



**TURUN  
YLIOPISTO**  
UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Focus on Women Entrepreneurs

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Riikka Franzén





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*To Linnu and Liius*

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## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial opportunities are considered not only to be the basis of any profitable business, but also to form the core of entrepreneurship domain together with the enterprising individuals and to have the potential for developing the field of entrepreneurship research forward. However, problems with operationalization and measuring as well as the clarity of the concept itself have hindered research. This has led some scholars to argue that despite the efforts, research on opportunities has provided only little useful knowledge. Albeit these difficulties, the concept has been conceived as useful for practitioners, and it is still widely considered focal for entrepreneurship research. Thus, I suggest that investigating opportunities from a social constructionist, and particularly relational constructionist perspective, which has still not become a mainstream approach in opportunity research, offers us new understanding and new avenues for future research.

This study aims to provide a contextualised understanding of how opportunity creation is constructed by women entrepreneurs. It concentrates on women entrepreneurs' talk to find out how they make sense of opportunity creation, what kinds of interpretations they make and what kinds of meanings they assign to people, actions, events, or situations in which they create opportunities. This study answers the call for contextualization in entrepreneurship research by investigating how women entrepreneurs' sense making and interpretations are formed in the cultural and social environment they are embedded in and how they negotiate understandings that can accommodate the opportunity and their business within the social and cultural norms and understandings of "how the world is". Furthermore, the study's aim is to understand women entrepreneurs' individual situations and their embeddedness in social structures and practices that enable and restrict their endeavors to create opportunities.

The research material consists of video-recorded conversations of a group of nine women entrepreneurs in addition to individual interviews with each one. The stories they shared with the interviewer and with each other are investigated as narratives to understand the context in which they talk about creating opportunities. When telling stories, people give meaning to their experiences and actions, simultaneously narrating themselves and their identities. The opportunity concept is fuzzy and unfamiliar to these entrepreneurs; thus, they are likely to lack vocabulary and, thus, to use metaphors when describing their efforts to create opportunities. The

entrepreneurs' use of metaphorical language is identified, and metaphors describing opportunity creation, business and entrepreneurs are built (maturing, pedaling, owner-building, jumping into water, conquering land, jigsaw puzzle, and nature metaphors). These metaphors also describe an entrepreneur's role and actions, to some extent, which are used to study what kind of picture these metaphors draw of entrepreneurs. The individual cases of these women entrepreneurs are used not only to build an understanding of their life situations, the ways they build the confidence needed to establish a business, and the strategies they use to create business opportunities, but also to gain insight about how these women entrepreneurs construct opportunity creation in different situations.

This study's findings tell a mundane account of opportunity creation, challenging the heroic account that has been prevalent in entrepreneurship research. According to creation theory, opportunity is not discovered based on an exceptional cognitive capacity nor on an exceptional ability to predict the future but is continuously created in interactions with the environment. Creation does not end when a venture is established but continues through the existence of the business, sometimes even in a different business entity. The social constructionist viewpoint says that entrepreneurs are embedded in the social structures and practices that enable and restrict their endeavors to create the opportunity. The stories of these women entrepreneurs tell how their expectations, dreams, aspirations, and actions to create an opportunity are influenced by their family situations, the decisions and attitudes of their family members, their own and their family members' health situations, and the assumptions, expectations, and actions of those around them. The stories of these women entrepreneurs present a picture of entrepreneurs as hardworking, active, responsible, persistent, and enthusiastic, even passionate. Enterprising, for them, is not just about creating wealth; it is more about a way to create an environment in which it is possible to generate a livelihood in a meaningful way.

This study contributes to the entrepreneurship and opportunity literature by bringing out the voices of women entrepreneurs who are often invisible in entrepreneurship research. Combining different kinds of materials and readings enabled us to add to our understanding of how women entrepreneurs construct opportunity creation in their talk and to gain a more contextualised picture of the circumstances and environments in which they create opportunities. The study indicates that even in one of the most equal countries in the world, women entrepreneurs cannot escape gendered social norms and practices when creating entrepreneurial opportunities.

**KEYWORDS:** opportunity creation, women's entrepreneurship, metaphors, narratives, social constructionism

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

Liiketoimintamahdollisuus ei ole pelkästään jokaisen menestyvän liiketoiminnan perusta, vaan sen on nähty olevan myös yrittäjyyden tutkimuksen ytimessä yhdessä yrittävän yksilön kanssa tarjoten mahdollisuuden yrittäjyyden tutkimuksen ja teorian kehittymiseen. Liiketoimintamahdollisuuden käsite on kuitenkin epäselvä, ja operationalisoinnin ja mittaamisen ongelmat ovat vaikeuttaneet tutkimusta. Tämä on johtanut käsitykseen, ettei liiketoimintamahdollisuuden käsite ole ollut tieteenalalle kovinkaan hyödyllinen ja ettei se ole pystynyt lunastamaan sille asetettuja odotuksia. Tästä huolimatta yrittäjyyden tutkimuksen piirissä käsitettä edelleen pidetään keskeisenä, ja se on löytänyt tiensä myös käytännön toimijoiden käyttöön. Näin ollen esitän, että liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien tarkastelu sosiaalisen konstruktionismin ja erityisesti relationaalisen konstruktionismin lähtökohdista käsin tarjoaa uutta ymmärrystä ja uusia tutkimussuuntia.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoite on tuottaa uutta, kontekstin huomioivaa ymmärrystä siitä, miten naisyrittäjät puheessaan konstruoivat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomisen. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan, millaisia tulkintoja ja merkityksiä he antavat ihmisille, asioille, tapahtumille ja tilanteille, joissa he luovat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia, miten he nämä ymmärtävät eli “make sense”. Yrittäjyyden tutkimuksessa tärkeäksi tunnistettu konteksti huomioidaan tarkastelemassa, miten naisyrittäjien ymmärrys ja tulkinnat syntyvät heidän kulttuurisessa ja sosiaalisessa ympäristössään ja miten niistä neuvotellaan ympäristön kanssa, niin että heidän liiketoimintamahdollisuutensa ja liiketoimintansa sovituu sen sosiaalisiin ja kulttuurisiin normeihin käsitykseen siitä, millainen maailma on. Lisäksi tarkoitus on ymmärtää naisyrittäjien yksilöllisiä tilanteita ja sosiaalisia rakenteita ja käytänteitä, jota mahdollistavat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomisen samalla kuitenkin asettamalla sille rajoitteita.

Tutkimusmateriaalina on yhdeksän naisyrittäjän muodostaman ryhmän keskustelujen videotallenteita sekä jokaisen ryhmäkeskusteluihin osallistuneiden naisyrittäjien yksilöhaastattelut. Naisyrittäjien näissä kertomia tarinoita tarkastellaan narratiiveina, joiden avulla jäsenämme ja annamme merkityksiä kokemuksillemme ja toiminnallemme samalla rakentaen tarinaa myös itsestämme ja identiteetistämme. Narratiivianalyysin avulla pyritään hahmottamaan erityisesti liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomisen ja hahmottamisen kontekstia. Tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin myös naisyrittäjien puheessaan käyttämiä metaforia, joihin usein turvaudutaan



puhuttaessa vieraista ja epäselvistä asioista, joille on vaikea löytää sanoja. Analyysissä tunnistettiin metaforista kielenkäyttöä, jonka perusteella rakennettiin metaforia, jotka kuvaavat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien tunnistamista, liiketoimintaa ja yrittäjiä: kypsyminen, polkupyörällä polkeminen, hartiapankki, hyppy veteen, valloittaminen, palapeli, ja luontometaforat. Yrittäjien yksilölliset tapaukset auttoivat ymmärtämään heidän elämäntilanteitaan ja keinojaan rakentaa luottamusta ja varmuutta liiketoimintamahdollisuudesta, heidän käyttämiään strategioita luoda liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia sekä sitä, miten he erilaisissa tilanteissa hahmottavat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomisen.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset kertovat yrittäjyyden arkista tarinaa, joka haastaa monien yrittäjyyden tutkimusten kuvan yrittäjästä sankarina. Liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomisen teorian mukaisesti mahdollisuuden havaitseminen ei perustu yrittäjän poikkeuksellisiin kognitiivisiin kykyihin tai kyvyn ennustaa tulevaisuutta, vaan yrittäjä luo mahdollisuutta jatkuvasti vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristönsä kanssa. Luominen ei pääty yrityksen perustamiseen, vaan jatkuu sen jälkeen, joskus jopa toisessa organisaatiossa. Sosiaalisen konstruktionismin mukaisesti yrittäjä on osa sosiaalisia rakenteita ja käytänteitä, jotka paitsi mahdollistavat myös rajoittavat heidän toimintaansa. Tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneiden naisyrittäjien tarinat osoittavat, miten perhetilanne, perheenjäsenten päätökset ja asenteet, oma tai perheenjäsenten terveydentila, sekä heidän ympärillään olevien muiden ihmisten odotukset ja teot vaikuttavat heidän odotuksiinsa, unelmiinsa, tavoitteisiinsa sekä liiketoimintamahdollisuuden luomiseen. Tarinat kuvaavat yrittäjiä työteliinä, aktiivisina, vastuullisina, sinnikkäinä sekä innostuneina ja yrittäjyyteensä intohimoisesti suhtautuvina. Heille yrittäjyys ei ole vain keino luoda vaurautta vaan pikemminkin luoda itselleen ympäristö, jossa työskentely on heille merkityksellistä.

Tämä tutkimus vahvistaa naisyrittäjien näkökulmaa yrittäjyyden ja liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien tutkimuksessa. Tutkimuksessa yhdistetään erilaisia aineistoja ja luentatapoja, mikä tuottaa uutta ymmärrystä siitä, miten naisyrittäjät hahmottavat ja rakentavat liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomista puheessaan. Tutkimus auttaa myös hahmottamaan erilaisia tilanteita ja ympäristöjä, joissa naisyrittäjät mahdollisuuksia luovat. Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan todeta, että myös yhdessä maailman tasa-arvoisimmista maista liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luomista ohjaa sukupuolittuneet sosiaaliset rakenteet ja käytännöt.

**ASIASANAT:** liiketoimintamahdollisuuksien luominen, naisyrittäjyys, metaforat, narratiivit, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi.

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In Pori, 16 August 2021  
*Riikka Franzén*

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# 1 Introduction

I found it fascinating when doing my master's thesis to learn why some people choose entrepreneurship and others do not. I came across some trait studies and learned that, for example, graphology and phrenology used to be considered a legitimate way to identify an entrepreneur in the old days. Those methods have not been used for a long time, but entrepreneurial traits have remained an important stream of research in entrepreneurship. Academic interest moved to investigating what entrepreneurs do rather than what they are like when this line of research was found incapable of revealing "truth" about entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship research until the end of 20th century had mostly concentrated on either the enterprising individual or on the environment of ventures. Years after finishing my master's thesis, when returning to the Turku School of Economics, I was introduced to the concept of entrepreneurial opportunity, which I found intriguing: What is an opportunity really, and where do they come from? Situations in which a particular commodity can be bought cheaper than its market price can be called an opportunity. However, if nobody notices this or is willing to act on it, is it really an opportunity? Maybe we still need to consider the role of the individual here – someone must perceive that situation as an opportunity and take action based on that interpretation. Thus, it seems fair to assume that the individual must not be forgotten.

My reflections on entrepreneurial opportunities took so many years that the research is already moving forward and the discussion of opportunities is becoming more intensive, even to the extent of using the term "opportunity wars" (Wright & Phan 2020) to refer to the recent discussions in the entrepreneurship field. Some scholars are claiming that efforts put into studying opportunities have been able to provide us with little useful knowledge and that the concept should be replaced (e.g., Klein 2008; Foss & Klein 2010, 2020; Davidsson 2015; Kitching & Rouse 2016; Davidsson et al. 2020). Opportunity is conceptually intriguing, but difficulties concerning studying it do exist. Scholars have recognised problems with operationalisation and measuring, as well as with the fuzziness of the concept itself (Dimov 2011; Singh 2001; Alvarez & Barney 2010; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson 2007). Taking this as my starting point, I began to wonder how entrepreneurs talk about opportunities; if the opportunity is such a focal concept in entrepreneurship, it

should somehow be present in entrepreneurs' talk. Because entrepreneurship research has for decades concentrated on male samples, women entrepreneurs have stayed understudied, yet they have the potential to add to our understanding of entrepreneurship. Already when observing the entrepreneurs' conversations and later when reading the transcriptions of my research material, I noticed that opportunities seem to be tightly intertwined with the entrepreneurs: their dreams, their ambitions, and their life situations. If this was not the case, if they could not connect with the opportunity cognitively and emotionally, it might not be an opportunity for them (Haynie et al. 2009).

Several authors have criticised the heroic nature of the entrepreneurial tale prevalent in entrepreneurship research as impeding the (theory) development of the field (Dimov 2011; Gorling & Rehn 2008; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson 2007). For example, Dimov (2010) has reflected on the almost supernatural foresight that entrepreneurs are supposed to have when being capable of predicting future prices. The path of discovering an opportunity and establishing a new venture also seems very neat and clear when looked at afterwards, although the reality more resembles trials and errors (Dimov 2011). I found it interesting to see what kinds of opportunity stories the entrepreneurs tell in my material. Are they consistent with the heroic tale, or are they more mundane stories about opportunity creation?

Thus, building on social constructionism, I concentrated on women entrepreneurs' talk to discover how they make sense of opportunity creation, what kind of interpretations they make and what kind of meanings they assign to people, actions, events, or situations in which they create opportunities. Adding a relational perspective, I also investigated how these women entrepreneurs' sense making and interpretations are formed in the cultural and social environment they are embedded in and how they negotiate understandings that offer space to accommodate the opportunity and their business within the social and cultural norms and understandings of "how the world is". Thus, my overall research question is:

How do women entrepreneurs construct opportunities, themselves as entrepreneurs, and their businesses in their talk?

We must remember when studying entrepreneurs' talk that it is produced by certain individuals in particular contexts. To be able to understand these contexts, and the meanings these individuals assign to different factors, I asked my research material this sub-question:

1. How do women entrepreneurs narrate their entrepreneurship and their context, and how does this inform us about opportunity creation?



The purpose of this sub-question was to allow me to understand the women entrepreneurs' individual situations and their embeddedness in social structures and practices that enable and restrict their endeavours to create opportunities.

The first sub-question informs us about the context; the second sub-question focuses on opportunities. Thus, I investigate how women entrepreneurs talk about opportunity creation, and more specifically, what kind of metaphors they use. Metaphors are often used when explaining something abstract or new for which words do not necessarily exist. The creation of entrepreneurial opportunities is presumably difficult to explain, so entrepreneurs may be prone to metaphorical use of language. Based on what kind of words and language the entrepreneurs used, I contemplated the meaning of the metaphor, put flesh on them, and linked them with the opportunity research to be able to answer my sub-question:

2. What kind of metaphors do entrepreneurs use when talking about entrepreneurial opportunities, and how do they inform us about opportunity creation?

The answers to these questions can be combined to provide a contextualised understanding of how opportunity creation is constructed by women entrepreneurs. This thesis does that by providing a relevant and comprehensive enough theoretical background by discussing the concept of opportunity, the two views of how opportunities come into existence (discovery and creation theory), and then focusing on the creation theory, looking at creation opportunities and how opportunity creation has been studied earlier (Chapter 2). Some scholars have advocated the abandonment of opportunities in entrepreneurship research. Instead, I suggest that taking a social constructionist perspective, which has still not become a mainstream approach in opportunity research, might offer us new understanding and new avenues for future research (Chapter 3).

The environments and social contexts in which entrepreneurs live and create opportunities cannot be left aside. Rather, a deeper understanding of the contexts offer opportunities to develop our theories and have greater rigor and relevance (Zahra 2007). I present some contextual factors in Chapter 4 that, according to prior research, are especially present in women entrepreneurs' lives.

I describe how I conducted the study in Chapter 5. I present the methodological choices I made, introduce the metaphor concept and continue to show how they can be used in research, especially in entrepreneurship research. I also introduce my research materials in this chapter and offer a glimpse of the entrepreneurs with whom the materials were produced. I close the chapter by describing how I used the materials to find answers to my research questions, identifying and building on the

metaphors used by the entrepreneurs, and investigating the stories they shared with me and with each other as narratives.

I present my findings in Chapter 6. I start by presenting the findings concerning each entrepreneur. I focus here on how the women entrepreneurs narrate themselves and their context, how they talk about building their confidence and, finally, how they describe creating the opportunities. In the headings, I bring up characteristics that seem to be emphasised in their stories. After describing the findings according to individual entrepreneurs, I concentrate on how the entrepreneurs narrate themselves, how they build causality in their stories and how they narrate the context in which they had been creating opportunities. I then move on to present the metaphors for opportunity creation that I elicited based on the entrepreneurs' talk. I also discuss what kind of picture the metaphors draw about entrepreneurs in general.

Finally, I draw conclusions in Chapter 7 and discuss the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of my study as well as the ideas for future research it has evoked.

## 2 Entrepreneurial Opportunities

### 2.1 Two Views of the Opportunity Formation Process

Significant research effort has been devoted to studying entrepreneurial opportunities since the pioneering article, “The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research” was published by Shane and Venkataraman (2000). The “Promise” article brought opportunities to the scene of entrepreneurship research as a concept that was helpful in justifying entrepreneurship as a separate research field and moving the field forward by strengthening its theoretical base – a lack that the field had been criticised for (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shane 2012; Short, Ketchen, Shook & Ireland 2010). It suggested that opportunities form the core of the entrepreneurship domain together with the enterprising individuals (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Before the shift of the millennium, the focus of entrepreneurship research had been the characteristics and behavior of individual entrepreneurs (Shane 2003). However, the entrepreneurial characteristics research was unable to demonstrate plausible explanations for entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1998), partly because entrepreneurial activity is episodic, and explaining episodic activity with (more or less) stable characteristics is unlikely to be successful (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003). After recognising these challenges, the research focus shifted to entrepreneurs' behaviour.

The questions about the emergence of opportunities have invoked conversations and debates among entrepreneurship scholars for several decades. The “Promise” article was followed by “The general theory of entrepreneurs: the individual – opportunity nexus” by Shane (2003), which laid the groundwork for discovery theory. According to discovery theory, entrepreneurial opportunities are formed based on inefficiencies in market forces, and they exist objectively and independently from the individuals who discover them (Shane & Venkataraman 2000, Shane 2003, Eckhard & Shane 2003). The creation view started to take shape around the same time with the formulation of Sarasvathy's theory of effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001, 2008) and the consideration of the role of bricolage in venture creation and growth (Baker & Nelson 2005). Creation theory sees opportunities as subjective and dependent on the entrepreneur who creates them. Entrepreneurs have

idiosyncratic beliefs about the world, and when acting according to these beliefs, they create the opportunity in interaction with their environment (Dimov 2011; Alvarez & Barney 2007, 2010; Wood & McKinley 2010; Cornelissen & Clarke 2010, Cornelissen 2012). However, the ideas belonging to the creation view were not combined into a consistent theory until Alvarez and Barney’s (2007) first attempt to clarify the assumptions and distinctions of the two views in their article “Discovery and creation: alternative theories of entrepreneurial action”. As noted by Alvarez and Barney (2007), both of these theories belong to teleological theories, meaning that they both try to explain the behavior of individuals by considering how that behavior helps them to achieve their goals. However, these theories produce different prognoses about what kinds of actions are effective when forming opportunities and exploiting them in certain contexts (Alvarez & Barney, 2007). Alvarez and Barney (2007) have listed the main differences between the discovery and creation theories (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** The main differences between discovery and creation theories (Alvarez & Barney, 2007).

**Central assumptions of discovery and creation theories in entrepreneurial action**

	<b>Discovery</b>	<b>Creation</b>
Nature of Opportunities	Opportunities exist, independent of entrepreneurs. Applies a realist philosophy.	Opportunities do not exist independent of entrepreneurs. Applies an evolutionary realist philosophy.
Nature of Entrepreneurs	Differ in some important ways from non-entrepreneurs, ex-ante.	May or may not differ from non-entrepreneurs, ex-ante. Differences may emerge, ex-post.
Nature of Decision Making Context	Risky	Uncertain

Table 1 shows that the discovery and creation theories hold different assumptions concerning the nature of opportunities, the nature of entrepreneurs and the nature of the decision-making context. According to discovery theory, entrepreneurial opportunities come into existence because market forces are not functioning effectively. These market equilibrium disruptions are generated by exogenous shocks that occur because of technological, regulatory, political, social or demographic changes (Shane 2003). Opportunities are seen as objectively existing, independently from their discoverers. Alvarez and Barney (2007) have used the Mount Everest example to illustrate this objectivity: Just as Mount Everest exists

with or without us seeing it, opportunities are also formed and exist independent from entrepreneurs, waiting to be discovered.

The Discovery theory view is that important ex-ante differences exist between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs. Research has found evidence for differences related to alertness, for example (Kirzner 1997, 1999, 2009), which refers to the entrepreneur's ability to notice opportunities without search, different personality traits (e.g., the big five), internal locus of control (Minniti 2010; Koellinger et al. 2007; Simon et al. 2000), and self-efficacy that refers to an individual's belief that they can accomplish a given task (Bandura 1977; Shepherd 2003; Chen et al. 1998; Gist & Mitchell 1992). According to a research stream emphasising entrepreneurs' cognitive characteristics and prior knowledge (cognitive view), entrepreneurs differ from non-entrepreneurs in their learning and reasoning skills that enable them to absorb and process information in a way that makes them more apt to identify certain opportunities (Dimov, 2007). Aspects of human cognition have been studied related to opportunity recognition, e.g., the formation of intentions (Krueger et al. 2000; Krueger 2003, 2009), the effect of prior knowledge in opportunity recognition (Shane 2000), experience (Gruber et al. 2008; Delmar & Shane 2006; Dimov 2010), cognitive scripts and their role in venture creation process (Mitchell et al. 2000), cognitive frameworks like prototypes (Baron & Ensley 2006) or opportunity templates (Barreto 2012). Creation theory acknowledges the potential of the research on cognitions (Alvarez & Barney 2007; Ucbasaran et al. 2001; Edelman & Yli-Renko 2010) and acknowledges that some of the differences found might exist ex-post. However, many studies have compared entrepreneurs with non-entrepreneurs, and because entrepreneurship is episodic, so the differences may result from the experience of acting as an entrepreneur (Alvarez & Barney 2007). Some limitations of this stream of research have been noted, for example, that the studies within this view tend to treat entrepreneurs in isolation from their social environment; it also does not explain how entrepreneurs use their creativity to create opportunities that surpass their experiences (Cornelissen & Clarke 2010).

Discovery theory sees the decision-making context of entrepreneurs as risky, but because the possible futures and their respective likelihood cannot be calculated in many cases, creation theory argues that the context involves uncertainty rather than risk. The emphasis of this so-called Knightian uncertainty has been seen as one of the important theoretical developments that research on opportunities has brought to entrepreneurship theory (Alvarez & Barney 2020).

Discovery theory has tried to formulate a process model of the entrepreneurial process, starting with discovering (thanks to the knowledge, information and the cognitive capacity the individual possesses, e.g., Baron et al. 2006) the opportunity (that has emerged because of inefficiencies of the markets), evaluating the discovered opportunity (e.g., Haynie et al. 2009), and possibly developing it (e.g.

Ardichvili et al. 2003) before moving to exploit the opportunity. However, it has been criticised for presenting the process as neat and clean when looked at afterwards, although the reality more resembles trial and error (Dimov 2011).

## 2.2 The Philosophical Assumptions of the Discovery and Creation Theories

Discovery theory builds on critical realist epistemology, which developed based on realism and positivism (Shane & Venkataraman 2000; Shane 2012; Alvarez & Barney 2007, 2010, 2013; Alvarez et al. 2014). Positivism claims that all studied phenomena must be observable and measurable, yet critical realists see that it is possible to also study nonobservable phenomena. Direct observations are not needed, because knowledge can be obtained by examining mechanisms that are real but unobservable (Töttö 2004 p. 250 – 256). However, several mechanisms act simultaneously and some of them can preclude others in open systems. Open systems are problematic, because an event can be explained but it cannot be predicted with the mechanism (Töttö 2004 p. 255 – 256). However, not only are closed systems practically impossible to find, but this is also true of totally open systems. Töttö notes that, in reality, all systems seem to be located somewhere between these extremes. It means that if conformity = causality in closed systems, and conformity  $\neq$  causality in open systems, then conformity  $\approx$  causality in practice (Töttö 2004, p. 270 - 271). Mechanisms can be revealed by constructing closed systems in experiments in which only one causal mechanism can operate at a time. Such conditions can be costly or even impossible to arrange because, as in the social sciences, abstraction is the only real option for researchers (Töttö 2004 p. 262 - 264).

According to Bhaskar, an objective reality exists that is independent from individuals' perceptions or thoughts (Alvarez & Barney 2010). Social reality is similarly independent of individuals' thoughts, which makes it possible to study it using the scientific method (Alvarez & Barney 2010). Alvarez and Barney (2013) note that, according to critical realism, the discovery theory's proposition that opportunities exist independent of their observation is not testable, because opportunities cannot be observed and measured.

Creation theory applies evolutionary realist philosophy (Alvarez & Barney 2007, 2010). According to Alvarez et al. (2014), social institutions are epistemologically objective (as opposed to ontologically objective) things, meaning that they cease to exist if people stop believing in their existence. The existence of ontologically objective things, such as rocks, trees, or houses, does not depend on peoples' beliefs: They continue existing whether we believe in their existence or not. Evolutionary realism has emerged from the debate between critical realism and social constructionism, and it incorporates many ideas of social constructionism (Alvarez

& Barney 2010). The evolutionary realism viewpoint is that individuals' social constructions may conflict with other phenomena – either other people's dominant constructs or objective phenomena. Individuals' constructions are replaced over time with constructions that are more consistent with the objective reality or the dominant constructions of reality (Alvarez & Barney 2010). According to Alvarez & Barney (2010), although it might seem that the objective reality may have same kind of effects as dominant socially constructed reality, there are important differences that lead to very different assumptions of opportunities whether considered from a critical realist or an evolutionary realist viewpoint. My aim in this study is to examine opportunity creation from the social constructionist perspective.

## 2.3 Focusing on Opportunity Creation

### 2.3.1 What are Creation Opportunities?

Creation theory sees that opportunities are not objectively existing, just waiting to be discovered by alert individuals (Shane & Venkataraman 2000, Eckhardt & Shane 2003; Shane 2012; Kirzner 1997, 2009). They are instead formed endogenously by entrepreneurs in a process of enactment (Alvarez & Barney 2010; Aldrich & Ruef 2006 p. 78-107), thus being a result of the entrepreneurial process (Alvarez & Barney 2007, 2010, 2013; Alvarez et al. 2013, 2014). Entrepreneurs act according to their beliefs and assumptions about the world and the opportunity and receive feedback from their environment (peers, stakeholders) (Wood & McKinley 2010; Dimov 2011). The entrepreneur's perception of the opportunity is moulded as she makes sense of the feedback and subsequently starts acting according to her changed perceptions. The opportunity is created in this process of action and reaction. The process of creation does not end until the opportunity has unfolded, and the opportunity cannot be understood until it exists, which is not until it has been enacted in the iterative process of action and reaction (Alvarez & Barney 2010).

Dimov (2010) defined opportunity as *“an evolving blueprint for action, synthesizing the entrepreneur's sense of, expectation about, and aspirations for the future”*. This means that the opportunity is constantly changing: It is a process. It also encompasses the entrepreneur's perceptions of the world around her (the market, what people are willing to / will be willing to pay for; the technology, what is / will be possible, who would be willing to accompany me) as well as her own aspirations (what I want to do). The opportunity is a plan for action; thus, it is always oriented toward the future.

Instead of viewing opportunities as the starting point of the entrepreneurial process, the creation view sees them more as an outcome of that process. The opportunity is not a situation that the entrepreneur can notice if she is alert to

information and capable of evaluating the meaning of that information pointing to the specific opportunity (Alvarez and Barney, 2007). Opportunity instead unfolds as the entrepreneur acts according to her subjective interpretation of the signals she receives (Dimov, 2007). The entrepreneur is constantly interacting with her social environment, so opportunity ideas are moulded and shaped all the time. The number of opportunities is unlimited when opportunities are seen as creations of entrepreneurs (and their social environment).

Entrepreneurial opportunities are subjective phenomena that begin unformed and develop over time (Wood and McKinley, 2010). According to Wood and McKinley (2010), the process of opportunity creation starts when a nascent entrepreneur imagines an opportunity. After its initiation, the imagined opportunity begins to shape and form. The imagined opportunity develops to be more accurate and more concrete. The entrepreneur's environment influences this shaping. At this stage the opportunity is often labelled an opportunity idea (Dimov, 2011; Wood and McKinley, 2010), but it still remains unarticulated. At some point, the nascent entrepreneur is ready to articulate the opportunity, and beyond this point, the opportunity is more strongly shaped in the interaction between the nascent entrepreneurs and their social environment.

### 2.3.2 How Has Opportunity Creation Been Studied?

Alvarez and Barney (2010) have noted that because the process of creating opportunities cannot be observed, the best way would be to study the processes that highly correlate with the creation of opportunities and by which opportunities are created and formed. Thus, Alvarez and Barney (2010) point out that research on opportunity creation should benefit from adopting the models of process research developed in organisation theory. They suggest that research on opportunity creation should focus on the interaction of the context (environment) and the entrepreneur's actions when forming the opportunity, and this would help us to understand the causes and consequences of opportunity creation. This focus on the process enables us to produce new knowledge on the human action in the entrepreneurial process. Based on the recommendations of Mintzberg and Westley for process research, Alvarez & Barney (2010) suggest historical analysis or close examination of a restricted number of cases over a longer period of time to be beneficial. Alvarez & Barney (2010) offer Baker & Nelson's (2005) study on bricolage and Santos & Eisenhardt's (2009) study on market construction as good examples of research on opportunity creation.

Dimov (2007, 714) noted that, when studying opportunity development, we should “1) capture its ephemeral beginning and fragile sustenance in order to avoid survival bias, 2) reconcile the positivist and constructivist accounts of the nature of



*opportunities, and 3) incorporate the involvement of stakeholders beyond the individual entrepreneur*". Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson (2007) have also emphasised the importance of viewing entrepreneurs acting in their social context. These challenges have been addressed by the creation view as it also tries to give attention to ventures that have not been successful, the process of creation, and the social interaction of entrepreneurs and their environment (Alvarez & Barney 2010; Vekataraman 2012; Cornelissen & Clarke 2010, Cornelissen 2012; Wood & McKinley 2012).

Baker and Nelson (2005) applied grounded theory to examine what kind of threats and opportunities resource-constrained small firms faced and how the concept of bricolage, i.e., "making do with what is at hand", explained the behavior they observed in those firms. The case study included hundreds of hours of fieldwork, interviews with entrepreneurs, employees, customers and observations. Sarasvathy (2008) instead reported using the think aloud verbal protocol in her study of experienced entrepreneurs, which yielded the formulation of her Theory of Effectuation. She presented fictional decision-making situations that were typical for start-ups to 27 expert entrepreneurs and recorded when they thought aloud continuously as they solved the problems. The same kind of technique was used by Grégoire et al. (2010b) in their study focused on structural alignment as a mechanism of opportunity recognition.

Venkataraman et al. (2012) suggest a new nexus between action and interaction for opportunity research, whereby entrepreneurial transformations would be traced and measured and the unit of analysis would be the interaction between entrepreneurs and their stakeholders. They argue that we should be interested in the deals that entrepreneurs make with their stakeholders that may lead to finding or making opportunities. Venkataraman et al. (2012) offer an example of Ruth Owades who managed to squeeze her investment from an estimated \$250,000 to \$30,000, which was in the limits of her affordable loss (Sarasvathy 2008), by negotiating several deals (e.g., with the U.S. Post Office) and made the opportunity worth enacting. Without such a deal, the opportunity would not have existed, at least not for her. Venkataraman et al. (2012) noted that the markets themselves can be artifacts made from the actions and interactions of entrepreneurs and their stakeholders. The market is not an antecedent of the actions and interactions, but constructed by them. Besides the question by whom opportunities are made and found, Venkataraman et al. (2012) raise the question for whom they are made, and for whom not.

Chiasson and Sounders (2005) have utilised Structuration Theory to reconcile the discovery and creation views of opportunities. (Also Sarason et al. 2006 have utilised structuration theory to elaborate on the individual – opportunity nexus.) They argue that opportunities are both recognised and created through scripts that are enabled and constrained by business and social structures. Entrepreneurs learn which

scripts (action rules) are legitimate, competent and powerful when becoming familiar with the existing structures and which ones lead to favourable outcomes, and they then start acting according to those. However, they also play and experiment with their action and form new scripts. The use of common or new scripts will reinforce (reproduce) or change the structures that guide the use of scripts (Chiasson & Sounders 2005). Common scripts are legitimate and competent but lacking differentiating power. The new scripts developed by entrepreneurs, instead, lack legitimacy at first but may turn out to be competent and powerful differentiators. According to Chiasson and Sounders (2005), the discovery view has the structure as its starting point, whereas the creation view emphasises agency and individuals' ability to form new scripts that can change the structures. However, they argue that these views are not incompatible when the enabling and constraining function, as well the reproduction and change of structure through the agency of individuals, are taken into account (Chiasson & Sounders 2005).

Sarasvathy and Dew (2005) also discuss economic structures (i.e., institutions) but as a means for entrepreneurs to set bounds on uncertainty and in that way creating a space in which decisions can be made (the decision making is economical). Existing institutions are one way of bounding uncertainty, because they offer rules and procedures that limit uncertainty. In the case of market creation, entrepreneurs look for existing structures connecting users and producers and try to use them whenever possible. According to Sarasvathy and Dew (2005), this may lead to transformations of those structures – the argument also made by Chiasson and Sounders (2005).

## 2.4 Opportunities – a Dead End?

The theoretical discussion about entrepreneurial opportunities has continued for over two decades. The initial enthusiasm and faith in the usefulness of the concept has waned as the problems with clarity, testability, and biases persisted despite the investments made in opportunity research. This has led to questioning the usefulness of the concept and arguing for its reconceptualisation or even abandonment. Because of the problems with testability and the lack of clarity of the opportunity concept, e.g., Davidsson (2015, 2020) has urged for the reconceptualisation of the opportunity concept or substituting it with, e.g., the concept of idea, which is possible, although not easy, to measure. Görling and Rehn (2008) have called for reconceptualising the opportunity concept due to the problems of testability and the lack of consideration for luck and happenstances. Foss and Klein have spoken for abandoning the opportunity concept, because they see it merely as an unhelpful metaphor (Foss & Klein 2010, 2020). They suggest that the research should focus on entrepreneurs' actions and should see entrepreneurship as judgement (Foss & Klein 2010; Klein

2008). Kitching and Rouse (2016) have also taken the same path and suggested, mostly because of ontological fuzziness, inconsistency and inability to contribute to the development of the research field, that the opportunity concept should be substituted with the concepts of 'entrepreneurial project' and 'conditions of action'.

However, the opportunity concept has served well to define the field of entrepreneurship and provide it with legitimacy, as acknowledged by Short et al. (2010) as well as Foss and Klein (2020). Alvarez and Barney (2020) have strongly advocated the fruitfulness of the opportunity concept, arguing that it has offered the field a central research question and forced entrepreneurship scholars to express their assumptions more clearly, contributed to the introduction of Knightian uncertainty into entrepreneurship, helped to focus scholarly attention on entrepreneurial processes, and finally, helped address theoretical weaknesses in other fields, such as Resource-based Theory in strategic management. The opportunity concept has also been recognised as having practical value for teaching entrepreneurship, because opportunity discovery or creation is included in many entrepreneurship curricula (e.g., in the Entrepreneurship competence framework), as well as for governmental policies (e.g., the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process within the European Commission's smart specialisation platform). Thus, albeit the difficulties with inquiring about opportunities, the concept has been found useful for practitioners and is still widely considered the core of entrepreneurship. I want to give opportunity another chance in this study and to approach opportunity creation from a social constructionist perspective that, although already applied in entrepreneurship research, is underutilised within the opportunity literature. Furthermore, the relational constructionist approach can be useful for opportunity research in several ways. First, it sees the opportunity as emerging from the enactment of entrepreneurs and their stakeholders. Thus it removes the overemphasis from the individual agent and places the interaction between actors as central in the process. Second, at the same time, it moves the focus from being objective or subjective to intersubjective.

# 3 Social Constructionist View on Opportunity Creation

## 3.1 The Focal Assumptions of Social Constructionism

Social constructionism has been suggested to be helpful in the theoretical development of the entrepreneurship field (Fletcher, 2006; Nicholson & Anderson 2005), because it represents the nonmainstream approaches (Junaid et al. 2015; Jennings et al. 2005). Entrepreneurship research has been dominated by a functionalist paradigm that is characterised by an objective perspective. Concentrating on objective facts ignores the individual, *“the emotions and personal angsts of the entrepreneurs”*, which requires counterbalance (Jennings et al. 2005, p. 147). Additionally, sticking to one paradigm narrows the use of methodologies, which usually leads to a limited understanding of social phenomena (Jennings et al. 2005). According to Junaid et al. (2015), treating entrepreneurship as a purely economic phenomenon has been taken for granted, and economics have dominated in entrepreneurship theory and methodology. Alternative paradigms or methodologies (like Interpretivist, not to mention Radical Humanist and Radical Structuralist, according to Burrell & Morgan 2003 cited by Jennings et al. 2005) are easily labelled as ‘nonmainstream’, causing them to stay in the shadow of the functionalist, objectivist research with the risk of being viewed as ‘atheoretical empirism’ or ‘evidencing political rhetoric’, as noted by Jennings et al. (2005 p. 147). Nicholson and Anderson (2005, p. 154) propose that social constructionism would help us understand entrepreneurship and the contradiction within it as well as *“to address the different layers of meaning and the production of these meanings that surrounds and forms the idea of entrepreneurship”*.

There is no one approach actually called social constructionism, but many different streams that in some ways have certain things in common (Burr 2003, Fletcher 2006). Burr (2003) makes a division into two streams: social constructionism and constructivism, explaining that constructivism gives more emphasise to the individual, whereas social constructionism sees the behavior of the individual more restricted by the structures. She states that this distinction is somewhat vague and suggests that bringing these views closer together would be

beneficial (Burr, 2003). Fletcher (2006) instead uses a division into three: social constructivism, social constructionism, and relational constructionism. Venkataraman et al. (2012) instead prefer using the term 'intersubjective' to social, and constructivism to social constructionism, because they view constructivism as more nuanced and scientifically coherent. Before going more deeply into the different emphases of these different approaches, it is useful to look into some basic ideas they share. Here I use 'social constructionism' as a general label, making no difference between the streams within it. I discuss the three streams used by Fletcher (2006) in more detail in the next chapter.

First, social constructionism takes a critical approach to taken-for-granted assumptions, including assumptions about the world. The focal idea is that reality is not something objectively existing but that we actively construct our reality based on our observations (what we see, hear, feel) and our inferences from our experiences and memories (Nicholson & Anderson 2005; Berger & Luckman 1966) in social processes. This knowledge about phenomena guides our actions (Burr 2003). For example, because entrepreneurship is seen as having an important role in wealth creation, societies invest in different ways to support venture creation in the form of information and advice centres for new entrepreneurs, business accelerators, incubators, start-up funding and so forth. Power relations are also inherent in our constructions of the world, and these determine what is accepted and allowed for different groups. For example, entrepreneurs have a stronger voice in the society than the unemployed, or it is better accepted that someone neglects her children because she is an entrepreneur and work long hours than because of alcoholism. Social constructionism does not accept essentialism, meaning that there is no determined nature to the social world or people. Instead, the world, as well as we ourselves, are products of social processes (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Social constructionism questions realism because it believes that no truth about any phenomena exists but that there are different ways of seeing and interpreting the world, although Burr (2003) notes that some constructionists do accept critical realism. According to social constructionism, all knowledge is history and culture specific. In different times and different cultures, different assumptions and ways of thinking prevail, and our western way of seeing things is not the only nor the best one (Burr 2003).

