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## Women entrepreneurs and wellbeing: An identity perspective

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Recognizing the importance of women entrepreneurs for economies and societies, researchers and policy makers are increasingly interested in supporting women's entrepreneurship activities. Enhancing the wellbeing of women entrepreneurs is essential not only as an ethical imperative but also as a mechanism to understand and improve the process and outcomes of women's entrepreneurship activities. This chapter employs an identity lens to offer a novel perspective on women entrepreneurs' wellbeing in a way that is reflective of their nuanced and subjective experiences across multiple local and national contexts. The chapter presents the findings of a literature review on women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing to explicate the multidimensional relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and their sustainable eudaimonic and temporal hedonic wellbeing. It maps out the multiple identities salient to women entrepreneurs and considers three main themes: 1) entrepreneurship as an authentic expression of a positive identity, thus contributing to women entrepreneurs' eudaimonic wellbeing; 2) women entrepreneurs' multiple conflicting and synergetic identities influencing hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing; and 3) identity work as an active approach to enhance hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. The chapter concludes with a consideration of what the findings mean for researchers, women entrepreneurs, and for actors in entrepreneurship ecosystems.

### **Keywords**

Female entrepreneurship, gender, identity, identity work, wellbeing, women entrepreneurs

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of women entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup> is related to multiple positive outcomes for individuals, families, communities, and economies across the globe (Brush & Cooper, 2012). Therefore, exploring the experiences of women entrepreneurs and the factors that shape these experiences and individual and organizational outcomes have added theoretical and practical relevance. One important factor in understanding why, how, and with what individual and collective outcomes women engage in entrepreneurship across the globe is wellbeing (Stephan, 2018). For example, wellbeing influences entrepreneurs' motivation, decision-making, and persistence across the entrepreneurial journey (Stephan, 2018).

Wellbeing is broadly defined as a state “in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2014). Research differentiates between two general perspectives of wellbeing: hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). Hedonic wellbeing is conceptualized in terms of temporal happiness as attaining pleasure and satisfaction and avoiding pain. Eudaimonic wellbeing is broadly conceptualized in terms of sustainable actualization of own human potential in ways true to one self. Thus, eudaimonic wellbeing reflects self-realization, authenticity, vitality, and human flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993) in a sustainable and long-term fashion instead of as a temporary state. Indeed, reaching one's potential in terms of flourishing and authenticity can be a painful or unpleasant experience as it requires learning, resilience, and effort.

Identity is central to human, and thus to women entrepreneurs', wellbeing. Identity broadly refers to the collection of subjective attributes, meanings, experiences and knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> While “female entrepreneur” is often used in the academic literature, I adopt the label “woman entrepreneur” in line with a human centered approach.

individuals attach to themselves as they act as entrepreneurs or think of themselves as entrepreneurs across their daily experiences (adapted from Ramarajan, 2014). Thus, identity is a cognitive schema serving as a framework to understand oneself as a unique individual, a member of a social group, or an actor with a specific role.

Women entrepreneurs, as all individuals, have multiple identities. For example, women entrepreneurs have salient work-related identities that encompass meanings they develop about themselves based on the groups they participate in as well as the roles and activities of starting and leading new ventures in specific industries or sectors. However, they also have non-work identities, such as those related to religion and ethnicity, that are meaningful for their entrepreneurship experiences and interact with their work identities. Thus, women entrepreneurs' multiple identities shape their wellbeing in different ways. On the one hand, remaining true to ourselves as unique individuals with multiple identities enhances wellbeing (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Thoits, 1983). On the other hand, women entrepreneurs' multiple identities related to gender, motherhood, professions, and entrepreneurship create tensions, stress, and contradictions (e.g., Essers & Benschop, 2007). Such tensions and contradictions act as negative experiences and stressors hindering wellbeing because they force women entrepreneurs to act in ways inconsistent with their authentic selves.

