity could also be gained by considering the discourse of other actors such as journalists and politicians, whose discourses play a relevant role in shaping the social construction of women entrepreneurs' identity.

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