Second, we have learned the concepts and categories that we use when interpreting our experiences and our world and then communicating them through language. We learn them from other people speaking the same language and belonging to the same culture (significant others) and reproduce them in our use of language every day (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Thus, language is a precondition of thought, and it determines how one sees the world (Burr 2003). We use language in framing, filtering, and transforming our subjective reality into a more tangible reality

that is more understandable for others (Nicholson & Anderson 2005). However, ‘words are not pictures of the world’ (Nicholson & Anderson 2005, 156) or carriers of ‘truth’ or ‘knowledge’ (Gergen & Thatchenkerry 2004), but they are subject to specific interest. For example, when giving an account, we do not tell our audience what actually happened, but we tell our story according to the social conventions of that particular context, which makes it understandable for our audience and enables the audience to view us as knowledgeable (Gergen & Thatchenkerry 2004). According to Gergen and Thatchenkerry (2004), language is a product of communal cooperation, and making sense is a communal achievement. Thinking of rationality as actions consistent with a given language means, then, that rationality would be a form of communal participation, of being able to speak according to the conventions of language. Language is understood as performative: Utterances both constitute and describe action, which is called reflexivity (Downing 2005). Talk not only describes things, but it also does things, e.g., convey meanings and attitude, influence people’s thinking, or order or persuade them to do something (Wood and Kroger 2000; Wetherell 2001; Burr 2003). Indexicality takes into account the context in which language is produced and states that it is the people who fill in the meaning to the words, and this occurs in a specific context (Downing 2005).

Context refers to the specific values, attitudes, practices and social relations that constitute the cultural and social environment. Individuals are embedded in different contexts, meaning that they take for granted, e.g., the values, rules for acting and for using language, and roles (Berger & Luckmann 1966). According to Goss (2005), social punishment (that causes shame) or acceptance (that causes pride) is a mechanism that steers the behavior of individuals. People usually do what they are compensated for, this way maximising pride, and avoid what they are punished for, that way minimising shame. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 67) remark that controlling is inherent in all institutions, and it differs from sanctioning mechanisms that are built to bolster institutions.

### 3.2 Three Forms of Social Constructionism

Fletcher (2006, 426), building on Vygotsky, Bruner and Gergen, describes **social constructivism** as concerned with “*how individuals mentally construct their worlds with categories supplied by social relationships*”. The focus is on individual cognitive processes as well as on socio-cultural practices and norms that shape those cognitive processes of individuals. **Social constructionism**, which draws on Berger and Luckman as well as Giddens, is instead more concerned with “*the interplay between agency and structure, which links individual construction of sense-making and enactment to the societal level through the processes of structuration*” (Fletcher 2006, 427). This description incorporates ideas of structuration theory that

emphasises both individual cognitive processes and the socio-cultural practices and norms shaping them. Fletcher presents **relational constructionism** as the third stream of constructionism, which has its roots in the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, Weber and Durkheim), social phenomenology (Schultz), and cultural psychology (Gergen). It is interested in the relationality and coordination between people and their texts or contexts (Fletcher 2006). **Table 2** presents the emphasis, examples, theoretical foundations and applications in entrepreneurship research of these three streams of social constructionism.

**Table 2.** Social constructivism, social constructionism, and relational constructionism: emphasis, theoretical foundations and applications in entrepreneurship research, based on Fletcher (2006) with some examples of studies related to opportunity creation added by the author.

	<b>Social constructivism</b>	<b>Social constructionism</b>	<b>Relational constructionism</b>
Emphasis	subjective knowing, individual cognitive processes, socio-cultural practices and norms that shape the cognitive processes of individuals	the interplay between agency and structure that links individual construction of sense-making and enactment to the societal level through the processes of structuration	the relationality and coordinations between people and their texts or contexts
Examples	linguistic expressions as representations of individuals' inner states; constructs the understanding of entrepreneurship through cognitive capabilities in the separate minds of people; social context and environment in which entrepreneurial activities are constructed, e.g., educational and family background, as explaining the cognitive structures	entrepreneurial lives or identities; the cultural, social, regional and community contexts in which entrepreneurial practices are embedded, e.g., how biography, class, gender, culture, community, identity are constituted in particular practices or peoples' lives; cultural situatedness; how social reality is produced through the inter-subjective aspects of exchange	business ideas take form as entrepreneurs are constantly relating to things around them, through conversations, dialogues, relational experiences, e.g., testing ideas with friends or potential customers; capital, labour, or emotional support are acquired from family members, friends or banks; "the accounts people construct about opportunity emergence are expressions of relationships to the culture, society and the institutions in which they have been reproduced"; family processes, enterprise discourses, changing consumption patterns

Theoretical foundation	Vygotsky 1981, Bruner 1990, Gergen 1999	Berger and Luckman 1967, Giddens 1984	sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann 1967, Weber 1978, Durkheim 1982), social phenomenology (Schultz 1967), as well as cultural psychology (Gergen 1999, Gergen & Gergen 1991)
Applied in entrepreneurship research	how cognitive processes are influenced by social situatedness and cultural or discursive practices, e.g., Pitt 1998, Dodd 2002	embeddedness of entrepreneurship, e.g., the situated, community or local cultural and historical context as the medium for social construction processes, e.g., Jack and Anderson 2002, Lindh de Montoya 1999, Goss 2005; Chiasson and Sounders 2005; Baker & Nelson 2005 -> creating the opportunity by inducing changes to “rules”, i.e., the structure	individuals as ‘relational beings’ who, in relation to past and future interactions/relations, engage in acts of becoming as they created new possibilities, the generative discourses and relational processes signifying and performing the material and social world, e.g., Wood & McKinley 2010; Cornelissen & Clark 2010; Downing 2005; Sarasvathy 2001, 2008; Dew & Sarasvathy 2005; Venkataraman et al. 2012; Selden & Fletcher 2015; Nielsen et al. 2017

The ideas of social constructionism are inherent in studies applying opportunity creation theory. Social constructivism has been applied, for example, in Pitt’s (1998) and Dodd’s (2002) studies. Pitt investigated entrepreneurs’ narratives to understand their personal theories of action, which contain “*descriptive and normative beliefs that facilitate sense making and decisions in context*” (Pitt 1998, 388). Pitt argues that when appropriately contextualised, narratives allow access to the “*hearts, minds and motivations*” of the individuals (entrepreneurs) (Pitt 1998, 388), thus being interested in the cognitive processes and the context of the entrepreneurs’ sense making and acting. Pitt (1998) also considers the metaphorical role of conceptions as one component of the personal theory of action, because the way entrepreneurs conceive themselves influences their action templates. Dodd (2002) also has investigated metaphors used by entrepreneurs, and she found that entrepreneurs described entrepreneurship in terms of *journey, race, building, parenting, war, iconoclasm and passion*. Wood and McKinley (2010) argue that they examine ‘entrepreneurial opportunity production from a constructivist perspective’, but I would rather place their study within the relational constructionism, because the



interaction between the entrepreneur and ‘significant others’ as well as the feedback from the environment is the focus of the model they present.

The idea of the structure (context) as enabling and constricting the actions of the actor (entrepreneur) at the same time can be seen, for example, in the studies by Lindh de Montoya (1999), Jack and Anderson (2002), Goss (2005), Chiasson and Sounders (2005) as well as in Baker and Nelson (2005). Structuration theory, which was developed by Anthony Giddens, focuses on the reciprocal interaction of human actors and social structure. Agents, like entrepreneurs and stakeholders, are simultaneously enabled and constrained by structures that have been built by the previous actions of agents and that are renewed and altered by the actions of agents. The rules and resources that people (agents) use in their everyday interactions constitute the structure within a social system. The structures (i.e., the rules and resources) are considered ‘real’ by agents, who simultaneously reaffirm them by acting according to them. Thus, actors are both creators and creations of social systems. Structures exist only because agents draw on them and reconstitute them by doing that (Jack & Anderson 2002; Sarason et al. 2006; Wood & McKinley 2010). Structures are *“both the medium and the outcome of the situated practices that make up a social system”* (Sarason et al. 2006, 292). Embeddedness is the process of becoming part of the structure and understanding the logic of the context: the values, the attitudes, and action rationales that are taken for granted by the members of the context (Jack & Anderson 2002).

Sarason et al.’s (2006) article discusses how structuration theory can be applied to entrepreneurship by using Shane and Venkataraman’s (2000) proposition of the individual-opportunity nexus as the focus of entrepreneurship research. According to the structuration view, the entrepreneur and social systems co-evolve because the entrepreneurial process involves a dynamic interaction of the individual and the opportunity. The entrepreneur and the opportunity are conceptualised as a duality: *“Entrepreneurs are conceptualized as agents acting within social and economic systems that engender potentially economically rewarding opportunities”* (Sarason et al. 2006, 289).

Sarason et al. (2006) refer to the opportunity as structure. They write *“Structuration theory specifies a reciprocal relationship between agency and structure, and as such offers a perspective that specifically articulates the relationship between agent (entrepreneur) and structure (opportunity) as a duality”* (Sarason et al. 2006, 289). Jack and Anderson (2002), however, argue that the entrepreneur is the agent and context is the structure. Sometimes, there are resources within the social structure that are accessible to entrepreneurs because of their embeddedness in the social structure and that the entrepreneur can utilise when creating the opportunity. Jack and Anderson’s (2002) study showed that *“the*

*opportunities exist within the structure and only become manifest by the action of entrepreneurial agency”* (Jack & Anderson 2002, 484).

In the studies by Lindh de Montoya (1999) and Jack and Anderson (2002), the opportunities were created (although Jack and Anderson use the words ‘recognition’ and ‘realisation’) based on the entrepreneurs’ embeddedness in the local culture and the social structure. Jack & Anderson use Giddens’s theory of structuration to “*develop the conception of entrepreneurship as embedded socio-economic process*”(Jack & Anderson 2002, 647). They define embeddedness as “*the nature, depth, and extent of an individual’s ties into the environment*” (Jack & Anderson 2002 p. 468). Embeddedness means that actors are embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations, and these relations constrain their behavior (Jack & Anderson 2002). Here, the entrepreneur is the agent, and the context is the structure, equivalent to Giddens’s structuration theory. Jack and Anderson (2002) use this theory to explore how social structures influence entrepreneurial activity, especially by constraining and allowing access to resources. They investigated the cause and effect relationship of embeddedness and the entrepreneurial process and found out that embeddedness is important in shaping and sustaining business: It creates opportunity and enhances performance because it enables entrepreneurs to utilise the specifics of the environment. The social context shapes and forms entrepreneurial outcomes, and embedding is the mechanism by which the entrepreneur becomes part of the local structure. Being part of the local structure enables entrepreneurs to utilise resources (Jack & Anderson 2002). “*...in some instances, being embedded actually creates opportunities*” (Jack & Anderson 2002 p. 467). However, embeddedness can also be a constraint: for example, a critical partner exiting the network, institutional forces rationalising markets, social aspects of exchange superseding the economic ones, or isolation from information outside the network (Jack & Anderson 2002; Uzzi 1997).

Lindh de Montoya (1999) studied how the entrepreneurs not only identified and manipulated social and economic structures to create opportunities but also took advantage of discrepancies and disparities between systems for their own gain. However, at the same time, the entrepreneurs induced changes to the local culture and ways of living and doing business, which possibly initiated a gradual change that started to erode the basis of their business.

Baker and Nelson (2005) reported how the entrepreneurs in their study did basically the same thing when they, using the logic of bricolage, questioned the taken-for-granted assumptions of the culture and in that way created the opportunity for their business. The constraining function of the structure can possibly be seen in the way the simultaneous use of bricolage in multiple domains was found to restrict business growth.

Relational constructionism views the process of opportunity creation as iterative and social, because the entrepreneurs and their stakeholders act, react, give feedback, interpret, make sense and experiment (Fletcher 2002). These ideas can be seen at least in the studies of Sarasvathy (2001, 2008), Dew and Sarasvathy (2005), Venkataraman et al. (2012), Wood and McKinley (2010), Cornelissen & Clarke (2010), Selden & Fletcher (2015) and Nielsen et al. (2017).

According to Wood and McKinley (2010), the critical phases in the process are objectification of the opportunity idea during which the opportunity is conceived as an entity outside the entrepreneur's mind. Wood and McKinley argue that if the peers to whom the opportunity idea is presented and with whom the entrepreneur interacts cannot reach consensus, or the level of consensus among the peer is low, objectification is likely to be delayed and the opportunity rethought or even abandoned. Entrepreneurs move to the enactment phase after objectification, trying to obtain support for the opportunity from a group of stakeholders. Opportunities that have reached the enactment phase might also be abandoned. Wood and McKinley (2010) also discuss both the influence of the entrepreneur's social ties and reputation and the emotional consequences of abandonment.

Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) focus on entrepreneurs' use of language and linguistic devices, such as analogies and metaphors, when talking to others as a means of sense making and sense giving. This kind of inductive reasoning is used to gain legitimacy and to create new ventures. As they note "*...social context interacts with processes of language use and cognition*" (ibid pp. 542). Thus, the opportunities are created as the entrepreneurs convince their audience about them and thus engage in creation of a new social reality.

Sarasvathy's theory of effectuation explains how economic artifacts, such as firms, markets, and economies, come into existence (Sarasvathy 2001). Based on her studies of experienced entrepreneurs, she noticed that they followed a different logic from that of causation that was traditionally assumed in business and entrepreneurship research. Causation is based on the logic of prediction, so effectuation rests on the logic of control (Sarasvathy 2001). Sarasvathy (2008; 2001) explains that, according to causation logic "*to the extent we can predict the future we can control it*", but effectual thinking follows the idea that "*to the extent that we can control the future, we don't have to predict it*". Sarasvathy (2001, 245) defines effectuation as, "*Effectuation processes take a set of means as given and focus on selecting between possible effects that can be created with that set of means*". Human reasoning consists of both causation and effectuation, which can be applied simultaneously, and they can also complete each other (Sarasvathy 2001). Relational constructionism can be seen in several ideas of effectuation, for example, in one of the starting points for opportunity creation: Who I know. Here the social networks and the entrepreneur's embeddedness in them are seen as enabling opportunity

creation. The crazy-quilt principle emphasises strategic alliances and taking aboard stakeholders who are willing to make commitments to the project as a means to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, the goals of the business are determined based on who are the partners, not vice versa. Taking other people aboard means that the opportunity being created will change; other people will almost inevitably bring along their aspirations and views. Thus, the opportunity is negotiated and a new version of the opportunity is developed and the opportunity is thus created in interaction with the entrepreneur's environment.

Venkataraman et al. (2012) argue for a new view of opportunities as artifacts and entrepreneurship as a science of the artificial. This view, with its emphasis on the interface of organisms and their environment, shifts the focus from things to relationships (Venkataraman et al. 2012). According to Venkataraman et al. (2012), both creation and discovering are involved when stakeholders interact for bringing an opportunity into existence. By applying an idea of the tripod of subjective, objective and intersubjective to opportunities, they propose that, in addition to knowledge, opportunities are also constructed of these three elements: the objective elements that are found; the subjective motivations, behavior and activities of entrepreneurs; and the intersubjective, by which they mean the ex-ante taken-for-granted and shared assumptions of the persons interacting (Venkataraman et al. 2012). According to Venkataraman et al. (2012), the engagement of entrepreneurs and their stakeholders in cooperation and competition allows them to form new intersubjective understandings (i.e., new realities) that may lead to new opportunities.

Selden and Fletcher (2015) continue with the idea of entrepreneurship as a science of the artificial and the entrepreneurial journey as an emergent hierarchical system of artifact-creating process. They explain that an artifact is "*an emergent outcome at the boundary interface of an inner and outer environment that is contingently and functionally designed for 'how things might be', rather than 'how things are'*" (Selden & Fletcher 2015, 605 refer to Simon 1981, ix). According to Selden & Fletcher (2015), social artifacts are mediums of social interaction, and they include linguistic artifacts (e.g., ideas and texts), relational artifacts (e.g., networks and organisations), and material artifacts (e.g., commodities and technologies). Selden and Fletcher (2015) argue that artifact emergence should be the key unit of analysis in entrepreneurship research. They adopt a process perspective and view the entrepreneurial journey as a hierarchy of emergent subsystems in which the entrepreneurial artifact created in the former subsystem works as an enabling and constraining context for the higher-level subsystem.

Nielsen et al. (2017) also build on the science of the artificial and design and argue for the fields of design and entrepreneurship being complementary to each other. The design perspective on opportunity creation highlights the intersubjective,

i.e., a co-creation process for unfolding futures. Nielsen et al. (2017) argue that the processes of opportunity design and creation are mutually dependent, and the opportunity is formed in iteration between these subprocesses. The design part of the holistic process is focused on exploration and the entrepreneurship part on exploitation, and the holistic process is dependent on exchange and mutual adaptation of these subprocesses. The design perspective is focused more on the idea formation, concept development and prototype production (as opposed to opportunity exploitation); thus, it seems to be promising when examining the initial phases of emerging opportunities, which, for example, Short et al. (2010) named as one important area of entrepreneurship research in the future.

I investigate in this study how women entrepreneurs narrate their opportunity creation. These narratives interweave their identities as entrepreneurs, women and mothers, the context of creating their opportunities (i.e., their situational embeddedness in social structures and practices that enable and restrict their endeavours of opportunity creation) and the emergence and taking shape of the opportunity. The women entrepreneurs make sense of their decisions, actions, and emotions when telling their accounts. I pay attention to how they narrate their life situation and relationships that enabled them to engage in the creation of their businesses. I am interested in what kind of identities they narrate (as there are many parallel identities, not only one) and what kind of cause and effect relationships they offer when constructing their stories. A story is always told to a certain audience in a certain situation. Language is a product of communal cooperation (Gergen & Thatchenkerry 2004), so the women entrepreneurs build their stories on cultural ways of understanding how things are and how things can be communicated. However, it is not easy to communicate one's interpretations, insights and sense making; thus, I pay attention to how the women entrepreneurs use metaphors when expressing their thoughts.

### 3.3 Social Constructionism in This Study

I adopted the relational constructionist perspective in this study, expecting that, together with the women entrepreneurs' perspective, it would add to our understanding of opportunity creation. The social constructionist approach is visible in this study in the following ways.

According to social constructionism, people engage in social processes through which they create meaning and negotiate understandings (Fletcher 2006). I am interested in how women entrepreneurs make sense of opportunity creation: how they understand it and what they see as important in what they are doing. I interviewed women entrepreneurs and observed (and video recorded) discussions within a group of women entrepreneurs. For example, when talking to me or the

other entrepreneurs, they told their entrepreneurial story, statements about themselves, about occurrences, their ideas about causes and effects, the influences of other people and critical events in their lives. They drew on their experiences and knowledge, on stories they had heard and examples they had seen, organising their thoughts as they were speaking, making sense and giving sense. One could say that when talking, they are drawing on and refining their personal Theory of Action (Pitt 1998) that states what the effective ways of acting are for them to achieve a certain goal in a certain context.

Building on social constructionism, I acknowledge that the participants' negotiated understanding about opportunity creation is guided by the social practices and rules of the cultures to which the participants belong. These social contexts (subcontexts) influence what they consider as acceptable, desirable or even possible, thus enabling, guiding and constraining their actions. This kind of guidance is helpful because it makes people's behavior more predictable and in that way easier for others to understand, but it is also a way of controlling it (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 67-68). While the participants negotiate meanings, they are also involved in sustaining particular traditions and cultural practices that are sensible to themselves and others (Fletcher 2006). Berger and Luckmann (1966, 89) argued that institutions need to be constantly reproduced, and an individual participates in constructing and reproducing the social world and its institutions. The participants in this study represent entrepreneurs and, more specifically, women entrepreneurs, but they also are women, wives, mothers, daughters, and in some occasions, sisters and daughters-in-law. Doing of gender and doing of entrepreneurship are intertwined; when women entrepreneurs are doing entrepreneurship, they simultaneously continue doing womanhood (West & Zimmerman 1987). There are certain rules against which an individual's performance is evaluated, i.e., people are accountable for the gender-appropriateness of their behavior (West & Zimmerman 1987). For example, an entrepreneur is supposed to behave and talk in a certain way, which presumably differs from what is expected from, or allowed to, women in general. These expectations may conflict with each other, possibly causing stress and dissonance for the individuals. In my material, conflicts between being an entrepreneur and being a mother are seen, often caused by problems with allocating time between these duties.

We take the social reality that we live in for granted, and it seems to us as objective, external and possibly out of our influence. However, it is produced and reproduced by us and other people; thus, it is changeable (Berger & Luckmann 103-104, 173; Downing 2005). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966, 172-173), conversation is the most important mechanism for reproducing social reality. Language objectifies our subjective world, and our identities and realities are produced and changed by using language. Language offers names, categories and

concepts for understanding our world and for communicating this to others. Different institutions or different groups have their own subworlds and, because different knowledge is relevant for different institutions (division of knowledge in the society), their language is also specialised. We show that we belong to a group (e.g., occupation) by knowing the language and the conventions of using it and that we are regarded as a legitimate member of the group and are realising our role legitimately. The participants were engaged in this study as entrepreneurs and, more specifically, woman entrepreneurs. They use the language that is legitimate and understandable for each other and bring up issues that the others find relevant in the frame of their 'subreality'. The participants can assume when talking within the group that the others understand their context both as women entrepreneurs and as mothers. They have learned the norms and values, even the emotions, that are part of belonging to these groups, and they identify themselves with roles that these social subworlds accommodate (Berger & Luckmann 1966.) The more novice entrepreneurs in the group are learning their role and building their identity as women entrepreneurs, which the group affirms by acknowledging and legitimating their belonging. The participants draw on their experiences and knowledge, which become objectified, that form their mutual stock of knowledge. In the interviews, they address me in my role as a doctoral student in business, someone with whom they cannot assume to share their understanding of women entrepreneurs' reality but who is capable of understanding the 'world of business', at least to some degree. Entrepreneurs are not familiar with the concept of opportunity creation, so they literally do not talk about it; thus, it is probably difficult to organise and express their thoughts about it. This led me to examine their metaphorical use of language, because people often use metaphors when trying to explain something that is unfamiliar or unclear to themselves.

Our knowing and actions, from the perspective of relationality that is present in social constructionism, are related to the past and the future. We assign certain meanings to occurrences when making sense and forming an understanding. We do this based on our knowledge and our experiences and with a certain (imagined) view of the future in our minds. Thus, our understanding is not static but constantly changing as we gather new information, knowledge and experiences that shape our interpretation of the past and anticipation for the future (Fletcher 2006). Fletcher (2006) refer to individuals as 'relational beings' "*who in relation to past and future interactions/relations engage in acts of becoming as they created new possibilities*" (Fletcher 2006, 427). The participants form a particular understanding as they talk about their experiences; thus, they formulate the past by giving new meanings to occurrences. The present is always linked with the past and the future, so as our thinking is oriented toward what we become, the meanings the participants choose are related to some future they can imagine.

The social context, i.e., the structure, constrains individuals' actions, while their understanding of, and embeddedness within, it moulds their view of the opportunities. According to Jack and Anderson (2002), embeddedness is the process of understanding the nature of, and becoming part of, the structure. They argue that social embeddedness can offer an entrepreneur access to latent resources that exist in the structure but become manifest by the entrepreneur's actions.

According to Fletcher (2006), social constructionism is less interested in people's subjective experiences and perceptions than in the social processes they engage in to negotiate meanings and that contribute to the construction of their reality. Part of my material is produced by a group of women entrepreneurs, so it offers me an opportunity investigate how women entrepreneurs together construct opportunity creation. Sense making is a communal process (Gergen & Thatchenkerry 2004), and the entrepreneurs draw on their understanding of social processes, cultural meanings, and their common language that they had formed during the education program. They occasionally refer to their earlier discussions or to concepts shared previously, for example, "luck has a fringe" was a saying introduced by Wilma, which became part of their language and was also used by other members of the group. The group provided them with an arena to discuss entrepreneurship with their peers in a new way. Within these discussion, they engaged in constructing, producing and reproducing their reality; thus, it also offered them a chance to produce new meanings and changed understandings that could alter their reality. My study is building on relational constructionism in this way, emphasising the entrepreneurs relating to their environment when creating opportunities. Opportunity creation, as I see it, is about creating new realities by inducing changes in the way others perceive the world. As noted by Rindova et al. (2009), entrepreneurial action is fundamentally about creating change, and by creating change, entrepreneurs can create new markets and new opportunities.



# 4 The Context of Women Entrepreneurs

## 4.1 Context Matters

Earlier researchers assumed that female and male entrepreneurs shared the same characteristics, which is why it was considered unnecessary to study women entrepreneurs separately (Jennings & Brush 2013; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004; Achtenhagen & Welter 2011). However, differences between the background characteristics, growth and other dimensions of different groups of women have been found, and we would actually need more research on not only women but also groups of women to better understand the complexities of the entrepreneurial process (De Bruin et al. 2006). In the majority of entrepreneurship research, samples have consisted mainly of men entrepreneurs, and many measures have also been developed utilising male samples (e.g., Jennings & Brush 2013; Brush et al. 2009). This means that the characteristics of women and their businesses may have been missed (Brush et al. 2009; De Bruin, Brush & Welter 2007; Bird & Brush 2002).

Opportunity creation or discovery has not been widely studied among women entrepreneurs. Sullivan and Meek (2012) reported that, although opportunity is one of the most researched topics in the entrepreneurship field, they found only three articles investigating factors related to women's opportunity recognition and the types of opportunities they recognise. Two of these articles considered women's social networks and how they are related to opportunity identification and access to finance (Greve and Salaff 2003; Harrison and Mason, 2007); the third is about the differences in the human capital of men and women, as well as the different opportunity identification processes they use (DeTienne & Chandler 2007). DeTienne and Chandler (2007) found that men's opportunity identification was best predicted by the number of previous entrepreneurial ventures, whereas the number of previous jobs and retail industry experience were the best predictors of opportunity identification for women. Women also prefer to develop a product or technology first and only afterwards look for a market, whereas men more often recognise a market need first and then develop a product or service or acquire an existing income stream (e.g., a buyout, a spin-out, a portion of an existing venture).

However, DeTienne and Chandler (2007) found no differences between the sexes regarding the innovativeness of identified opportunities.

Several authors have advocated deeper contextualisation in entrepreneurship research and especially women's entrepreneurship (De Bruin et al. 2006; Neergaard & Ullhøi 2007; Leitch et al 2009; Yousafzai 2018; Welter et al 2019). As put by Welter et al (2019, 321), "*A contextualized perspective on entrepreneurship encourages us to see, consider, and analyze varieties of entrepreneurship that too often remain invisible to us.... it is also about identifying and developing theory to understand difference where we might otherwise expect sameness.*" How contextualisation can facilitate theory building has been discussed, for example, by Zahra (2007).

People do not start businesses or create opportunities in a vacuum, but there are issues influencing their decisions in their personal life as well, such as family, children, employment, health, and the institutional and cultural environment around them. The different contexts of women entrepreneurs are increasingly being taken into consideration. For example, the influence of the size of the state (availability of maternity leave and childcare), formal discrimination against women (the lack of freedom of movement outside the home and protection against violence) (Estrin & Mickiewicz 2011), and religion and patriarchal culture are often found to restrict women's opportunities to act as entrepreneurs (Goktan et al. 2016; Zehra & Acgtenhagen 2016). The situation is far from the same across all women entrepreneurs, and this kind of diversity has still not been taken into account in most of the studies concerning women's entrepreneurship (Ekinsmyth 2014). The women entrepreneurs participating in this study made the decision to start a business and took other business-related decisions in very different kinds of situations. Some of them had already established their second or third business, and both the situations and the triggers were naturally different from the previous cases. Earlier findings of studies concerning women's entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in general have shown that women often start their business as a reaction to, e.g., unemployment, demanding family situations, dissatisfaction with their career or its advancement. These contextual factors reflect the institutional and cultural environment in which women entrepreneurs operate. All entrepreneurs participating in this study live in Finland, which is considered one of the world's most equal countries (2<sup>nd</sup> place according to Global Gender Gap Report 2021). Finnish women gained the right to inherit in 1878, the right to vote and eligibility in elections in 1906 (first in Europe), and the right to serve as members of parliament in 1907. However, gender inequality can still be seen in the segregation of education and professions, income (women's Euro is 84 cents), time used in household work (women use 68 minutes more per day), parental leave (almost 90 % of parental allowances are paid to women), higher education (57,5 % of those holding a higher education degree are women), and

political representation (47 % of the members of parliament are women) (Sukupuolten tasa-arvo Suomessa 2021). The right to parental leave and the availability of public childcare, which promote gender equality through offering better possibilities for women to participate in the labour market and be financially more independent, have been found to have a negative influence on women's entrepreneurship (Estrin & Mickiewicz 2011). Thus, the influences of the cultural and institutional environment are not always clear.

Despite being the second most equal country in the world, business life in Finland seems to lag behind regarding gender equality, and women still are a minority in leading positions in larger organisations. According to a report of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, women were only eight percent of COEs in listed companies and 13 percent of nonlisted companies and only 5 % of the chairmen of the board in listed companies (Lipasti et al. 2020). Public counselling, training and funding are available for entrepreneurs, and an association especially for women entrepreneurs exists. A special loan for women with a nominally lower interest was introduced in the 1990s to encourage women to establish companies, but it was cancelled as discriminating against men entrepreneurs. Neither the formal institutions' decisions and practices (e.g., funding decisions, business advice) nor the informal institutions are isolated from the cultural beliefs and attitudes despite the existence of gender equal regulations and official policies.

In the next chapter, I discuss the contextual factors recognised in earlier research that can be found in the stories of the women entrepreneurs participating in this study. First, I look more deeply into cultural norms and then move on to family issues, such as family situation and support as well as maternity, that are often brought up in studies regarding women's entrepreneurship. Children and maternity were introduced by the participants themselves in this study, either in the group discussions or in interviews. All participants in this study actually had a family and children, and they brought it up as a factor influencing their entrepreneurship and the decisions about their business. Interestingly, motherhood seems to be often considered relevant for women's entrepreneurship, indicating the important role of motherhood in women's life. How is the role of fatherhood taken into account in studies regarding men's entrepreneurship? One might think that is not received similar attention, which might indicate that women are still considered to be mainly responsible for childcare, and this responsibility influences their decision to enter entrepreneurship (e.g. Caputo & Dolinsky 1998), as well as how much time they devote to entrepreneurship (Jennings et al 2016). For example, the studies by Patrick (2016), Jennings et al. (2016), and Hodges (2012), which compare married women to unmarried, women to men, and concentrate on women in their midlife, respectively, offer interesting results that add to our understanding of the diversity of women entrepreneurs.

Dissatisfaction with current employment has been found to push women into self-employment, and the cases of the participating entrepreneurs in this study are also examined from this viewpoint. The employment situation may be dissatisfying in terms of lack of employment, abilities to balance family and work life, or constraining women's possibilities for professional development, self-fulfilment, or income (Jennings & Brush 2013; Sullivan & Meek 2012; Malach-Pines & Schwartz 2008; Patrick et al. 2016; Buttner & More 1997). These factors can be found in this study's material, too, and, thus, are discussed in chapter 4.5. As noted by Hodges (2012), on the one hand, the decisions to escape these restrictions seem liberating, but on the other hand, they mean that women step aside from powerful professional positions, which reproduce the current inequality and professional segregation.

Finally, chapter 4.6 discusses the identities and roles as well as the possibilities of women entrepreneurs to do or undo gender or difference.

## 4.2 Cultural Norms

Entrepreneurship is a socially constructed phenomenon, so societies legitimate or restrict entrepreneurial activity through the culturally accepted role models that define whether entrepreneurship is recognised as a viable career option and the types of entrepreneurship that are accepted in a specific culture (Achtenhagen & Welter 2011). Women's entrepreneurship is influenced, in addition to cultural norms, by society's attitude towards women's employment in general, which can be observed in the state's childcare facilities (e.g., Klyver et al. 2017) or in other discriminatory practices such as the tax system that discriminates against women's participation in the formal labor market in West Germany (Achtenhagen & Welter 2011). Also the image of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs primarily as male (Bird & Brush 2002; Ahl 2006) decreases women's interest in entrepreneurship. For example, the heroic tale prevalent in entrepreneurship has contributed to viewing entrepreneurship as a male task in Germany (Achtenhagen & Welter 2011 refer to Schmidt 2002). Achtenhagen & Welter (2011) noted that female entrepreneurship is constructed as divergent from male entrepreneurship, and they identified two options used by women entrepreneurs to overcome this: adhering to the male stereotype or distancing themselves from the predominant norm.

The cultural norms that regulate the attitudes towards entrepreneurship can be observed in public discourse, e.g., in the media (Achtenhagen & Welter 2011; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004b). Achtenhagen & Welter (2011), for example, analysed the representations of women's entrepreneurship in German newspapers. Interestingly, they found that the number of articles concentrating on female entrepreneurs was lower than five percent, although around one third of new businesses in Germany are founded by women, which shows the underrepresentation

of women's entrepreneurship in the public discourse and repeats earlier results reported from the US. They also noticed that the articles more often focus on nonbusiness-related issues than on female entrepreneurs' businesses. This broad focus can be regarded as positive, because it demonstrates the variety of women's entrepreneurship and illustrates the "human" side of entrepreneurs; however, if it does not go deeper than traditional gender stereotypes, it is problematic. In fact, they found that the leading German newspapers they investigated implicitly reinforce gender stereotypes and role models by sending a message that women should primarily fulfil their roles as housewives and mothers, and if they choose to pursue entrepreneurship that should be done in "female" sectors. (Achtenhagen & Welter 2011.)

Achtenhagen & Welter (2011) note that one problem is the male notion of entrepreneur (*unternehmer*) in the German, which is assumed to include also female entrepreneurs. In Finnish, the notion of the word entrepreneur, 'yrittäjä', is neither male nor female, so there is no gender connotation in the word itself. However, the qualities attributed to entrepreneurs may still be primarily male (see Bird & Brush 2002); to differentiate between male and female entrepreneurs, the term "women" is often used as an adjective when referring to women entrepreneurs. An interesting study by Hechavarría et al. (2018) investigated language structure's influence on the gender gap in entrepreneurial activity. They found that countries where sex-based systems and gender-differentiated pronouns exist in the language structure have a lower level of female entrepreneurial activity compared to that of men, indicating the role of language in reinforcing gender stereotypes and influencing women's interest in entrepreneurship.

Research concerning the public discourse on women and entrepreneurship in Finland is scarce. On a more general level, Finland is considered one of the most equal countries, although, for example, the division of household work is far from equal between the genders (Anttila 2012). Women generally do more housework than men, although the gap has decreased since 2000. The chance to renegotiate the gender roles, however, is concentrated on middle-class households, and those belonging to the working class seem to lack resources for that (Anttila 2012). Because of the male image of entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs are practicing (doing) gender in a way that differs from the expectations of their environment. By acting as entrepreneurs, they are widening the array of ways of being a woman that are conceived as acceptable and, thus, influencing the gender order in the society.

### 4.3 Family Situation and Support

Their families are in many ways present in the decisions women entrepreneurs make. The family's needs and support are taken into consideration when they are making the decision to start a new business or other important decisions related to the business. By family, I mean here the nuclear family consisting of the spouse and the children, as well as the extended family that includes parents and siblings. Family can be an important source of emotional and instrumental support, but it can also constrain the possibilities that entrepreneurs consider viable.

The decision to start a business can generally be viewed as one kind of work decision. Family factors have not received the attention they deserve when studying work-related decisions, argue Greenhouse and Powell (2012), who introduced a "family-relatedness of work decisions" framework (FRWD). The FRWD framework proposes that the work-related decisions made aim at achieving positive outcomes for the family. The stronger the impact of family life on work decisions, the higher are those decisions' family relatedness. Greenhouse and Powell (2012) define family situation as "*a bundle of family-related pressures, demands, responsibilities, or needs that call for the attention of a focal individual and have potential implications for the well-being of the individual's family*". Some examples of family-related situational factors that the authors named are being married or in a long-term relationship, having children and the number and ages of them, responsibility for elderly family members, the needs (financial, medical, psychological or social) of family members, the career orientation of a spouse or a partner, and being a breadwinner or responsible for housekeeping and taking care of children. Even though, e.g., support offered by the spouse or other family members have been found to be important when starting a business as well as influencing working long hours, they are not included in the FRWD framework, because they represent more support than demands from the family side (Greenhouse & Powell 2012).

In light of this study's findings, women entrepreneurs do not make the important work-related decisions in isolation, but their influence for the whole family is considered. Starting or growing a business, moving and changing to employment were constructed as 'big decisions' in which multiple perspectives were taken. In some cases, the decision to start a business was described as a mutual decision of the spouses, and in some cases the decision was prepared by discussions within the larger family (spouse, parents, parents-in-law) to secure support. In other cases, entrepreneurship was framed as a solution to the organisation of the family duties of the entrepreneur (taking care of children or elderly family members). The breadwinner's perspective easily dominates when women entrepreneurs are considering the decision from the whole family's perspective. One can argue that this is natural, because families' aim is to maximise their earnings; however, power is often also related to money in family context, and the career of the breadwinner

might be regarded as the most important. According to the traditional gender order, the husband is the breadwinner, which automatically places women's careers in a subordinate position. Women are presumed to provide resources for their husbands and not to receive them, and women's career choices are often determined by those of the husband. (Bowman 2009; Heikkinen et al. 2014). However, in my material, most of the women entrepreneurs mentioned that their spouses supported them in their endeavours to start and run their businesses.

Family can be a source of different kinds of support that can be categorised as emotional and instrumental support. Emotional support has been defined as the perception or experience that one is loved, cared for by others, esteemed, valued, and part of a mutually supportive social network (Edelman et al. 2016) that provides encouragement, understanding, and attention (Eddleston & Powell 2012) or listens and provides empathy (Klyver et al. 2017). Instrumental support means receiving tangible assistance with solving problems (Klyver et al. 2017). In their study about spousal support, Heikkinen et al. (2014) constructed three categories of spousal support based on women managers' narratives, namely psychosocial support, hands-on support, and career assistance. Psychosocial support can be explicit or tacit and contributes to a woman manager's career indirectly. It includes cheering up, discussing, listening, and providing a steady and reliable background for the woman's career. Hands-on support also indirectly influences the woman manager's career, because it contains practical and manual tasks, e.g., taking care of children and the household. Career assistance, instead, directly influences the career of the woman manager by assisting in work-related activities, providing instrumental support for work and career, and making career choices that are advantageous for the woman's career.

The importance of different forms of family support appears in my material, too. One of the entrepreneurs mentioned "a good and understanding husband" who believed in her as the first thing when she was asked what convinced her that she could combine growing her business with having a child (Paula, video 2.2). She also added that she would not have done it without her husband's support. This is an example of emotional support, but in practice, it likely also meant hands-on support (according to the categorisation of Heikkinen et al. 2014) with childcare. Nevertheless, it presents the entrepreneur's decision as dependent from her husband's will and possibilities (practical arrangements related to, e.g., childcare within the family, also dependent on husband's career decisions) to offer support. Instrumental support provided by the family appears in my material as, e.g., working for the business (designing web pages, financial administration) and providing financial support or networks. Women entrepreneurs might through their family (or other network) have access to networks that otherwise would be closed for them (the spanning function of networks, Hanson & Blake 2009). People are embedded in

different kinds of networks, and it is not just business or working life networks that can facilitate business. Psychosocial support consists of listening and discussing about business related issues. Several of the entrepreneurs in my study said that they discussed business-related issues with their spouse, parents, and sometimes with friends.

Family has been recognised as having an important role in explaining the entrepreneurial experience (Eddleston & Powell 2012). A high level of family demands has been suggested to contribute to the work-family conflict (Eddleston & Powell 2012; Shelton 2006; Heikkinen et al. 2014), which can lead to increased life stress, decreased human capital to be available for the business, and even to lower business performance (Eddleston and Powell 2012). Women usually have greater family responsibilities, and typically, those are not reduced when starting a business, unlike those of men (Eddleston & Powell 2012).

## 4.4 Motherhood

Earlier research has shown that women balance work and family roles more often than men (Carter, Gartner, Shaver & Gatewood 2003). For women, the choice to start a business is often related to necessity, time or location flexibility, for example, to accommodate childcare or other family needs (Minniti 2010; Sullivan & Meek 2012; Jennings et al. 2016; Patrick 2016). One form of this is mothers who configure their business around their motherhood role (Ekinsmyth 2014). These ‘mumpreneurs’ have become the new focus of a research stream in the entrepreneurship field (Luomala 2018, p.14-15). Ekinsmyth (2014) raises the question of whether the label ‘mumpreneurship’ is actually beneficial for these businesses. However, on the macro level, the concept might be beneficial because, as Ekinsmyth (2014, 1231) has suggested, it has the potential to disrupt “*the hegemonic dualism that position ‘mother’ as antithetical to ‘good worker’*”.

My study included no mumpreneurs according to Ekinsmyth’s definition, but children and family are present in these entrepreneurs’ talk. One entrepreneur saw children as one reason for her to start her business, because as an entrepreneur she had better possibilities to manage her time. She had been working part-time as an entrepreneur in another field while taking care of her two children. In this case, the support from the public sector was influential, because the lack of part-time day care encouraged her to start as a full-time entrepreneur, which would not have been her first choice. However, in this case, children were not the only reason for starting a business, but the entrepreneur saw that there was no other way to do the work she wanted to do, because no employer was offering that kind of job. Additionally, the steady job and income of the husband and support from the extended family created



an environment in which she considered the decision to start a business to be reasonable and viable.