While the identities of women entrepreneurs matter for wellbeing, the field lacks a consistent and nuanced understanding of the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and their wellbeing. To a large extent this is because research on the identity of women entrepreneurs and gender identity of entrepreneurs is dispersed. For instance, relevant research about different identity perspectives appears in journals in entrepreneurship (e.g., Marlow & McAdam, 2015), gender studies (e.g., Orser, Elliott, & Leck, 2011), and human relations (e.g.,

Bisel, Kramer, & Banas, 2017). While identity as inter-individual differences alone can hardly explain women entrepreneurs' wellbeing entirely, a systematic and nuanced exploration of the relationship between identity and wellbeing can provide an important perspective on the factors associated with wellbeing at a personal level. An identity perspective provides new insights into how women entrepreneurs sustain their wellbeing through identity work and recognizes the diversity of identities that might be salient to women entrepreneurs across the globe related to, for instance, ethnicity or religion.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize emerging research that provides insights into the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and their temporal hedonic and sustainable eudaimonic wellbeing. This review takes stock of research on the topic to promote an evidence-based discussion about what we know and what need to learn about the wellbeing of women entrepreneurs from an identity perspective to map fruitful areas for future research and to improve wellbeing among women entrepreneurs. This review offers a refined account of the multidimensional relationship between the multiple identities of women entrepreneurs and their wellbeing.

Next I present the review methodology, which identified 33 empirical sources broadly related to female entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing. I synthesize and integrate insights related to eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing to present what is currently known about the relationship between identity and wellbeing amongst women entrepreneurs. I conclude with a discussion of the findings in relation to future research and practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I conducted a literature search using Web of Science covering empirical studies published in journals up to August 2017 in English, including the following databases: Science Citation

Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED) – 1900 – present, Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) – 1956 – present, Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) – 1975 – present, and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) – 2015 – present.

For the purpose of this review, I adopted a broad definition of women entrepreneurs as individuals who self-identify as women; start, lead, and manage new organizations; and assume the multiple interpersonal, reputational, or financial risks involved in this process. To reflect this approach, I searched for four groups of keywords in the title, abstract and/or keywords of articles. These groups of keywords were related to *gender* (e.g., gender, female\*, feminin\*, masculin\*, wom\*n), *entrepreneurship* (e.g., entrepreneur\*, founder\*, self-employ\*, owner\*manager, “small business owner”), *identity* (e.g., identit\*, identif\*”, “self\*schema”, “self\*view\*”, “self\*concept\*”), and *wellbeing* (e.g., well\*being, authentic\*, tension\*, stress\*, contradict\*, happiness). These four groups of keywords were combined with an “and” Boolean logic. I complemented this search using Google Scholar as a robustness check and scanned the references of included articles to identify additional relevant sources not indexed by Web of Science. This search retrieved 945 abstracts, amongst which I identified a set of 33 empirical sources that the review is based on because they met the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) focused on women entrepreneurs or gender identity of entrepreneurs (recognizing gender and biological sex as different constructs and gender identity as fluid and non-binary);
- 2) focused on entrepreneurs’ identities; and
- 3) explored links between identity and wellbeing.

The included studies illustrate the experiences of women entrepreneurs across diverse national contexts (e.g. United Kingdom, Netherlands, United States of America, New Zealand, India, Turkey, France, Portugal, Spain) in relation to identity and wellbeing. All studies were

published after 1997 with the majority of studies (73%) published after 2010 demonstrating the increasing research interest in both identity and wellbeing. Majority of the studies were qualitative (82%) using mostly cross-sectional or narrative data.

The studies reviewed rarely and explicitly focused on the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing. However, applying hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing as an organizing framework revealed that the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing is multidimensional. I present these insights below clustered in three main themes:

- 1) entrepreneurship as an authentic expression of positive identity, thus contributing to women entrepreneurs' eudaimonic wellbeing;
- 2) women entrepreneurs' multiple conflicting and synergetic identities as influencing hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing;
- 3) identity work for hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing.

Before introducing these three themes on the multidimensional relationship between identity and wellbeing, I map out the multiple identities that emerged as salient to women entrepreneurs across the studies reviewed to embed the findings in female entrepreneurs' own self-views.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Women Entrepreneurs' Salient Identities***

The reviewed studies reiterate that women entrepreneurs have multiple work-related identities salient in their entrepreneurship experiences. Women entrepreneurs' work-related identities include identification with the role of entrepreneur, business owner, business creator, and self-employed person (e.g., Cohen & Musson, 2000; Cruz, Hardy, & Sanders, 2017;



Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Essers, Doorewaard, & Benschop, 2013; García & Welter, 2011; Gherardi, 2015; Hytti et al., 2017; Lewis, 2015; Loscocco, 1997; Marlow & Mcadam, 2015; Orser et al., 2011; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014; Warren, 2004). However, these identities broadly related to the role of the entrepreneur are not salient to all women entrepreneurs, are fluidly salient depending on context, and may be rejected by some women entrepreneurs depending on their context and conflict with other salient identities (e.g., Chasserio, Pailot, & Poroli, 2014; Nadin, 2011; Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015; Strier, 2010; Warren, 2004).

Other work-related identities salient to women entrepreneurs include businessperson (e.g., Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010; Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017), professional (e.g., Lewis, 2013; Lewis et al., 2016), leader (Lewis, 2015; Sims, Gong, & Hughes, 2017), boss, and colleague (Nadin, 2011). Finally, women entrepreneurs also hold salient identities related to their specific occupations and craft (Chasserio et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2015). Some of these identities are related to personally valued attributes, such as being professional in one's activities, while others are related to specific occupations where individuals are labeled as belonging to a professional class, such as accountants or consultants.

The reviewed studies confirm that women entrepreneurs also have multiple non-work identities that are salient in their entrepreneurship experiences. The most frequently explored non-work identities are broadly related to the intertwined internalized norms, expectations, behaviors, roles, and attributes associated with gender and family. The research on the topic examines the degree of identification of women entrepreneurs with certain personal attitudes, values, self-concepts, social behaviors, and career choices that are consistent with socially constructed gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (e.g., Dy, Marlow, & Martin, 2017; Eddleston & Powell, 2008; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers et al., 2010, 2013; Fernandes &

Mota-Ribeiro, 2017; García & Welter, 2011; Goktan & Gupta, 2015; Lewis, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Orser et al., 2011; Perez-Quintana, Hormiga, Martori, & Madariaga, 2017; Sims et al., 2017; Warren, 2004). For example, identification with masculinity is related to entrepreneurial intentions (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009) and identification with masculinity or femininity is associated with different indicators of entrepreneurial career success, such as status or contributing to society (Eddleston & Powell, 2008). While gender identity is frequently explored in relation to the experiences of women entrepreneurs, this identity is fluidly salient to women entrepreneurs depending on their context and interactions with others (García & Welter, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015). Indeed gender identity represents a more nuanced internalization of subjective attributes beyond the binary of masculinity and femininity whereby women entrepreneurs' identities may not clearly align with societal expectations of masculinity and femininity (Orser et al., 2011; Perez-Quintana et al., 2017).

Intertwined with women entrepreneurs' gender identities, are family-related (Gherardi, 2015) gendered identities. These include (responsible, good) wife or partner (e.g., Chasserio et al., 2014; Essers et al., 2010, 2013; Gherardi, 2015; Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015; Warren, 2004), (caring, good) mother (figure) (e.g., Bisel et al., 2017; Chasserio et al., 2014; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers et al., 2013; Hytti et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2016; Loscocco, 1997; Nadin, 2011; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014; Warren, 2004), daughter (in the context of family businesses) (e.g., Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017; Gherardi, 2015; Hytti et al., 2017), and provider (e.g., Loscocco, 1997). These gendered family-related identities are associated with stereotypes of female roles and femininity in the home domain that may be actively rejected or stigmatized by some women entrepreneurs (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Loscocco, 1997) depending on their context.