Entrepreneurship can be seen as a solution to women's problems of combining family responsibilities with work, e.g., by offering to them the possibility to decide how much and when to work, yet it can be also used to question women entrepreneurs' ability to engage in 'good mothering'. This seems to be a card that can always be pulled when a women entrepreneur is succeeding, "Yes, her business prospers, but is she a good mother?" In western societies, mothers are expected to devote themselves to nurturing their children (Huopalainen & Satama 2019). In Finnish studies, the ideal mother is present, capable, sacrificing and providing love. A focal part of good mothering is being present in children's lives (Krok 2009 p. 71-76.) Of course, our understanding of motherhood depends on time and place, and parallel constructions of motherhood exist. Feminist research views motherhood as a gendered and cultural construct (Huopalainen & Satama 2019). These cultural constructs of the good mother and good mothering are not easy to combine with a demanding career, for example, being an entrepreneur.

The problems of performing "good motherhood" while working in a field in which long working hours are the norm is evident in the entrepreneurs' accounts. It is easy to notice how the cultural norms and conceptions of motherhood guide women to a certain way of practicing motherhood and how they struggle with their feelings of guilt when negotiating a different way of their own. One way to deal with this challenge is to allow the spheres of private and professional to overlap (described by Huopalainen & Satama 2019). For example, one of the entrepreneurs refers to a friend of hers, also an entrepreneur, who had been raising her children in her shop's backroom, but this was presented as a nonviable solution. An interesting example is the entrepreneur-husband of one of the participants who used to take their children to his work, even to business meetings, this way stretching the boundaries of his professional life sphere to accommodate the children within it. However, his wife was working as a nurse in a hospital, whereas he was an entrepreneur and able to set the rules at his workplace, so this was probably the easier way to organise childcare in their family.

Family has often been viewed as intruding on the entrepreneurial experience, although contradictory evidence also exists (Eddleston & Powel, 2012; Huopalainen & Satama 2019). Eddleston and Powell's study (2012) investigated how the positive spill over from their family experience influences women and men entrepreneurs' satisfaction with their work – or family balance. Building on theories of work–family enrichment and social support, they studied how enrichment and support can enhance entrepreneurs' satisfaction with work-life balance. Entrepreneurs may utilise their business resources that are generated in the family domain, which is called family-to-business enrichment. This form of enrichment can be divided into

affective and instrumental components. The former means the transferring of positive affect and the latter the transferring of skills and behavior from the family to the business domain. Earlier research suggest that family-to-business enrichment in the form of participation in the family role may enhance entrepreneurs' well-being (Eddleston & Powell 2012).

## 4.5 Employment Situation

The reasons for women to start businesses often relate to dissatisfaction with current employment, flexibility and family concerns, independence, self-fulfilment, and income pursuit (Jennings & Brush 2013; Sullivan & Meek 2012; Malach-Pines & Schwartz 2008; Patrick et al. 2016). Regarding the employment situation, entrepreneurship has been seen by women as a means to control advancement opportunities (breaking through the organisations' glass ceilings), performance evaluation, or to create a more pleasant work environment (Sullivan & Meek 2012; Hodges 2012; Buttner and Moore 1997). Malach-Pines and Schwartz's (2008) study found that among Israeli women entrepreneurs and nascent entrepreneurs, facing unemployment was rated as the least important reason to start a business, while the most important reasons were being one's own boss and self-actualisation. The same patterns were found among female business students.

Entrepreneurship has been suggested as a solution for individuals who have difficulties finding employment because of their unattractive mix of human capital. In these cases self-employment may be a way to create income or as a steppingstone for entering wage or salaried employment (Patrick et al. 2016). Patrick et al. (2016) found that experience encourages US women to participate in the labor market, but at the same time it discourages women to enter self-employment. Children have the opposite influence: Having young children pushes women away from salaried employment either to self-employment with more flexibility or to no work at all (Caputo & Dolinski 1998; Patrick et al 2016). Patrick et al.'s (2016) study revealed some interesting differences between married and unmarried women that show the importance of appreciating the heterogeneity among women entrepreneurs. For example, expectations for greater earnings in self-employment than in salaried employment encourage unmarried women to choose entrepreneurship. That did not apply to married women, whose decision to enter self-employment was influenced more by their perceptions of their ability and self-confidence.

Hodges (2012) has studied midlife women who enter entrepreneurship after working for a bigger organisation in the UK. By focusing on women between 46-60 years of age, Hodges contributes to the call to understand the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs. She found two prevalent accounts about the reasons why these women left their employment and entered entrepreneurship. Nearly half of the

participants in her study said that they left because of dissatisfaction and disappointment with their organisations. For example, they felt that they were no longer accepted, for example, because of their age. The rest of the stories (over one half of the participants) were about choosing entrepreneurship because it offered the women authority and opportunities to use their knowledge and capabilities. Hodges' study shows the importance of the working environment and how it can create a push or pull into entrepreneurship. Employment situations or dissatisfaction with the current work were also important triggers in almost all cases in my study. None of the entrepreneurs actually said that they would have preferred entrepreneurship as their career choice, and some of them found it even difficult to identify themselves with their entrepreneurial role.

Jane's story is exceptional in my material, as it shows how she considered entrepreneurship a possibility for her because she was a student. She was neither unsatisfied nor having any problems with her employment, but she did not have a promising career or a good salary that she would have lost when becoming an entrepreneur. Ann and Lisa had been unemployed or working part time. Natalie had experienced health problems that forced her to change her occupation and caused problems with motivation in her previous job. Paula had experienced burnout in her previous work, pushing her to rethink her career. Kate's former employer did not allow her to have vacation when she needed it, which led her to resign and move into entrepreneurship. Sharon had experienced unemployment previously, but at that time, she saw entrepreneurship as too difficult and found other employment, which, however, helped her to build her entrepreneurial self-efficacy so that she dared to enter entrepreneurship later.

The women entrepreneurs also narrated other reasons in addition to factors related to unemployment or dissatisfaction with their current employment. Thus, at least in these cases, the employment situation may have been influential in pushing the women towards entrepreneurship, but it was not the only reason in of these cases. Rather, these women were in a situation with several different factors pointing to entrepreneurship as a preferable solution.

## 4.6 Identities, Roles and Gender

Identity has become a popular concept that can be used to study a wide array of phenomena (Alvesson et al. 2008). Within entrepreneurship, identity has been applied, for example, to studying building an entrepreneurial identity (Hytti 2003), career identities of mumpreneurs (Duberley & Carrigan 2012), gender identities of women entrepreneurs (Díaz García & Welter 2013), construction of entrepreneurial identities as part of entrepreneurial learning (Rae 2005), and construction of the entrepreneurial identity of social entrepreneurs (Jones et al. 2008).

According to Alvesson et al. (2008), identity means the subjective meanings and experiences related to the ongoing process of addressing the questions of “Who am I?” and “How should I act?” Alvesson et al. (2008, p. 6) explain, “*One’s personal identity implies certain forms of (often positive) subjectivity and thereby entwines feelings, values and behavior and points them in particular (sometimes conflicting) directions.*” This way, rather than being fixed, identity can be understood as temporary, context-sensitive, evolving, multiple, shifting, competing (Alvesson et al. 2008), emergent, partial, fragmented, and produced (Pullen & Simpson 2009).

Identity is involved with who we belong to (social identity) in addition to addressing who we are (personal identity). Alvesson et al. (2008) highlight the presence of both the personal and the social, because we need feedback from other people to be able to see ourselves and to build our identities. The social side of identity comes along when we identify ourselves with a group as distinct from other groups. We need the others to see who we are and who we are not; thus, identity includes the notion of otherness (Pullen & Simpson 2009). We all have multiple social identities that can be “*donned or shed, muted or made more salient, depending on the situation*” (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 139).

One’s sense of identity is constructed in a sense-making process “*through gestalt that fits parts and wholes together*” (Downing 2005, 191; Polkinghorne 1991). The sense-making process related to identity links the past, the present and the future, because individuals build their sense making on the present and on what has happened in the past, drawing on the cultural stories, myths, narratives, and social discourses in which we are embedded (Steyaert 2007; Alvesson et al. 2008; Polkinghorne 1991). This sense making also depends on others, because personal identities are negotiated in ongoing, embodied interactions. Through our interactions with others, our identities are created, reproduced, threatened, or altered (Alvesson et al. 2008; Pullen & Simpson 2009).

Alvesson et al. (2008) argue that much of the research concerning identity, especially within functionalist and interpretivist approaches, could pay more attention to the broader historical, cultural, organisational and political influences on the local relational context and “interactive production”. Thus, they are concerned about overly localised views when analysing the personal-social relation. Alvesson et al. (2008, p. 11) stated, “*...how we understand ourselves is shaped by larger cultural and historical formations, which supply much of our identity vocabularies, norms, pressures and solutions, yet which do so in indirect and subtle ways.*” Therefore, close readings of individual identity constructions should be balanced with consideration of broader contexts and macro developments (Alvesson et al. 2008 p. 12).

Roles are situated identities, meaning that they change across different situations. Someone can be a student in the educational context and a patient in the health care

context, but one cannot stop being a woman or a man (belonging to a sex category) or at least be categorised by others as one or the other. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is the managing of our conduct taking into consideration the normative conception of the attitudes and activities that are appropriate for each sex category, while doing gender is an “*ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction*” aiming to be seen by others in a particular context as gender appropriate, i.e., accountable (West & Zimmerman 1987 p. 130-131). In addition to doing gender, we have the option of undoing gender (or self or identity), which means reducing, disrupting, dismantling or challenging gender differences (Deutch 2007). Many roles are so tightly seen linked with a certain sex category that an explanatory qualifier, like ‘male-nurse’, is used. (West & Zimmerman 1987). Entrepreneur is one of these roles that need the prefix ‘woman’, if we do not mean men entrepreneurs, and we even need the term ‘women’s entrepreneurship’ to distinguish the field from ‘normal’ entrepreneurship.

In the entrepreneurship discourse, the masculine world view is perceived as legitimate (Ahl 2002, 2006), as are the male gender qualities associated with entrepreneurship: achievement, dominance, control, autonomy, aggression, independence, idiosyncrasy vs. female subjugation, submissiveness, appreciation, support, co-operation, dependence, conformity (Ogbor 2000). Ahl (2002) has shown how entrepreneurship is male gendered by examining the attributes of entrepreneurs used in the literature and comparing these with Bem’s sex-role inventory. She found that the words describing masculinity matched well with those describing entrepreneurs. Ahl continued with forming negation words of entrepreneurs, and compare those with the words in Bem’s femininity scale. She noticed that the words in the femininity scale most associated with the non-entrepreneur words were ‘yielding’ and ‘gullible’. Most of the positive words in Bem’s femininity inventory were absent from the discussion about entrepreneurship, even to describing the opposite of entrepreneurs (Ahl 2002, 53-58). Bird & Brush (2002) have also contemplated the lack of feminine attributes connected to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. They remind that the concepts of sex and gender must not be mixed: entrepreneurs, like all individuals, can behave both in masculine and feminine ways, and it is reasonable to assume that both of these are also present in the process of opportunity creation. However, the feminine side of the process has not been articulated as strongly as the masculine, which means that the masculine side is emphasised, at least in the theories of opportunity discovery. This means that concepts such as control, competition, rationality and dominance (Ogbor 2000) have been central when defining the norm for entrepreneurship, just like performance or success. This can also be seen in the metaphors used to describe entrepreneurship, such as those identified by Koironen (1995). These are all action oriented, because

sportsman, game player, adventurer, warrior, or battler, according to Nicholson and Anderson (2005), reinforce the dominant account in entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs, like any other women who work in a men-dominated sector, must navigate between the social expectations of the masculine entrepreneur and those of the suitable career for women and then integrate and negotiate these into their notion of self. Díaz-García and Welter (2013) have shown that some women entrepreneurs perceive dissonance between the discourses of womanhood and entrepreneurship whereas others do not. Identity and gender are negotiated (done/redone, reproduced, challenged, altered) based on our interpretations of experiences and situations (i.e., the past) in dialogue and everyday interactions within a conflicting discourse. There is an array of culturally embedded practices available for women entrepreneurs to consciously or unconsciously redo gender (Díaz-García & Welter 2013). Thus, gender is also not stable but constantly (re)produced depending on context and agency (Díaz-García & Welter 2013; Deutch 2009; West & Zimmerman 1987).

Díaz-García and Welter (2013) identified five ways of constructing gender identity used by women entrepreneurs: if perceiving dissonance between womanhood and entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs either identified themselves with the societal assumption of what it is to be a woman or defined themselves as “other” compared to the traditional entrepreneur. If they perceived no dissonance, their options were to distance themselves from the societal assumption of what it means to be a woman to emphasise their token status or to take for granted that the male norm is gender neutral. Balachandra et al. (2021) have investigated entrepreneurs’ use of language when pitching and found that gendered use of language when pitching influences investors’ funding decisions. The study showed that the language style used by women entrepreneurs was more masculine than feminine but that an overly masculine style did not convince investors, either. Balachandra et al. (2021) concluded that women entrepreneurs are aware of the preferences of their investor audience and how the language used influences them and, thus, are not using stereotypically feminine styles of ambivalence or ambiguity. Pullen & Simpson (2009) showed in their study concerning men’s doing gender in a female-dominated sector in feminised work that we also do gender by doing (or undoing) difference (Pullen & Simpson 2009). Otherness is not restricted to women but, for example, men working in female-dominated occupations are considered to be others, as shown by Pullen and Simpson (2009). However, women entrepreneurs’ situations are arguably different, because regardless of the sector, women’s subordinate position allows men to draw on their belonging to the dominant group.

It seems that, although they distance themselves from the societal norm of being a woman, the entrepreneurs participating in my study still perceive the dissonance

between the discourses of womanhood and entrepreneurship, which is in conflict with the proposition made by Díaz García and Welter (2013). According to their interpretation, distancing oneself from the norm of being a woman is available only if one does not perceive the conflict.

The participants' stories in this study could be analysed taking into account the fluid and changeable nature of gender and that both sexes show feminine and masculine qualities and behavior. The underlying idea, however, is that it is possible to learn about the feminine side of opportunity creation better by investigating women's entrepreneurship rather than men's entrepreneurship. Thus, this study follows the example of earlier studies in the field. I return to entrepreneurs' identities and (gender) roles in chapter 6.3 when describing the narrative reading of the research materials. Before that, in the next chapter, I present how I conducted the study.

# 5 Conducting the Study

## 5.1 Methodological Choices

The positivist approach has dominated the field of entrepreneurship research, leading to a need for wider use of diverse methodologies and a qualitative lens (e.g., Ogbor 2000; Jennings et al. 2005; Cope 2005; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007; Brush et al. 2009; Leitch et al. 2009; Henry et al. 2015; Junaid et al. 2015) to illuminate the phenomena within entrepreneurship that cannot be quantified or measured. Leitch, Hill and Harrison (2009) argued that, to be able to produce rich and in-depth knowledge, entrepreneurship researchers must adopt diverse ontological and epistemological positions and draw on a variety of theoretical and practical traditions from both the social sciences and the humanities. Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) also emphasise the need for pluralism and note that the mainstream entrepreneurship research often omits discussing its ontological, epistemological and ideological positions, which is problematic because it leaves the basic assumptions and hidden perspectives unexplicated. Some of these assumptions, they argue, are problematic in empirical entrepreneurship research because of their oversimplified view of the complexity of the real world. In line with the previously-mentioned concerns, Brush et al. (2009) recommend using mixed methods or ‘less accepted’ methods. In the same tone, Junaid (2015) argues for using nonmainstream approaches, particularly when trying to conceptualise informal or unorganised issues. Moreover, Brush et al. (2009) have encouraged the use of the constructionist perspective when studying women’s entrepreneurship, because it contributes to the recognition of the different layers of embeddedness in which entrepreneurship occurs.

According to Lindgren and Packendorff (2009), theory development means critical questioning of the institutionalised research questions, definitions of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, methodologies and theories: *“The importance of research thus also will have to be judged against how we can challenge institutionalised barriers in our way of integrating theories..., find new methods for research..., find entrepreneurship in new contexts..., and identify entrepreneurs outside current research populations...”*. The potential of qualitative research for developing theory in completely new directions has been especially recognised in new or understudied empirical contexts or about complex challenges. Inductive



theorising based on abstraction of observations from the data and generalisation to the theory can generate knowledge that can also be generalisable beyond the original context of the data (Bansal, Smith & Vaara 2018).

To be able to understand the empirical material of a study and to recognise how it relates to the theory, it is important to consider the context in which it has been produced. The outcome of the research process using qualitative methodologies is not general rules, but “*to arrive at particular conclusions in particular locations for particular studies*” (Leitch et al. 2009, 70). The aim for the researcher is to acknowledge the complexity of the social worlds by entering the participants’ realities and describing their experiences so that the meanings the actors assign to them can be uncovered (Leitch et al. 2009; Gephart 2004). Leitch et al. (2009 p. 71 referring to Gherardi 2006) note that, because entrepreneurship is a practice-based discipline, its “*knowledge is bounded by its contextual nature*”.

Welter et al. (2019) have identified three waves of contextualisation, with the newest wave encouraging scholars to deepen their theorising and add diversity to the domain of entrepreneurship research. Henry et al. (2015) have also investigated the methodological trends of research particularly concerning women’s entrepreneurship. Their findings and recommendations are in line with those mentioned earlier. They conclude that the majority of research published in the journals they selected report using quantitative methodology, but only a few adopted a feminist epistemology. Thus, they urge scholars to utilise more innovative methodologies and apply a feminist lens to better understand the complexity of women’s entrepreneurship in its contexts.

The choice of methodology must be based on the study’s aim and on the research questions. This study’s aim is to add to our understanding of how women entrepreneurs make sense of opportunity creation: how they understand it and what they see as important in what they are doing. This aim is about understanding how people make sense of their experiences and what kinds of meanings they give to them, so I have applied the social constructionist approach in this study. I have chosen to apply metaphor analysis and narrative analysis to my material. The use of two different readings of the same material helps to reach a more versatile and contextualised picture of women’s sense making of opportunity creation, thus contributing to the study’s reliability.

A great deal of the existing research is cross-sectional, so there is a need for more longitudinal studies. I gathered my material between 2010 and 2013, so there is an opportunity to also conduct a temporal analysis. I examined how the women entrepreneurs’ use of metaphors change over time and found that the changes seem to be related to situational factors, such as the economic situation or the growth prospects of the business or issues regarding the entrepreneur’s health. I could not find any clear pattern suggesting that the changes would be related to entrepreneurial

experience, age of the firm, age of the entrepreneur, or entrepreneur's start-up motives.

## 5.2 Stories and Narrative Analysis

Narratives are stories that people tell and that enable them to give meaning, order and structure to their experiences (Georgakopoulou 2006). Narratives can be longer or shorter (micro narratives), but they are typically constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end, which makes them coherent in a way that makes sense to listeners (Duberley & Carrigan 2012). Narratives do not need to be long stories, although these kinds of narratives are easier to detect, but they can also be small, fragmented, unfinished stories "*captured in everyday conversation or 'narratives in interaction'*" (Larty and Hamilton 2011, 225; Georgakopoulou 2006).

Stories are variable and change according to the audience and context. Listeners are involved in the process of storytelling as coproducers: they challenge, revise, fill in missing parts with their own experience, and participate in the negotiation of meanings. In organisations, stories are focal for organisation members' sense making, decision making, and action. (Boje 1991). They function as the institutional memory system, a means of "*supplementing individual memories with organisational memories*" (Boje 1991, 106). Just as some stories are sacred in organisations, so also there are culturally sacred narratives in families and in larger communities, such as the narratives about the high value of hard work in the Finnish culture. People draw on these so-called 'grand narratives', 'master narratives', or cultural narratives by using them as threads that are available for interweaving, appropriating, resisting or altering, according to what they need (Steyaert 2007). We must acknowledge when studying narratives that individuals construct the narratives of their working life so that they fit to the grand narratives or prevailing discourses in their society, which define how a career should progress and what a legitimate career is (Duberley & Carrigan 2012; Larty & Hamilton 2011). All individuals are not equal when narrating, but they do it from "*embodied, gendered and unequal positions within the social world*", as stated by Miller (2005, p. 14 cited by Duberley and Carrigan 2012); thus, it is important that storytelling be perceived as "*embodied and embedded performance*" (Steyaert 2007, p. 734).

According to Polkinghorne (1991), narratives offer a way of constructing the self as a story, which illuminates the temporal and developmental aspects of the self instead of presenting it as stable and unchangeable. Narratives are cognitive processes in which we give meaning to events as we include them in a story. These events are pieces that have meaning relative to other selected events, together composing the plot as the narrative unfolds. These narratives can be public stories, but in the personal ones, individuals compose events in their lives into an

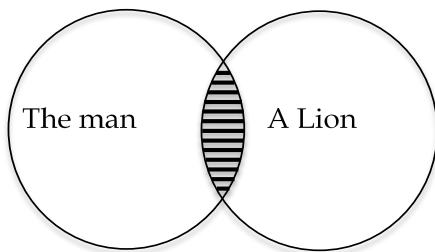
understandable whole, the story about the personal identity. In narratives, the past, present and future are embraced to form a meaningful whole: The past gives the means to understand the present, and vice versa, which is the foundation for imagining the life to come and choosing actions that are assumed to lead to a desired future. Polkinghorne (1991, 143) stated, “...*my life as a whole – that is my self – is something temporal that unfolds in time, and whose phases I survey prospectively and retrospectively from within an ever-changing present.*”.

Narratives have been utilised more widely in organisation research (Boje 1991), leadership research (Auvinen et al. 2013) but also in entrepreneurship, for example, in studies concerning entrepreneurial identities (Hytti 2003, Maclean et al. 2015), career identities of mumpreneurs (Duberley & Carrigan 2012), gender identities (Hytti et al. 2017) and identities in entrepreneurship education (Nielsen & Gartner 2017).

### 5.3 Metaphors Constructing Our World

Metaphors are figurative language, one of the tropes together with sarcasm, hyperbole, satire, and humour (Oswick, Keenoy & Grant 2002). According to Oxford Dictionaries (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>), metaphor is “*a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable*”. Metaphors establish correspondence between concepts from disparate domains of knowledge by transferring meaning from one conceptual domain (the source or the base) to another (the target). For example, we can use the ‘time is money’ metaphor, in which we transfer attributes of money, like a scarcity, to time. However, not all characteristics of money are applicable to time. A metaphor can never convey more than a partial truth by ignoring some obvious dissimilarities between the source and the target domain (Morgan 1997). As Morgan (1997, 5) says, “*the way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of not seeing*”. A metaphor can offer us insight, but we must be aware of its nature of blinding and inhibiting us to get an overall view, as **Figure 1** illustrates.

Metaphor invites us to see the similarities



But ignore the differences

Metaphor stretches imagination in a way that can create powerful insights, but at the risk of distortion.

**Figure 1.** The Nature of metaphor (Morgan 1997, 5).

To be effective, the source and the target domain need to have an “optimum overlap” so as not to remain “nonsensical or weak imagery” (Morgan 1997; Oswick, Keenoy & Grant 2002.) It has been shown that the more similar the source and the target are, the more apt and more easily and rapidly interpreted the metaphor is (Bowdle & Gentner 2005).

The use of metaphors is not restricted to give a poetic tone to speech, but they are commonly used in everyday communication (Bowdle & Gentner 2005). In fact, metaphors are so embedded in our use of language, thoughts and actions that it is difficult for us to notice them and the ways in which they shape our world (Latusek & Vlaar 2015; Kendal & Kendal 1993). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3), “*our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of how we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature*”. The concepts we hold influence how we define our realities, what we perceive, how we think, how we experience, act and relate to other people (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3; Hill & Lavenhagen 1995; Kendal & Kendal 1993). New metaphors extend our thinking and also offer new possibilities for action (Morgan 1997). For example, conceiving competition in terms of a war is unlikely to result in noticing possibilities for cooperation; instead, employing a game metaphor may open up possibilities for new insights that lead to more cooperative behavior. New metaphors can create new reality in this way (Nicholson & Anderson 2005).

Metaphors are used when trying to understand, create order, make sense of or communicate about abstract, novel or ambiguous issues (Moser 2000; Cornelissen 2012; Morgan 1997). They enable us to making sense of our experiences and particularly our emotions in a more sharply defined way (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Metaphors can capture the essentials of ambiguous situations and also legitimise

actions (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). They help us to communicate issues that are difficult to express in words or when no words exist. Metaphors are effective communicators because they can convey a large amount of information and ideas (Tsoukas 1991). Thanks to the ambiguous language of metaphors, they offer guidance but still allow flexibility and interpretations. This can be an effective way to communicate in uncertain environments (Hill & Levenhagen 1995).

Metaphors are open to interpretations and reinterpretations; thus, they have been suggested to encourage creativity in others and to make it easier to understand and remember information, thanks to the vivid images that metaphors elicit. Thus, metaphors are also used to invent, organise and illuminate theoretical constructs. They can facilitate learning and coping in new situations because they can serve as heuristics (Hill & Levenhagen 1995). Metaphors can be used not only as a learning tool but also as a scientific tool. Metaphors can assist learning because they draw on our knowledge of the familiar when making sense of the new, and they describe something abstract in a more concrete way (Inns 2002).

Metaphors, although helpful in articulating things that are difficult to describe, have limitations. They are incomplete, and there are logical inconsistencies, incongruences or contradictions in metaphorical descriptions (Hill & Levenhagen 1995). Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) has noted that metaphor analysis has been used so widely and related to so many kinds of research problems that its theoretical development has not always kept pace with its use. Oswick, Keenoy & Grant (2002) criticise the optimum overlap of the source and the target, because they see it as bounding creative thinking and hindering the generation of multiple perspectives and restricting operating to the “cognitive comfort zone”. They suggest irony as more useful in rejecting taken-for-granted conceptions of reality.

Some scholars have suggested concentrating on literal language due to metaphors’ imprecision and low conceptual content (Tsoukas 1991). Tsoukas (1991) proposed a methodology to combine the benefits of metaphorical and the use of literal language by explicating the transition of metaphors into literal language. He argues that the use of metaphors is inevitable both in lay and scientific discourses but that their knowledge function is different. In lay discourse, metaphors are used to convey primarily experiential information in a vivid and economical way, whereas metaphors can provide insight into mechanisms that produce phenomena in scientific discourse. This, as Tsoukas (1991) argued, is possible only by revealing the literal core of the metaphor.

Consideration of several metaphors have been recommended because metaphors are capable of generating only partial insight (El-Sawad 2005; Morgan 1997). The insights gained by using multiple metaphors complement each other and are helpful in drawing a more versatile picture of the focal phenomenon or situation. According to Morgan (1997), an understanding of the “mutual causality and patterns of paradox

and contradiction” of several metaphors adds to our understanding and is able to contribute to theory building. This kind of rich insight building on multiple perspectives also lets us see different possibilities for action, some of which we formerly would not see as possible. The metaphors used are also realised in our actions in this way and, as noted by Morgan (1997), metaphors are not just theoretical but are also extremely practical. Morgan (1997) suggests that using the insights from one metaphor can be used to overcome the limitations of another metaphor.

In the case of entrepreneurship, metaphors are found to be a particularly important tool of sense making due to the difficulties of defining or even describing entrepreneurship (Nicholson & Anderson 2005). Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) suggest that metaphors can offer a key to the cognitive processes of entrepreneurs and how they perceive their reality. Entrepreneurs often operate at the edge of their knowledge, particularly when creating a new kind of environment in which they are better able to compete but for which no set interpretive schemes or mental models exist (Hill & Lavenhagen 1993).

Metaphors have been used in entrepreneurship research, e.g., by Cardon et al. (2005), who have used a parenting metaphor to explore and bring new insights into entrepreneurship research. The authors suggest that the parenting metaphor with its components of passion, identification, protectiveness, and even neglect and abuse, offer a fruitful way to examine entrepreneurship and that is also relevant for entrepreneurs themselves. Their examination of the metaphor covers the pre-emergent stages of conception and gestation as well as the post-emergent stages of infancy, toddlerhood, childhood, growth and maturity, bringing up new and interesting questions for future research. They highlight the existence of high emotions (e.g., passion), identification and attachment, nurturing and the importance of context as the key ideas emerging from the parental metaphor.

Hyrsky (1999) studied the metaphors about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs used by both entrepreneurs and nonentrepreneurs in different countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Australia, Canada). He concluded that the majority of the metaphors used contained very positive or even idealistic and glorifying views of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs were often seen as modern heroes, especially in the Nordic countries, who are highly valuable for the society, with entrepreneurs themselves seeing entrepreneurs more positively than nonentrepreneurs. However, beside these highly positive views, which were in the minority, Hyrsky (1999) also found negative, cynical and sceptic perceptions of entrepreneurs.

In Drakopoulou Dodd's (2002) study, entrepreneurs described entrepreneurship in terms of *journey, race, building, parenting, war, iconoclasm and passion*. Drakopoulou Dodd suspected that use of the journey metaphors could be something

special for North American entrepreneurs. However, in this study, the pedaling metaphor is related to a journey with a reference to having a destination (a vision), although it emphasises persistence in making the journey.

Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) studied entrepreneurs' use of linguistic devices when talking to others as a means of sense making and sense giving. Here, entrepreneurs used metaphors and analogies to describe their new business in terms of something their audiences were familiar with to increase its acceptance.

I used a combination of the metaphor analyses just described for this study. I started with the approach used by Hyrsky (1999) and Drakopoulou Dodd (2002) as I identified the metaphorical use of language by entrepreneurs. I then turned to Cardon et al.'s (2005) use of metaphors as I continued building the metaphors by asking questions such as 'what does that word mean', 'why does she use that word in this context', 'what is she trying to explicate by using that word' and so forth. This part of the analysis is discussed in more detail later in chapter 5.5.3 Metaphor analysis.

## 5.4 Research Material

### 5.4.1 Producing the Research Material

Given my aim to add to our understanding of how women entrepreneurs construct opportunities, I decided to combine multiple sources of empirical material to gain a more versatile view of the phenomenon.

Opportunities and opportunity creation are typically linked with nascent entrepreneurs and the creation of new firms, but practicing entrepreneurs also seeking to develop their firms have opportunity thoughts and engage in opportunity creation. The efforts to create the opportunity do not end when a company is established: Entrepreneurs must continue creating the opportunity (Wood & McKinley 2017). I examine entrepreneurial opportunities and opportunity creation among practicing and nascent entrepreneurs by focusing in this study on a group of development-oriented women entrepreneurs. I gathered my research material in pursuit of a development program with a group of nine women entrepreneurs who self-selected to participate in the program. They all had perceived a problem or a need for development in their work or business and were looking for some kind of development or change.

Paula, one of the participants, recalls the situation of deciding to attend the course:

*“The word ‘experience’ (the translation does not cover all the nuances of the Finnish word, which means a powerful, emotional experience), ‘experiential’ is a lovely word. It was a bit, at that time I was a bit, like feeling a bit lost, like*

*what am I going to do. And it was to some extent related to family issues also in the sense that for years we had had the need to find a new home, and it was all running on without anything becoming ready, so it was experiential time also.”*

The program was organised by a local university and funded by the local Regional Council and European Social Fund. It consisted of two components, the first of which had more informational, interactive lectures on topics covering time management, self-management, emotional intelligence, growth, and networks. The curriculum comprised 7 sessions each lasting 2,5 hours. A draft of the curriculum was presented to the participating entrepreneurs at the beginning of the program, and the final composition was decided by the participants according to which topics they found useful. The second component of the program comprised group sessions utilising theatre-based methods. The entrepreneurs attended 12 of these sessions (within 15 months) tutored by an expert who specialised in theatre-based methods (see more about the method in Hytti & Nieminen 2013). The entrepreneurs were also asked to write their autobiographies; based on that work, they performed and directed short episodes about their own experiences that they found meaningful. They also familiarised themselves with some women entrepreneurs who they found in some way interesting and could name as their role model and wrote about their lives, pondering the similarities and differences with their own life as entrepreneur, their motivations and aspirations for the future.

The atmosphere in these training sessions was relaxed, enthusiastic and open, which could be seen, for instance, in the participants' collective decision to wear woollen socks instead of shoes. The conversations during the sessions were lively, covering a variety of themes, and occasionally outside the scope of the 'official' topics. The entrepreneurs could bring up issues that they found important in this way, even if they did not fit the theme of the session in question. The discussions were informal, and intimate issues were even shared by the participants. The entrepreneurs consciously built an atmosphere of trust, appreciation and care during the sessions, starting with an explicit verbal agreement of confidentiality at the beginning of the program. Appendix 1 presents a broad list of themes that were discussed on the video recordings: The themes of conversations in the video recordings.

The development program was offered specifically to women entrepreneurs. The participants themselves brought up that the exclusion of men entrepreneurs influenced the program, the dynamics of the group and the discussions that occurred. They highlighted the positive effects that *“there were no geezers calling us girls”* (Jane), that other women entrepreneurs can more easily understand the problems women entrepreneurs face, and that they could express and experience different emotions. One could argue that this setting offered the participants more freedom concerning some of the normative conceptions of entrepreneurship and cultural



norms of being a woman. They could, for example, define growth in their own terms regardless of how it is usually defined (in the media, in the talk of entrepreneurs). Additionally, the inclusion of men might have eroded the fragile entrepreneurial identity of the novice entrepreneurs in the group, who might have found the women-only setting more encouraging (taking into consideration Jane's comment above). It has been suggested that gender-specific education related to entrepreneurial self-efficacy would especially benefit women (Sullivan & Meek 2012; Wilson et al. 2007). The absence of men entrepreneurs may have meant that some areas, such as the financial issues of the enterprise, were excluded, and others, such as combining children and enterprising, were brought up in the discussions.

The group met 20 times during the program, which started in October 2009 and ended in a final seminar in March 2011. No meetings were held during summer 2010, but the participants chose to organise a meeting of their own. The participants have stayed in contact with each other since the program ended and have organised meetings several times per year. Many of the participants regarded the group as a unique and important source of support for them when I discussed this with them during summer 2013.

I also gathered data during the program about the entrepreneurs' networks for network analysis. This was done by asking the participants to draw a map of the connections they had, and to describe the people or organisations appearing on their maps and the resources these provided (name generator). This material was not used in this study, but gathering it offered me an additional conversation with these entrepreneurs. All of these occasions when I met with the entrepreneurs offered me an opportunity to get to know the participants better, which helped me later in the analysis of the other material used in this study.

The research material is diverse and offers access to investigate the sense making of the entrepreneurs. The interviews were produced for and with myself as the interviewer, whereas in the video material, the audience was the other entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs are sharing their experiences and interpretations of them in different ways, especially on the videos, both verbally and by acting. They also negotiate their interpretations, forming their mutually constructed, individual understandings. The production of the research material follows the ideas of social constructionism and relational constructionism in this way.

All the participants were women, except the facilitator, so the stories were told and the episodes were performed mainly to other women. I can only speculate how this influenced the content of the conversations and stories, but with a male audience, most probably it would have been different. The participants could assume the other women entrepreneurs would understand their experiences of motherhood and womanhood without thoroughly explaining. They also did not need to hide their femininity or intentionally change their behavior to be more masculine to meet the business world's

expectations. However, the context of entrepreneurship brings some degree of expectations for masculinity in the context of producing the materials.

## 5.4.2 Interviews

I conducted one-to-one interviews with each of the 9 entrepreneurs on two occasions (altogether 18 interviews). The first interviews were conducted between November 2009 and January 2010, right after the beginning of the development program. These interviews started with an open question of how these women had become entrepreneurs, which allowed the participants to narrate their stories, including the history of their business. The other themes of the interviews included if and how the entrepreneurs look for new opportunities and how they evaluated opportunities if they had new opportunity ideas, how they had proceeded with them, and if not, why they did not proceed with them. All interviews (the first as well as the second) were tape recorded and transcribed. The length of the first interviews varied between 1 and 2,5 hours (altogether 14.5 hours) and yielded 237 pages of transcribed text; the second interviews were between 1 to 2,5 hours and yielded 15 hours of speech, equalling 116 pages of transcribed text.

The second interviews were conducted between June and September 2013, after the development program had ended. These were also theme interviews that allowed the entrepreneurs to report issues that they found worth telling. These interviews served two purposes: first, to find out how the businesses had developed since the last time I had met with the entrepreneurs, and second, to tell them about the study and its findings. I was particularly looking for feedback on the metaphors I had elicited by that time (maturation, pedaling, owner-building). Consulting the participants is recommended throughout a longitudinal research process (e.g., Saldaña 2003, p. 24). The interviews started with the entrepreneurs' stories of what had happened in their businesses since the last time I met them in August 2010. The situation in the business directed the how the interviews proceeded. I asked the entrepreneurs about significant factors influencing the development of their business (positive or negative), their plans for the future, new opportunity ideas, what they were doing to develop these opportunities, and what should happen so that they could proceed with those opportunities. For example, Lisa had decided to close her shop, and Jane had already closed her shop and was focusing on the web store. These decisions were discussed; the reasons for closing, how the transition was made and, in Lisa's case, the reasons why she planned to continue with a web store and not retire, as well as her plans for the web store. The discussion with Sharon focused on her decision to sell her share of the company to her business partner and to establish a new one by herself and how she had dealt with the particular difficulties in her new firm. The conversations also covered issues concerning the entrepreneurs' personal

lives, for example, personal goals, dreams and family issues. After discussing the current situation, the plans for future, and any issues the entrepreneurs perceived worth telling, I told them about the study and the metaphors elicited. I asked them to tell me anything the metaphors brought to their minds, contradicting or supporting arguments, and whether or not the metaphors made sense to them in the light of their own entrepreneurial path. The entrepreneurs generally found the metaphors to be an interesting way of describing some aspects of entrepreneurship and they mainly saw them as applicable to their experiences. Some entrepreneurs found certain metaphors more appealing than others, and some saw certain attributes that contradicted their experiences. The discussions also inspired the entrepreneurs to expand the metaphors and to bring out new aspects related to them, which are, together with the contradicting aspects, discussed in detail after the descriptions of the metaphor.

### 5.4.3 Video Recordings of Group Discussions

The video recordings show the group of women entrepreneurs discussing their ventures, the development of their businesses and themselves during the development sessions. Each of the 11 sessions was recorded (one of which was lost), totalling about 35 hours of group conversation. The material closely resembles naturally occurring talk (Taylor, 2001), because the conversations were minimally guided and were initiated to a great extent by the participants; if initiated by the tutor, the topics of discussion were not linked with our study. Various topics were discussed during these sessions, but for this study, sections concerning themes that are linked with business opportunities, creating, identifying or developing opportunities, were chosen for analysis.

The video recordings include discussions and, like the theatre-based methods utilised in the program, different kind of exercises in which the participants direct and perform short episodes or scenes. One example of these is an exercise of directing a scene of a hypothetical discussion between a son and his entrepreneur father about a new business idea that the son was about to present. This setting was brought to the group by the tutor, and the exercise consisted of directing the scene, not actually performing it. The tutor chose one of the participants to act as the director, but the whole group engaged in the discussion of the storyline and how to perform it. The actual lines of the characters were excluded from the exercise, and the task was to decide the setting of the scene. This might sound like a simple task, but it spurred a lot of discussion and decisions. Another exercise concerned a hypothetical discussion with the participants' guru entrepreneurs. They had been asked to choose a well-known entrepreneur as their guru and to familiarise themselves with the stories of these entrepreneurs (by reading books, interviews, newspaper articles, watching TV programs, conducting an interview, etc.) In this

particular exercise, each participant was asked to produce a short line stating what her guru entrepreneur would say to her, and after that, how would she reply. Then these lines were performed and discussed within the group.

The interaction and conversation occurred mostly between the entrepreneurs during these sessions. The tutor, who was not part of the research team, initiated some discussions and set broad limits on the conversations. Some discussions were initiated deliberately by some of the entrepreneurs, and some were brought up spontaneously. The atmosphere within the group was remarkably relaxed and supportive. Discussion in groups can lose spontaneity and candour (Pitt, 1998), but based on my observations, I believe that it was possible for the entrepreneurs to openly express their thoughts and opinions in the group. Therefore, I believe that this setting was suitable for collecting rich research material that is appropriate for informing us how opportunity creation is constructed by women entrepreneurs. **Table 3** describes the materials used in this study.