Additionally, women entrepreneurs have salient identities related to personal characteristics and membership in specific communities and social groups. These identities include internalization of subjective aspects related to ethnicity, race, citizenship, religion (e.g., Addo, 2017; Chasserio et al., 2014; Dy et al., 2017; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers et al., 2010, 2013; Strier, 2010) and age (Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014) as personal characteristics. They also include community identification (Greenberg & Mollick, 2016) and relational identities, such as parent and friend (Nadin, 2007), that are salient to women entrepreneurs.

While women entrepreneurs have multiple work and non-work identities that are salient during their entrepreneurship journeys, they also create hybrid identities. A hybrid identity is a cognitive scheme that represents a superordinate identity that combines elements from other identities. Thus, hybrid identities represent identities associated with women entrepreneurs' life domains (e.g. work and home) or with their different roles (e.g. entrepreneur and leader). The research suggests that the following hybrid identities are salient to some women entrepreneurs: independent working mother (Lewis et al., 2016; Strier, 2010), good working woman, immigrant woman entrepreneur (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015), businesswoman (Ekinsmyth, 2014), family business leader (Hytti et al., 2017), family-minded professional (Warren, 2004), and entrepreneurial scientist (Szelényi, Bresonis, & Mars, 2016).

### ***Authenticity and Wellbeing***

The studies reviewed suggest that entrepreneurship activities can enhance the eudaimonic wellbeing of women entrepreneurs by enabling authenticity and positive sense of self.

Authenticity refers to individuals' unobstructed operation of their true self in their daily activities; to conduct their work and life according to their deeply held values (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), thus it is directly related to eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Several

of the reviewed studies suggest that women entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurship to express their identities in authentic and meaningful ways. Women entrepreneurs start new ventures as a means of self-expression of their identities related to creativity, craft, and occupation (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Gherardi, 2015). They start new ventures to express their identities as community members who want to address justice and community needs, while also belonging to their communities (Addo, 2017). Women entrepreneurs also start new ventures to express their gendered identities as good and caring mothers and responsible wives and daughters (Bisel et al., 2017; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Gherardi, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016; Loscocco, 1997; Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015; Strier, 2010). For example, women start new ventures to challenge established norms and practices that are damaging to their children (Bisel et al., 2017), to spend more time with their children (Loscocco, 1997), or to support and follow their life partners (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015). Regardless of which identities are salient and expressed through entrepreneurship activities, entrepreneurship offers one pathway for women entrepreneurs' authenticity, self-expression, and flourishing, thus enhancing eudaimonic wellbeing.

The extant literature suggests that entrepreneurship activities enable women entrepreneurs' eudaimonic wellbeing by helping them to develop, sustain, and express positive and valued identities that counter stigmatized, marginalized, devalued, and undesired identities and labels related to professions, age, and gender. Some of the reviewed studies demonstrate that certain professions, such as being a dancer, age, and gender position women as vulnerable, objectified, delegitimized, and stigmatized (Cruz et al., 2017; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Strier, 2010; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014). In some cases, they are denied positive work identities in traditional labor markets or ascribed undesired gender labels (e.g. "I am not just a housewife!", Duberley & Carrigan, 2013). Entrepreneurship activities and a developing entrepreneur identity

thus enable women entrepreneurs to see themselves as professionals, as craftspeople, as proactive and self-reliant agents with autonomy and self-control as opposed to powerless, victimized, and stigmatized objects devalued by labor markets (Cruz et al., 2017; Strier, 2010; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014).

Entrepreneurship activities also serve as a source of meaning and to provide a platform for flourishing after retirement (Loscocco, 1997). They enable women entrepreneurs to cope with the loneliness and isolation of unemployed or retired life (Strier, 2010). Thus, entrepreneurship activities and identities enable women entrepreneurs to maintain their eudaimonic wellbeing through self-realization and vitality despite stigma and imposed undesired labels across life stages and particularly in the later stages of life.

While entrepreneurship activities can enhance women entrepreneurs' eudaimonic wellbeing through authentic expression of positive identities, the research also suggests some negative aspects of a salient entrepreneur identity for health and wellbeing. A salient entrepreneur identity that is associated with a strong identification with the venture may hinder appropriate coping mechanisms and adequate attention to health during instances of ill-health or medical conditions (e.g., pregnancy and birth). In such situations, women entrepreneurs may face the difficult decision to suspend venture activities for a period of time, which is stressful and hinders hedonic wellbeing, or to continue working which can have a tangible negative impact on their health (Gherardi, 2015) in relation to burnout and lack of appropriate medical attention.

### *Conflicting and Synergetic Identities*

Women entrepreneurs' multiple identities can be conflicting or synergetic and the relationships between multiple identities influence both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing.

Women entrepreneurs experience identity conflicts and tensions that hinder their eudaimonic wellbeing. Women entrepreneurs have multiple identities that represent internalized norms, expectations, and behaviors that suggest different actions and motivation across roles and domains. Expressing one identity may contradict expression of another. Thus, women entrepreneurs' multiple identities may be conflicting as they suggest incompatible actions and behaviors. For example, the entrepreneur identity is often described in masculine, youthful, and agentic terms that are in opposition with the actions guided by women entrepreneurs' other identities related to gender, family, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and age (e.g., Chasserio et al., 2014; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Essers et al., 2010; 2013; Orser et al., 2011; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014; Warren, 2004). Entrepreneurship ecosystems, including incubators, accelerators, and digital spaces, are also characterized by masculine norms instead of being gender neutral (Dy et al., 2017; Marlow & Mcadam, 2015). Thus, entrepreneurship ecosystems also provide identity-sharpening feedback to women entrepreneurs that makes some identities more salient than others or challenges women entrepreneurs' identities and legitimacy in entrepreneurship spaces, which affects their access to resources (Greenberg & Mollick, 2016).

In cases of incongruence between multiple identities or between salient identities and gendered entrepreneurship ecosystems, women entrepreneurs experience tensions, dissonance, and strain because they strive to express one identity and meet its identity-based expectations, which limits their opportunities to express a conflicting identity and meet its identity-based expectations. As women entrepreneurs' work identities are validated by others at work and at home (e.g., life partners), they may also face interpersonal conflict at home that is stressful (Ekinsmyth, 2014; Strier, 2010) and potentially resulting in closing of the venture or breakdown of the relationship (Gherardi, 2015). Such tensions and contradictions are stressors that are

unpleasant and painful experiences that influence negative affect and lower life satisfaction. Thus, conflicting identities and identity tensions hinder women entrepreneurs' hedonic wellbeing.

Women entrepreneurs' conflicting identities can also hinder their eudaimonic wellbeing. Their multiple work identities may not be recognized, thus introducing loneliness and exclusion into the experiences of women entrepreneurs (Hytti et al., 2017), challenging their legitimacy as entrepreneurs (Marlow & McAdam, 2015), and limiting access to resources (Greenberg & Mollick, 2016). These experiences are not only stressful and unpleasant, but they also limit women entrepreneurs' authenticity (Sims et al., 2017), self-realization, and flourishing as elements of eudaimonic wellbeing. These experiences force women entrepreneurs to act in ways inconsistent with their salient identities and even to conceal their ethnic, gender, or entrepreneur identities to gain entrepreneurial legitimacy, social credibility, access to resources and markets, and to maintain interpersonal relationships with limited conflict (Dy et al., 2017; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Szelényi et al., 2016). In such circumstances women entrepreneurs are forced to act in inauthentic ways to flourish and achieve personally valued goals for self-realization. Beyond hindering eudaimonic wellbeing through lack of authenticity, these experiences may also result in women entrepreneurs taking on additional projects without support leading to overwork and burnout (Szelényi et al., 2016).