**Table 3.** Descriptions of the research materials.

Production of the material	Material	Number of units	The time of collecting the material	Length of interviews and discussions	Amount of material
One-to-one interview	Transcriptions of the interviews	9 interviews	November 2009 – January 2010	Duration 1–2,5 hours	14,5 hours equal to 237 pages of transcriptions
	Transcriptions of the interviews	9 interviews	9 interviews	Duration 1–2,5 hours	15 hours equal to 116 pages of transcriptions
Sessions utilising theatre-based methods	Sessions utilising theatre-based methods	10 recorded sessions → 11 sections selected	November 2009 – December 2010	Average duration 3,5 hours, altogether 35 hours	Average duration 3,5 hours, altogether 35 hours
Background material not used in analysis	Observation notes	11 sessions observed	November 2009 – December 2010		16 pages
Background material not used in analysis: Network mappings	network charts and audio recordings of the discussions about the networks with each participants	9 network charts + audio recordings	Spring 2010		

I also had some background materials that were not formally included in the analysis but that obviously influenced my perception and interpretations. Being present and observing the working of the participants and preparing field notes already contained some degree of analysis. In that way, gathering the material and analysing it cannot be separated, but they are (partially) intertwined.

#### 5.4.4 The Participating Entrepreneurs

The entrepreneurs had various backgrounds and experiences and were all in different industries (real estate agency, fashion store, arts and crafts store, welfare services, interior decoration and design, graphic design, sports store, store specialised in design glass, site preparation and stone crushing). Three of the entrepreneurs had previous entrepreneurial experience (between six to nine years), one had not started her business yet but was finding out how to bring her product into the market as the oldest business had been established 15 years ago, two entrepreneurs were engaged in another business at the time they started their current businesses, and two were currently engaged in more than one business. At the beginning of the study in 2009, the entrepreneurs were between 28 and 59 years of age. **Table 4** shows the participating entrepreneurs' characteristics.

**Table 4.** Characteristics of the participant entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneur	Age (at the time of the first interview)	Industry	Age of the business	Former entrepreneurial experience	Solo / partner
Wilma	44	Site preparation and stone crushing	3 (Wilma as the ceo, following her father)	Yes (partner in family businesses, portfolio entrepreneur)	family owned
Kate	48	Fashion store	5	Yes (serial entrepreneur)	husband as a partner
Ann	36	Graphic design	1	No	husband involved
Lisa	59	Arts and crafts store	2	Yes (also failure experience)	solo
Heather	39	Welfare services	2	Yes	solo
Jane	28	Sports store	2	No	husband as a partner
Natalie	49	Store specialised in design glass	4	Yes (partner in family businesses; portfolio entrepreneur)	solo (+ family owned)
Sharon	40	Real estate agency	6	No	partner / solo
Paula	48	Interior decoration and design	15	No	solo
Background material not used in analysis: Network mappings	network charts and audio recordings of the discussions about the networks with each participants	9 network charts + audio recordings	Spring 2010		

Next, I introduce the participants and their businesses. I offer more detailed descriptions, including analysis, in chapter 6.2 in the Findings section.

### Wilma

Wilma took over the family business that was established by her father with his business partner. Her career plans did not originally include entrepreneurship, but

the decision to become involved in the family business grew out of the need to find employment. She would have preferred a career as a manager in a bigger company, but because her husband's enterprise was located in the same area and their children were still small, a move to another area with wider employment opportunities was not a real option for her. Instead, she started working in her father's firm, and two years later, she became a partner. After being a partner for 13 years and working as a financial manager, she followed her father as CEO of the firm. Entrepreneurship per se, is still not a must for her; she says that if she were forced to exit this business, she would not necessarily continue as an entrepreneur. However, she is strongly committed to her firm and is working hard to develop it.

Wilma is the only entrepreneur in this material who is involved in a family firm as a second-generation entrepreneur, and she is also the only one who brings out issues related to family businesses.

### Kate

Kate is a farmer in her heart. Her parents were farmers, and she started doing all the work on a farm with her father when she was very young. She learned farming and forestry and learned to respect diligence. She made her first entrepreneurial decision when she bought her parent's farm. She continued her full-time work as a counselor in a public organisation for agriculture until the work hindered farming too much. Then she resigned from her job, established a firm, and started doing the same counseling work as her own business. This arrangement was satisfactory for Kate, and she continued it until she established her clothing shop.

The start of the clothing shop stems from the fact that the income from farming had been declining all the time, and Kate and her husband thought that they needed another income source. They were constantly looking for a suitable opportunity for three or four years, until Kate's husband saw an announcement in a newspaper, saying that a clothing chain was looking for new entrepreneurs. They answered the announcement, and after that everything was easy. *"After stepping on that train, everything went smoothly"*, said Kate. They received strong support from the other entrepreneurs in the chain, including help and advice, and the sales have grown more rapidly than Kate could anticipate.

Kate is very hard working, and she sees this attribute as elementary for entrepreneurship. The cooperation within the chain is intensive and works well, but, for example, the local entrepreneurs' association has not turned out to be especially useful. Kate cooperates with some local entrepreneurs, but finds the atmosphere in the rural community unsupportive or even hostile for those who stick out somehow.

## Ann

Ann had gone into part-time self-employment as a graphic designer while simultaneously working part time for a local newspaper. Part-time work was suitable for her because she also took care of her small daughter. She was not looking for any product ideas but just noticed a need that she also believed other people have. Based on her own knowhow as a graphic designer, she started to design a product that would fulfill the need. The decision to become an entrepreneur became clear to her, when she could not see any other possibility after thinking about how to get the product to the market.

Ann said that she does not have the characteristics of an entrepreneur, and she would never ever have believed that she would become an entrepreneur. She had no connections to entrepreneurship, no relatives or friends who were entrepreneurs, when she started with the product. Ann said that she learned to know entrepreneurs for the first time through this development project, which was actually important for her because they offered her social support and advice. She also received support from her friends and her husband.

However, even though she did not see herself as suitable for entrepreneurship, her thinking was quite businesslike, for example, right from the start she thought about the size of the market, and she wanted to find a distribution channel that could reach a larger market before competing products appeared. Ann considers herself as more creative and saw herself primarily as a designer and only secondarily as an entrepreneur. Regarding entrepreneurship, she likes the independence and the freedom it brings. However, Ann has noted that the work plays a great role in the lives of many entrepreneurs, which was something she did not want. She was quite persistent with her efforts to create the business, because it took quite a long time and also included setbacks. She dreams about being international and says that it is better to dream about something big than something small.

## Lisa

Lisa is a serial entrepreneur for whom entrepreneurship is a way of fulfilling herself. Her first business produced knitwear, the second ended in failure, and the third concentrated on handcrafts and arts. However, she had established her latest business when she moved to take care of her mother to an area with limited employment opportunities. However, she was unexpectedly offered an opportunity to buy a store, which she accepted without hesitation.

Lisa received support from her friends and her parents, who offered her financial backing but never really accepted Lisa's entrepreneuring. They would have preferred her to continue as a secretary – a profession in which she had been working for ten years after closing her first business. After keeping the arts and crafts store for six



years, Lisa decided to close down the shop, because the location did not attract as many customers as it used to. She planned to continue with a web store, because she felt that she was not ready to retire yet.

Lisa saw herself as a creative person whose creativity was constrained by her work as a secretary, but she loves her job as an entrepreneur. In entrepreneurship, she liked the freedom, being her own boss and the possibility to manage her time. On the negative side, Lisa mentions the loneliness of being a solo entrepreneur.

## Heather

This welfare entrepreneur started her business because there were no such jobs that she wanted. However, for her this indicated that the level of competition was low, and she decided to create a job for herself. She also perceived that she would be better able to manage her time and to combine her work with family life as an entrepreneur.

Heather is one of the three entrepreneurs (the others being Wilma and Kate) in the group whose parents are also entrepreneurs. She had everything but a glamorous view of entrepreneurship, because she remembers the loneliness she experienced as a child when her parents were working long hours.

Heather sees herself as different, unique and being ahead of her time because she holds the view that welfare and business can be combined in a way it has not been done before. She also sees herself as creative, having good ideas that she sometimes gives away too easily.

## Jane

Several years ago, Jane and her husband noticed that there were several specialised stores in other cities but not in the area they came from. At first Jane's husband recognised this as an opportunity for someone, but after couple of months they started considering whether it could be an opportunity for them.

Jane and her husband have been very active in developing their business. First, they opened a filial store in another city, which, however, was be unsuccessful; then they detached from a chain to have other products, which would increase their profit margin. Jane realised, after returning home after working abroad for a while, that the shops' sales were insufficient, and the main part of the business was actually done through their web store, so they decided to close the shop and concentrate on the web store.

Jane could not see herself as entrepreneurial, but she grew to be one with the support from her husband and her own experience. Jane says that when looking back, she is amazed at the kind of difficult situations they have overcome and how much

she has learned. She started to perceive herself and her husband as a more equal team. Jane had difficulty believing how easy her life was when she concentrated just on the web store and said that she must remember to be grateful and not feel guilty about this easiness. Jane and her husband were developing their business and also thinking about new business opportunities at the time of the second interview.

## Natalie

Natalie had a long career in healthcare before entering entrepreneurship. She loved her work, but she could not continue because of health problems. Natalie's husband was a successful entrepreneur, and Natalie was also interested in business. Thus, supported by her husband, she started to prepare for a business of her own.

The core of Natalie's business was design glass that was her and her husband's mutual hobby. They already had knowledge and networks in the field, and she saw an opportunity to establish a shop because there was no similar business in their city. She started with low costs, she did not need any loans, and she was on a leave of absence from her office, with the possibility to go back if she wanted, so she considered the risk low.

Natalie is perhaps the most illustrative example of the family's influence in my material. Her husband's enterprising has influenced the whole family's life. Their children have also grown into entrepreneurship; they all have been doing some tasks in the firm, and their father used to take them to his workplace when Natalie was working. Natalie says that no work is more important than the family, and time must also be reserved for friends. Natalie has fallen seriously ill several times but luckily recovered, and these experiences have forced her and the whole family to reflect on their values. These kinds of hardships have emphasised the value of the family and its well-being.

Her husband has long experience in entrepreneuring, so she naturally turned to her husband for advice and support. He has supported her from the beginning; however, he told Natalie that this will be her business, and she must deal with it by herself. This principle has annoyed Natalie for time to time, but it has forced her to learn. Natalie is privileged because she has access to her husband's business networks, and she did not need to build everything from scratch. Counselors, accountants and auditors are at her disposal whenever she needs advice. Natalie's friends have also been supportive, despite the first surprise that Natalie's business was not in healthcare.

Natalie became ill again when her business had been operating for six years, and after discussing the situation with her family, she decided to close her shop. Her business still exists, but she runs it on her own terms. After closing the shop, she had feelings of uselessness and emptiness, but, at the same time also asked herself if she

is entitled to the new easiness of her life. At the time of the second interview, Natalie was actively working in other businesses of the family and keeping her mind open to changing the business model again.

## Sharon

Sharon's former colleague suggested a business partnership, which was her first contact with entrepreneurship. She had lost her job as an office manager for a big real estate agency, but at that time, she perceived that entrepreneurship included too much responsibility, so she turned the offer down. She started instead to work for another real estate agency in the same town. After two years, she felt that she was more knowledgeable and capable than her employers, and this made her realise that running a business should not be too difficult for her. Sharon was ready to accept it when her former colleague renewed his offer of a business partnership. Their partnership lasted for years, during which they managed to grow the company and also employ other people. However, Sharon felt that the partnership was somewhat unfair and restricting her visions. She decided to sell her share of the business and start a new venture by herself after trying to discuss these problems with her business partner.

Sharon had a baby soon after establishing the new business. The business was declining as the market situation became tighter, so she decided to end her maternity leave and return to fight for her business. She implemented changes, and after three months, sooner than she could ever hope for, the business had recovered. At the time of the second interview, Sharon's goal was to invest her time in the business for a year, after which she would be able to work a little less and be more with her baby.

Sharon is very hardworking, highly motivated and competitive. She wants to win, and business is her game. She needs the appreciation and satisfaction that she gets from her work. She says that her working style had always been very entrepreneurial, i.e., she had been very flexible and worked without counting hours. Interestingly, she describes herself as risk adverse and says that instability and uncertainty make her feel uncomfortable.

## Paula

Paula's business is founded on her knowledge of sewing and her love for beauty. However, she says that it was her previous job that made her an entrepreneur. It cultivated the entrepreneur in her by offering challenges through which she was able to grow and by endowing her with expertise in sales and marketing as well as networks. However, she finally felt that she had given everything there was to give to the work, but the work did not give her anything anymore; she could not grow.

She burned out, which led her to make big changes in her life. She resigned and fulfilled her dream of making a business out of her hobby.

Paula's business idea was innovative in those days: She copied a business model that allowed her to start with low investments and successfully used effectuation logic and bricolage. She operated without loans, keeping the control to herself and keeping costs down by doing everything herself, being creative and using leverage. Her parents and her boyfriend believed in her and supported her when starting business. Her boyfriend gave her small loans when she was short of cash and needed to buy materials. *"I suppose I would have starved to death if (the boyfriend) would not have made me pizza"*, she says dramatically. Paula has been very active in the entrepreneurs' association, and the support from other entrepreneurs has been very important to her. *"Without the support from the entrepreneurs' organisation, I would no longer be an entrepreneur"*, she says.

Paula said that she had never really wanted to become an entrepreneur, but she felt that it was the only way to fulfill her dream. For her, dreams are crucial, and she cannot imagine entrepreneurship without a dream. She is enthusiastic and passionate about her work but says that if she continues too long, she might not have anything to give anymore. She is motivated by the independence in entrepreneurship, which makes the work meaningful. Paula sees herself as suitable for entrepreneurship, because she is hardworking and active, having good people skills and networks. The entrepreneurial role is very strong in Paula, and it brings her acceptance and respect. Even though she says that the willingness to take risks differentiates entrepreneurs from other people, she describes herself as risk averse. She says that she never imagined that she would have a business like the one she now has; her dreams have grown little by little. She is cautious about growth, and it seems that she has set her business limits beyond which she does not want it to grow, because she anticipates that it would bring problems with managing and with her own wellbeing. Now she feels that she can manage the business well, and her life is easy, she is "living her dream". This entrepreneur still has dreams and ideas for a new business, but the time is not right for them, and she is not ready yet.

## 5.5 Analysing the Research Material

### 5.5.1 Conducting the Analyses

I started the analysis by going through the first interviews. Based on this and observing the group during the sessions, I wrote the first descriptions of the participants, which were condensed and concentrated more on the "facts". Later, after conducting the first round of analysing the video material, I rewrote the descriptions based on the first and second interviews complemented with my

understanding of the video material. I decided to structure the descriptions in three sections that made sense to me on the basis of the literature, the narratives produced in the interviews, and the discussions in the video recordings: descriptions of how each participant became an entrepreneur, what kind of measures they used to build confidence in themselves as entrepreneurs, and what kind of actions they had taken to create the opportunity. Writing these descriptions thus included analysis. Furthermore, making the division between the phases of data collection and analysis is to some extent artificial, because observing, writing field notes and talking to participants (or other researchers) automatically include analysis and guide perception and further analysis. Thus, the collection of the material and analysis are intertwined.

Pre-understanding of the participants and the interaction within the group were obtained already from attending the training sessions as an observer and preparing observation notes after the sessions. This pre-understanding was deepened, and more rigorous views of the personal and occupational situations as well as the histories of the participants and their businesses were formed while conducting the first interviews in 2009–2010. Based on the interviews, I compiled a data sheet on each entrepreneur that I also utilised when composing the descriptions of the entrepreneurs.

The preparation of the analysis of the video material started by scanning the recordings and writing down the themes of the conversations on each recording. I had already marked potential sections for the analysis at this point. The final selection of the relevant sections was done on the basis of the various definitions of entrepreneurial or business opportunities found in the entrepreneurship literature. **Table 5** presents the definitions of the opportunities used in the selection.

**Table 5.** Characteristics of the participant entrepreneurs.

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Definition of entrepreneurial/ business opportunity</b>
Casson 1982	“Those situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, or organizing methods can be introduced and sold at greater than their cost of production.”
Singh 2001	“A feasible, profit-seeking, potential venture, that provides an innovative new product or service to the market, improves an existing product/service in a less-than-saturated market.”
Shane & Venkataraman 2000 (Following Casson, also used by Zahra 2008)	“Situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, markets and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new means, ends, or means-ends relationships.”
Grégoire et al. 2010a	“Opportunities are about the projected courses of action to introduce (and profit of) new and/or improved supply-demand combinations that seek to address market failure problems.”
Dimov 2011	“An evolving blueprint for action, synthesizing the entrepreneur's sense of, expectation about, and aspirations for the future”
Sarason et al. 2006 (according to structuration perspective)	“(Opportunity is) not as an interpretation of a singular social and economic gap, but as an individually idiosyncratic conceptualization of an instantiated social and economic system.”
Short et al. 2010	“an idea or dream that is discovered or created by an entrepreneurial entity and that is revealed through analysis over time to be potentially lucrative”

The definition by Casson (1982) has served as a starting point for several other definitions in the opportunity literature. For example, some of the ingredients can be seen in the definition by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), which has been widely applied in studies on recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities (for example, Zahra 2008). Casson's definition directed my attention to sections in the material that concerned introducing new goods, services, raw materials or organising methods. However, the definition is a bit problematic in the sense that it includes a requirement for profitability, which is impossible to know in advance (Singh, 2001). However, in the conversations, this could be found in utterances describing the entrepreneurs' perception of profitability, for example, why they think a business might be profitable or constitute a “good opportunity”. Singh's definition adds the aspect of uncertainty about the profits in the definition, as well as the idea of improving an existing product/service. Shane's and Venkataraman's definition adds the idea of new means, ends, or new means-ends frameworks (a new way of thinking about the relationship between action and outcome; Shane 2003) as a source of opportunity. Whereas Casson (1982), Shane and Venkataraman (2000) have defined an

opportunity as a situation, definition used by Grégoire et al. (2010a) perceives it in terms of projection of a future. This definition is also in line with the discovery view, because it sees an opportunity as rising from a market failure.

The rest of the definitions are more affiliated with the creation view because they emphasise the individuals' subjective perceptions, interpretations and actions as forming the continuous development of the opportunity. Short et al.'s (2010) definition guided me to scan the material for sections with discussions about dreams, potential ideas for new business, and analysing new ideas. Dimov's (2010) definition informed me to select sections concerning what the future looks like, what the entrepreneurs appreciate and aspire to. Additionally, all sections concerning starting a new venture, venture growth, and developing a business were selected for analysis. After scanning through the video recordings, I chose 11 sections for analysis and transcribed selected discussions that yielded 28 pages of text.

The transcripts were examined several times, and on every occasion the utterances of the participants and the previous remarks of the researcher were reviewed and the interpretations were developed further. The understanding gained from the previous analysis of the interviews supported the analysis of the video material and the material from the second interviews. All the material from the first and second interviews as well the video material were used in both the narrative analysis and the metaphor analysis. The second interview served as an opportunity to collect feedback about the metaphors and to see the development in the businesses and the situations of the entrepreneurs over a longer period. Thus, the analysis followed abductive logic as I moved between the theory and data (Dubois & Gadde 2002; Van Maanen et al. 2007). The material was collected during a longer period of time, which allowed focusing on issues that were considered important based on the material already collected and the theory. I also revisited the material several times during the analyses, and building the metaphors especially involved an interplay between the data and theory. Next, I describe in more detail how I conducted the narrative and metaphor analyses.

### 5.5.2 Narrative Analysis

I used narrative analysis to access the experiences of the women entrepreneurs participating in my study. Duberley and Carrigan (2012, 631-632) argue in their study about identity construction of mumpreneurs that narrative analysis offered them *“a more holistic way of gaining access to the richness of career experiences and links this to individual identity construction”*. I likewise believe that a narrative analysis of the stories women entrepreneurs tell about becoming entrepreneurs and the development of their entrepreneurship will endow me with a deeper

understanding of the context in which women entrepreneurs create business opportunities.

In the narrative analysis, I investigated the interviews I conducted with the women entrepreneurs and the stories they told to each other. Some parts of these narratives may have been told earlier, but they are not stories that would have been practiced and performed many times (like, e.g., business presentations). They are produced within the conversation, answering the questions and building on the comments of the listeners, forming a coherent whole that makes sense to the teller and is understandable to the audience.

I am especially interested in how the women entrepreneurs position themselves, who else is present in their story, and what kind of position or role they narrate to these others; thus, I started the narrative analysis by investigating the identities and positions the entrepreneurs narrated for themselves and other significant actors in their storylines. I was reading the research material and literature about narrative analysis, especially Downing (2005) and Steyaert (2007), as well as examples of how narrative analysis has been applied (e.g., Hytti 2003), thus moving between the material and the theory and writing down my interpretations constantly as I proceeded entrepreneur by entrepreneur. After analysing how the entrepreneurs narrated themselves, I moved to an aggregate level to describe the narration of selves more generally. Chapter 6.3.1 presents the findings of this phase of the analysis I followed the same logic when analysing the reasons and cause-and-effect reasoning the entrepreneurs offered in their narrations.

According to Downing (2005), these storylines are produced together with others, and the positioning may also be done reciprocally. The interviews are produced together with the interviewee and the interviewer. In my role as the interviewer, I gave the interviewees the role of an entrepreneur who tells the story of their business, explaining the incidents and situations, needs, desires and actions of themselves or the people around them which, according to their perception, pushed them in a certain direction that then led them to establish a business. In my role as an interviewer and interlocutor, I participated in their positioning of themselves and others. Additionally, I influenced how the story developed with my questions and comments: who was present, which episodes were included, and what became the plot for the story. If the story had been told to some other person, it would have been different. In the same way, if it had been told a week earlier or later, other incidents in the life of the storyteller may have influenced the story, making it different. In that way, the stories are always unique, depending on when, where, and to whom they are told.

The next step in my analysis was to look at the storylines and the “emplotment”, which is the process in which the remembered episodes (=parts) that best fit together are fitted into a plot of a narrative (=wholes) (Downing 2005; Polkinghorne 1991).



This is done subconsciously, and it may be verbalised or not. A plot creates narrative coherence and meaning through building causality between the events in our lives. Thus, plots are sense-making devices, and the selection of a plot involves emotions as well as a notion of identity (Downing 2005; Polkinghorne 1991). Narrators simultaneously construct their identity when telling a story, i.e., selecting the episodes, connecting them into a selected plot and building cause and effect linkages, positioning themselves and others, deciding about the order of presenting and offering reasoning and contextualising. As elegantly put by Steyaert (2007, p. 734), *“Storytelling is an ongoing writing of ourselves with all the incoherence and contradiction this implies and which makes that no story is ever the whole story”*.

Storytellers choose certain plots, some of which may be weaved into the grand or master narratives that the storytellers can draw on (Steyaert 2007). It may be difficult sometimes to fit diverse episodes together, and it may require multiple subplots to accommodate these stories into the sense of self and meaning of life (Downing 2005; Polkinghorne 1991). Based on this, I continued my analysis by looking at the cause-and-effect reasoning that the women entrepreneurs plot into their stories. I am interested in what they narrate about the kind of triggers or causes for their entrepreneurship or reasons for their decisions regarding their business.

Narratives are given a structure, in addition to weaving the storylines into a plot, which brings chronology, elaboration and contextualisation to the story (Downing 2005). The participants explain and give reasons and causes when generating the storylines and selecting the plot, but this is elaborated, and the context of the plot is elucidated in the structuring of the narrative. Downing (2005) suggested that examining the process of emplotment and narrative structuring offers a practical way to study the processes of social construction. Drawing on this, I continued my analysis by looking at how the women entrepreneurs structured their narratives, especially how they contextualise it.

The video recordings include interesting material of the women entrepreneurs directing a scene from their life. The scene was supposed to be about something meaningful that had happened to them. They did not act in their own scenes, but they directed the other(s) who were the actress(es). This was an interesting piece of storytelling, because no words were used; only after the act, the audience was at first asked to guess what was going on in the scene, and that initiated a conversation in which the director explained what she actually meant by the scene. All of these scenes were very much about the person herself, which was helpful in understanding the identity and positioning of the participants.

I do not propose that the stories constructed and narrated and my interpretations made during this study would be the only possible or the “right” ones or representative in any quantitative sense, because the stories and interpretations are always unique, time and context dependent.

### 5.5.3 Metaphor Analysis

I started the analysis of the transcribed sections by reading through the material and writing remarks, questions and possible and alternative answers to these questions. Some discursive elements can be found in my analysis, such as the interest in metaphors and the functions of the utterances (see, e.g., Wood and Kroger, 2000) as I also asked myself “what does she mean by that?” and “what does she want to accomplish by saying that?”. Sometimes there were several alternative answers to these questions, and I wrote them down to be considered in the later rounds of reading. Anything surprising or unanticipated, mainly raising the question “why does she say that?” was highlighted and again, plausible reasons were written down. These remarks were used to discover what the piece of conversation or an utterance was about and labelling these (e.g., enjoying one’s work, flow, support talk, endurance, energy etc.). I first used MS Word to organise excerpts demonstrating these initial concepts, but later I switched to MS Excel to record the concepts appearing in the material, potentially also with an illustrative excerpt. After that, I focused on the actual words used by the participants (which words were used, how the use of different words would influence the interpretation), the variability in the conversation (between sections and between participants), the positions of (agent – patient), and the participants’ metaphorical use of words. The metaphorical use of some words in the material led me to building metaphors. The metaphors in this study are thus grounded in the talk of the entrepreneurs, although the flesh on the bones was added by the researcher. This was done by thinking about what the metaphorically used word means in its original meaning (source domain), which concepts can be seen as related to it, and how they could be transferred to the context of opportunity creation. This step in the analysis was naturally influenced by my preconceptions based on my understanding of the opportunity literature, my experiences and previous observations.

The next step of the analysis was finding how the initial concepts found in the material were connected to each other and to the metaphors. I found as I did this that many of the concepts I had recognised in the material were actually related to the metaphors. For example, I had found references to dreams, faith, courage, timing, luck and chance, the active role of the entrepreneur, as well as keeping control to oneself, but I did not immediately realise that they actually were part of the metaphors. Seeing these connections and forming this way a more versatile view of the metaphors was the process that I refer to as building the metaphors.

After building the first three metaphors, my interpretations were exposed to the participants’ evaluations in the second interviews. I asked them what came to their minds when I introduced the metaphors, if they felt that they applied to their experiences, or if not, how they should be changed. These discussions brought up new interpretations and aspects of the metaphors while also making the picture of

them clearer and sharper. These conversations about the metaphors also offered the entrepreneurs a possibility to participate in the process of building the metaphors. Thus, the metaphors were not built solely by me nor the entrepreneurs but were mutually created.

I continued the analysis with the second interviews, finding references not only to these metaphors that I had already built but also to new metaphors or new dimensions that the participants had elicited. After transcribing the second interviews, I scrutinised all material again to see if there were references to these new metaphors. While conducting this analysis, I paid attention to any metaphorical use of language regardless of whether it described opportunity creation or not. This time I also found metaphors that were used to describe business in general, entrepreneurship or entrepreneur. The conceptions of the entrepreneur and the business are often intertwined and entrepreneurs cannot always separate these, so it is reasonable to also present these metaphors as part of my findings. Thus, the metaphors elicited describe opportunity creation, business, and entrepreneur or entrepreneurship. I present the metaphors and findings in a dialog with relevant theoretical conversations.

I also wanted to try a temporal analysis of the material because I had collected the different research materials at different points in time (video material during a period of a year; interview material in the beginning of the project and three years after) and because of the calls in the literature for more longitudinal research settings (De Bruin et al. 2007; Short et al. 2010). I conducted this by investigating if the use of metaphors changes over time and if there were some patterns that I could find. I grouped the participants according to their experience in entrepreneurship (expert – novice) and motivations to start a business, but I couldn't detect clear patterns in the references they made to the metaphors. Rather, their use of metaphors seems to be more linked with the contemporary situation of their business and the acute problems they might be facing, which is very natural. For example, in the second interview, Wilma was talking about the difficulties the economic recession had caused her business, which, according to my interpretation, initiated an increase in the use of the pedalling metaphor (perceiving opportunity creation more as hard work requiring persistence). One might have expected that the pedalling metaphor would have been present more strongly in the stories about younger businesses, but this might indicate the periodical nature of opportunity creation. Environmental changes, or personal or family issues, are likely to induce changes in the way entrepreneurs perceive opportunity creation.

In the next section, I present my findings, starting with the individual participants' narratives and continuing to analysing their context on a more aggregate level.

# 6 Findings

## 6.1 Presenting the Findings

First, I want to present the case descriptions of the participants. These are based on all the material I have gathered (1st and 2nd interviews plus video material). They are not just chronological summaries of what the participants have said but include interpretation. I structured the descriptions so that I start by describing how the entrepreneurs narrate themselves and the contexts in which they have created opportunities. I continue with how the participants built their confidence in the opportunity and themselves as entrepreneurs, and how they developed and created the opportunities.

Second, I move on to present the findings of the narrative reading of the materials on the aggregate level and also to discuss the entrepreneurs' social embeddedness. The purpose of this analysis was to dig deeper into the world of women entrepreneurs and gain an understanding of how they construct themselves as entrepreneurs, women, and women entrepreneurs, and how they narrate the contexts of their entrepreneurship.

Finally, I describe the metaphors about opportunity creation and entrepreneur elicited in this study and discuss the contradictions within them as well as their connections to the literature about entrepreneurial opportunities.

## 6.2 Women Entrepreneurs Narrating Themselves, Their Context and Creation of Opportunities

### 6.2.1 Wilma: Continuing a Family Business

#### Narrating the self and the context

Wilma was not originally interested in entrepreneurship; she would have preferred a career as a manager in a bigger company. She used to feel herself inferior compared to her friends from the university who were working for more glamorous and bigger companies. Entrepreneurship was thus not considered very lucrative, at least among

higher education graduates. After many years as an entrepreneur, she still felt that entrepreneurship was not a must for her, and if she were forced to exit this business, she would not necessarily continue as an entrepreneur.

Wilma narrated her family situation as leading to accepting her father's offer for work in the family firm. Her husband's enterprise was located in the area, their children were still small and her family was there to support her, so moving to find better employment opportunities was not a real option for her. Wilma narrates this decision to become employed in the family firm as putting her career hopes aside and making a decision that was best for the family. This is in line with the FRWD framework proposed by Greenhouse and Powell (2012). Here, Wilma adheres to the traditional grand narrative of motherhood, according to which the best for the family is that the mother is close and available for the children, implying that the mother is the primary caretaker, the career of the husband is more important than the wife's, and the proximity of grandparents (or other relatives) is an important support network for raising the children (discussed in Chapter 4.3).

Working with her father was not totally problem free, because they both have strong personalities; nevertheless, becoming the CEO went more smoothly than she expected. Her father has given her enough space to manage the firm, still being there in case Wilma needs him. Wilma's husband is also an entrepreneur, which means that he understands the requirements of entrepreneurship, and they also discuss the issues of both businesses. Wilma is the only entrepreneur in this material who is involved in a family firm as a second-generation entrepreneur, and she is also the only one to bring out issues related to family businesses. She sees that family relations impose certain rules on the company: There may be more freedom and trust but also a different kind of responsibility, because the actions and decisions affect the relationships in the whole family, including children and grandparents. Thus, the personal or family life cannot be separated from the business life, and the embeddedness and mutual dependencies seem to be strong in family firms.

Wilma emphasises rationality and professionalism in doing business, and she believes that hard work will reap good results. Here the Protestant work ethic highlighting the value of working hard can be observed, and it is present in the participants' group discussions, too, as well as in the more general discourse of entrepreneurship. One could also argue that the idea that you create your own fortune can be seen here. Wilma sees entrepreneurs as energetic and active persons who will always have many things going on. She shares the view that the entrepreneur is the heart of the firm with the rest of the group; an entrepreneur should employ people who are smarter than herself but should also remember that no one else can understand the business like the entrepreneur.

Being a woman CEO in a male-dominated sector has never been a problem for Wilma; on the contrary, she sees her gender more as an advantage: her firm is often

regarded as somewhat special and interesting. She has, however, also experienced some diminishing attitudes and behavior, too, from her own staff. She partly understands it because of her background as the financial manager with quite shallow knowledge of the technical side of the work. This begs the question, however: Would a male entrepreneur with the same background be questioned in the same way? The assumption that men are more capable of understanding technical issues still seems to prevail in Finnish society, leading, for example, to occupational segregation.

### Building confidence

Wilma sees herself as a special kind of person. She has a strong faith in life, that it finds its way. In the video material, she performs an episode in which she highlighted that she has always been encouraged by people she respected, who (as representative of a group) she portrayed as a man. Choosing to perform this particular episode implies that this kind of encouragement had been important in building her self-confidence. She also talked about how she has always received support from her parents from her husband.

With a degree in economics and business administration, experience as a financial manager, and knowing that she could rely on support from people around her, her entrepreneurial self-efficacy was quite high when starting as an entrepreneur. She already knew a lot about the business, although when looking back, she recognises how restricted her knowledge actually was.

Wilma perceives herself as suitable for entrepreneurship: She is strong and determined, capable of fast decision making, and she likes to do things her own way. Wilma seems to highlight analytical thinking and a systematic way of managing a company. She refers on many occasions to calculations and analysis of the numerical data as a source of understanding of the business or as indicating the existence of an opportunity (e.g., when discussing with the group the hypothetical situation of a son convincing his father about the existence of the opportunity). She had also started to deal with the problem in her company of low profitability by developing and sharpening their cost accounting to increase efficiency and decrease costs. When considering development options that the new board had identified, Wilma explained:

*“...of course these [development options] are not going to be realised right now, but at least we are counting, analysing these things and considering, because now we have been floating a bit here.” (Wilma, 2. interview)*

## Creating the opportunity

Wilma has focused on developing the management and the company's activities to become more professional and systematic. She has put effort into developing their financial and production management systems as well as in enhancing efficiency. In the first interview, Wilma said that they scan the business environment for changes, especially regarding regulations, and they also explored opportunities to expand their activities in the value chain, which would enable them not only to offer their customers better service but also to leave more space with pricing for themselves. She takes a customer's viewpoint when looking for new business opportunities – what the customer needs and what kind of service would help the customer – but also the point of view of the existing business – what kinds of activities would fit the company's scope, as well as her own knowledge, what kind of business she understands and how much she would need to learn to be able to deal with the new possible business line. Wilma already referred in the first interview to tightened competition leading to a decreasing price level, which influences the firm's profitability. She anticipated more difficult times ahead, and at the time of the second interview, Wilma reported that they were struggling, and she had even pondered whether it was sensible to continue with the business. She was trying to find a way, with the help of new board members who were recruited to gain fresh views, to develop the business to be better equipped to cope with fluctuations in the economy.

## 6.2.2 Kate: On the Terms of the Existing Business

### Narrating the self and the context

Kate is a farmer in her heart. The strong farmer identity can be seen in several ways in Kate's narratives. She was a daddy's girl who accompanied her father in the farming work, possibly in the absence of a son. She learned farming and forestry and to respect diligence. Kate says on the video recording, "*I was supposed to be a boy*". By this she meant, that the parents were expecting a boy who could be raised to be a farmer, but as they only had girls, for some reason Kate was chosen for this role. Spending more time with her father compared to her sisters also positioned her as different from them. Kate tells in the video recording that she always felt like sticking out from her sisters, not as being less or subordinate, but as being special. Thus, Kate had developed an identity of being different (special) and of being capable of doing men's work, and thus being as good as men. This could be regarded as atypical for Finnish women in general, although a traditional narrative of strong women and weak men exists in Finnish culture, which belongs to the Russian heritage (Julkunen 2010, p. 74). The expectation of some people, however, was that a farm should still

have a male farmer. Kate tells that when she was negotiating financing to buy the farm, the officer making the financing decision, asked if she had a husband. Kate interpreted this as an indication of a general assumption that men are more capable of farming than women, which she challenged. She said that she wrote in her autobiography when buying her parent's farm, "*I became the master of the house*" (interview 1 with Kate). By using the Finnish word 'isäntä', and in this way making a reference to a male owner of a farm, she emphasised her femininity and otherness with respect to the traditional social order.

Kate narrated a conflict between her and her former employer as the reason for starting her previous business in agricultural consulting. She had applied for a vacation to be able to do the spring sowing, but her employer denied it. Kate resigned from her job and started doing the same counselling work as her own business. Kate positions herself with this narrative as an active agent, acting to change the situation when she could not be happy with others' decisions, and being confident in her knowledge and capabilities. In Kate's case, entrepreneurship offered her time to manage her time so that she could also accommodate farming in her schedule. That is important for her and, thus, it reflects the emancipatory aspects of entrepreneuring (Rindova et al. 2009). According to Rindova et al. (2009, p. 478), the emancipatory perspective "*focuses on understanding the factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded – and, on occasion, the social order itself*". Thus, the emancipatory perspective on entrepreneuring acknowledges the emancipatory aspirations of entrepreneurs and the creation of change besides wealth creation, which is clearly present in the narrative Kate talks about founding her first business. Even though the narrative about starting the second business focuses more on wealth creation, emancipatory interests are not absent from this story, either.

The start of the clothing shop originated in the declining farming income, and Kate and her husband thought they needed an additional source of income. Kate wanted to give up consulting because of contradictions in values, and she started to look for other business opportunities that would remove this constraint. Kate and her husband were looking for a suitable opportunity for three or four years, and considered, for example, a riding stable, a B&B, or a café, which they rejected because other similar services were available in the area or they just did not feel inspired. Then, one day Kate's husband saw an announcement in a newspaper, according to which a clothing chain looked for new entrepreneurs. "*Kate, listen*", he said, "*this is something for us*". Kate said that she would never have noticed the announcement because it was in Swedish, but it was specifically the language that caught her husband's attention. Kate was a bit incredulous at first, but her husband was convinced that this was the opportunity they had been looking for. They contacted the chain, and after that, everything went smoothly. They received support



from the other entrepreneurs in the chain, and the business growth exceeded their expectations.

Starting the business went smoothly, but Kate found the atmosphere in the rural community unsupportive. She felt that the local community does not accept those who stick out, which conflicted with her desire to do things differently.

*“I want to do things my way... I don’t want to be put in any mold”* (Kate, interview 2)

Kate cooperated with some local entrepreneurs, but she had not found a reason to participate, for example, in the local entrepreneurs’ association.

Kate’s and her husband’s farmer identity has contributed to their efforts to continue farming. They have made decisions to keep farming as the priority, and other businesses should support and ensure the continuation of farming, although farming also contributes to the experience they offer to their customers.

Kate’s description of her life gives an impression of a hard-working woman who has set almost impossible demands for herself; she must be knowledgeable, capable, never tired nor giving up. Kate admits that she is a workaholic, but she sees hard work as elementary for entrepreneurship. The founding of the clothing shop was demanding for Kate and her husband, because of big changes in their family occurring at the same time. Combining entrepreneurship and motherhood has been challenging to Kate; she had to admit that even she cannot do everything by herself, so they hired outside help for the housework. This challenges the ideal of ‘good mothering’ (good mother is always present) to some extent, and Kate had to negotiate an appropriate way for her to engage in mothering.

In Kate’s stories, otherness, being different, and breaking the traditional expectations and social order are consistently present. Kate was not a typical small girl, she is not a typical farmer, she is not a typical mother, nor a typical woman.

### Building confidence

Kate felt quite confident when launching her shop after running two different kinds of businesses before and being offered support by the chain and by friends. The tutoring offered by the chain convinced her about the viability of the business; thus, she saw the opportunity as one worth seizing. Kate and her husband’s economic situation was good, so the investments needed were reasonable, and the profitability of the business increased faster than expected.

Kate was convinced when starting her business of their ability to run the business profitably, so her entrepreneurial self-efficacy was high. The work itself was

different, and as Kate reported in the first interview, she had to learn a new occupation, but she was positive that with her experience, she would succeed.

### Creating the opportunity

Kate negotiated a deal with the municipalities, when launching her consulting business, that allowed farmers to buy subsidised counselling from Kate's firm as long as her prices did not exceed those of her former employer. She had a very good reputation and the farmers knew and trusted her, which obviously helped her to reach this agreement. These kinds of agreements are often used by entrepreneurs when they build partnerships to bring down the initial capital requirements of new ventures or, as in this (and also in Paula's) case, to ensure that customers exist (Sarasvathy 2001, 2008).

In the case of the clothing shop, finding the opportunity in the newspaper seems to fit better with opportunity recognition than creation theory. They had been looking for and considering some business opportunities for three or four years, and then suddenly an opportunity that seemed perfect for them was offered in a newspaper announcement. They engaged in a lengthy communication with the chain about the opportunity after looking at it more closely. Kate and her husband became more confident about the business and its suitability for them during this communication. They considered not only the business itself, its profitability and the income it could provide but also the chain's reputation and other entrepreneurs in the chain with whom they were going to work. This evaluation was mutual, of course. Thus, from the creation perspective, the enactment of the opportunity began in the social interaction between Kate and her husband and the entrepreneurs representing the chain, and it continued with investments and changes needed to meet the requirements set by the chain. The chain had already worked to create the opportunity – the image, the reputation, the brand, and the whole concept – that Kate and her husband were able to utilise.