While women entrepreneurs' multiple identities can be in conflict with one another, multiple identities may also create synergies, thus enhancing eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing. Women entrepreneurs' multiple identities are synergetic when the expression of one or more identities enhances and supports the expression of another identity and meeting its identity-based expectations. Identities are synergetic because they are congruent, complementary, and

overlapping as they share internalized meanings. Thus, expressing these identities together is less challenging than expressing conflicting identities. For example, an entrepreneur identity can support, accommodate, and enable the expression of non-entrepreneur identities, such as expressing professional identities while raising young children (e.g., Chasserio et al., 2014; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Loscocco, 1997; Strier, 2010). Non-entrepreneur identities, such as identities related to religion, ethnicity, gender, and family, can also support, accommodate, and enable the expression of entrepreneur identity. Such identities can reveal opportunities for new offerings or provide access to social capital essential for enacting an entrepreneur identity (e.g., Essers & Benschop, 2007). These synergies between multiple identities enable women entrepreneurs to act in authentic ways across multiple domains of their lives (e.g. home and work), thus enhancing their eudaimonic wellbeing. These synergies also create opportunities for flourishing and self-realization as elements of eudaimonic wellbeing. As synergetic identities enable women entrepreneurs to enact multiple identities at the same time with lower strain, dissonance, and tensions, they can also enhance hedonic wellbeing.

### *Identity Work and Wellbeing*

The reviewed studies suggest that the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and their wellbeing is not static. Indeed, women entrepreneurs are creative and proactive agents who actively shape this relationship through identity work that reduces identity tensions and contradictions, thus enhancing their hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Identity work is defined as women entrepreneurs' reflexive efforts to create coherent sense of self that is accepted as legitimate within the various environments they encounter in response to multiple (and potentially conflicting) scripts, roles, and subjects in both work and non-work domains (Kuhn, 2006). Women entrepreneurs struggle to authentically express their identities related to



ethnicity, gender, and age because these identities are less visible, mainstream, and even stigmatized in entrepreneurship ecosystems as well as carry different internalized norms, scripts, and meanings in comparison to the entrepreneur or business owner identities (Essers et al., 2010; 2013; García & Welter, 2011; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014; Warren, 2004). This is why women entrepreneurs enact various strategies to maintain, strengthen or revise identities in relation to other identities and in relation to claims, demands, and power structures imposed on them by others, such as family members, peers, and stakeholders.

The extant research suggests that identity work exists on a continuum and women entrepreneurs enact multiple strategies along the continuum with different audiences. These strategies build on creative management of meanings, processes, and boundaries to reproduce, manage, and transform identities and social norms (Ekinsmyth, 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Marlow & McAdam, 2015). At one end of the identity work continuum are strategies of internalization of conventional norms and social expectations related to specific identities, such as gender, family, age, ethnicity (also labelled compliance). At the other end of the identity work continuum are strategies of rejecting, challenging, and transforming social norms associated with certain roles or communities through opposition (e.g., Chessario et al., 2014; Essers et al., 2010; García & Welter, 2011). However, beyond full internalization or transformation of norms associated with specific identities, women entrepreneurs can conform to or challenge norms to a degree. For example, they can engage in selective identification with or resistance of norms to suit their situation, distancing from specific norms and communities, and selective borrowing and projection of norms even when they are not internalized (e.g., Essers et al., 2010; Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017; Lewis, 2013; Warren, 2004). They can segregate identities across space, time, and audiences and marginalize non-entrepreneur identities in the entrepreneurship context,

thus continuously sliding between identities and adapting to micro-contexts (also labelled separation or compartmentalization) (e.g., Essers et al., 2010; Nadin, 2007). Finally, to challenge social norms, women entrepreneurs integrate existing identities to incorporate meanings and underpinning cultural frameworks in new ways, thus creating hybrid identities (Essers et al., 2010; Warren, 2004) and engaging in social creativity to expand the meaning of roles and norms (e.g., Essers & Benschop, 2007; Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017).

Identity work enables women entrepreneurs to enhance their hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. As women entrepreneurs engage in identity work to cope with conflicting identities, the various identity work strategies enable them to lessen tensions, dissonance, and strain, thus enhancing hedonic wellbeing. Identity work also enables women entrepreneurs to express their salient identities in meaningful ways across domains, thus enhancing authenticity. Indeed, identity tensions, contradictions, and conflicts are not just threats to hedonic wellbeing to be addressed, but they also represent opportunities for growth and transformation of the self through identity work. Thus, identity work enhances eudaimonic wellbeing by facilitating authenticity, growth, and self-realization.