At the time of the second interview, Kate and her husband were still looking for a new business opportunity that would support or at least fit with the clothing shop and support farming. Kate and her husband gave up a substantial share of their privacy when deciding to start the shop, because the shop is located right next to their home; that, together with the amount of time available, seem to be critical resources for their business creation. Because of Kate's preference for doing things by herself, delegating, communicating her wishes and vision, accepting that mistakes are inevitable and finding a business model that would not add to Kate's own workload would be important prerequisites for growing their business portfolio.

### 6.2.3 Ann: Committing to the Process of Opportunity Creation

#### Narrating the self and the context

Ann began her narrative of becoming an entrepreneur by describing how she had the first product idea that then became the core of her aspiration to start a business. She was not consciously looking for a business idea, but she was not satisfied with her part-time job nor the work itself and, thus, wanted a change. Her first idea to bring the product to market was to build partnerships with some existing businesses to utilise their networks and access to the market. However, she found that path unfruitful, and concluded that the only option was to start her own business.

*“It started to feel that how else I could proceed... I couldn’t, in a way, see any other possibility, really.”* (Ann, interview 1)

Thus, entrepreneurship was a way out of unsatisfactory part-time work for her and an opportunity to create for herself work that she would enjoy. These emancipatory motivations were, however, combined with an aim to create wealth. She said in her first interview that she was looking for economic success, *“I have been waiting for a pretty long time to be rich”*, Ann said.

Ann describes herself as a creative person, who wants to work on her own, to do things her own way. However, she was surprised how much she was required to do by herself, and some of the routine tasks in running a business that she found uninteresting. She did not consider herself as particularly entrepreneurial, and she had never thought that she would be an entrepreneur.

*“...because I’m not a business genius, I have noticed that I’m more like a bohemian artist...”* (Ann, interview 1)

It was clear for Ann right from the start that she would not become a craftsperson; she wanted her products to be produced by another company so she could concentrate only on designing. She admires entrepreneurs who have started small but grown their business internationally; Ann thinks that it’s better to dream about something big than something small and to aim a bit higher.

Ann had been a member in a group innovating new products that, however, were pending, for example, because of problems with patenting. In Ann’s narrative, waiting is strongly present; she was fed up with waiting, and she wanted things to move forward, but she narrated herself as waiting instead of acting, because she did not have control over the situations.

*“...the whole spring I was waiting and waiting, and that’s why I’m making the web pages now, because I thought that when I get some money, I will start, but the whole spring went waiting for things to clear up. And now the economic situation is getting worse, so now it’s difficult to say...The web pages should be ready. I don’t do the technical side, I created the visual side, and [a firm] will do the technical side. But it has also been delayed for two weeks now because of them... Persistence and patience are what was needed. Now it feels that I just want something to move...Now I just wait...I don’t know, if it’s because I’m somehow stuck here, but I feel like it’s going to evolve...” (Ann, interview 1)*

Ann’s narratives do not include much about her daughter; she is present in the story of getting the product idea and when Ann was describing her part-time working arrangements, with which she was quite happy because she did not have to pay any rent for office. It offered her enough time to work, especially with grandparents’ help.

Ann talked more about her husband in the second interview and how he assists her in administrative tasks. This kind of support can be categorised as instrumental hands-on support, according to Heikkinen et al.’s (2014) study. At the time when Ann was still trying to get her products to the market, her husband was the breadwinner for the family, which allowed Ann to develop her business.

*“...I worked pretty persistently and [had] quite many really dry years, but then of course, because [the husband] had a good job...so that we were not made of money, but we didn’t need to starve, either. You know that the support was there, he never said that come on now... [implying that Ann should do something else that would bring money]” (Ann, interview 2)*

Here the traditional order that men have higher salaries and are supposed to provide for their families can be seen. This traditional arrangement allowed Ann (like Natalie and Lisa, and Jane to some extent, too) to invest her time in developing her business without pressure to provide income. The business could basically be just a means of self-fulfilment, or this development time could be regarded as an investment that will be repaid in the future.

### Building confidence

Ann did not consider herself to have the attributes needed to become an entrepreneur. However, she was familiar with the trends and knew what kind of products were on the market. One thing that increased her confidence was that *“there were far more silly products on the market”*, as she put it. As a member of the innovation group,

she had been designing products in which other people also believed and invested, which increased her confidence, although the progress was slow and none of these products had yet moved to production. Conversely, she did not believe in her abilities in selling, marketing or administrating, for which she wanted external help. The feedback Ann received from potential customers and cooperation partners was positive and enthusiastic, which built up her confidence in the product.

In the second interview, Ann said that she was proud of being persistent with her idea and of all that she had accomplished almost by herself. These experiences had taught her a lot and increased her confidence. She acknowledged that her husband's support and solid economic situation were focal, together with support from other entrepreneurs and cooperation partners. They also believed in her ability to create the business when she could not see it herself. Ann contacted a local advice centre for entrepreneurs when making the contract with the supermarket chain and bought a consultation package designed for growing businesses. They helped with her business plan and making some calculations, but Ann still felt that she did not get that kind of support she needed. She also contacted Wilma, whose help she found important.

### Creating the opportunity

Right after establishing her business, Ann found a contact who helped her with marketing, but she was not happy with the results and changed her approach to seeking publicity to generate demand for the product.

Interestingly, the original product around which Ann established her whole business has actually never been very successful. The product was sold through Ann's web store and some interior decoration stores, but the sales stayed low. The product that later became the core of her business was designed to complete the original product and to better show its qualities. Customers were unexpectedly more interested in this product, and she started to produce them.

Ann was quite overwhelmed when the things she had been dreaming about suddenly started to become true. She describes her experiences as a journey, "*It has been quite a journey*" she said, "*and if somebody had told me before what will happen during this year, I would have been very bewildered indeed*". The whole period from the first product idea, with the sidetrack of participating in the innovation group, to the launching of her web store and the development of the new product family, has really been a journey that took several years. It taught Ann a lot about people, running a business and how to be an entrepreneur. The unexpectedness can be seen very well when one has the opportunity to follow the developments of the business as it happens. The story would most probably be more coherent, logical and rationalised when looking back after everything had already happened. Ann has

reached her goals of building a successful business based on products she designs, but the journey to these goals was longer and proceeded through totally different routes and stops than she imagined, which required persistence and belief in her idea.

Ann had had some trouble with her suppliers and cooperation partners because many of them have problems keeping the timetables and with the quality of their goods. She was prepared to this, fortunately, and although annoyed, she realised that she could actually turn this to her advantage: She can actually outperform many of her competitors by delivering the right product on time.

In Ann's account, meeting new people opens new paths for the entrepreneur to take her business. One friend of Ann's was a significant sparring partner for Ann, pushing her forward and compensating her temporary inability to act. Ann recognises this friend's importance, and says that without her, she might still be in the planning phase. Ann's blog also contributed to creating the opportunity, because it was the blog that was noticed, leading to a new contact and finally to a business deal. At some point, Ann received a partnership offer that would have provided complementary knowledge, but she turned it down, fearful of losing control over the business. Furthermore, she thought that it possible to buy such knowledge when needed without sacrificing her independence.

The experience of participating in the innovation group was a good learning experience that offered Ann an opportunity to build her networks, to learn, and to understand that having a business of her own allows her more control over its progress.

## 6.2.4 Lisa: Entrepreneurship as a Way to Fulfil Oneself

### Narrating the self and the context

Two characteristics of Lisa clearly emerge in her stories: creativity and taking care of others. Lisa considers herself a very creative person and sees entrepreneurship as offering her a way to use her creativity and to fulfil herself. She described creativity as something that she values and appreciates. She also said that her mother and daughter are creative, but the daughter had not "dared to let her creativity out", thinking that a permanent job is a must, Lisa explains. However, Lisa's perception is that the hurry and administrative work that belongs to entrepreneuring hinders her creativity.

Lisa has grown to take care of others, and this can still be seen in the way she wants to offer the best possible service to her customers, as she reasoned in the first interview. "*I always think what's best for the customer*", she said, and she wants her service to be 'as perfect as possible'. Caretaking also played an important role in starting her arts and crafts store, because Lisa decided to move to be better able to

take care of her old mother. Because of the limited employment opportunities in the area, Lisa had to find something to do. The answer to Lisa's puzzle came in the form of an offer for Lisa to buy an arts and crafts store. Lisa recognises that there had to be some kind of trigger that initiates the action, and for her finding a perfect location for the shop pushed her from thinking into acting.

Being an entrepreneur was Lisa's dream, and "to be one's own master" is the best thing about entrepreneurship, according to her. She likes to be able to make decisions and manage her time by herself. Lisa describes herself as an independent woman who does not let others control her life.

*"...friends have always been very important to me...and then children, grandchildren. They are important, but I haven't let children and grandchildren to rule my life..."* (Lisa, interview 1)

Lisa paradoxically talks about loneliness as an entrepreneur, how she is alone with the problems, thus recognising the two sides of independence. She says that she collaborates, however, with several other businesses and with a competitor to some extent, which not only implies that this might alleviate her feelings of loneliness but also draws a picture of her as a nice and cooperative person.

Lisa's parents, however, were not happy about Lisa's entrepreneurship; they appreciated her career as a secretary more.

*"...my parents have all the time been against it [entrepreneurship] and they have been very angry, that why can't you have a normal salary work, why don't you...of course it has been their purse that I could have used in emergency situations... so there has been pressure and arguing about that."* (Lisa, interview 1)

For Lisa's parents, entrepreneurship was clearly not the 'normal' or preferable path. Lisa's story pictures her as a good and responsible daughter, but someone still making decisions against her parents' will. If Lisa's entrepreneuring had been highly profitable and did not require any support from her parents, would their perception have been different? Money is an important measure of success that easily outweighs the emotional income from work. Her parents' attitude was clear already when Lisa established her first business: "My father almost got a nervous breakdown", she explains. However, her husband had a steady job then and supported her financially, so the income expectations for the business were lower.

*"When I started [the first business] ...it was easy, because he [the husband] had good income, and I didn't need to worry, I could just fulfil myself, he gave the*

*possibility to that, so that I just took care of children and home and fulfilled myself.” (Lisa, interview 1)*

This excerpt shows that in her family, Lisa as the mother was responsible for the children and the home according to the traditional gender roles. Lisa’s husband concentrated on his work, which included a lot of travelling, so he was not there to share the domestic responsibilities. This was at the beginning of the 1980s, which at least partly explains the traditional division of duties in her family. The husband provided the money, and Lisa decided how she organised her domestic duties and combined them with her work. However, this traditional way of seeing the husband as the breadwinner enabled Lisa to start her business. Lisa had experienced a business failure after the first business, causing some financial loss; due to this her parents may have perceived the entrepreneurial risk as too big. In the first interview, Lisa however, narrated herself as a risk taker as she wondered why she took the risk, even though she *“knew that [the previous entrepreneur] failed”* and a bigger player in the field decided to close its outlet in the town.

Interestingly, Lisa mentioned the closing of her first business as her most severe failure experience. A business partner had joined in, and then suddenly Lisa and her family had to move for her husband’s work. Lisa and her business partner continued to collaborate despite the move until the partner fell ill. Lisa narrated the illness of the partner as inability and even incompetence because of which Lisa was left to take care of the business by herself.

*“...the biggest failure I experienced when I left...and took the girl with me, because it felt so ok, genuinely a good thing, and then it turned out to be a total failure...Nowadays [I] wouldn’t easily take a partner, because it can easily happen that you end up being alone and the other one just walks out like nothing happened.” (Lisa, interview 1)*

Lisa had to close her business after falling ill herself, even though technically the company still existed.

Lisa says that she is not really interested in money but that having a reasonable income is enough for her. Of course, money was one motivation to start a business for her, because she had been unemployed and had difficulties in finding a job. However, she did not require her business to be profitable right from the beginning but only after three years. In the second interview, Lisa was preparing to close her store and to switch to the web store because of the declining number of customers and sales. However, she said that if she had the money, she would not have close but would have expanded the shop to be able to answer all possible customer needs.



## Building confidence

Lisa had established her first business in the 1980's, so she already had experience from two businesses. She worked as a secretary for almost two decades after the first business closure, after which she resigned to establish her second business, which also did not succeed. She next worked as a manager in an arts and crafts store, so when she started her third business, she already had experience running and managing an arts and crafts store. She has an education in business, which added her confidence.

Lisa says that her friends have always supported her. She received social and financial support from her husband when establishing her first business. Even though her parents had difficulty accepting Lisa's choice to become an entrepreneur, they always helped her when she had difficulties with finances of her business.

## Creating the opportunity

Lisa saw that there was space for her business because a big competitor withdrew from the city, but the business she bought did not match her vision of a successful arts and crafts store. She saw that the business could prosper in the right location with her superior service. She changed the selection of products and added new services to the business. The business premises had a big influence on how Lisa developed the business; she was able to add new services only after moving to bigger premises. Lisa experimented with new products in small quantities, and after seeing her customers' reactions, she decided whether to have to the product in her selection.

Lisa had utilised networks to develop her business. She joined a chain of independent arts and crafts entrepreneurs through which she found a cooperation partner, although otherwise she was quite disappointed in the chain. Lisa cooperated with other entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood to boost all the businesses located there. Lisa had thus acted to mould the opportunity, she was involved in networks that she thought would be helpful for her business, and she has taken the initiative to develop the environment to be more hospitable for her business. However, despite her efforts, at the same time she put her business for sale, she decided to change to a web store because she thought it would offer her better possibilities to continue with her shop.

## 6.2.5 Heather: Networking to Develop the Business

### Narrating the self and the context

Heather narrates herself as a positive, emotional, strong, courageous, creative and visionary person, ahead of her time, who questions existing ways of doing things, is cooperative and appreciates others. In the first interview, she referred to herself as a ‘professional networker’ who knows that she can get things done only through networking. However, especially in the first interview, she referred to herself as a novice entrepreneur whose business is not providing much income yet but who is development oriented, open to new advancements and has quite big dreams concerning her business. Heather explained that her childhood experiences made her a change agent who saw educating others and influencing people’s attitudes as her duty. She said several times in the interview that she is different, and she saw that difference as an asset that enables her to perform well in her work. In the same positive way, she also presents herself as unique among other welfare entrepreneurs, but this also has a disadvantage – she perceives that almost no one is able to understand her business and, thus, it is difficult to find someone who could give her advice.

Heather comes from an entrepreneurial family, and she had some previous entrepreneurial experience herself. The start-up decision was not difficult for her, but the question was more about timing. Her attitude towards entrepreneurship was mixed, however, because she had no rosy picture about entrepreneuring based on her experiences as an entrepreneurs’ child.

She had to take into account her children’s day care, her husband’s work, the economics of the family, and her own goals when making the decision to start a business. The availability of day care services seems to be focal when deciding whether to be a full time or part time entrepreneur. It seems that it was her responsibility as a mother to organise the childcare, which follows the traditional division of duties and responsibilities in families. Her mother-in-law could have taken care of Heather’s son, but Heather didn’t want that.

*“But somehow the contradiction that I don’t want to use my mother-in-law as a nanny, I wanted to save her for occasions when we really need time together [with the husband] or something, I mean, I didn’t want to use her as an instrument for my entrepreneuring.” (Heather, interview 1)*

In the second interview, the children and the husband are again present. Heather took her family’s needs into account when making decisions about her work.

However, she ended up having too much work, but according to her, “family is flexible”.

Heather considered her responsibility for her colleagues when starting her business, and she continued with her previous work until she felt that it was ok for her to leave the organisation. Heather prepared the shift to entrepreneurship with her family (husband, parents) by discussing and ensuring that they understood and approved her decision. Despite that, she presents it as her decision. Heather reasoned when talking about her husband’s attitude, which she found very supportive:

*“It might have been that when one has gone through the internal process, it is of course easier for the people close to you to accept it, compared to the situation where I would be struggling and puzzling over it all the time.”* (Heather, interview 1)

Here Heather refers to an internal process that has to be ready. So the decision was hers, although she wanted it to be approved by the family members.

Heather did not perceive her parents as supportive, despite them supporting her financially. The experience resembles Lisa’s, because her parents, too, were unable to offer emotional support, although they supported her financially. Furthermore, both Lisa and Heather mentioned that they needed to show others (mostly their parents) that they will manage. Heather’s husband supports her, but she is unable to share issues about her work with him because she feels he would not understand. She has some friends, though, with whom she can discuss business issues and from whom she can get emotional support.

Heather’s case is interesting, because at the time of the second interview, she had taken employment and was a part-time entrepreneur. It was a difficult decision for her that she felt ashamed of. The reason for this was the difficult economic situation of her business, and she felt that she had to ensure a certain income level because of her family. She received plenty of orders after several months and had more work than she actually wanted. This story pictures Heather as a bold decision maker, acting rather than waiting for what will happen. It also shows her as flexible in her actions and thinking, as she describes how she reframed the situation as a learning event, trying to figure out how she could use the experience as an advantage in her work. This resonates nicely with Sarasvathy’s (2001, 2008) Lemon Principle of effectuation: If life gives you lemons, make lemonade!

Heather positions herself in her narratives as being in charge. She is strong, courageous, she makes decisions, and manages. She is like a lonely warrior who does not know how to ask help or there is nobody to help her, so she deals with her problems by herself. She is flexible and experiments with different approaches. She portrays herself as visionary and as doing something that has not been done before.

She wants to enjoy and to be proud of her work. In the first interview, Heather said that her goal for the business is that it would provide enough income at first for her and later also for her family. Interestingly she brought up that her husband wanted to be a stay-at-home dad, meaning that Heather would be the breadwinner. This is a quite rare arrangement among Finnish families and indicates that neither Heather nor her husband are bound by the traditional gender roles.

### Building confidence

Heather was very confident that her style of working was effective because she had seen the results in her previous work. She sees herself as having the strength and courage that is needed in her work. She says that she knew as no similar service was available, although she had seen a strong need for it. Her education is in welfare in business, which endowed her with the basic knowledge about business management. Before launching, she used business incubator facilities provided by her school and took a course for new entrepreneurs. She did not find the public advice services for new entrepreneurs especially helpful because of the uniqueness of her business, which makes it difficult for others to understand.

She thought about the possibility when starting her business that it would not be profitable. She set a two year time limit for the business to become profitable and framed her entrepreneuring so that failing would not be the end of the world: This business was not something that she would have to do for the rest of her life.

### Creating the opportunity

Heather's business idea is firmly grounded in the work she had been doing. She combined the need that she saw with the capabilities she had (unique style of working). She had already started to prepare the business during her studies. She utilised practical training included in her studies for making contacts that might become regular customers. She also believed that by spreading the word widely would initially generate business at some point.

Her business was first located within a business community (independent businesses operating in same space), but quite soon she noticed that she needed a different kind of environment for her business to grow. She felt that the other entrepreneurs did not share her business orientation, and she moved to another business community. It seems that Heather has actively used different kinds of platforms, like the business incubator and different business communities, to facilitate networking, to find synergies with other businesses, and to find cooperation partners to develop her business. She was a solo entrepreneur who was looking for opportunities to develop her business through partnerships, through the capabilities,

contacts and new ideas the partners could offer. She has been flexible and sensitive to see how others' resources (capabilities, strengths, networks etc.) can complement hers and how they could be used to develop business jointly. She is not particularly interested in employing others but sees networks and partnerships as important ways to develop and grow her business. This kind of thinking relates to effectuation: She is maintaining her independence and keeping control to herself, but at the same time through networking and partnerships she is able to utilise resources beyond her own firm. This kind of network-based entrepreneurship could be an example of the new kind of partnerships that has been suggested to be especially beneficial for women entrepreneurs (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2010).

Heather is constantly developing new ideas for her business. She often gets ideas from other people and continues developing them. She usually tests the new ideas with her customers, and makes changes or puts the idea on the shelf to wait for the time to be right based on their reactions. She acknowledges that certain times are better suitable for development, such as an economic downturn when there is time for development.

## 6.2.6 Jane: Constantly Developing the Opportunity

### Narrating the self and the context

Jane's husband is strongly present in her stories. In the first interview, Jane narrates her husband as the founder of the idea and the initiator of their business. Jane's position becomes stronger in her stories, but her husband is still influential. In the beginning, Jane was quite a novice entrepreneur. She portrayed herself as not having entrepreneurial characteristics, education or much experience, although she had already experienced her first business failure. Jane was counting on her husband as having more experience, which actually gave her freedom to try and learn.

*"I guess entrepreneurship requires throwing yourself into it, and there's plenty of that, just going forward based on the feelings. And then when the husband is, or can be asked to come and help"* (Jane, interview 1)

Jane said that she would not have dared by herself, and she had never thought of becoming an entrepreneur. However, in the second interview Jane narrates herself and her husband as having a more equal partnership in which they both have their own knowledge and roles that complement the other's. The reason for this in Jane's narrative was a period when she was working abroad outside their business. This was prepared for by moving the shop to other premises and employing a salesperson. Jane learned upon her return that this period had hardly been profitable, and they

decided to close the shop and concentrate on the web store that they had launched a few years ago to support the shop's sales. Jane saw during her time abroad how her husband lost his enthusiasm in the business, and how he found it again when she returned. For Jane, this meant that she had an important role in the business, and in the second interview, she narrates herself as more self-confident, more mature as an entrepreneur, and as more content with her life. In the first interview, she said the goal was that the business would offer a job for someone but definitely not for her. At that time, the business was just temporary work for her, and her aspiration was to return to her own profession. Four years later, she still describes herself as not capable, for example, of solo entrepreneurship, but her dreams about her future include entrepreneurship.

Jane was a student when she started the business. She describes that as a situation in which she did not have much to lose. She had no career, she had no permanent job that she had to resign from, and she had the opportunity to take a year off. Later, she felt that it has helped her in difficult times, that she had nothing else with which to cope the situation.

*“I can't even calculate my value, I can happily do my things without receiving any compensation. And then there's the situations where it doesn't help, there's no point in thinking whether you get your salary or not, but you just need to do the tasks... I find it supportive, so that I've managed the difficult situations, that I didn't need to compare with anything.”* (Jane, interview 2)

Her husband continued in his job, so they had economic safety, but the business was required to generate income, too. They had small children, and in Jane's narratives she is juggling between work and home. Jane did not feel like she had energy to generate development ideas for the business, because she had to look after the children and their home. However, she describes taking care of the domestic issues as healthy and balancing. She brought up in the second interview the possibility of her children suffering because mother was working and not at home. However, Jane narrates herself as the one reminding her husband to bear the family in mind when developing new business ideas. Here, Jane as the mother is the family's guardian, looking after the family's interests, while the husband is more outward bound focusing on issues outside the home. Jane told a story about an idea of having a café, which they abandoned.

*“Luckily it is buried!...Because somebody would have had to be there until eleven [in the evening], so totally impossible. So there should be someone else then [an employee]...He [the husband] said that he can be there, so I was like,*

*no you can't! We have a family, please note that then we won't see each other at all anymore.” (Jane, interview 1)*

The time Jane spent abroad was, of course, difficult for organising the family life. Jane said that her mother retired at the same time, so she was available to help, and her husband naturally took a bigger role in looking after the children and the home.

Jane says that she is amazed by the kinds of difficult situations they have overcome and how much she has learned when she looks back on that time. “...*big things for me personally... big steps that I was required to take*”, she said.

Jane has trouble believing how easy her life is when she concentrates just on the web store, because she is not tied to a shop and its opening hours. She says that she must remember to be grateful and not feel guilty about this ease. This situation is something that she had been targeting all the time, although originally she thought that it would be reached by having an employee in the shop.

### Building confidence

Jane did not consider herself an “entrepreneurial type”, and she had never thought to become an entrepreneur. However, she perceived her husband as entrepreneurial because he had previous entrepreneurial experience, and he was highly engaged in their business while having a job elsewhere. Jane, however, thought that running a business was something that she could learn by doing. Jane worked in her friend’s shop before starting her business to gain experience in customer service, and this friend also gave her advice about running a business. There were no entrepreneurs in Jane’s family, and she described her mother as terrified when she heard about their plans to start a company, but other family members and friends were encouraging. Jane and her husband already knew about the products because the business was related to their hobbies. The supplier (a chain) also offered education about their products, which boosted Jane’s confidence. They also visited an advice centre for new entrepreneurs, but the feedback from there was not particularly encouraging until they saw the business plan Jane had written.

The experience Jane has gained while running the business has cemented her confidence. Jane and her husband have experienced problems related to profitability, time management, and combining the business with the family life, as well as with some cooperation partners. Jane says that after managing these kinds of difficulties, she can manage anything.

## Creating the opportunity

Jane and her husband looked for an easy way with low risk when they established their store. The opportunity, however, was not ready when the shop was opened, but they continued to develop it. Based on communication with customers and their reactions, the selection of the shop was changed. They also launched a filial in another city, which turned out to be difficult to manage because of the distance, and finally they decided to close the shop to limit its losses. Jane and her husband decided to detach themselves from the chain that had offered them easy way to enter the market, but whose contract they found too restricting in order to gain more freedom and to increase their margins.

According to the original idea, Jane worked in the shop and continued her studies part time. The business was not her dream, and she wanted to do something related to her field of education. She considered concentrating merely on their web store that they had already launched to support the shop when she accepted the offer to work abroad for a while. However, it was not until Jane returned home that they finally decided to close the shop and continue with the more profitable Internet business. Moving the store to a new location, Jane being away, and an employee running the shop had turned out to be a bad combination. Jane acknowledged the importance of her participation and of being responsible for the shop after this experiment.

## 6.2.7 Natalie: Family Comes First

### Narrating the self and the context

Natalie's stories seem to have two main threads: the family and the husband, and her health, which she narrates as the ultimate reasons for her becoming an entrepreneur. When telling her story about becoming an entrepreneur, she starts by saying that it was a long process, and by the second sentence, she brought up her husband's entrepreneuring.

*“My husband had been working as an entrepreneur for 17 years, so we have lived this kind of entrepreneurial family life all the time very intensively, although I have been in healthcare ...”* (Natalie, interview 1)

This is in line with earlier studies, according to which, the husband influences the wife's decision to become an entrepreneur, and also other way round, although the influence is stronger on women (Caputo & Dolinski 1998; Patrick et al. 2016). This strong connection can partly be explained by family entrepreneurship as well as by strong role models (Tervo & Haapalainen 2007). The life of Natalie's family



seems to be intertwined with her husband's entrepreneurship, as Natalie describes their business acquaintances who are also family friends, children being taken to their enterprise and to business meetings (because they were not taken to day care), her taking entrepreneurship courses "*just to understand what my husband does*", and her traveling with her husband on business trips. Their children have also worked in the family businesses, but they were not interested in continuing Natalie's shop when she decided to close it. Natalie replied when I asked about this:

*"...our children study and all, so I didn't want to tie her [the daughter] into that small shop, they have totally different plans for life. Although of course related to entrepreneurship."* (Natalie, interview 2)

Natalie's stories picture a reality in which the lives of all the family members revolve around entrepreneurship. The core of this entrepreneurial world is Natalie's husband and the successful businesses he has built. The children are encouraged to study and have their own plans for life, but it is still taken for granted that those will involve entrepreneurship. The children have been socialised to entrepreneurship, and having entrepreneurial parents has been shown to increase the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur. Natalie brought up that the children are allowed to construct their lives as they wish, but it would be interesting to know if this principle is applied in practice.

Natalie constructs an entrepreneurial narrative in which her career as an entrepreneur makes perfect sense. Taking into consideration her environment and the support she received (the networks, the advice), her decision seems very logical. Entrepreneurship seems to have inherent value in their family, and becoming an entrepreneur might have strengthened Natalie's belonging to the family. Just having a business of her own was valuable for Natalie, which can be seen in the second interview.

Riikka: "*May I ask, is the business now profitable?*"

Natalie: "*Well, how would I think? Well...actually it's not, in a way, because if think that when I had the shop open every day, the sales were dozens times higher...*"

Natalie is telling about her activities in the family's other businesses.

Riikka: "*... since you have all those other things to do, you have the real estates and everything, so why didn't you just close this business?*"

Natalie: *"I didn't want to close it."*

Riikka: *"Yes, but why not?"*

Natalie: *"No, I just didn't want to close. I kind of...I like the glass and tableware and working with those...Somehow, I just wanted to keep the business. It never was an alternative that I would close my business."* (Natalie, interview 2)

The other important theme in Natalie's accounts is health. Natalie had been living in a family environment that strongly nurtures entrepreneurship, yet she enjoyed her work in healthcare so much that she needed an extra push to enter into entrepreneurship. This trigger was her health problems which made her realise that she could not continue with her current work. She did not feel like going back to work after one summer vacation, and when talking about it to her husband, he just said, *"Well, don't go then"*. That was the moment when she really started to prepare for her entrepreneurship and applied for a leave of absence from her office. Natalie's health plays an important role in reminding her about what is really important in life and demanding her to make decisions. She fell seriously ill, which forced her and the whole family to reflect on their values. These kinds of hardships have emphasised the value of the family and her own well-being.

*"Entrepreneurship is...something that, if something revolutionary would happen in my life, I could easily give up entrepreneurship...18 months ago, I was operated a brain tumour, and that was hard time for the family... Even that time I didn't think, what about my business. It's about you and how the family is coping, so maybe that's why family is more important to me than entrepreneurship...As a family you can survive anything."* (Natalie, interview 1)

When Natalie decided to continue with her business without a shop, she again narrated it as a reaction to her illness.

Natalie positions herself strongly as the wife of a successful entrepreneur. She names her husband as her 'guru entrepreneur', and her husband's influence can be seen in her decision to start a business. However, she had her career, too, because she was working in healthcare. That must have been demanding in terms of childcare, but she did not become a stay-at-home mother; instead, they negotiated an arrangement in which her husband participated in taking care of the children.

Natalie's friends were enthusiastic about her new business, but according to Natalie, they expected it to be in healthcare. However, she chose a business idea related to her hobby, which also involved her husband. Considering the income from the other family businesses, Natalie's entrepreneurship does not seem necessary for

the family's support. Moreover, it might have been possible for her to stay at home, or, as she did later, be more strongly involved in the other businesses of the family. However, she wanted to have something of her own, which indicates Natalie's independence. Her business could be seen as a way to enter her husband's world of entrepreneurship in which her work would be regarded as valuable using the 'entrepreneurship yardstick' but still as an independent individual. My intention here is not to suggest that her work as a nurse would not be valued by her family, but that maybe, as an entrepreneur, she felt more 'compatible' with the family's norms and values and maybe also more connected with her husband. Entrepreneurship is clearly important for Natalie, yet she says that running the business is her work, not a mission in life, and maybe someday she will still return to healthcare.

### Building confidence

At first Natalie was not sure about her capabilities as an entrepreneur. She reflected on whether she was up to it, because one successful entrepreneur in the family does not mean that she would also be successful. Her family's support has been critical for Natalie; she said that without that support she would not have had the courage to start a business. However, she felt that starting was easy for her because she had access to her husband's business networks; whenever she was facing problems, it was easy for her to turn to these experts who she already knew.

Natalie thought about the manageable risk level for her when starting out; thus, she acted according to the affordable loss principle of effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001, 2008), as she.

*"I wasn't really afraid, and I had this principle that I won't have a large loan to start with, but with own money. It was also one thing...that you knew that even if you had to say after a year that this is not working, it wouldn't cause you any economic catastrophe"* (Natalie, interview 1)

The family's economic situation made the decision to start a business easier for Natalie. She planned the business so that she did not need any loan and the losses would be limited in case of failure. This fact helped Natalie in her decision making and made her more confident.

Natalie believes in life-long learning, which can be seen in how she prepared herself for entrepreneurship. She wanted to educate herself more, and she took courses in marketing and completed a vocational degree in entrepreneurship. All this training boosted her confidence.

## Creating the opportunity

Natalie said that the business idea developed substantially during the first years, and the greatest development was to also have a new design beside the old that was based on the contacts that Natalie and her husband already had. They personally knew designers and had done business with them, and these relationships now materialised in a business opportunity.

*“We knew them beforehand, we had visited their gallery, and my husband had been collaborating with him. But it is always for them, their glass art is available in [limited places] in Finland, so it is quite an issue...”* (Natalie, interview 1)

Natalie had built networks of her own in addition to having access to her husband’s networks. She cooperated with other entrepreneurs in the town centre, and she thinks that competition is good, because it facilitates business development. She had also used the services of the local business development organisation and was happy with their service.

Besides life-long learning and personal development, Natalie also believes in continuous business development. She says that it is important to look for new opportunities all the time. She did not have resources to compete with chains that have high volumes, so she concentrated on quality products that are sold only in small shops. She has also thought a lot about the focus of her business to avoid diversifying too much. An interesting detail is that when asked about growth and the optimal size of her business, Natalie defined it in terms of the number of designers she represents.

Natalie sees entrepreneurship as flexible, something that can change form. The mode of operation can be changed based on the entrepreneur’s life situation. For example, Natalie’s illness forced her to close the shop, but she wanted her firm still to exist and wanted to continue with the business, although on a smaller scale.

### 6.2.8 Sharon: Communication as a Device of Opportunity Creation

#### Narrating the self and the context

Sharon describes herself as the primary decision maker in her story of becoming an entrepreneur, although there are some other people on the scene assisting her. The first was her colleague who offered her a business partnership after their employer had decided to close its office where Sharon was working as an office manager. The others were owner-managers of another real estate agency where Sharon worked

after turning down her colleague's offer as she *"didn't dare because there's so much responsibility"*. Despite these actors' contributions, Sharon narrates becoming an entrepreneur as her personal process, how she saw what entrepreneurship demands, and how she realised that she has all that it takes.

*"I realised that wait a minute, if these...[entrepreneurs] can run this business by themselves...so why on earth couldn't I? Why do I work for others, when I could do the same work and get better pay for myself..."* (Sharon, interview 1)

She emphasised after saying this that she is motivated by succeeding in her work, not by the money. Thus, even though money seems to be a factor influencing Sharon's decision, she wanted to make it clear that it has never been such an important thing for her. Being motivated by money can be easily interpreted in the Finnish culture as being greedy, which is not appreciated, and especially this group of women entrepreneurs perceived entrepreneurship more in terms of having meaningful work and fulfilling their dreams. Bringing up money as a reason for starting a businesses may have sounded greedy in this context.

The role of the family changes over time in Sharon's stories. In the first interview or the video recordings, she does not talk much about her family as being related to her work (she shared some intimate information about her history, though). She mentioned that sometimes she is unable to change her 'professional self' to her 'family self' when she goes home, which caused problems. This problem with switching roles seems not to occur when she goes to work, which might imply that the professional role is stronger or more 'natural' to her. The cultural and social expectations of herself, her family, and the wider social environment regarding the role of the wife and mother probably created her need to switch roles (I discuss this further in the chapter 6.3.1 that focuses on the positioning and identities of the women entrepreneurs).

*"..work and home must be linked...so that the family understands, when I'm working...I might work 16 hours...when I have those long, difficult days, when I'm tired, really...it might cause that when I come in...I'm [angry] as a wasp, when the sneakers are in wrong order on the veranda. I need understanding, but I need also family's help...so that I can educate myself not to take it out on them, but I would have some other channel for that, which is a big challenge for the future."* (Sharon, interview 1)

Sharon explains that she needs understanding and support from her family; thus, her family life is also a resource for her, not just something that causes problems when it has to be combined with work. Her husband is almost nonexistent in

Sharon's stories. Sharon refers to her ex-husband when talking about her messy divorce in the second interview, but in her narration, her husband has no role in making decisions about her business (neither starting it nor withdrawing from it). Sharon's baby is quite strongly present in the second interview, and she narrates the situation of having a baby and being on maternity leave as the reason for the severe problems in her business. The serious situation in the business forced her to partly give up her mother role and take on the entrepreneur role more than she wanted, which caused her anxiety. The norm is that the mother stays home at least for nine months, and people usually think that the longer the child is in the mother's care, the better. Sharon's anxiety about her early return to work is probably partly caused by her decision conflicting with the grand narrative of good mothering. She understands that the grandmother is capable of providing good care for the baby, and as she said, this other baby of hers needed her more than her real baby, but still she was distressed because of her decision. However, this time Sharon also narrates herself as making the decision.

*"During the time I was away [on maternity leave] the firm didn't succeed, on the contrary, we backtracked... that's why I came back so early."* (Sharon, interview 2)

The baby's strong influence can also be seen when Sharon presents the baby as determining her decisions about how to manage and develop the business or how much time to devote to it. Hence, being a mother of a small child has changed her use of time and influenced how the business operates and how the opportunity is constructed. In the second interview, thus, the focal characters are Sharon herself and her baby.

Sharon narrates herself as a competitive person who enjoys winning customers, who needs that kind of success to persevere and to feel appreciated. Losing is really not an option for her, and if it happens, she takes it very personally.

*"If it [becoming second] happens, I contemplate it two days, I lose my sleep thinking about what I did wrong, what I didn't handle right with that person. Why did that [person] think that someone else is better than me."* (Sharon, interview 1)

She also pictures herself as a strong and independent person who is used to making decisions and who wants to do that. Sharon describes her working style as entrepreneurial because she has always worked hard, not counting hours but letting results speak for themselves and expecting to be fairly compensated for the results. She also pictures herself as highly emotional and making decisions based on her

emotions (for example, evaluating new business opportunities). Sharon's decision when starting her first business was based not on calculations but on her experience and the results of her years of work in the business. Thus, the decision might not just be based on emotions but on intuition or heuristics, which stem from experience and expertise. Sharon brought up that she had always been "*the black sheep of the family*", unlike her sister, when the group members discussed their backgrounds and feelings of otherness. She describes herself as the opposite of her sister, who diligently completed her homework and stayed at home "*practicing potato cooking*". Sharon's expression indicates the unimportance of her sister's chores and her adhering to the female norm more than Sharon. Interestingly, both Sharon and her sister became entrepreneurs, despite not having an entrepreneurial background.

### Building confidence

Sharon had learned the basics of the real estate agency's work and developed her own style of doing it while being employed. She was confident that her work would be profitable, she knew the market and had already a large clientele and a good reputation.

*"...we were certain that we will succeed, because we knew how big our clientele was. [The town] is so small that it doesn't matter what it says on the office signboard, even if it would say 'bean and weaner'. People buy from and give their home for sale to Sharon or [the business partner] or [the employee]...Also [the employee] has started to gain a foothold among the old customers, but it's based on people knowing me, they know how I work, and the reputation, I have a certain kind of personal reputation in this town."* (Sharon, interview 1)

However, when she was first offered a partnership, she found herself neither competent or willing to be an entrepreneur. Her self-confidence increased as she saw how other entrepreneurs run an agency, and she became sure that she could do at least the same as them. She started to consider entrepreneurship more seriously when she realised that she does not have to do everything by herself but can purchase services.

Sharon and her business partner needed advice on the technicalities of establishing a company, so they went to an advice centre for new businesses, which she did not find particularly useful. They also received some calculations that did not matter to them, firstly because they had their own visions and, secondly, the calculations were too modest. Their turnover for the first year was double compared to the counsellor's scenario.

Sharon had her family's support when starting the company. She had always worked long hours, so becoming an entrepreneur did not bring any big changes to her mode of working. Later, when her baby was born, it was more complicated to reconcile the needs of the business and the family. Ending her maternity leave was a big sacrifice for Sharon, making her wonder if it really was worth it.

### Creating the opportunity

Sharon already had a good reputation and a big clientele in the town when starting her business. Sharon's idea was that the business would succeed with high quality service and her hard work. Her view is that every day creates future business. She wants the customers to be so satisfied that they will also recommend and use her services in future.

Sharon has a vision of adding some products to complete their services. She reasons that these products should support their basic business by strengthening the image of high quality and bringing extra satisfaction to the customers by intensifying their positive emotions. Sharon takes the emotions and feelings of her customers into consideration in almost every step of her service.

*“I think that it has to work in practice first, I have to see that it really works in practice somehow, somewhere. And I reflect on the basis of emotions, and kind of openly and honestly. I don't look for numeral facts to understand if something works, but...for example [a new business idea], I know how I experienced it myself and how our group experienced it. I've talked to people about their experiences, based on their feelings, and when that is right, kind of.” (Sharon, interview 1)*

The fit of new ideas with the existing business and experimenting with new products can also be seen in Sharon's case. New business is often planned to support and serve the needs of the existing business. Sharon says that she would not end the real estate agency but would have something new besides it. She does not want to take big risks and move to something that she does not know but would rather lower the risk by building a new business that supports the existing one. However, Sharon sold her share in the first company because she could not realise her visions within it. She has a view of how the business “should be”, but enterprising with a partner did not allow her to take her ideas into action. Sharon needed a firm of her own, so she established a new company that was based on the same business opportunity she kept creating. Thus, the new ideas fitted with her view of the existing business, but they did not fit with the existing company. Just like the establishment of a company is more like a technical event - although making the opportunity more objectively



existing and bringing it legitimacy - so the company also like a shell accommodating the opportunity, and if the shell does not have room for the business, it has to be changed.

Sharon says that being an entrepreneur has taught her humility. She means by this that she must give her full attention to every customer; she cannot afford for customers to feel they were treated indifferently. It also means that she must always know how the market is developing, be proactive and prepare her customers for changes in the market.

The basic idea of Sharon's business is to be different. She talks about three ways to be different – appearance difference, emotional difference, and operational difference – which all are related to each other. The difference in appearance can be seen in the office, which does not look like a standard office. Sharon cooperated with other entrepreneurs whose businesses were able to contribute to her business's differences and to extra satisfaction for her customers. Both the office and the webpages reflect the high quality of service, which is produced not just by delivering the service as agreed but also by taking the customers' emotions into consideration in each step of the service. The operational difference could be seen, for example, in Sharon's proactive responses to market changes. She chose to act exactly opposite to her competitors, looking for customer contacts and more aggressively seeking visibility for her business. She used the whole repertoire of print media, social media, Internet, their focal location, and the image of the business to communicate that they are working hard, doing business, and are doing well despite the market situation.

*“During the first weeks I thought... I ripped from my back all I could do, and what I must do differently. Because I must arise, stick out positively... And right away I started spreading the word that I will recruit more people, here will be an interior decoration shop, which was not yet there, but the feeling was there on the field. I talked about it all the time to customers...immediately when there was an opportunity, I told... and, you know, when somebody builds something positive, the image is always good. Even if it would not happen next month, if it would happen after a year, but I maintained the positive image. I had no chance economically to do this renovation in February...it needs investing...it was not possible. But I just said that this is what I will do. I had no idea... if it would work, but I just said.”* (Sharon, interview 2)

Communicating about something that does not yet exist is linked with an activity that Aldrich and Ruef (2006, p. 99) call issue framing; *“Founders who can behave as if the activity were a reality – producing and directing great theater, as it were – may convince others about the tangible reality of the new activity”*. This is very clear in what Sharon described: She communicated (acted) as if the vision she had was

already reality. Sharon's company made record sales in three months in a harsh situation when you would think that no opportunity to grow a business existed. Sharon and her team were able to make the most of the situation when competitors were decreasing their operations because they thought there were no customers anyway. Sharon and her team created an opportunity to grow their business by working hard with their own style, by strong communication, and by questioning the unwritten rules of the field. Communicating a certain image of the business played a focal role in creating this opportunity. According to the creation theory, the opportunity at first is in the entrepreneur's mind, and when she starts communicating the opportunity, it also begins to form in the minds of potential customers and other stakeholders. Sharon communicated a powerful image of the company as being the most active real estate agent in the market reaching good results. When the people saw the message in its different forms, they believed it and started behaving according to it.

### 6.2.9 Paula: Fulfilling Her Dream by Small Steps

#### Narrating the self and the context

Paula's narration has three main themes: health, having a child (also discussed in chapter 6.3.1), and making one's dreams come true. Paula starts her story about becoming an entrepreneur like this, "*Actually, I was making my dreams come true.*" She continues by building a cause and effect relationship "*I was totally burned out in my old job.*" She describes the situation as her personal crisis when she radically changed her life after realising that her job could not offer her what she wanted. She then made radical changes: moved, divorced, resigned, and started a business. I have heard many times the advice to 'think big', encapsulating the idea that your thoughts and images will set limits to your business. Paula, however, said:

*"I thought that I would become a craftswoman and with my needlework I will provide myself, that's what I thought then. I don't know if I dreamt or thought... I never thought this far, I didn't even know that this kind of business that I have now could exist. So the dreams have grown piece by piece."* (Paula, interview 1)

In the spirit of effectuation, Paula demonstrated that it is possible to succeed even if starting small and even without having big expectations. Thus, it is important to start creating the opportunity, even if one could not yet see the business as a market leader or as employing others.

Health issues arose again in the second interview when Paula talks about her accident and how it influenced the business. She was first in a hospital and then on

a sick leave for a month, causing serious problems because she was the only person handling the finances of the business. Then she moved to making sense of the incident, bringing up the positive effects, attaching meaning to the incident (“*it was meant to stop me*”).

Paula received support from her parents and her boyfriend when starting her company. Her parents believed in her, because they knew that “she’s not going to do anything crazy”. Paula’s boyfriend helped her economically, giving her petty loans that enabled her to buy materials to finish customer orders. As her main source of support, Paula mentions the entrepreneurs’ association.

*“If I think where I have received support, it’s the entrepreneurs’ association and nothing else... You may lose your own faith in your entrepreneurship sometimes, but other entrepreneurs will give you that.”* (Paula, interview 1)

Paula narrated herself as having a strong wish to grow, which gives her the energy to pursue her dreams. She also described herself as talkative, entrepreneurial, not choosing the easiest way, hardworking, responsible, sensitive, and creative. Interestingly, she said that the willingness to take risks differentiates entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs, and she still describes herself as risk averse.

*“I had 3000 marks, and I rented an apartment, quit my job, and divorced. That was the money I had, and then I just. I still don’t have much money, but somehow this thing is still working. I’ve made everything very cautiously. I started without any loan...I’m not afraid of loans, but somehow I didn’t want to take the risk, I just held out.”* (Paula, interview 1)

Paula obviously does not see her radical decisions as risky, because she explains that she has made them all cautiously. To an outsider, making such changes in life involves risk, but Paula might see risk taking mainly as related to money.

Paula also narrates herself as weak, needing appreciation and “being something”, which she can receive as an entrepreneur. She recognises three different roles in her life:

*“...I’m Paula the entrepreneur, and then I’m Paula the wife and Paula the mother, that’s how I divide myself. And there is no just Paula... I feel like there is no Paula, who wouldn’t be in some of these roles...as an entrepreneur, I get this certain kind of appreciation, I am something. ...thanks to entrepreneurship, I’ve had to grow. I’ve been given the opportunity to grow. And I’ve got that kind of appreciation that one needs...As a wife or mother, do I get that kind of*

*appreciation that makes me feel that I am something, I don't think so...they don't offer me that kind of sparkle.” (Paula, interview 1)*

Being a wife and a mother – although becoming a mother was another big dream of hers – is not enough for Paula. To feel good about herself and to be satisfied, she also needs the feeling of accomplishment and appreciation outside home. This arena is entrepreneurship for Paula, even though it might be employment, too. She never really wanted to become an entrepreneur, but she just could not see any other way to realise her dream. I discuss how Paula sees these different spheres of her life in more detail in chapter 6.3.1.

Paula positions herself as knowledgeable, capable and in charge. She is engaged and fully lives everything happening in her shop. Her spirit can be observed in her description of a good employee: “...*she needs to have certain kind of ability, certain understanding of the work as a whole. And she needs to have passion for this work. If she just comes for a job, it's not going to work.*” She has the vision, and she makes decisions. She does not talk about any conflicts between her work role and her home role, except that at home she does not want to make decisions because she gets enough of it at her work – she lets her husband decide, but this is also her choice.

## Building confidence

Sewing was her hobby, so Paula already knew the actors in that market, and based on her own experiences as a customer, it was easy for her to imagine what kind of service the customers were missing. She already had good networks in the area and experience in starting a new business, thanks to her previous employment. She had solid sales and marketing skills that strengthened her confidence. However, she worked in a friend's shop during her summer vacation to gain experience, and this period of serving customers helped her to understand what the customers' problems really were. She also attended a course for new entrepreneurs during which her idea of the opportunity received confirmation.

*“I was enlightened on that entrepreneurship course, which strengthened my thinking...that I was doing the right thing, and it was this SWOT analysis I made about my competitors. There was a huge empty space for me! A really huge space! There was, like when you establish your business here, you're going to be ok.” (Paula, interview 1)*

Paula was offered good working opportunities when she resigned from her job, which made a big difference to her, because she thought that in case of a failure, she can always remember that she was good enough to be offered jobs like that.

## Creating the opportunity

Paula has created her business in small steps with a low budget, using bricolage and effectuation logic. She built the business on what she knew and what she liked to do, using creativity to be able to manage with the money she had and to get whatever she could out of the efforts she made. She did all that was possible to do by herself, because that cost only her time. She copied a business model that enabled her to start with a small investment and contacts with new customers.

*“That kind of public marketing and sort of general marketing I didn’t do at all, until 18 months later. I didn’t put a single advertisement anywhere about starting, nothing...I did all the marketing myself. Because it didn’t cost anything. I couldn’t have a newspaper advertisement, where would I have got the money from? It had to be done with my own work...my first guest book had 700 names, just like that. All those customers had come..., and they were there just for that one thing.” (Paula, interview 1)*

Paula had good contacts in local enterprises that she utilised to negotiate campaigns that benefited both her and the other enterprise. She did not want to take a loan, which restricted her possibilities, but that enabled her to keep more of the control for herself. Paula’s business seems to be a textbook example of effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001, 2008).

According to Paula, her business has always grown out of customer demand. Her goal when she started was to employ herself, but at some point, she realised that she does not have enough time to serve all the customers, and she decided hire an employee, although she had been advised not to by professionals. Her product selection had expanded according to the demand. Paula also has ideas for new businesses, but she is not yet ready to start with them.

Paula's case illustrates the role of dreams in constructing the opportunity. Paula's dreams were not especially big at first, but they have grown as the business has developed, and that is the way they should be. She says that one should be careful what one wishes for, because it might come true. This means that the dreams steer our attention and guide our actions, even though we might not notice it.

Paula’s dreams might limit the growth of her business. A conversation about Paula is included in the video material, in which the entrepreneurs (mostly Wilma, supported by Natalie) challenge Paula to have bigger dreams and to utilise her full potential. The group saw that Paula and her business had a lot of potential that she has not exploited yet. However, she should give up the limits she set to be able to do that and give herself permission to dream. Paula had a dream related to a new business, but she said that it is not realistic, she is not ready, and she is worried about her wellbeing. She was afraid that if she gives herself permission to dream bigger

dreams, she will start running the rat race again, as in her previous job, and she does not want to jeopardise her own wellbeing. This discussion about dreams sheds light particularly well on the interconnectedness of the business opportunity and the entrepreneur. If the opportunity cannot serve the needs and wishes of the entrepreneur, it is not an opportunity. In Paula's case, even though there could be 'an opportunity' if it causes her more worries than it brings pleasure or fulfilment, she will not seize it until she is ready to see how the opportunity makes sense in her world. As time goes by, the opportunity and the business develops, maybe into something different, but guided by the entrepreneur's dreams.

## 6.3 Narrative Reading of the Women Entrepreneurs' Stories

### 6.3.1 Narrating the Self

As noted by Steyaert (2007), we narrate ourselves in the stories we tell. Thus, telling me about their businesses and discussing with each other, the women entrepreneurs simultaneously narrated about their identities. In fact, they had several conversations during which they tried to find similarities between themselves, trying to make sense of what a woman entrepreneur is like. In the interviews and the video material, I found the entrepreneurs constructing their identities as entrepreneurs, as women entrepreneurs, as mothers, and as persons / individuals.

#### Identity as an Entrepreneur and a Women Entrepreneur

Ann and Jane were the most novice entrepreneurs in the group. Jane positions herself as unsuitable for entrepreneurship and business, and vice versa – she does not see being an entrepreneur as particularly desirable:

*"I don't have any kind of business education, nor a sense of business. I felt [at the time of starting the business] that I'm completely unfit to business life...I know how to sell and how to be with customers...but I see entrepreneurship as harsh..."* (Jane, interview 1)

Ann also saw herself neither as entrepreneurial nor as having knowledge in business, such as book-keeping or selling. She replied, when I asked her if she had earlier thought about becoming an entrepreneur:

*"Never, I probably have all the characteristics that an entrepreneur should not have. Well, there must be some good ones, too, but I would have never ever*

*thought that I would become an entrepreneur. I don't know any entrepreneurs, and there are no entrepreneurs in my family, no contact whatsoever. None.*" (Ann, interview 1)

Jane and Ann's positioning is somewhat different in the second interviews, indicating the development of an entrepreneurial identity. Jane not only brought up her husband as innovative and entrepreneurial in the first and the second interviews, but she also was the originator of their business idea. However, she narrates herself as an integral part of their duo in the second interview, as more equal, both doing their share of running the business, although she still did not see herself as capable for solo entrepreneurship. She also gives an explanation for this change in her perception: While living abroad, she left her husband and an employee responsible for the business, which resulted in a decline in its turnover and her husband's enthusiasm. Her husband found his drive again after she returned, and the business started to develop. This indicated to Jane that she was needed, and she no longer was "just" doing the practical, everyday tasks in the business: The business could not flourish without her. Jane's entrepreneurial identity has thus strengthened, such that she wondered in the second interview whether she could ever adapt to "normal employment" again, she has become so used to the entrepreneur's freedom. Here Jane's entrepreneurial identity is developing based on the sense-making of her experiences, and her understanding of herself as an entrepreneur incorporates the past as well as the future (Steyard 2007; Alvesson et al. 2008; Polkinghorne 1991).

Ann's entrepreneurial identity had also strengthened. She explains that she is proud of herself and all what she had been able to do by herself. She recognises that she has learned a lot about being an entrepreneur, about agency, and about the arbitrariness of entrepreneurship. She might have had second thoughts if she had known in advance how much work and learning entrepreneurship entails. However, she also recognises that the most important thing is not reaching the goal but what happens on the way.

The group discussed their entrepreneurial identities (even though they were using the word 'role') and their centrality to them. They recognised the problem with the overemphasis on one identity, for example, identity as an athlete or a work identity, or entrepreneurial identity, and if that is taken away, it may cause severe problems. Paula says that the entrepreneurial identity is very central to her:

*"...So that it won't happen that if I'm no longer an entrepreneur, I'm nothing anymore...that I could understand the value, that I'm still something even though I wouldn't be an entrepreneur. For example for me it is tremendously difficult. My self-esteem is so strongly constructed around my entrepreneurial role."* (Paula, video recording 2.2)

The others (Wilma, Heather, Natalie) then led the conversation to a more positive direction, stating that entrepreneurs are such active people that even in case of unemployment, they will find their way and will organise something else meaningful for themselves to do. Thus, agency is also seen as being strong in entrepreneurs in this conversation.

Heather tells in the second interview how taking a fixed-term employment caused her problems with her identity as an entrepreneur. She was working with entrepreneurs, and suddenly she was “only” a part-time entrepreneur, which she was ashamed of.

*“Suddenly I become an extramural entrepreneur, oh gosh, how can I now support entrepreneurs?...I thought that what I did was shameful.”* (Heather, interview 2).

However, she noted that it was important that she dared to speak about her shame, because it helped her to reframe the situation as a learning experience that she could use to her advantage. This is one strategy of emotion regulation, namely cognitive change (i.e., altering the meanings attached to the situation; Goss 2002), that can be used in failure situations (Boss & Simms 2008).

Ann recognises the meaning of belonging to a community of entrepreneurs, because she says that it is important for her to be part of the group and to know the other entrepreneurs who are able to understand her. *“There are many things that non-entrepreneurs can’t understand”*, she says. When we look at the identity construction of the novice entrepreneurs from the perspective of (secondary) socialisation, we see that they are learning the “sub-world” of entrepreneurship, the language, the values, and also the emotions (Berger & Luckman, p. 157). Belonging to a community of entrepreneurs supports the construction of entrepreneurial identity, because identity also involves to whom we belong (Alvesson et al. 2008; Pullen & Simpson 2009). One this kind of community is the Associations for women entrepreneurs. At least two or three of the participants were active in these associations; conversely, one saw that this kind of organisation could not offer her anything. Paula had been an active member of her local association for a long time, and she considered it as an important source of support for her.

*“..if I now think where I have received support, it’s only the women entrepreneurs’ association, nowhere else... I wouldn’t be an entrepreneur anymore, if I wasn’t in the entrepreneurs’ association. That’s for sure. The support from there has been so enormous.”* (Paula, interview 1)



The participants did not talk much about themselves as women entrepreneurs. When discussing Jane's episode (the entrepreneurs were directing and performing episodes of each other's lives), they brought up that sometimes people think that they do not need to behave appropriately with a young entrepreneur but that it becomes easier with age as one becomes more powerful to resist and to demand respectful behaviour from others. Wilma had also experienced some belittling when she was a novice entrepreneur, but she had mostly felt that it was an advantage to be a woman entrepreneur in a male-dominated sector. Her firm was usually considered interesting because of having the only female CEO in their field.

One interesting theme in the materials is about being different. Many of the entrepreneurs have experiences of being different, either in their families, schools, or working life. The entrepreneurs used the metaphor "being the black sheep of the family" to describe the feelings of being different. 'Black sheep' did not necessarily mean being somehow worse, just not quite fitting in. Some of the women (Kate, Sharon, Paula, Natalie, Jane, Heather, Ann) described having had these feelings since their childhood or adolescence. One might argue that these experiences of otherness contributed to their ability to resist the societal (or parental) expectations and prepared them for distancing themselves from the cultural norm of being a woman. Kate especially experienced herself as different very early in her childhood; she said that she was supposed to be a boy and described how she was chosen (probably indicating interest by herself, which then was accepted and maybe also strengthened by her parents) to be raised as a farmer (ref. Hytti et al. 2017), which inevitably made her different from her sisters. The video material has a scene by Kate in which she takes a step forward from the row of sisters. She felt that she was special, spending more time with her father than her sisters, and learning about farming. This difference became her strength, because she learned to work in "the men's world" and developed an identity of being strong and capable, as good as men, and not minding doing things differently. Being different has continued in her adulthood, and as an entrepreneur, she feels that she is still standing out from the crowd in the way that is not accepted in the agrarian society:

*Kate: "...I want the local people not gossiping so much about our things... People are so interested in when we are going bankrupt."*

*Riikka: "Is it some kind of basic Finnish thing?"*

*Kate: "I guess it's more about agrarian society, it's about someone sticking her head out a bit differently here on the countryside, so bang, head down, so you won't differ."* (Kate, Interview 1)

This relates to Kate's attempt to consolidate her two identities: those of a farmer and an entrepreneur. The local community and the farming industry has its own social norms that guide what is conceived as appropriate and legitimate ways of being an entrepreneurial farmer (Stenholm & Hytti 2014).

Heather was instead deemed to be different in her childhood because of her medical condition. However, she was proud of being special, and she happily educated people around her about the illness. Being different or special is still strong in her, including in her entrepreneurial identity, because she positions herself as being creative and ahead of her time, doing things that have not been done before and looking at business from a distinctive perspective. This suggests that being different or special might contribute to feeling comfortable not adhering to the environment's cultural roles or expectations and, thus, also choosing a career, like entrepreneurship, that is traditionally perceived as more suitable for men. Perceiving oneself as special may support the development of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977), which has been shown to contribute to venture creation intention (Krueger et al. 2000; Krueger 2003, 2009), agency and resilience (Bandura 2000).

Some of the entrepreneurs pondered their entrepreneurial role from their customers' or other people's viewpoints, trying to live up to these groups' expectations. Customers or other stakeholders have role expectations for entrepreneurs, as in Jane's case, such as what a fitness shop keeper should look like, or in Kate's case, how a clothing shop owner or a successful entrepreneur should look. These entrepreneurs felt that something in them and in their identity were contradicting the roles that these external stakeholders imposed on them. Jane feels that she should have a trained, muscular body as a fitness store owner, and the customers may be disappointed when they discover that she is an ordinary woman. Jane describes the customers' idea of a fitness shop keeper as a "muscle monster" that may refer rather to a man than a woman, although that was not explicitly expressed. However, she thinks that her personal service would appeal especially to female customers, including the fact that she is a woman with children living in a small village, making her living with the web store, compared to some multinational giant.

Kate is a farmer, with a very strong farmer identity. She had encountered situations in which her gender conflicted with her role as a farmer. She told me a story about applying for funding to buy her farm, and the officer making the funding decision suddenly asked her if she had a husband. Kate found this question unexpected and irrelevant, and answered, "*No, is that a problem?*". Despite her experiences of not fitting into other people's gender expectations, Kate still feels that she cannot be seen wearing her farming gear, because it would contradict the local people's idea of a high-end clothing shop owner's appearance. Thus, Kate has changed her behavior to better fit to the role the locals have in their mind. This is an

example of how the role expectations may conflict with an entrepreneur's identities. This might cause difficulties for Kate to construct her entrepreneurial identity, because it causes problems for her farmer identity that is more salient to her. However, the clothing shop owner identity might be easier to reconcile with others' gender expectations than the farmer identity. Dressing has been seen in organisation studies not only as conveying an organisational identity but also as constructing it (Aaltio 2004). This raises an interesting question about whether the environment's pressure to dress according to the "clothing shop keeper" norm actually contributes to Kate's entrepreneurial identity.

These accounts of Kate and Jane are actually the only ones in which the presence of body is clear. The presence of body is often unrecognised or implicit in identity studies within entrepreneurship, leading to an under emphasis on nonlinguistic practices – such as gestures, bodily movements, facial expressions, or dressing – and a disembodied notion of entrepreneurship (Kašperová & Kitching 2014). The discussion of Jane's experiences of belittling might also be connected to body, although the group thought it was connected to her age, but it is the body that mostly shows clues for someone's age. Women entrepreneurs are tied to their female bodies, which inevitably invoke gender roles and doing gender (West & Zimmerman 1987).

Sharon narrated a conflict between her family and entrepreneurial roles. She explains that she is strong and capable of making decisions and driving the business issues forward, but she feels it creates problems at home.

*"I am a bit of a crusher at home, because I have to be that at work, it becomes a bit enmeshed, when I go home, I'm not just that mother of the family, small, weak woman, which I also am 30 percent, but I'm the same road roller that goes in business field and decides...So it runs to home, and that's why it is challenging for the family to live with me..."* (Sharon, interview 1)

Here Sharon contrasts an entrepreneur, who is strong, with a mother of a family, who is small and weak. Her identity is clearly more consistent with the former than the latter. She knows that she is performing well at her work, but she notices that the same characteristics do not fit with her family's expectations. Sharon says that this is a challenge for her to learn how to change from the business mode to the family mode and that she needs her family to understand and support her in this.

Paula's case is a bit of the opposite situation, because she relates that she gets tired of making decisions and being decisive at work and how she then likes that her husband makes decisions at home (at least minor ones, like what to have for supper). It seems that her role as an entrepreneur requires her to behave in a way that she does not feel is natural, and it consumes her energy. This might indicate that the entrepreneurial role (what people expect from an entrepreneur or what she assumes

that people expect from her) does not allow room for her (gender) identity, which she then can enact more freely in the sphere of the family.

Sharon's and Paula's accounts show the entrepreneurship role as more masculine and the family role as more feminine. An interesting question is how women entrepreneurs do gender as entrepreneurs.

### Identity as a Mother

Family and children are present in the women entrepreneurs' talk. Good mothering is inherent in the cultural role of a mother (Huopalainen & Satama 2019; Krok 2009 p. 71 refers to Katvala 2001; Krok 2009 p. 72-76), so it is interesting what kind of identity as a mother the women entrepreneurs narrate and how they accommodate both identities. Narratives aim at coherence, although it is not always reached. Devoting time for children is a key characteristics of good mothering, but there might be difficulties in organising that in everyday life. It seems that women entrepreneurs are likely to find some alternative ways of practicing good mothering.

Heather is the only entrepreneur who said that managing time so she can spend more time with her family was one important reason for her entrepreneuring. She says that she has learned to value the time spent with the family because she could not have that during her childhood when her parents were working long hours in their business. Thus, Heather did not have a positive perception of entrepreneurship, and she certainly did not want to repeat what her parents had done. She says that she could not give her family money, but she can give time, which is more important according to her. This way she draws on the cultural narrative of good mothering as devoting time to her children. Providing money is clearly less preferable in Heather's narrative. Heather does not make a distinctions between mother and father, so it seems that for her, this applies to both and, thus, is really about good parenting. However, she said in the same interview that she had been a part-time, stay-at-home mother, and when starting her business, she had to take her children to full-time day care, which seems to contradict what she said earlier. She stated in the second interview, after she had taken the job and was working hard, that "family adapts", but she added that the children do react when mother is not home. Additionally, she relates how nice it is that now she can afford to organise a bit fancier confirmation party for her son and to give him some money as a present. Thus, her perception about giving time versus giving money had somewhat changed in the second interview, but her children were older now and probably did not need as much of their mother's time and attention as earlier.

Paula presented an episode in the video material of facing a situation in which she had to decide whether to let her business grow or to limit its growth so she could

devote more time to her newborn baby. Paula framed the situation as choosing between the business and the baby.

Paula: *“As 36-year-old I got the happy news that I was pregnant. It was unbelievable situation as a woman...and as a woman entrepreneur. A totally terrible combination, an awful combination. I had just been giving birth to my enterprise for five years, made my dream come true, and then...another dream (comes true).... But could not give up now, I had to choose between gas and brake... It was about closing the business or continuing, whether to choose motherhood or entrepreneurship, or mumpreneurship...”*

Wilma: *“It’s good that you chose both.”*

Paula: *“I totally agree. I would be a poor mother if I could not live entrepreneurial life.”* (Video recording 2.2)

Paula decided to have both, and she showed that it is possible to be a successful entrepreneur in parallel to being a good mother. Paula does not talk about difficulties dividing her time between family and business, so apparently she did not experience that as a problem. Instead, she talks about the business as her dream come true, and she would have been a worse mother if she had chosen other ways. She does not explain this comment further, so we can only guess what she means. Maybe she thinks that giving up her dream because of a baby would have made her unhappy, disappointed or bitter. Maybe she suspects that her life without entrepreneurship would have been too boring or would not have offered her feelings of success or satisfaction. Paula’s entrepreneurial identity is apparently essential to her, and Paula is narrating herself as independent, more in line with mothers who are presented in the Finnish media (Krok 2009 p. 71 refers to Berg 2008).

The conversation between Paula and Wilma continued after the previous excerpt.

Wilma: *“What made you strong about it is possible for you to take them both? That you can be both a mother and an entrepreneur?”*

Paula: *“Well, firstly a good husband, definitely a good and understanding husband.... Nobody believed in my dream of... expanding my business and hiring an employee... maybe my father and mother believed... And my husband surely believed because if he had told me not to, I wouldn’t have gone into it.”* (Video recording 2.2.)

Paula highlights here the importance of a husband when an entrepreneur is going to have a child and makes the decision to combine motherhood and entrepreneurship. Of course, family support is essential, but in Paula's story, the woman entrepreneur is depending on the husband's approval to continue as an entrepreneur. The child is clearly the priority, and entrepreneurship is thus subordinated to motherhood. Women's commitment to motherhood and family has been studied, for example, by Bowman (2009), who argues that we still, despite an apparent change, continue to divide responsibilities according to a gender-based deal. The deal is that the husband is the breadwinner who brings money to the family, and the wife's responsibility is to support the husband's work by committing to childcare and other family responsibilities. This kind of support with family responsibilities was found also by Jennings et al. (2016). Interestingly, they found that the wives of entrepreneurs with small children often work part-time, while the husbands of women entrepreneurs in the same kind of situation do not.

Having a child and being on maternity leave can indeed be problematic for an entrepreneur. Sharon describes how her maternity leave created a big crisis for her newly established company. There was an economic downturn that, together with her being away, caused a decline in sales. Sharon did not notice the situation initially, because she was not informed by the employee left in charge, but when she realised what was happening, she made a difficult decision to end her maternity leave early and to return as soon as possible.

*"I saw from the books of the company that it is crying for Sharon more than the baby. Otherwise this other baby of mine will soon seize to exist. And then I came running."* (Sharon, interview 2)

Sharon saw her going back as a must, but it was not an easy decision. She had to leave her baby girl in her mother's care, who luckily was retired and able to take care of her. Otherwise, the situation would have been much more painful for her, although she still was pondering whether the sacrifice really was worth it. She had a plan to invest her time heavily in the business now, so that later she could work 80 % and spend the rest of the time with her daughter.

Sharon's mothering is also related here to the time spent with her child. Guo & Werner (2016) recently investigated the US population of business owners and found that, in contrast to male business owners who work longer hours if they have small children, women business owners tend to work less if they are married, have small children and receive support from their spouse. However, children need different kinds of mothering at different ages, which could also be seen in Heather's narrative. Sharon also narrated a more independent mother identity in the previous interview when she had just her older daughters. She said that she has never been at home,

waiting with a dinner for her family to come home, so the family did not expect that after she started her business. Thus, with older children, the time spent at home was not so essential, and the family understood that working was important for the mother. Sharon's story shows that, even though the mother is not physically present as much, she knows what is going on in her children's lives, she discusses their problems and gives them advice and consolation.

What is most remarkable in Kate's story is that they were starting their business at the same time they had their children. They both, but especially Kate, needed to devote lots of time and energy to the business, to learning a new occupation, and simultaneously, learning how to be parents.

*"It was just performing for me...It was so difficult for me, not many understand that, because of the children"* (Kate, Interview 1)

It took over a year before she even started to like her working in the business due to this conflict between entrepreneurship and motherhood.

### 6.3.2 Narrating Reason

Narrating includes emplotment, which means building causality between the events in the story, which helps in sense making and creating a meaning in our lives and coherence to the story (Downing 2005). The women entrepreneurs offer explanations for their decisions and behaviour when narrating. However, as they narrate about the events in their lives, they simultaneously narrate about their contexts, but also about themselves.

The entrepreneurs narrate about the reasons for the situations in which they started their ventures. The reason can be roughly categorised in family issues (small children or parents; Heather, Wilma, Lisa), employment situation (unemployment or dissatisfaction with the employment; Kate, Wilma, Ann, Lisa, Sharon, Paula), own health (Paula, Natalie), fulfilling oneself or being able to do the work they wanted (Lisa, Heather, Paula, Ann, Kate, Natalie), and reacting to an opportunity (Jane, Kate). It would be overly simplistic to say that there would be only one reason, when actually, several situational factors and the individual's interpretation of them form circumstances that show entrepreneurship as a viable solution.

#### Reasons for Becoming an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship can offer a solution to family demands, as in the case of mumpreneurs (Luomala, 2018; Duberley & Carrigan 2012). In my study, Wilma's, Heather's and Lisa's decisions to become an entrepreneur were related to family

situations. Heather and Wilma had small children, so time spent away from home was focal for them. Lisa's story is a bit different, because she decided to move to another city to be able to take care of her mother. First she was unemployed, but she already had the idea to establish a business. Here, the caretaker role is perceived as "natural" for women, and none of these entrepreneurs questioned it in their stories (see, e.g., Bowman 2009). Heather said that she discussed her start-up decision with her family, meaning her husband, her parents, and probably also her parents-in-law. In Wilma's story, her career decision was dependent on her husband's business and the need to take care of her child, which limited her options within a certain range from their home city. Working in the family firm did not coincide with her idea of a "good career", and she felt somehow inferior when comparing her career to those of her university friends. However, her story does not tell, for example, about assessing the husband's possibilities to work part-time to enable Wilma's career. Lisa has a strong caretaker identity: She had already been placed in that role as a 10-year-old child, when she and her father were responsible for her family when her mother was hospitalised for several months. The caretaker role can be seen also in her business; she wants to serve her customers well, and she deeply dislikes situations when she has to tell a customer that she does not have the product the customer is asking for. Lisa has a brother, but her story does not include discussions with him about who would be their mother's primary caretaker. However, in the second interview, when her retirement was approaching, she was more determined to draw the line about what she would do, because she said that she refuses to babysit her grandchildren if she does not have time for that.

Ann was working part time, and Lisa and Wilma had difficulties finding employment when they were deciding to start a business (Wilma when deciding to work in the family business). Moving to entrepreneurship can be perceived as a career choice, and from a boundaryless career's perspective, it is an individual's decision to take a new challenge in the form of entrepreneurship instead of changing a job (Hytti 2010; Patterson & Mavin 2009). Kate had found that there was a conflict between her work and farming, and the only solution for her was to resign from her employment (she was already engaged in agriculture), and start as an entrepreneur. Sharon actually started both her first and second business in a situation she was unsatisfied with because she perceived her income was unfair compared to the amount of work she was doing.

Consideration for one's own health was the trigger for entrepreneurship in Paula's and Natalie's stories, although Paula presents health issues as secondary.

*"Actually, I was making my dream come true. That was it. And on the other hand, my decision was influenced also that I burned out in my previous job...I understood that I had given all there was to give to that job, but the job was*



*giving me nothing... and at the same time, the dream was tickling all the time, it is a great combination...*” (Paula, Interview 1)

Natalie, instead, was enjoying her work in a hospital before she started to have health problems. She was told by doctor to start considering other options, and the idea for a business began to take form.

Fulfilling themselves or being able to do the work they wanted was narrated as a key reason for entrepreneurship by Lisa, Heather, Paula, Ann, Kate and Natalie (see, e.g., Rindova et al. 2009).

*“It started to feel like how else I could proceed [than as an entrepreneur]. At least I couldn’t see any other way, really.”* (Ann, Interview 1)

Kate narrates a strong farmer identity and, interestingly, it seems that the start-up decision was made to create extra income so that she and her husband could continue farming.

Lisa was married and the whole family moved because of her husband’s work when she was starting her first business. The employment opportunities were limited in the new town, and Lisa decided to start a business. However, her husband was the breadwinner in the family, and Lisa’s firm had really no pressure to make a profit; its main purpose was to offer Lisa some meaningful work. Natalie’s, Ann’s and Wilma’s stories also draw a picture in which the husband has well-paid work, and the wife’s earnings from entrepreneuring is not absolutely necessary, although welcomed, to support the family.

The reasons narrated by the participants for choosing entrepreneurship are varied. No one clear reason can be found in all of the cases, but instead a combination of several factors. Resonating with earlier research (e.g., Patterson & Mavin 2009; Hytti 2010), this suggests that the traditionally used categorisation into push and pull factors is too simplistic, and there are actually many factors related to different spheres of life contributing to the entrepreneurship decision.

## Support for entrepreneurship

As acknowledged by Ann, entrepreneurs are quite lonely with all the decisions they have to make, so it is essential to have support when starting a business. **Table 6** maps the main sources and forms of support the entrepreneurs received as well as their family needs and ways to navigate between different roles. I used the categories of instrumental and emotional support used earlier by Edelman et al. (2016), Klyver et al. (2018), and Heikkinen et al. (2014) and the ways to navigate between roles that mitigate role conflicts developed by Shelton (2006).

**Table 6.** Family situation, form of support and strategies of navigating between different roles used by the women entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneur	Family situation	Support from the family		Support from other sources		Strategies of navigating between different roles
		Instrumental support	Emotional support	Instrumental support	Emotional support	Role elimination / reduction / sharing
Paula: start-up decision	no children	monetary support from the spouse	from the spouse and the parents	friend (training in the friend's shop)	women entrepreneur's association	
Paula: decision to expand	one child (baby)		from the spouse and the parents		women entrepreneur's association	role reduction (one child), role sharing (sharing childcare and household work with husband)
Kate: start-up decision	children, extensive needs		from the spouse (partner in the business)	friend (accounting)		role sharing (paid help with childcare and household work)
Wilma: start-up decision	children	advice from the spouse and from the parents; access to parent's and husband's business networks	from the spouse and the parents			role reduction (meaning giving up career ambitions and settling with a career in the family business)
Lisa: start-up decision (first business)	small children, but their needs were not mentioned as influencing the start-up decision	monetary support from the spouse			the local society	

Lisa: start-up decision (third business)	third enterprise: elderly parents	monetary support from parents			friends	
Sharon: start-up decision	(children were not mentioned as influencing the start-up decision)	help with household work from the spouse			business partner	role sharing (sharing childcare and household work with husband); role reduction in the form of negotiating the mother's role
Sharon: decision to expand (discontinue maternity leave)	child			from mother (childcare)		role sharing (childcare help from the mother);
Natalie: start-up decision		advice from the spouse, access to business networks	from the spouse, from children		friends	
Jane: start-up decision	(children were not mentioned as influencing the start-up decision)	from the spouse (experience in entrepreneurship)	from the spouse (spouse as a business partner)	friends (training in the friend's shop) , the chain	friends	role sharing (managerial and family duties shared with husband)
Jane: decision to expand (another shop)	children (the time spent away from home)	from the spouse (experience in entrepreneurship)	from the spouse (business partner)			
Ann: start-up decision		monetary support and advice from the spouse			the participants of the development program	role reduction (one child)
Ann: decision to expand		advice from the spouse		advice from one of the participants	the participants of development program	role reduction (one child)

Heather: start-up decision	children (the possibility to more effective time management)	monetary support from parents and the spouse	from the spouse, parents, parents-in-law, and a sister	community of entrepreneurs	community of entrepreneurs	
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By emotional support I mean, e.g., encouragement, and by instrumental, e.g., feedback, advise or assistance with running the business or assuming household responsibilities so that entrepreneurs can concentrate on their business (Eddleston & Powell 2012). This study's participants used family-to-business enrichment, in the form of transferring skills from the family domain, as well as emotional and instrumental support. This is partly in line with earlier research that has suggested family-to-business enrichment is more likely used by women entrepreneurs, while men entrepreneurs tend to obtain more instrumental family support, although they both contribute to higher satisfaction with the work–family balance (Eddleston & Powell 2012). If we regard hobbies as part of the family domain, Paula, Lisa, Natalie, and Jane built their businesses on the knowledge and skills they had obtained through a hobby. Paula said that her grandmother taught her to sew, and later on, she capitalised on her knowledge of and enthusiasm for fabrics and creating beautiful things for home decoration when starting her business. Lisa has a business education, but she had been making clothes before starting her business. Natalie and her husband had a mutual interest in art glass, resulting in knowledge and networks in that area that Natalie could utilise in her business. Jane and her husband had also gathered knowledge in different sports through their own hobbies which then could be used in their business.

Family also matters in terms of having support for entrepreneurial intentions. Having both a self-employed spouse (Sullivan & Meek 2012; Caputo & Dolinsky 1998) and self-employed parents (Sullivan & Meek 2012; Matthews & Moser 1996), and in the case of women, especially a self-employed mother, encourages women to start a business (Sullivan & Meek 2012; Malach-Pines & Schwartz 2008). Wilma was employed by a firm owned by her family, so both her parents and her husband were entrepreneurs. Wilma tells how she and her husband have always discussed their companies' issues with each other. Her husband has been her sounding board offering advice, understanding and emotional support. Wilma shares on the videos a story of how her parents supported her when she was having doubts about how long she would have the strength to work as hard she had been working for her business and whether it was enough to guarantee the business's profitability in the future. She also said that her parents, and especially her mother, have always been an important support for her.

Women entrepreneurs might have access through their family (or other network) to networks that would otherwise be closed for them. This so-called spanning function of networks is based on Granovetter's ideas (Hanson & Blake 2009). People are embedded in different kinds of networks, and it is not just business or working life networks that can facilitate business. For example, because Natalie's husband is a successful entrepreneur and has established business networks, she has had connection to her husband's contacts right from the beginning.

Natalie: *“I felt that it was easy for me because I had the safety net (supporting network) to whom I could just call and ask. All trade promoters, auditors, bookkeepers, I knew them all because of my husband’s entrepreneurial background.”* (1. Interview with Natalie)

Natalie: *“I’m grateful to our bookkeeper, I have always received help from them whenever I need it...This same bookkeeping office has taken care of our bookkeeping already for more than ten years, so it is something you can lean on.”* (Natalie, Interview 1)

Natalie additionally has a viable connection through her family’s personal contacts to some of the glass artists she is representing. Some of these artists are family friends, so building business relationship with them is easier for Natalie than for an outsider.

Riikka: *“...as I understood, some of the artists were your friends?”*

Natalie: *“... had a personal relationship, and still have. Like it’s great that the relationships still exist. And we still order their products and use them as business gifts and all this, just like earlier.”* (Natalie, Interview 2)

The material included references to entrepreneurship’s negative and positive effects and consequences. The sacrifices made for the emotional and monetary losses caused by entrepreneurship were not discussed so much by the women entrepreneurs, but the time spent away from the family were brought up. Jane said in the second interview that she has not really counted the negative and positive consequences of entrepreneurship.

*“...even now I don’t really want to count, like when we opened the other shop in (another city)...it took couple of years totally. So, I’m just thinking about the sacrifices, how much it took away from the family. I don’t measure it in money, but how tired I have been or physically being away. And not being very happy. So there is quite much of that kind of losses.”* (Jane, Interview 2)

These kinds of issues were not really discussed in the group, but like Jane’s comment above, the more private matters were shared more in interviews. They are part of being an entrepreneur, although not echoing the heroic tale, at least not more than as a cursory reference to the hardships that the entrepreneur overcomes. This kind of story contradicting the heroic one will be discussed further in the

conclusions, but before that, I continue with the findings by moving to the metaphors used by the women entrepreneurs.

## 6.4 The Metaphors Describing Opportunity Creation, Business and the Entrepreneur

I describe in this chapter the metaphors detected and elicited in the women entrepreneurs' talk and that I discussed and developed together with the entrepreneurs. Thus, the metaphors as presented here are co-created. They have been built based on the conversations between and with the entrepreneurs and my understanding of the theory. As discussed in the analysis section (5.5.1), the building of metaphors could be described as abductive, because it involved not only reading the materials with a pre-understanding of theory but also iteratively moving between the theory and the transcriptions of the conversations and my notes (Dubois & Gadde 2002; Van Maanen et al. 2007).

The metaphors elicited are maturation, pedalling, owner-builder, jump into water, conquering land, jigsaw puzzle, and nature metaphors (including seed, nurturing a plant and parenting). Next, I present the metaphors with their focal aspects and also discuss contradictory sections in the material that challenge the metaphors.

### 6.4.1 Maturation Metaphor

The verb 'to grow up' was used by Wilma when the women entrepreneurs were discussing the moment of selecting one idea for a new business and acting to realise it. The conversation related to Ann, who had designed a product but had not yet been very active in developing the opportunity further; she appeared to be waiting for something to happen or someone else to act and did not claim the control for herself. The importance of ideas was recognised in the conversations, and the ability to create a variety of ideas was admired. At the same time, it was emphasised that when becoming an entrepreneur, the nascent entrepreneur must be ready to choose one idea to be realised and be prepared to take action. An entrepreneur cannot stay in the world of ideas but must 'grow up'. Here, creating ideas and reflecting on them is seen as 'childhood' or 'adolescence', when the nascent entrepreneur can wander around ignoring the realities of life, where resources are unlimited and everything is possible.

Based on this, I labelled this metaphor 'maturation' because it reflects growing up and becoming an adult. **Table 7** presents and further discusses the concepts and dimensions of the maturation metaphor.

**Table 7.** Concepts and dimensions of the maturation metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Maturation	Responsibility	<p>Grow up to take responsibility</p> <p>Carry responsibility Make decisions</p> <p>Avoiding responsibility</p> <p>Carrying responsibility; also of decisions with</p>	<p>(As part of the program, the participants wrote a self-biography, which were also discussed in classroom; the tutor draws attention to Ann's capability to produce ideas, which sparks the following discussion.)</p> <p>Paula: Look, during the previous discussion the tutor identified the same capability in you. It is so strong and visible. You are some way too modest.</p> <p>Ann: this sort of (capability) is a new thing to me.</p> <p>Paula: Think about it.</p> <p>Ann: It has just come to me... about year and a half ago. I am still wondering myself.. how come, from where.. I am confused about it.</p> <p>Wilma: When you have the bad day, take it the way, the same way I said earlier. Take the words he (referring to a successful entrepreneur who visited the group) said to you and save them in your heart because...That guy, they netted about 80 million from selling the firm he was a partner in. So they were made of money, weren't working for a long time and so forth and so forth, and ...and everything he has been part of has multiplied, and I thought that he doesn't have to, and he didn't come there to talk empty words to us. And he said, he visited your web pages with his phone, and he said that this product of yours is fantastic.</p> <p>Wilma: So I tell you now, that you have to grow now. You have to grow to take... (an interruption)</p> <p>Wilma: ...you use your shoulders and take this idea forward...so that you don't end up being 55 and saying damn, I had (a good idea) back then, but I just didn't have the guts.</p> <p>(later on in the same discussion)</p> <p>Ann: well I do have to say, that I have this (product), but then...the others, others, as we have this innovation group, so they are travelling to Italy on Monday to discuss this further.</p> <p>(participants are discussing how to handle a difficult situations)</p> <p>Paula: And here is the good thing that you are not breaking with that person... but you are cancelling your agreement. You aren't doing any</p>



		negative outcomes	<p>relationship drama here, you are making a decision for your company...</p> <p>Sharon: ... you're just doing your job, you are stepping forward (with your business).</p> <p>Wilma: Yes, yes. And you are responsible for your company. She is responsible for her business.</p> <p>Heather: And if they cannot carry the responsibility for it, it's not yours to carry.</p>
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The maturation metaphor also conveys the impression of the ability to make choices. An entrepreneur must choose one idea, she will 'not be able to keep all doors open' as was expressed in the conversations. Choosing the idea to be realised is not easy, because it cannot be known for certain which of the ideas is the best one (best being a sum of monetary and emotional income and costs; see, e.g., Gimeno et al. 1997). Even though certainty is not possible, entrepreneurs are thought to evaluate ideas. Wood and McKinley (2010) have studied this process from the social constructionist point of view. They propose that while interacting with their peers, entrepreneurs objectify the opportunity idea, so that it becomes an entity outside the entrepreneur's mind. Based on the feedback they receive, the objectification either takes place, or in case of conflicting feedback, the process may be delayed or the idea may be abandoned. Entrepreneurs move to the enactment phase if the objectification process is successful, but it is still possible that the enactment is postponed or the idea is abandoned.

Taking action is a focal part of the maturation metaphor. As Dimov (2010, 66) puts it, "...*opportunity cannot be labeled 'opportunity' unless acted upon... some action is already presumed when what is observed is considered to be an opportunity*". Dimov (2010, 65) also notes that "...*opportunities require that the entrepreneurs 'carve out' space within the social context in which they are to be instituted. That is, customers, suppliers, employees, etc., need to be attracted and retained as each of them can engage with other market actors*". According to discourse theory, language is action, and it is used to do things (Wetherell 2001; Wood and Kroger 2000). Hence, when combining this with the idea that it must be acted on to be an opportunity, this implies that the first time when the nascent entrepreneur expresses her opportunity idea to others can be considered the emergence of the opportunity. Until that moment, the opportunity idea has been residing in the mind of the nascent entrepreneur, although it is being evaluated and shaped by the interpretations of events in the environment (Dimov, 2010). Thus, entrepreneurs move from childhood to the world of adults when talking about their opportunity thoughts to others.

The entrepreneurs participating in this study view taking action as something that is common to all of them. Taking action is a prerequisite, but it is also rewarding.

They see themselves as people who have an urge to act and for whom being idle is unnatural. They discussed a hypothetical situation of unemployment and came to the conclusion that entrepreneurs are people who always find some meaningful work to do, whether it is volunteer work or another business idea to be realised.

This can be linked with the ideas of responsibility. Taking responsibility and bearing responsibility are also part of the maturation metaphor; maturing and becoming an adult means becoming responsible. Entrepreneurs are responsible for themselves and for their businesses. As an adult, entrepreneurs are responsible for providing a livelihood for their employees and themselves and their families (at least to some extent). Being responsible also means not avoiding unpleasant tasks or thinking only of one's own immediate benefit. The work of entrepreneurs necessarily includes unpleasant tasks and sometimes also confronting others – however, if it is necessary, the entrepreneur will not avoid it. Another aspect of responsibility is accepting the consequences of one's actions. An adult and an entrepreneur must understand that the actions they take also have consequences and bearing those consequences is the entrepreneur's responsibility.

A lack of courage is mentioned as one obstacle to the realisation of an idea in the conversations among the entrepreneurs. Courage and boldness are needed when making a decision (like selecting an idea), presenting an idea to others and trying to convince them of its viability. This is the point when entrepreneurs receive feedback, and the opportunity is being evaluated and revised. In the video recordings, the situation of presenting an idea to others is presented as a crucial moment in the entrepreneurial process when even one person can deny the existence of the opportunity. Cornelissen and Clarke (2010) have reported interesting results on how entrepreneurs induce opportunities utilising linguistic devices, such as metaphors and analogies, when talking to significant others to build legitimacy for a new business idea. More conventional ways of convincing are suggested in my material, such as presenting numbers and calculations about potential customers. However, convincing others is seen as needing much preparation work, which materialises in piles of papers showing the existence of the opportunity.

A constructivist view of opportunity creation emphasises the interaction between individuals and their social environments. The entrepreneur's peers or other stakeholders provide feedback on the opportunity idea, but at the same time the perceptions of these peers or stakeholders are influenced by the entrepreneur's actions (including talk) (Wood and McKinley, 2010; Dimov, 2007; Cornelissen, 2010).

One interesting aspect in this metaphor is that people report that the reason why they have not realised their aspiration to enter entrepreneurship is the lack of a good idea. Non-entrepreneurs consequently seem to overemphasise the "goodness" of the idea, whereas entrepreneurs see ideas as necessary but not sufficient for new

business. Ideas are not enough; an entrepreneur must develop or rise to the next level (mature) to be able to select between the ideas and to actually turn them into a business. One possible explanation for these different views on the importance of ideas is the experience of being an entrepreneur. It has been concluded that novice entrepreneurs more often evoke causal logic, which can be identified with the discovery perspective of opportunities, whereas experienced entrepreneurs are more prone to using effectuation logic, which is in accordance with the creation view (Hannibal, 2011). Creation theory and effectuation theory focus more on the action that eventually creates the opportunity (Sarasvathy, 2008; Dimov, 2010); the entrepreneur's actions will evoke responses in the environment that will guide the entrepreneur to fine tune the business idea until the opportunity is co-created by the entrepreneur and her environment.

Ann's case interestingly shows the importance of the entrepreneur assuming the responsibility for action. Ann had a friend whose contribution Ann herself evaluates as substantial. This friend strongly supported Ann when she was still wondering what to do with her product idea and which path to take. The friend did this not only by discussing and planning together with her but also by pushing Ann forward. Ann considers this friend's initiative and contribution as substantial in activities that were important milestones along the way of establishing the business, like starting a blog, attending a fair, and establishing a web store. Ann felt uncomfortable with the idea of attending a fair, but her friend thought it would be beneficial and insisted that they should attend. Ann thought afterwards that it had been a good decision. The friend was even more persistent with the web store, which seemed to have been beneficial, too.

*"...as I had been thinking already for ages, and they (the products) were not really anywhere yet (for sale)...., so then (she) just said that now the products must get brought out, and (if necessary) she can start keeping the web store with her husband. Because I was panicking how I can, by myself, handle it all..."*

*"So, without her, I don't know if I would still be thinking about what to do with these products and how..."*

*"So, it was probably, there was lot of good, that we got started, and the blog and everything..., and for me, it was a big thing that I was at the fair... and it went well, so it was also, of course, like a really big step for me." (Ann, Interview 2)*

Thus, Ann recognises the importance of this friend as an initiator and activator who made things happen. Her friend pulled her along with her when Ann was still incapable of acting or of deciding how to proceed. These experiences increased

Ann's confidence and were also actions that contributed to the existence of the business opportunity.

Based on Ann's experiences, it seems that although the entrepreneur should be the one assuming the responsibility for acting, at various times it can be compensated with actions of someone else. In these activities, Ann could not decide and could not act, so she passed the responsibility for action to her friend. This friend luckily was able and willing to assume the responsibility until Ann was ready to make it her business.

Ann's case also illustrates the situation in which responsibility is divided among a group of people and not entrusted to anyone specifically. Ann was part of an innovation group that had designed several promising products. However, after four years, they were all still waiting for progress, for example, for some problems with patenting to be solved. There were one or two persons working on the products, while the others were merely waiting. The ones working found it too burdensome to work alone, and the others became tired of waiting. This led to a situation in which promising product prototypes were not utilised at all, and all investment had been wasted.

Sharon said, when discussing the metaphors with her, that it is somewhat difficult for her to identify with the maturation metaphor because it includes choosing the idea. In her case, the beginning was other way round, which also applies to many other entrepreneurs. She did not dream about several business ideas between which she needed to choose, nor did she discover any opportunity. She just wanted to do the work she had been doing for years on her own account, and she had already seen that her work was profitable. For her, it was clear right from the start that her business would be a real estate agency because that is what she knows, where her abilities are strong, and where she has already worked to build a reputation and contacts. For many other entrepreneurs, as well, it is evident that they want to continue the work they had been doing as an employee, but at some point, they realise that entrepreneurship offers them better possibilities to do that work the way they want to do it. The idea about the service was particularly clear in Sharon's case; the differentiating aspect of the service was the way of working, which later crystallised in the three differences mentioned in the description of Sharon's case (p. 106). Sharon did not have the phase of generating and evaluating different opportunity ideas when they are viewed this way. However, it is also possible to see the moment of maturing in her case. Sharon was not ready at the time her business partner made the first offer to establish a business. She knew that she was good at her work, she was confident that she was able to do profitable work, but she saw entrepreneurship as too difficult, because she had worked in a big company where she had no contact with an entrepreneur's tasks and responsibilities. Only after working in a smaller firm where she could closely observe the work of the

entrepreneurs, her confidence in her abilities to be an entrepreneur had increased enough, and she was ready to accept the offer.

## 6.4.2 Pedaling Metaphor

When discussing Ann's innovativeness and the multiple ideas she had generated but which seem to be moving forward very slowly, Wilma said to Ann, "...*you have to grow...because now you have to pedal...*" meaning that Ann has to start working persistently to get her product to the market. The pedaling metaphor describes opportunity creation as riding a bicycle, which on the one hand is monotonous and sometimes hard, but on the other hand it offers a possibility to enjoy the speed and have a sense of accomplishment when moving forward and finally reaching the destination. One moves forward slowly relative to the input when going uphill; the progress is faster when going downhill. The pace of progress is sometimes impossible to anticipate. Nascent entrepreneurs need to be patient, persistent, and have endurance in order to pedal their idea into business, and they need to work hard and believe that it will eventually take them to their destination. The person pedaling must have an idea of the destination or goal. However, the question remains how clear that goal should be. One might argue that a clear view of the destination is a prerequisite for a successful journey, otherwise the rider ends up somewhere other than the intended destination. However, sometimes cycling without a strict plan might get the cyclist to unexpected and possibly more lucrative destinations, and sometimes taking a detour might turn out to be more valuable than the route originally planned. Regardless of the route or destination, the journey seldom turns out exactly as planned. **Table 8** gathers the concepts and dimensions of the pedaling metaphor.

**Table 8.** Concepts and dimensions of the pedaling metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Pedaling	Persistence	Keep on acting to realise the idea	(Discussing Ann's ideas that she had not proceeded with)  Wilma: Because now you have to pedal. Otherwise you will be sorry. Because you have that gift. You have the gift of being innovative.  (participants are discussing how they experience being different from their family members. The discussion also touches upon to the level of

		<p>Endurance Hard work</p>	<p>energy among the group members and the level of energy required in different situations.)</p> <p>Paula: I use the word endurance. I have a damn high level of endurance. I am, I have, if I have to work for 14 hour, I have no problems with bearing it, although I'm not physically strong or in good condition. I can take, I have an incredible endurance, I have it.</p> <p>(in the background there is a remark on proud refusal to lie down and be beaten)</p> <p>Paula: Someone can be in really good physical condition, but does not have endurance. So I think, sort of strong in a different way.</p> <p>Wilma: I think the tutor's point on energy (tutor made an earlier point about how he senses that the group has more energy than needed) is crucial.</p> <p>Paula: Yes.</p> <p>Wilma: As I look at you women, thinking like this, I can see the energy, of course it is a bit different, but you can find it</p> <p>Ann: Sort of efficiency and productivity</p> <p>Wilma: Spirit of doing things.</p>
		<p>Belief</p>	<p>Kate: But your enthusiasm must also be visible. That you have this zeal for your idea. So although you ask if this is a good moment, it must be visible that you have this idea inside of you (pointing to her chest, not her head).</p>
		<p>Determination</p>	<p>Wilma: Because it won't ever get through if you're not really convincing.</p>
		<p>Belief</p>	<p>Sharon: And the determination must show that you have been mustering strength and courage for presenting (the idea). Of course, it will be shot down, but you have to present it persuasively.</p> <p>Paula: But the fear must show there also. You now this situation, you know the almost certain result, so the fear must be seen in you.</p> <p>Kate:.. and then the intensiveness, the enthusiasm you have when you present your idea, although you know that (your partner) not necessarily will accept it right away. But you must believe that you have something that has not been seen before in this firm.</p>
		<p>Destination</p>	<p>Wilma: I remember when... my father asked me to join this firm. I remember agonising over not having a vision, that can I ever be leading this firm if I can't see into the future five or ten years ahead. And at some point I realised that now I see</p>

Pedaling can be seen as one of the subcategories of the journey metaphor, which has been used to describe entrepreneurship (Drakopoulou Dodd 2002), the system development process (Kendal & Kendal 1993), and learning. According to Kendal and Kendal (1993), the key attributes of the journey metaphor are the leader and his or her crew and unpredictability that can involve risk or danger, but also adventure. The journey has a goal, and the captain and the crew are navigating the ship (the business) towards it, but the sea (the economy) may be also rough, and the ship may damage or even sink, or mistakes can be made in navigating, which may cause the ship to run into the rocks (Kendal & Kendal 1993).

Ann uses the journey metaphor to describe the early development of her business:

*"This has been somehow...quite a journey...and kind of exiting in every way. I must say that if someone would have told me a year ago what kind of a year this will be, what will happen during this year, I would have been very, very bewildered."* (Ann, Interview 2)

This quote highlights the adventurousness and unexpectedness of the journey metaphor. This aspect of uncertainty is highlighted in the jump into water metaphor presented in chapter 6.4.4. The journey metaphor encompasses the processual nature of opportunity creation. You start with an idea, see new things and places, get to know new people, and for the most part, you learn during your journey. Reaching the destination is not always the most important thing, the process itself is.

Besides making a journey by bike, the material has references to traveling by train and to a sea voyage. Sharon describes the decreasing sales of the firm as the sinking of a ship. She says that she understands that fixing the problem requires systematically stopping the many little leaks one by one with mundane work. Kate refers to a train trip by describing starting a business within a chain with a metaphor of stepping on a train:

*"After hopping on the train, it has been easy. Now we just do."* (Kate, Interview 1)

The pedaling metaphor is related to faith and belief, which were both visible in the videos and interviews. The entrepreneurs explained that you have to have faith in your idea even though nobody else believes in it. This became clear for one of the entrepreneurs who had been given a recommendation not to grow her business by an advisor in a counselling office for new ventures when she was considering hiring her first employee. However, because she believed in her business idea, she decided to ignore the advice. The effects of the nascent entrepreneurs' personal beliefs have

been previously discussed by Dimov (2011), who refers to the nascent entrepreneurs' belief about the feasibility of the opportunity and about her (or their) ability to establish a venture for the exploitation of the opportunity at hand collectively as opportunity confidence. Dimov (2011) proposes that opportunity confidence is instrumental in venture emergence: Sustained and increased opportunity confidence keeps the nascent entrepreneur engaged in the opportunity creation process and eventually leads to the creation of a new venture, whereas a lack of confidence may lead to the abandonment of the process. From the creation perspective, it is self-evident that others cannot perceive the business idea in the same way as the entrepreneur, because the opportunity, and possibly also the market, does not exist yet, and the information about the market and the opportunity is not available. Entrepreneurs consequently have a unique perception of the world, and in that world the opportunity is evident.

Belief in the business idea is present also in the owner-builder metaphor that I discuss next. The belief helps the entrepreneur to be persistent with the opportunity. "Good" opportunities go through setbacks and difficult times when the entrepreneur's belief is tested. Some signals from the environment may challenge the entrepreneur's perception of the world, and the opportunity must be re-evaluated and recreated.

### 6.4.3 Owner-Builder Metaphor

In the discussion, Wilma advises Ann "...to take your shoulders...", which at first seemed a bit strange, but which I then linked with the Finnish word "hartiapankki". The word has been used in Finnish to describe how the veterans of the Winter War built housing for their families by relying on their own labor and somewhat also on the voluntary work of their friends and relatives. This does not have a translation in English, but it can be related to the concept of "owner building". The shortage of money and other resources is also the case for many new ventures. The metaphor describes the entrepreneur's need to be strong and fit and to be able to work hard. It also conveys the idea of entrepreneurs building their venture on their own, relying mostly their own resources but sometimes inviting help from others. Besides the need for strength and persistence, the owner-builder metaphor also includes the idea of the entrepreneur as an active agent. The entrepreneur is responsible for creating the opportunity and the business, and this task cannot be outsourced to someone else. **Table 9** shows the dimensions of the owner-builder metaphor.



**Table 9.** Concepts and dimensions of the owner-builder metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Owner-Builder	Responsibility	Doing by oneself, hard work  Entrepreneur responsible to work hard	<p>Wilma: ...you use your shoulders and take this idea forward...</p> <p>Wilma: We have had... problems with profitability during this recession. I work really hard, and we are doing lots of good things. I know my firm, and of course there is something to be improved in every firm, but we have done so many things well and developed, and I have modified and created processes...and I'm a leader in my field, I scan new IT-solutions so that we could benefit, so I know that I'm good, and goddammit if it's not enough!</p>
	Dreams	Need to dream	<p>(Group is discussing the autobiography written by one of the participants)</p> <p>Wilma: I would say that you're holding back... You're a great person, you're good with people and you know yourself, but I think you're holding back. If I suggest something, or just throw some ideas, you say "no, I don't want that, no way, I don't want".</p> <p>Heather: That's not my cup of tea (not referring to herself, but the entrepreneur under discussion)</p> <p>(Someone laughs, discussion on how one can draw lines around one's territory)</p> <p>Wilma: A: You have set boundaries for yourself, I won't cross that line... That can be the right decision, but I think that you don't even toy with the idea that... let yourself (imagine) what if I. Because you have the capacity...</p> <p>Natalie: Our (entrepreneur) does not do so. No, she does not play with any ideas. She has made the decision that the venture is here, so here it is. She does not play with what ifs.</p> <p>Paula: I have jumped out of one rat race and I now see that I have entered another one. It is in my nature that if I enter the rat race again, I would fully engage with it and I would need to get out of it again. I do not feel like holding back.. I am enjoying life..</p> <p>Wilma: I don't deny that you are enjoying life and doing what you are good at. But you have set boundaries for yourself, I won't cross that line... . Dream! OK, those dreams don't have to come true. But you don't even dream.</p>

		<p>Natalie: I see her more as someone who wants to control the entire thing</p> <p>(The group continues to discuss maintaining control and enjoying life)</p> <p>Paula: It is not the right time. I am going to do all kinds of things during my life, but now is not the right time for me.</p> <p>Paula: I'm going to do lots of things. I know I have certain (things I want to do). But, for example, I walked one day to our new house, and then I thought that this is one of the big projects in my life, that it's probably one of my big dreams. And I've said that you must be careful what you wish for because it might come true. And when I walked to the house, I thought "goddammit, that's where I could locate it, next to the house"... and I was like I have to tell somebody about this, and then I suddenly I realised that that dream of mine, its coming to me, I can't help it.</p>
	<p>Dreams guide perception, decision making and action, entrepreneurs even unconsciously make decisions that move them closer to realising their dreams</p>	

The owner-builder metaphor is the most culture-dependent metaphor of the metaphors elicited in this study. The beginning of the word, 'hartia', means 'shoulder', and the end, 'pankki', means 'bank'. The idea is that those who did not have money and could not obtain a loan from a bank had to take it from their "shoulder bank", i.e., compensate the lack of money with their own work. Owner building became a must for a larger population after the war with the Soviet Union ended in 1944 because of the substantial housing shortage; this was not only to rebuild the houses destroyed in the war but also to accommodate the evacuated population from the cession areas. There were 400.000 evacuated citizens and altogether 11% of the population was without housing (Wikipedia). To be able to meet these needs, special legislation was enacted in 1949 to regulate funding (loans) and building of housing. However, people with lower incomes were unable to meet the requirements for self-financing to receive loan, and the only possible option was owner building. The population started to move from the countryside to the cities in the 1950's, which further increased the need for housing in the cities.

A series of type house were designed to meet the needs of the population and the requirements of funding organised by the state. The blueprints for a house could be obtained without costs, and houses were also designed so that people without in-depth knowledge of building could build a house at least almost by themselves. One of these type houses was called "the veteran house", and there are whole districts in many Finnish cities with the same house model. Nowadays the word hartia pankki is still used, but the reason for owner building is more often the will to save money

rather than an absolute lack of it. The concept of *hartiapankki* is also time dependent, so younger generations in Finland do not necessarily know the meaning of the word, although many recognise it. For example, I myself had to visit the website of Museum for Finnish Architecture to check the exact meaning.

The entrepreneur's active role can be seen on multiple occasions in the data: The entrepreneur must actively make the decisions concerning her business, in addition to keeping control to herself. In the data, the young entrepreneur is advised to take an active role in developing her product ideas into a business, but she is cautioned to do it in a way that enables her to remain in control. This resonates with the Pilot-in-the-Plane principle of effectuation, according to which, to the extent we are able to control the future we do not have to predict it (Sarasvathy, 2008). Instead of relying on predictions, it is preferable to try to mould the future to be more favourable by focusing on those things that can be controlled. However, there are also situations that are out of the entrepreneur's control. Interestingly, in the entrepreneurs' discussions failure is seen as resulting from an entrepreneur's bad decisions or incapability, but when talking about the economic problems of their own businesses, the reason for the problems was seen to be the overall economic situation and, thus, outside the entrepreneur's control.

Ann highlighted the importance of action and acting in the beginning of the business creation process when discussing the owner builder metaphor. She also recognises the role of locus of control:

*“But it is just that you were saying about this owner builder thing, so I think it is (like that) also in other areas of life that you do something about those things. That you think that you can do something about them is, you know. Because many people, if they have difficulties, or with their relationship, or whatever, they don't do anything, they just complain... Is it a characteristic of entrepreneurs, or successful entrepreneur, or how you think of it, that you roll up your sleeves, kind of. But also I kept waiting for pulling up my sleeves. It took some time.”* (Ann, Interview 2)

The work of owner builders is hard, and they are doing it almost all by themselves, yet the dream of having their own home for the family motivates owner builders and directs their efforts. In the material, dreams were brought up on multiple occasions and from slightly different perspectives. The entrepreneurs saw one member of the group as holding back and not employing her full potential, which they suspected was restricting the development of her enterprise. The group viewed this entrepreneur as possessing considerable potential to develop and expand her business to new areas, but the entrepreneur herself was reluctant. She explained that this was caused by her experiences of burn out in her former employment. One

participant encouraged her to dream and to think “what if”. This suggests that dreams and dreaming could be a prerequisite for the creation of new opportunities, but, conversely, it could potentially also restrict the development of the business.

Dreams have been suggested as playing a role in opportunity creation (Short et al., 2010). It is evident, when considering opportunities from the emancipatory perspective, that many entrepreneurs create their ventures to fulfil their dreams rather than to create wealth, whether it concerns increasing their personal autonomy, changing the world, or being creative. Entrepreneurial action is fundamentally about creating change from the emancipatory perspective, and entrepreneurs can create new markets and new opportunities by creating change (Rindova et al., 2009). Breaking free from a constraining situation can be seen in my material. For one participant, starting her own business was for her a possibility to have more creative work, because her work as a secretary was distracting her from her identity as a creative person (see Cardon et al., 2009). For another participant, entrepreneurship offered a change to drop out of the rat race of her former job. Starting their own businesses was the instrument that helped these women to fulfil their dreams. The women came to the conclusion, when discussing hiring employees and specifically employees more capable than the entrepreneur, that one can always hire employees that know some specific area better than the entrepreneur, but they could never replace or compensate the entrepreneur, who is the heart of the business and the only one with a “grand” view of the whole business. This is an interesting assertion, because it seems unlikely that no other person could run the business successfully. This view of the entrepreneur as the heart must relate to the entrepreneur’s passion and dreams, because dreams are personal, so no one else can run the business according to the entrepreneur’s dreams.

Dreaming and dreams may serve as an important source of self-efficacy and direction for action. Mental imagery, a method widely used in sports psychology, has been proposed to influence the entrepreneurs’ thought patterns, the self-efficacy, intentions and behavior of entrepreneurs together with self-dialogue and beliefs (Neck et al. 1999; Neck & Manz 1992). Neck et al. (1999, 487) define mental imagery as “*imagining successful performance of a task before it is actually completed*”. Mental imagery has been identified as effective in several studies (see, e.g., Neck et al. 1999; Neck & Manz 1992), but usually it has been linked with a single performance. Can dreams be regarded as working as mental imagery? This study’s participants on several occasions brought up the idea that one must be careful what one wishes for, because it might become true. One entrepreneur also spoke about one of her entrepreneurial dreams that she already had abandoned but that keeps on coming up. “*The dream is coming to me, I can’t help it*” she said. This suggests that dreams play a role in perception, making the decision to start a business

and pursuing venture creation through influencing the entrepreneurs' behavior and self-efficacy.

Jane was a bit disturbed in the second interview, because she could not see her business as her dream or passion. Jane felt that she was missing something because the group had brought up on several occasions the importance of dreams in facilitating development of the business. For her, the business was just a way to earn a livelihood, and her real ambitions were elsewhere.

*"...I have suffered because I envy, when someone has something, when someone has passion for something, so I'm envious, because I don't have that kind of passion... bugger, where to find it! I can be persistent, I don't care what other people think, but I've now tried to deal with this, maybe I just don't have it, I'm interested in many things, and then I do little bit everything but not with particular enthusiasm." (Jane, interview 2)*

Jane's goal was to be able to employ someone else to manage the business so that she could continue with her career in teaching. This business, however, showed Jane that, contrary to her initial feelings, she is capable of managing a business. This had led her to think about other business opportunities, which widened the career options she saw suitable for herself.

#### 6.4.4 Jump into Water Metaphor

One of the participants described the uncertainty or ambiguity inherent in starting a business as a jump into water.

*"And how many know when starting something, you know, what it's going to be, so it's quite. You just have to jump into the water and see." (Ann, Interview 2)*

The water surface is like the line between present and the future. Just as the water surface prevents us from seeing what is beneath, it is not possible to know for sure what the future will bring. The water may be cold, or warm, and the depth of the water might be unknown, too. Changing one's mind and turning back is not possible after jumping. Climbing up from the water is possible, of course, but it does not erase the jump. This kind of irrevocability applies to entrepreneurship, too. Naturally, it is possible to close a business, but some responsibilities and changes, for example, in unemployment benefits occur as soon as the status changes from employee to entrepreneur. However, preparations can be made to enhance the safety of jumping. The degree of unfamiliarity can be lowered by inspecting what lies underneath the surface, for example, stones or other dangerous objects, or the depth of water. It is

also possible to control when one dives (window of opportunity), and whether one knows how to swim, or what kind of life-saving aid is available. Several of the entrepreneurs mentioned that they make experiments, observe, or gather experience by practicing or get education or training before making decisions about engaging in developing new business or starting a new venture. Education and experience strengthen self-efficacy opportunity feasibility belief (i.e., opportunity confidence according to Dimov 2011, discussed in chapter 6.4.2), which could be assumed to lower the level of perceived risk and the courage needed. However, these measures do not remove all the uncertainty, just like measuring water depth or watching a video of the landscape beneath the water surface does not provide certainty about, for example, whether a shark or flock of fish will appear when diving. Thus, faith and courage is needed to face the uncertainty and to take the leap. **Table 10** presents this metaphor’s concepts and dimensions.

**Table 10.** Concepts and dimensions of the jump in water metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Jump into water	Uncertainty	Dealing with uncertainty	<p>Ann: “And how many know when starting something, you know, what it’s going to be, so it’s quite. You just have to jump into the water and see.”</p> <p>Ann: “...I have this head in the bush method. For example, [the husband] has taken care of the finances just because (taking a deep breath) it’s better that I don’t think about them, but I envision for the future. So, I’ve been using that method to some extent, I don’t know how much it is used in general. That you’re not totally aware.”</p> <p>Sharon: “..I figured out really what to do. That now we have to come down from the tree, although we were not even high there, but even that small distance we had to dismount, to get into the mundane journey, like systematically, you know, with small things, those small holes and the leaks in the boat, they have to be blocked one by one. One at a time, not trying to blunder with everything, but one at a time, with small things, which there’s plenty of.</p>
	Courage	Courage is needed for making decision under uncertainty	Natalie: “Of course you have to ponder what and how and why, but I don’t know. I just had decided [to start the business].”

	Support from others enhancing courage to act (related also to taking responsibility)	Ann: "I have now last night come to the conclusion that I have to take the reins myself. And this training has, I think it has been really wonderful to receive that kind of good and encouraging feedback. I've kind of started to believe that I really am capable and knowledgeable. I have not felt that I know and can do things, and now I've received [positive feedback], every time and from many different sources, that now even a fool has to believe." Paula: "someone else than just you have to believe in it [new business idea]"
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I discussed with Ann her ways of dealing with uncertainty. I continued from the previous excerpt by saying, "is it just about courage or trusting that everything will be ok", to which she replied that to some extent she has been using the "hide your head in a bush" method, i.e., concentrating on certain issues and blocking others that might be too distressing. Ann had delegated some stress-causing tasks, such as taking care of the firm's financial issues, to her husband.

*"For example, [the husband] has taken care of the finances just because (taking a deep breath) it's better that I don't think about them, but I envision for the future."* (Ann, interview 2)

The idea here is that worrying about everything at the same may paralyse Ann and prevent her from acting. Sharon talks about the same thing when she discusses blocking the ship's leaks (the business or business as a ship, related to the journey metaphor) one by one, not trying to do everything at the same time but concentrating on one issue at a time.

Uncertainty is focal in opportunity creation (e.g., Alvarez & Barney 2007, 2010; Sarasvathy 2001, 2008). According to effectuation theory, entrepreneurs try to bound uncertainty (by negotiating deals, engaging others, keeping control to themselves), deal with it (making only commitments that are within the affordable loss) but also make the most out of it (leveraging contingencies) (Sarasvathy 2008). Interestingly, this metaphor presents uncertainty as unpleasant and dangerous rather than offering new possibilities and, thus, something to be embraced.

#### 6.4.5 Conquering Land Metaphor

The group was discussing how to direct a scene in one video recording in which a son was about to present his new business idea to his father who was the CEO of the firm. This spurred a lively discussion not only about the moment of presenting itself but also about selling new ideas to others, family businesses, and the transfer of

power in companies. This particular discussion focused on the very initial stage of the opportunity, when it is just an opportunity idea, that the nascent entrepreneur – in this case the son – is about to communicate. The father was expected to be reluctant to acknowledge the idea, so the group was discussing how the son should present the idea and how the father would welcome the idea. **Table 11** presents the language the group used in this recording, such as taking a piece of land with one’s ideas, fencing or setting boundaries, and penetrating into a restricted area. This kind of language led me to call this the conquering land metaphor. The opportunity idea is used to conquer the piece of land (or a plot). An entrepreneur fences or in other ways marks the boundaries of her territory where her opportunity lies. Here, the land could easily represent the market in which the entrepreneur carves out a space for her company and fences it to keep other companies away. Thus, the fenced piece of land belongs to the company that has the right to the crop (income) it produces. Land is a scarce resource, and other companies are viewed as rivals (unless they are allies with which the company fights against its competitors).

**Table 11.** Concepts and dimensions of the conquering land metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Conquering land	Conquer	Opportunity idea as a vehicle for conquering	Wilma: “A lucky combination is that this [the old entrepreneur] is able to step aside and offer his support and knowledge and, and, but also this new [entrepreneur] is able to take his own plot with new ideas, and do it somehow differently, maybe.”
		Taking the power	Wilma: “I understood the old saying that power is not given, it is taken. Until one day I understood that I take it, now I’m taking it”
	Territory	Fencing or setting boundaries	Kate: “The father is very strong, and he wants to set boundaries to what is done in this house (business)” Wilma: “You have drawn like that (drawing an invisible line around herself in the air), I’m not going to cross that.” Wilma: “It is said that [you should] employ people who are better than you, but how many really have the courage? I thought that it was wonderful yesterday when you [Paula] said that you have done that...you have understood that you don’t need to be the best...you run this business, and the others can be better buyers, or much better sewers, or exhibitors, but you are still the heart...there you can’t take”.



		Penetrating into a restricted area	<p>Paula: "well, maybe my job is to grasp the wider picture. None of them can understand the whole... they can be great in some part. And that they understand how my role is important, why I have to persist or... but not to tamper with that"</p> <p>Wilma: "and you make the decisions."</p> <p>...</p> <p>Wilma: "...in this way the son might be penetrating into a restricted area."</p> <p>...</p> <p>Wilma: "the father, won't even look, kind of, when he [the son] is presenting it [the new idea], but he rejects, because he's afraid."</p>
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The conquering land metaphor is an example of a container metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:29), and it has been used by Schumpeter (The theory of economic development, as cited by Ahl 2002:44). This is a masculine metaphor (e.g., Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004) that includes not only ideas about rivalry, power, winning or losing, but also some rules, because others are supposed to respect the claim once the territory is marked. Boundaries are important in the container metaphor, and if there are no physical boundaries, we tend to create them with a wall or fence or an abstract line or plane, to create an inside and a bounding surface. This preference for boundaries is based on the human territoriality instinct, and it represents quantification, because bounded objects have sizes (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:29)

This resonates with the idea of the market as a space with boundaries. There is only a certain amount of space or land available, and a rivalry exists between those who want to create an opportunity and business for themselves. What if we conceived the market space as infinite? What if entrepreneurs were not fighting for land, but, for example, for water that circulates through its different states from solid to liquid and to gas? It seems that this would be more in line with creation theory, whereas conquering land is more associated with discovery theory.

The following utterance also reflects fencing a territory, although from a slightly different angle. The entrepreneurs acknowledged the sacredness of the existing business idea when discussing the situation in which a son, who is working in his father's firm, suggests a new business idea for his father: "...so in that way this son might now be penetrating such a bounded area". Here, the business idea (or the opportunity) belongs only to the entrepreneur, and it is not for others to tamper with. The opportunity is so close to the identity of the entrepreneur that any violation would be considered as violating the entrepreneur himself. Here, the fence actually protects the sacred core of the business that the entrepreneur guards.

Sharon explained how she couldn't realise her vision in her first company; she had to always take the business partner's view into account. For example, she talks about the tempo in the business.

*“...with (the new firm) I can set the pace, because I’m the solo owner, just as I want, when it’s time to change the rhythm, like I changed last spring. When I say that it happens today, it happens today and not on next Wednesday.”* (Sharon, 2. Interview)

Thus, having their own “kingdom” allows entrepreneurs to fulfil themselves and realise their vision of the business.

### 6.4.6 Jigsaw Puzzle Metaphor

Two of the entrepreneurs described the opportunity as comprising pieces that fit together. The opportunity is not a whole without all the pieces, and it does not make sense to the entrepreneur. Thus, there is a moment of clarity or “aha” when the entrepreneur is able to understand what the pieces are and how they relate to each other so that they form the opportunity. This metaphor emphasises the cognitive processes related to opportunity identification. Many of the studies within this area of research, according to my understanding, are more affiliated with the discovery theory, although their potential has also been acknowledged by creation theory (discussed in chapter 2.1).

**Table 12** presents the concepts and dimensions of the jigsaw puzzle metaphor.

**Table 12.** Concepts and dimensions of the jigsaw puzzle metaphor.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Jigsaw puzzle	Pieces	Pieces forming the opportunity	Ann: “If you think, it took me a pretty long time with everything until somehow the pieces clicked into their places.”
	Aha moment	Seeing clearly, brain when provides the solution	Heather: “And I was thinking that it goes, when it clocked in my head this autumn, that wellbeing and business can go together.”

The entrepreneur might feel that she almost had it without all the pieces, but it does not feel right. This implies that the entrepreneur has a perception of the opportunity, or opportunity prototype, in her mind, which informs her what an opportunity should be like. Prototypes are cognitive frameworks that represent the most typical member of a category. They serve as templates that help individuals to notice connections between different events and to recognise meaningful patterns in these links. The object is perceived as fitting into the category if the new object fits the existing prototype, but if it does not, it is excluded as not fitting. (Baron & Ensley 2006). The entrepreneurs’ descriptions imply that they possibly received new

information or they were able to interpret some piece of information in a new way that allowed them to see it as fitting and completing the picture, like the last pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, so that it matched their opportunity prototype or their image of the opportunity (Mitchell & Shepherd 2010).

The pieces fitting together can be seen in this metaphor as representing the interrelatedness of the different aspects of the opportunity. In addition to the business-related factors such as the existence of customers, financing and expected cash flow, access to markets and potential partners etc., the whole must make sense to the entrepreneur. This also includes the entrepreneur's private life, family demands and personal aspirations.

### 6.4.7 Nature Metaphors

The entrepreneurs made references on several occasions that can be grouped under the label 'nature metaphors'. These include references to horticulture, such as the opportunity as a seed and opportunity creation as growing and nurturing a plant, as well as the parental metaphor that describes business as the entrepreneur's baby. These are both widely used metaphors; the parental metaphor, discussed in Chapter 5.3., has been elaborated in detail by Cardon et al. (2005), and the nurturing plant metaphor is often used to describe something that requires nurturing to grow and to bloom.

**Table 13** presents the concepts and dimensions of the nature metaphors.

**Table 13.** Concepts and dimensions of the nature metaphors.

Metaphor	Concepts	Dimensions	Illustrations from the conversations
Horticultural metaphor	Nurturing a plant	Seed of an opportunity	Wilma: Although it [investing in resource that could be utilised later] didn't solve anything, but it is a seed...but this is clearly a seed." Paula: "...a seed that keeps up your enthusiasm so that you have the strength to explain it again." Paula: "Someone else than just you has to believe in it [new business idea]"
Parenting metaphor	Business is a baby	Opportunity creation as pregnancy Opportunity as dependent on the entrepreneur Nurturing	Idea located inside the entrepreneur (in the video, Kate shows the area between her chest and stomach to indicate where the idea is located). Paula (saying to Jane when she explains her dilemma of detaching from the chain): "You cut the cord now." Sharon: "I saw from the books of the firm that it's calling for Sharon more than the baby, that otherwise my other baby won't exist anymore. And I came running."

The horticultural metaphor describes the opportunity as a plant that needs the gardener's nurture to grow and bloom. The seeds the entrepreneurs talked about can be seen as the opportunity idea that can grow into a real opportunity with proper care and hospitable circumstances. As the gardener takes care of the seed, providing water and nutrients and keeping the temperature optimal, she creates the opportunity. The idea of the seed germinating and the small plant appearing keep the gardener enthusiastic and willing to invest her time and effort in nurturing the seed and, eventually, the plant. Paula's quote in Table 13 refers to explaining or communicating the opportunity as one means of creating it. Communicating an opportunity is a way to objectify it (Wood and McKinley 2010). McBride et al. (2013) see opportunities as "*a creative process of embedding a venture ever more deeply into the objective institutions where it needs to exist to thrive*". They see opportunities as subjective, i.e., depending on the minds of humans, when compared to ontologically objective things, like rocks, trees and birds, whereas ontologically subjective things, such as business opportunities, markets, or other social institutions, would cease to exist if there were no more human beings believing in them and reproducing their existence. Hence, communicating the opportunity also makes other people able to see it, thus moving the opportunity from subjectivity towards objectivity.

The parenting metaphor concentrates here on pregnancy. The opportunity idea is growing inside the entrepreneur, it is dependent on the entrepreneur and incapable of surviving without the entrepreneur's care and nurture. This metaphor suggests a strong emotional tie between the entrepreneur and the opportunity, as well as the idea that the parent, i.e., the entrepreneur, ultimately knows what is best for the opportunity (or business).

#### 6.4.8 Missing Metaphors

Some aspects of opportunity creation that can be found in the research material are, however, not highlighted by the metaphors. For example, none of the metaphors emphasise networking or business partnerships, although this is central in opportunity creation. Traffic is somewhat present in the pedaling metaphor, but it shows the others in the traffic just as someone to take into consideration. Natalie, however, suggested a new dimension to the pedaling metaphor, because she said that occasionally a tandem bicycle can also be used. Natalie's comment was, however, an exception, and not even Heather, who actively searches for partnerships and new networks in order to develop her business, used a metaphor to describe this. The owner-builder metaphor includes the idea of unpaid work by neighbours and relatives. The emphasis in this metaphor, however, was rather on relying on one's own work and resources.

Embracing uncertainty is another aspect that one could expect to emerge in the entrepreneurs' talk. It belongs, in principle, to the adventurous side of the journey metaphor. The pedaling metaphor is treated in this study as the subcategory of the journey metaphor, but it did not come up in the entrepreneurs' discussions. Uncertainty is highlighted in the jump-in-the-water metaphor but more as something to be controlled and something to get rid of rather than something to be opportunistically embraced. Leveraging contingencies is central, for example, in effectuation theory (Sarasvathy 2008), so it should be inherent in entrepreneurs' thinking, but the entrepreneurs instead talk about luck. They did not see luck as something that just comes to you; rather, it requires an entrepreneur to be active herself. One of the entrepreneurs introduced the expression, "luck has a fringe", which was unknown to the rest of the group in the beginning, but it became their shared language. This saying means that you should grab luck by its fringe, or otherwise it will pass you by. The role of luck in opportunity creation and the critique of its absence in opportunity theory have been discussed earlier, for example, by Dimov (2010) and Görling and Rehn (2008), who argued that arbitrariness, accidents, and luck have been ignored in the research concerning opportunities and called for recontextualisation of entrepreneurship research so that it would better appreciate the unintentionality of human action. Alvarez and Barney (2019) recently emphasised Knightian uncertainty as one of the theoretical developments that the opportunity concept has brought to entrepreneurship theory. According to creation theory, the decision-making context for opportunity creation is not risky because the risk (probability) for all the possible incidences cannot be calculated, but decisions are made under uncertainty.

# 7 Discussion

## 7.1 Summarising the Study's Aims

This study's goal was to discover new insights about how women entrepreneurs construct opportunities and their businesses through their talk. I concentrated on how they make sense of opportunity creation, what kind of interpretations they make and what kind of meanings they assign to people, actions, events, or situations in which they create opportunities. I tried to take into account the criticism of entrepreneurship research for forgetting the context; thus, I wanted to understand the contexts in which the women entrepreneurs had been creating opportunities and how this had influenced the meanings they assigned to opportunity creation. I investigated their stories about themselves and their entrepreneurial paths and queried my material about how these women entrepreneurs narrated their entrepreneuring, their context of creating opportunities (i.e., their situational embeddedness in social structures and practices that enable and restrict their endeavours to create opportunities) and the emergence and taking shape of the opportunity.

Entrepreneurial opportunities have been claimed to lie at the core of entrepreneurship, so it was reasonable to assume that they would somehow be present in the entrepreneurs' talk. It was likely that the entrepreneurs might not have words to describe their experiences concerning opportunity creation because of the abstractness and elusiveness of the opportunity concept. Thus, my research material led me to investigate what kind of metaphors women entrepreneurs use when talking about entrepreneurial opportunities and how they inform us about opportunity creation.

I next contemplate the implications of my findings and sum up my conclusions for the theory, methodology and practice.

## 7.2 Implications for Theory

### 7.2.1 The Mundane Account of Opportunity Creation

The neglect of the mundane entrepreneurship and the overemphasis on the fast-growing, high-tech, venture capital-backed, so-called Silicon Valley model of

entrepreneurship has recently been criticised in entrepreneurship research. Welter et al. (2019) shared their concerns about the lack of diversity and the narrow focus of entrepreneurship research and how this has influenced theory development as well as the practical relevance of the research in the field. Aldrich and Ruef (2018) also argued that the narrow focus on high growth ("gazelles", "unicorns", the high proportion of publications concerning venture capital and IPOs), on a high level of innovativeness, and on opportunity discovery has caused the field to neglect the everyday entrepreneurship that, however, represents the vast majority of entrepreneurs and organisations. The dominant discourse in entrepreneurship research also describes the entrepreneur as essentially a male hero with super-normal qualities, making investments in the face of risk and uncertainty, producing innovations, and able to predict the future (Ogbor 2000; Dimov 2011; Kirzner 1997). The standard of the entrepreneur is a rational, white, European or North-American male, and those entrepreneurs differing from this standard are regarded as marginal. Science is built on the achievements of earlier research, so this ideological discourse is reproduced, and the taken-for-granted assumptions are maintained not only through language use but also through legitimation of certain research questions, research methodologies, and the interpretation of those results coherent with this discourse as valid. This discourse sustains the power structures in the society and reinforces the dominant position of the ruling groups. Entrepreneurship, like management research, must also have practical relevance, so the problems are defined in accordance with the views of managers, funding institutions or other reputable organisations who belong to society's powerful groups (Ogbor 2000). The influences of this conception are not just theoretical but also concern praxis, e.g., in terms of access to support services, education and financing.

The talk of the women entrepreneurs and the metaphors elicited in this study do not picture entrepreneurs as heroes but tell a more mundane account of opportunity creation, although they do manifest individualism and solitude of entrepreneurs to some extent, which have been criticised for heroic accounts of entrepreneurship (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson 2007; Dimov, 2010). For example, persistence, hard work, and responsibility are strongly present in the metaphors and the women entrepreneurs' stories, highlighting the everyday toil that entrepreneurship is for many, especially for solo and micro entrepreneurs, who comprise 93 percent of all enterprises in Finland (Federation of Finnish Enterprises), for example. They need to be persistent because of the hard work, the need to do much of it by themselves, and the unexpected happenstances that might challenge entrepreneurs' belief. Persistence (or perseverance) have been conceived as one of the entrepreneurship competences that enterprising individuals – or according to the EntreComp framework, all citizens – should possess (van Gelderen 2012; Bacigalupo et al. 2016). Sometimes perseverance have been conceived as a trait, which is quite

deterministic, whereas the competence approach allows people to learn and develop their perseverance (van Gelderen 2012). Persistence is needed with the process of opportunity creation and not with a particular opportunity idea – the idea is going to develop during the process anyway. This study suggests that emotions and the affect generated by the dreams and personal aspirations of the entrepreneur are fuel for persistence and an ability to work hard. For example, van Gelderen (2012) noted that the negative affect arisen from not proceeding towards a goal reduces perseverance, as expected, and identifies strategies entrepreneurs can use to persevere. However, these do not take into account the positive affect generated by dreams (the goal). These dreams, besides reaching for the stars, can be quite down to earth, such as having a more pleasant working environment or being able to manage one's time better. Goal-related strategies include scaling down or breaking down goals (van Gelderen 2012), which suggest that more mundane dreams would make persisting easier. However, van Gelderen reminds us that higher goals normally lead to better performance (as in the case of sales targets), so the goal should not be too easy. Dreams, however, are linked with personal aspirations and, thus, generate intrinsic motivation that should lead to better performance than goals set by some else.

Coping with uncertainty and even enjoying and creating change are focal in entrepreneurship (Gibb 2008), but the entrepreneur, unlike the heroic entrepreneur, is unable to predict the future. The future is, instead, hidden from the entrepreneur, who needs courage and support from her environment to be able to proceed with her opportunity idea. She modifies her actions based on the feedback she receives and jointly co-creates the opportunity with her environment. Thus, rather than predicting the future with her supernatural powers, the entrepreneur engages in creating the future together with others.

The mundane is strongly present in the owner-builder metaphor because it highlights resource scarcity and the entrepreneur's need to persistently complement monetary resources with her own labor. This metaphor is highly culture-dependent, echoing the Finnish mentality of hard work and persistence ('sisu' in Finnish). The Finnish word used in the video material can be traced to post-war rebuilding, but the mentality dates back before that; it can be found, for example, not only in the literature but also in the entrepreneurship discourse in general. The Finnish hero story is about working hard and persisting in adverse situations, but contrary to the American "rags to riches" stories, the pay for the effort is not excessive wealth but survival, acknowledgement and a better life, maybe not even for the hero himself but for his offspring. The wife's contribution is important because she is doing her woman's share. The strong women are the focal characters (e.g., Niskavuori) in some stories, but they are sometimes pictured as pushed to the man's role and behaving in a masculine way. This indicates how the metaphors we use stem from our culture and history that endow us with certain mental frames that we use to interpret the



world and our experience. We are “products” of our culture, and we draw on the cultural reserve when making interpretations, making sense, giving sense, and communicating with others.

Another aspect of the owner-builder metaphor is dreams and their alignment with the opportunity. In the heroic tale of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur is following his vision and is energised by his dream. The owner-builder is similarly motivated by the dream of one’s own house, and the entrepreneur described by the metaphor is motivated by her dream. However, the dream is not necessarily about something big; for example, in my data, the dreams of the entrepreneurs concern things like independence, fulfilling oneself, being able to do the work one wants (ref. Rindova et al. 2009).

Welter et al. (2017) point out that by concentrating on the minority of enterprises and labelling the others as uninteresting or not useful for research, we have also been unable to see diversity in motivations for entrepreneurship and the benefits it can bring other than wealth accumulation and job creation. This study makes a contribution in showing how the decision to create a venture grows out of the need to grow and challenge oneself, to fulfil oneself, to create an environment in which one can do the work that feels meaningful or do the work according to one’s own rules, values and ideas. These ambitions, however, need favourable circumstances in which starting a venture makes sense to the entrepreneur in terms of her earlier experiences, her life situation and her expectation for the future.

## 7.2.2 Opportunity Creation as a Continuous Process

This study pictures opportunity creation as a continuous process: Opportunity creation continues, it does not end when a new company is established. However, in this process, more intensive and less intensive phases seem to alternate, making creation periodic. One of these intensive periods precedes new venture creation, but a company’s establishment is separate from the creation process, albeit bringing objective existence and legitimacy to the venture (ref. McBride et al. 2013). Many theoretical models that explain the entrepreneurial process do not take into account the continuity of the creation process but assume that it ends as soon as the venture has been established. This is prevalent in the process models of opportunity discovery (e.g., Ardichvili et al. 2003), but it can also be seen in work building on opportunity creation (e.g., Tasavori et al. 2015). This study’s findings show how entrepreneurs engage in opportunity creation at different points of time, not just in the beginning of the entrepreneurial process, thus indicating that opportunity creation, discovery and exploitation are merged; the entrepreneur, when acting, is oriented to the future, and the opportunity is changing as her expectations for the future change. Aldrich and Ruef (2018, 467) suggest that “*Treating*

*entrepreneurship as the creation of new organizations changes the focus of entrepreneurship research from studying outcomes to studying the initiation of organizing processes that could result in new social entities*". Entrepreneurs do create organisations, but this perspective leaves out all entrepreneurial activities within established organisations. For example, people in the third sector often need to act entrepreneurially to accomplish their work, despite scarce resources, by using their creativity and building partnerships.

In light of my study, it seems that the organisation (the company) is not necessarily relevant for the entrepreneur. Many of the women entrepreneurs were, instead, merely interested in building an environment in which they could do the work they wanted in the way they wanted and they decided to create it by themselves because they could not find that kind of employment. A company, as a legal entity, offers a "platform" for the enactment of the opportunity until the point that it cannot serve this purpose anymore, which is when it is abandoned, and the opportunity is taken to a new "platform" that enables the entrepreneur to continue the creation (see, e.g., Sharon's case, pp. 106). The entrepreneurial journey may continue even if the venture is closed down, because the entrepreneurial activity often occurs in one form or another (new business created by the entrepreneur, continuing of the business or business strategy) (Selden & Fletcher 2015).

The importance of persistence in opportunity creation is present in the entrepreneurs' talk and the metaphors elicited in this study. The entrepreneur should not lock herself into the original opportunity idea but, rather, should commit herself to the creation process (ref. Wood & McKinley 2010). In line with the ideas of effectuation, the opportunity idea changes as the creation proceeds and partners, allies, network partners or customers appear to co-create the opportunity. For example, in Ann's case (pp. 89), the original opportunity idea was based on a product that yielded very few sales. However, it was crucial in the opportunity creation process, because it was noticed by a new customer who multiplied Ann's sales and brought the business to entirely new level. This challenges the hero-entrepreneur with future-predicting abilities and shows opportunity creation as continuous development through trial and error, in which the value of certain steps can only be understood afterwards.

Wood and McKinley (2010) write about objectification of an opportunity, and McBride et al. (2013) write about opportunities moving from ontological subjectivity towards objectivity, both of which have been contemplated by Dimov (2018). I see problems with observing opportunity even ex post. How do we know, in case of failure, that an individual-independent opportunity did not exist? Maybe the entrepreneur just chose the wrong way to exploit the opportunity. What about a successful venture; how long does a business need to be successful to prove an opportunity's existence? What about the liability of newness or adolescence? Many

new ventures survive for several years but close after that. Was there no opportunity in the first place, or did it cease to exist? Considering this, conceiving opportunities as a result of entrepreneurs' continuous creation efforts seems to make sense. Viewing opportunity discovery, development or creation as occurring only at the time of venture creation (before and after the establishment of a company) leaves out a vast amount of opportunity creation efforts that might be fruitful for opportunity research. Utilising process research in studying time and temporality related to opportunity creation might produce interesting new understanding about opportunities and the creation of them.

### 7.2.3 Identity and Gender in Opportunity Creation

This study's findings show the opportunity as tightly intertwined with and dependent on the entrepreneur; the opportunity incorporates the changing aspirations, motivations and identity (including gender identity) of the individual to the extent that it cannot exist separately. The environment changes as time passes, and so do the entrepreneur's needs concerning the business, rendering the opportunity as mouldable. The owner-builder metaphor includes the idea that dreams produce the energy for the entrepreneur's motivation and guide the entrepreneur on her path of opportunity creation. For some of the entrepreneurs in this study, the opportunity they saw was an opportunity to fulfil their dreams, to be able to set the rules for their work, to create their own work environment, or to be able to do the work they wanted because those kinds of jobs did not exist. These cases portray the opportunity as emancipation (Rindova et al. 2009). Jennings et al.'s (2016) view is that the emancipation perspective is in juxtaposition with the opportunity emphasis in entrepreneurship research, and thus consider it provoking and stimulating. They also argue that the previous research on entrepreneurship as emancipation has focused mainly on marginalised women or women living in developing countries, and they find that women are not more likely than men to choose entrepreneurship for emancipatory reasons, and when they do so, they actually are not necessarily able to change the "corporate rules", nor are they more likely to be more satisfied than their male counterparts. These are interesting findings from my study's point of view, too.

The women entrepreneurs participating in this study represent neither minorities nor less privileged groups. They are educated women living in a welfare country that is considered one of the most equal countries in the world. Despite that, they have challenges in their everyday life, some of which are arguably linked with gendered structures of the society. However, the constraints they were facing are not all women-specific. They chose entrepreneurship, for example, because of a need to step out from the "rat race", to be better able to manage their time, or to distance themselves from values to which they could not personally commit, which are

challenges present in both men's and women's working life. Paula's case (pp. 112) interestingly points out how she was not able to totally free herself, because her business development was at least partially restricted by her fear of the business turning into another "rat race". This resonates with the findings of Jennings et al. (2016), who found that even though women often start their businesses to be able to depart from the "corporate operating model" and to set limits to their working hours, many are, unfortunately, unable to do this, partly because they were afraid of losing customers. The findings of this study conducted in Finland indicate that emancipatory perspective is also applicable in developed countries, although the problems from which the entrepreneurs seek liberation are often not as severe as in developing countries, like poverty or violence. Thus, I see emancipatory motives in the women entrepreneurs' dreams and in their endeavours to create business opportunities and find the emancipation perspective in accordance with opportunity creation.

However, the opportunity is not about fulfilling one's dreams for everyone, as illustrated by Jane's case (pp. 99), who was a bit puzzled because her business didn't have that kind of (emotional) meaning for her, as well as by Kate's case (pp. 85), for whom the opportunity per se was not about fulfilling her dream, but it supported her way of life and identity as a farmer. In any case, the opportunity had to fit the entrepreneur's complex situation (family, health, employment, economy), and in case of women entrepreneurs, it often entails taking care of children or other family members. In addition to affecting practical arrangements within the family, entering entrepreneurship may cause opposition or disbelief among family and friends, partly because of the gendered conceptions of entrepreneurship. Lisa, with relatively old parents, especially had to resist their perception that entrepreneurship was unsuitable for Lisa, even though she had previous experience in entrepreneurship. However, she was married when she established her first business, and her husband was the primary breadwinner in the family, so the aim of the business was actually to offer Lisa something meaningful to do. This raises questions about whether women's entrepreneurship is more acceptable under a husband's wings and whether this gives the impression of women's businesses being "not serious". This relates to the question raised by Ekismynth (2014) about the usefulness of the mumpreneurship concept; does this invoke impressions of women's entrepreneurship as personal fulfilment or restricted to women's life and not entering the sphere of "real world of serious business"? While seemingly emancipating, it can actually continue women's dependence on their husbands and reproduce the gendered roles in the family, for example, if part-time entrepreneurship is used to combine meaningful work with childcare in order to offer the husband an opportunity to invest in his career.

I identified a narrative of being different in the women entrepreneurs' discussions. Distancing oneself from the cultural norms of being a woman has been

identified as a strategy that women entrepreneurs use (Díaz García & Welter 2013). Many of the entrepreneurs participating in this study shared feelings and experiences of being different, some even in their childhood. This might indicate that the feelings of being different or special could prepare women to reject the cultural norms defining what is acceptable work for women, which later might contribute to choosing entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneur has constructed her identity in a process of meaning making and sense making in interaction with her social environment, and thus, the taken-for-granted assumptions of the culture and social structures are incorporated in the notion of identity. Identity is one of the lenses used in making interpretations of experiences in the past and present as well as expectations for the future. It seems to make sense to claim that an entrepreneur's identity is an integral part of the opportunity, guiding the individual when making interpretations about what is possible and what is desirable for her. Identity is also indirectly present in Dimov's (2011, 62-63) definition, "*an evolving blueprint for action, synthesising the entrepreneur's sense of, expectation about, and aspirations for the future*". A blueprint for action encompasses the individual's (changing) interpretations of her past experiences, aspirations and expectations for the future, as well as her (also changing) conceptions of what is important, meaningful and possible. The opportunity must make sense to the individual on the emotional, practical and economic levels in order to be conceived as an opportunity, just like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together.

Gender is present in opportunity creation not only as an integral part of entrepreneurs' identity but also in the gendered practices through which opportunities are created. Gender is done in social interactions, and opportunities are also created in and by the entrepreneur's interactions with her environment, so opportunities cannot escape the gendered social practices. For example, some types of business are conceived as "natural" for women, like those related to health and care (e.g., Pullen & Simpson 2009), resulting in higher legitimacy and trustworthiness in others' eyes (Hanson & Blake 2009), whereas the capabilities of those operating in a "wrong" field can be questioned, as in a story Kate told (pp. 85). However, being in "women's" business might invoke images of small-scale lifestyle businesses with no growth opportunities even as professional advisors, as illustrated in Paula's case (pp. 97). This demonstrates how the gendered beliefs penetrate the formal institutions, where equal treatment should be guaranteed for women and men.

Entrepreneurs' embeddedness in networks is also focal in creating opportunities (e.g., Jack & Anderson 2002), and networks are gendered (the structure, the spatiality, the use of networks). Social identity that is based on gender, age, ethnicity etc., influences individuals' access to networks and the effectiveness of their use of those networks (Hanson & Blake 2009). For some of the entrepreneurs participating

in this study, a women entrepreneurs' association has been an important network that also offers access to the wider entrepreneurs' network that includes more men. Having more gender-balanced networks or having a male business partner have been shown to be advantageous for women's businesses (e.g., Hampton et al. 2009; Godwin et al. 2006). Natalie's case (pp. 102) shows how accessing a husband's business networks can facilitate starting a business. Conceiving gender as an integral part of identity, and thus part of opportunity, and as done in the social practices through which opportunities are created, inevitably renders opportunity creation as gendered.

#### 7.2.4 Opportunity as Co-created

This study pictures opportunity as co-created by different actors rather than an accomplishment of an individual entrepreneur. This is the area in which relational constructivism is most apparent in this study, because it emphasises entrepreneurs' embeddedness in the social structures and the opportunity arising as the result of a joint pursuit by the entrepreneur and her environment. The co-creational aspect of opportunity creation is not highlighted by the metaphors, although it can be observed in the research material. Collaboration and interaction could be incorporated in the pedaling metaphor in the form of traffic that can be seen as a collective effort that needs collaboration and interaction to flow smoothly. However, this kind of imagery was not brought up, and the discussions instead describe the other actors more as something to be taken into consideration. Natalie brought up a tandem bike as a temporary means of transport when pedaling the opportunity into existence. Her idea was that an entrepreneur occasionally needs help from others, but she continues by herself after receiving assistance with a particular situation or problem.

There is a contradiction in the material, however, between the narrative of the entrepreneur as the responsible key actor in opportunity creation and Ann's case of a friend assuming the responsibility for taking the opportunity forward. The participants often bring out the entrepreneur as responsible for acting in order to create the opportunity, being the heart of the business (understanding the opportunity in a way that no one else can), and doing "everything" by herself. This kind of talk is in accordance with the hero discourse of entrepreneurship, highlighting hard work and managing by oneself. However, Ann's case is interesting because it includes a story of a friend who assumed responsibility for taking the opportunity forward by pushing Ann to make decisions that she was not ready to make by herself. Despite acknowledging this friend's positive influence, Ann's interpretation was that entrepreneurship was harder than she expected because she had to do everything by herself. Co-creation is also apparent in some of the other cases in the form of partnerships (Heather's case pp. 96), active communication and use of media

(Sharon's case pp. 106), and a business model based on customers' involvement (Paula's case pp. 112) as a means to develop and grow one's business.

Networking and collaborating are often seen as natural for women entrepreneurs, and, for example, women business owners have been found to have a stronger preference for a collaborative network orientation than do their male counterparts (Sorenson et al. 2008). Despite these examples from the materials, collaboration and partnerships were quite absent in the women entrepreneurs' discussions. This indicates that the hero discourse and the ethos of managing on one's own is still strong in entrepreneurship.

### 7.2.5 Heterogeneity of Women's Entrepreneurship

Finally, this study adds to our understanding of the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs. As argued in earlier research (e.g., De Bruin et al. 2006), we should not treat women entrepreneurs as a homogenous group but pay more attention to their diversity. Telling the stories of the nine women entrepreneurs in this study contributes to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of women entrepreneurs' opportunity construction.

Even though the women participating in this study were trying to find similarities between each other, aiming for a common understanding of what it means to be a woman entrepreneur (e.g., action orientation, finding their way, being different), the stories told are very different. Some had no previous contacts with entrepreneurs, while some had entrepreneurial parents, which did not necessarily mean that they would prefer entrepreneurship as a career choice. Some were realising their dreams or fulfilling themselves; for some, entrepreneurship was just a way to earn their living. For some, the business was simultaneously a dream and a necessity to provide employment, which makes these particular cases difficult to categorise as push or pull or necessity or opportunity entrepreneurship. However, most of these women said that they would have not guessed that someday they would be entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship was not their goal, but somehow, at some point of their lives, it started to make sense to them.

Diverse goals for entrepreneurship have been discussed within the emancipation perspective (Rindova et al. 2009; Jennings et al. 2016). Wealth creation has been considered the main purpose of entrepreneurship in the research, drawing strongly on economics in which homo economicus makes decisions based on the expected return, yet entrepreneurship as emancipation perspective highlights freeing oneself from constraints as a powerful motive for entrepreneurship. This perspective is grounded in the women's entrepreneurship research; also counting the psychological income and losses enables us to have a more holistic view of entrepreneurship.

Goals and diversity both exist in the strategies and means for creating an opportunity. The women entrepreneurs first had to convince themselves about their entrepreneurial abilities and the existence of an opportunity and then their family, usually a spouse and / or parents. I have described the strategies they used when building their own confidence in the case descriptions (Chapter 6.2); gathering relevant working experience (e.g., customer service), investigating examples of other entrepreneurs in the same field, building networks and obtaining contacts and references, talking about the opportunity idea and obtaining feedback and (emotional) support. These activities were part of their preparation for entrepreneurship and moving from opportunity idea to the creation of the opportunity. The entrepreneurs engaged in these activities to the extent that those activities felt useful and fitting with their identity. Particular aspects of creating the opportunity seem to be highlighted for some of the entrepreneurs, for example, active networking and building partnerships (Heather), aggressive communication (Sharon), or drawing on the existing networks to negotiating deals to ensuring initial income and to accessing customers (Paula).

Seeing the diversity of entrepreneurship helps us to recognise and contemplate what entrepreneurship really is about. Is it about creating companies, creating wealth, creating business opportunities, creating value (economic, social, cultural, environmental), or creating change? Is it about fulfilling one's dreams or creating a platform for doing meaningful work? Various interpretations exist, and they develop and change over time; our contemporary definitions of entrepreneurship might be different from what we will call entrepreneurship in the future. We can widen our understanding by broadening our scope to research areas that are not so obvious for entrepreneurship and to methods not so widely used.

### 7.3 Methodological Implications

Earlier research called for increased diversity and pluralism as well as innovative use of methodologies in entrepreneurship research (e.g. Ogbor 2000; Jennings et al. 2005; Cope 2005; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007; Brush et al. 2009; Leitch et al. 2009; Lindgren & Packendorf 2009; Henry et al. 2012; Junaid et al. 2015). Quantitative, objectivist research with male samples have formed the research tradition in entrepreneurship, producing much of our theory and understanding of entrepreneurship which has resulted in the genderedness of the research field. Alh (2002) and Henry et al. (2012) have shown how this gendered conception of entrepreneurship is produced in research and how studies concerning women's entrepreneurship are ghettoised. This study aims to answer the call for diverse methods by employing metaphor and narrative analyses that are still not widely used within the qualitative research tradition. It shows an example of how these different



“readings” can be utilised when conducting interpretative research. Metaphor analysis was applied to learn how women entrepreneurs draw on the partly local and partly universal metaphorical use of language when constructing and communicating their understandings of entrepreneurs, entrepreneuring and creating opportunities. Following Downing (2005) and Steyaert (2007), narrative analysis was used to investigate how these women entrepreneurs narrated their identity and their situation when starting their business or making important decisions concerning them. These readings were combined to gain a contextualised view of opportunity creation. The research materials were also produced with and by women entrepreneurs, whose views and experiences are still underrepresented in entrepreneurship theories.

Metaphors are used to communicate ideas and experiences that are unfamiliar, abstract or otherwise difficult to articulate; thus, metaphor analysis could be used to study anything in which people are working at the edge of their knowledge or creating something new. Metaphors can also be powerful in grasping not only vague ideas or intuition, for example, in decision making, but also experiences and feelings. Metaphors have limitations, of course, because they highlight certain aspects and obscure others, as chapter 5.3 discussed.

The entrepreneurship literature encourages longitudinal studies, and the research material for this study was also gathered over a longer period (between 2009 and 2014). My temporal analysis did not reveal any clear patterns of metaphor use, but the time span allowed me to notice, for example, changes in the way some of the entrepreneurs discussed themselves as entrepreneurs, i.e., their entrepreneurial identity. Applying an ethnographic methodology seems fruitful from the viewpoint of opportunity creation, because it enables the researcher to observe the opportunity creation process and access the sense making and meaning giving of the entrepreneur(s) over a longer period.

## 7.4 Practical Implications

The fact that most of these women entrepreneurs had not thought about becoming entrepreneurs and that the most novice ones were especially somewhat surprised by the fact that they were actually running businesses of their own is liberating, because it shows that it is possible to become an entrepreneur even if one would not have noticed a particular aptitude for entrepreneurial thinking or mindset in themselves. Many of the women entrepreneurs had received and still were receiving support from their spouses, parents, and other network members, which demonstrates that entrepreneurship is not a solo endeavour, and that an entrepreneur does not need to be the hero who masters everything by herself. Instead, with partners and networks that complete the entrepreneur’s knowledge and competences, entrepreneurship is possible for any of us, if only we get an opportunity idea that presents an

“opportunity for me”. Jane’s case is very illustrative in this sense, because she stated that her identity was not compatible with her idea of an entrepreneur. She saw that she did not have the characteristics needed for entrepreneurship and said that she could never be a solo entrepreneur. This naturally relates to how to teach entrepreneurship or how entrepreneurship should be learned. Scholars have recently presented that entrepreneurship education should create learning experiences that offer possibilities for students to create new understandings of how entrepreneurship could function for themselves (Verduijn & Berglund 2019) and to reconstruct their identities more as entrepreneurs (Robinson et al. 2016).

One particular experience that was common for many of the women entrepreneurs in this study was the interpretation of oneself as different. This difference could be a different way of being a woman (or a girl), but it could also be about being different in one’s family. It did not necessarily mean being worse or less but being special. It might be that these experiences of being different prepared and helped these women to choose entrepreneurship, because it might have given them the strength to resist not only the cultural norms of what is allowed for a woman but also the norm of uniformity. The schooling system is (used to be) responsible for reconstruction of the latter to a great extent, but because the women entrepreneurs in this study were mostly born in the 1950’s and 60’s, the tendency for this has already changed for the better. However, encouraging and educating young people to deal with difference also enhances an entrepreneurial mindset, which may lead to the creation of new businesses as entrepreneurs or within established organisations.

Learning from role models is a widely used method for entrepreneurship education. However, to what kind of accounts of entrepreneurship do we expose our students? Are they stories about heroes? about exceptional growth? about success? By whom are they told? Obviously, there needs to be a balance; heroes and success inspire but may present entrepreneurship as too big, too difficult and too distant. We must ensure that these accounts are balanced with stories of the mundane, including failure and how it is possible to recover and learn from it. We ought to present the diversity within entrepreneurship; businesses created for different reasons, like social enterprises, showing that the value created by entrepreneurship can be something else than just financial value. We should obviously have both women and men entrepreneurs as role models. Easy to agree, but do we remember, for example, to check the pictures we use? I’m afraid that sometimes a picture of young men might slip into our presentations to illustrate start-ups. We construct the world with the words we use, the stories we tell and the pictures we show. If we want different kinds of people to be able to relate to our stories about entrepreneurship, there should be diversity in those stories. Female role models and accounts that inspire women and allow them to accommodate themselves within those accounts are especially needed, and why not engage students in co-creating the stories?

Entrepreneurship has been seen as an arena for changing conceptions of gender (Hanson & Blake 2009; Deutch 2009). We have the possibility not only to reconstruct but also to challenge the cultural conceptions and norms because we continuously produce it in social interaction. Deutch (2009) emphasised this opportunity for positive development, and that is what we should strive for more consciously. Women working as entrepreneurs are examples for others, especially younger people, by showing that entrepreneurship is not entirely the men's area and also demonstrating alternative ways of doing and undoing gender, resulting in more womanly entrepreneurial roles becoming available. Some studies have also shown women to have more women in their networks (Renzulli 2000; studies showing no significant difference between the networking of women and men also exist), which may open possibilities for other women. Reconstructing entrepreneurship as more gender balanced and renewing the business culture and practices accordingly would support women's entrepreneurship, diversify local business structures, and ultimately change the place. As noted by Hanson & Blake (2009, 145) "*...the inclusion of women [in business networks] will change the structures of and practices within those networks and lead to altered institutions... and thereby altered places.*" Excluding or pushing women-led businesses to the periphery based on, for example, their lower growth orientation is hardly beneficial for any region. Besides, growth is often interpreted as business success, although according to research, this is too simplistic (e.g., Davidsson et al. 2009).

## 7.5 The Future of Entrepreneurial Opportunities?

My aim was to examine opportunity creation in order to add new insights to our understanding of the opportunity concept or the ways opportunities are created. My approach has been social constructionist and interpretive, combining research methods and focusing on women entrepreneurs, which still remains nonmainstream within entrepreneurship research.

Dimov (2018, 339) has offered the following advice: "*If we are to step out from our positions as external observers, we need to attune ourselves to the situations that entrepreneurs face, the role of the language they use, and the nature of the knowledge they use.*" This study is an attempt to do so, because it tries to grasp the history, experiences, interpretations and knowledge (ref. personal theories of action; Pitt 1998) of women entrepreneurs and through this to understand these entrepreneurs' use of language as a means of sense making and sense giving. This involves interpretation, and I have tried to reflect and explicate my position as a Finnish female entrepreneurship researcher and co-producer of the research material.

This study contributes to entrepreneurship and opportunity literature by bringing out the voices of women entrepreneurs, who are often invisible in entrepreneurship

research (Brush et al. 2009; De Bruin et al. 2007; Bird & Brush 2002). Opportunity creation has especially not been widely studied among women entrepreneurs. I was able to shed light on how women entrepreneurs construct opportunity creation in their talk by combining different kinds of materials and readings, as well as to draw a more contextualised picture of the circumstances and environment in which they create opportunities. The context of this study was a Nordic welfare country that is considered one of the most equal countries in the world, yet women entrepreneurs cannot escape the gendered social norms and practices in their opportunity creation efforts.

The stories told by the women entrepreneurs participating in this study are mundane; they highlight responsibility, hard work, persistence, uncertainty, dissatisfaction with one's work, taking care of children or other family members, being different or special and also the role of dreams. Some threads in the stories manifest the entrepreneurs' individuality, solitude, courage and also power, which are more aligned with the heroic narrative of entrepreneurship that is prevalent in many cultures. For me, the mundane story of entrepreneurship highlights the value of entrepreneurship of individuals and groups in circumstances and places so far treated as marginal. For example, a shared culture endows transnational entrepreneurs with symbolic capital that can be leveraged as, e.g., in accumulating capital, although the effects for women entrepreneurs are not entirely positive, showing thus its gendered nature (Vershina & Rodgers 2020). In addition to women's entrepreneurship, for example, social entrepreneurship or cooperatives have not always been regarded as "real" entrepreneurship. It is also fruitful to look outside the contexts of formal entrepreneurship, for example, at the third sector, where people have to be entrepreneurial bricoleurs to manage with very limited resources in their endeavours to induce change.

The findings of this study indicate a tight connection between the opportunity and the entrepreneur. Conceiving identity as a part of the opportunity and focusing on the identity of women entrepreneurs or on ethnic or other minorities might also be useful for future research on opportunity creation. Investigating how these kinds of minorities construct their identity, especially their entrepreneurial identity, and how this influences their opportunity creation, are interesting questions that might shed light on opportunities and their creation. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs' gender identities and doing gender when creating opportunities remain understudied.

Based on this study, I see opportunity creation as having potential for entrepreneurship research. It brings the entrepreneur and her stakeholders into focus by seeing the opportunity unfolding as they interact. Despite the ambiguity, the tension between the discovery and creation theories, the demand to abandon the opportunity concept, that concept has been recognised as enabling the defining of entrepreneurship as a distinct discipline and theoretically moving the field forward

by offering a steppingstone on which to build new concepts (Alvarez and Barney 2020; Wright & Phan 2020). The debate about the entrepreneurial opportunities continues.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1.** The themes of conversations in the video recordings.

<b>Conversation theme</b>	<b>Initiator</b>
combining entrepreneurship and family	Paula
bearing responsibility	Lisa
the role of a caretaker	Lisa
being different	Kate
the importance of work, diligence	Kate
boldness	Natalie
making decisions	Natalie
the strength of positive thinking, joy	Ann
to show others (what one is capable of)	
responsibility	Paula
energy	the tutor
action	Wilma
enjoying one's work	Heather
charisma	Sharon
growth	the tutor
the significance of one's childhood	Wilma
taking risks, the negative side of growth	the tutor
giving up entrepreneuring / working	Wilma
the significance of the entrepreneurial role	Paula
introducing new business ideas	the tutor
family firm	Wilma
vision	Wilma
the difficulty of accepting new ideas (presented by someone else)	Paula



the relationship with one's mother	Ann
detaching from a chain business	Jane
dealing with unpleasant tasks	Jane
decision making	the tutor
joy	Heather
support from husband	Heather
earning a mothers' acceptance	Ann
Growth	Paula
art exhibition: utilising visuality, sounds and smells in business	the Tutor
combining entrepreneurial and artist identities	Natalie
presenting the guru: internationality	Ann
presenting the guru: leadership, turnaround	Paula
presenting the guru: combining business and art	Lisa
combining entrepreneurship and family	Paula

## Appendix 2: Interview guides

### Interview 1/ themes

1. How to become an entrepreneur
  - how the decision was made
  - the situation
2. The opportunity conceived
  - how the business idea was found and developed
  - why considered an opportunity
3. New business ideas
  - how are found and evaluated
4. Experiences as an entrepreneur
  - the most meaningful experiences
  - values and aims
  - entrepreneurs as role models
  - emotions (regulation/ utilisation)
5. developing the existing business
  - aims
  - thoughts about growth

### Interview 2/ themes

1. the development of the business since the first interview
  - most important developments / incidences; the decisions made and reasoning for them in those situations
  - situation, e.g., family situation, support received
2. New business ideas
  - how found/developed; what has been critical, if not yet acted on, why.
3. Aims for the future; related to business and more general aims
4. Discussing the metaphors elicited (collecting feedback and developing ideas about the metaphors)

Note: the interviews did not follow the same scripts, because the entrepreneurs were encouraged to bring out issues they felt important. The themes were also modified according to individual situations and development of the business. For example, with those entrepreneurs who had closed or were planning to close their business, the discussions focused more on their closing decision, exit plans, and plans for future.





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