## **DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the multidimensional relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing. It maps out the multiple identities that are salient to women entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial journeys and discusses how they enhance or limit hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. In doing so, this chapter has two main implications for research on female entrepreneurship and wellbeing.

## *Theoretical Implications*

This chapter presents a novel global perspective on the multiple, intersecting, conflicting, and synergetic identities that impact the wellbeing of women entrepreneurs. While previous research has explored how women entrepreneurs enhance the wellbeing of others (Brush & Cooper, 2012) or the gender differences in entrepreneurs' wellbeing (Stephan, 2018), this chapter offers identity as a lens that recognizes the subjective experiences of women entrepreneurs influencing their wellbeing beyond comparisons of national factors. It maps out the multiple work-related and non-work identities salient to women entrepreneurs, including less binary gender identities and identities related to craft, profession, and community. It considers how these multiple identities initiate and shape the entrepreneurial journeys of women to enable and constrain authenticity, self-realization, and transformation, while also introducing new stressors to women's lives. An identity perspective on women entrepreneurs' wellbeing highlights the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs' experiences across the globe based on their self-views. However, it also builds a platform for comparative research on women entrepreneurs' wellbeing internationally based on shared common identities related to religion, ethnicity, profession, and craft and the conflicting and synergetic relationships between these identities in specific cultural contexts.

This chapter also offers a nuanced view of women entrepreneurs' wellbeing and the multiple pathways through which identity influences wellbeing. Surprisingly, the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identity and their wellbeing is not explicitly addressed in the extant research. Building on the emerging research on women entrepreneurs' identities (e.g. Dy et al., 2017; Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017; Sims et al., 2017) and the extant research on wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993), the chapter differentiates between temporary

hedonic and sustainable eudaimonic wellbeing and uses these two perspectives as an organizing framework to explicate the multidimensional relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing. This differentiation suggests that women entrepreneurs' identities influence wellbeing in three distinct ways. First, identities can influence the pleasure, pain, and life satisfaction that women entrepreneurs experience (i.e. hedonic wellbeing). Second, identities can influence how women entrepreneurs approach and achieve authenticity, self-realization, and personal transformation across domains (i.e. eudaimonic wellbeing). Third, the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and wellbeing is not static and women entrepreneurs are active agents in shaping their hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing through identity work.

### *Directions for Future Research*

The synthesis of the literature on women entrepreneurs' identities in relation to wellbeing offers at least two main avenues for future research.

First, future research can rigorously and explicitly capture the multidimensional relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. While this relationship is suggested by the reviewed studies, it has not been tested empirically. Recognizing that women entrepreneurs engage in identity work (e.g., Essers et al., 2013; García & Welter, 2011) and that their identities are fluid and contextually salient (Nordqvist & Aygören, 2015; Orser et al., 2011), future research can employ longitudinal designs to explore how changes in identities influence hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Such identity changes and identity work are influenced by entrepreneurship ecosystems and women entrepreneurs' personal networks, including family members (e.g. Ekinsmyth, 2014; Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Szelényi et al., 2016; Warren, 2004), who provide identity sharpening feedback. Thus, longitudinal studies can include a more socially and culturally contextualized approach to

examining the relationship between women entrepreneurs' identities and different types of wellbeing to deepen comparative insights.

Second, future research can embrace a greater diversity of identities studied and methodologies to capture the identities salient to women entrepreneurs and examine their relationships with other phenomena. The majority of the extant research uses qualitative methodologies to explore how women entrepreneurs' cope with tensions between gender and entrepreneur roles (e.g., Fernandes & Mota-Ribeiro, 2017; Warren, 2004), often ascribing identities based on demographic characteristics instead of capturing women entrepreneurs' self-views. However, women entrepreneurs have many salient identities, beyond those of gender and entrepreneur, such as those related leadership, specific occupations, and crafts (Chasserio et al., 2014; Gherardi, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Strier, 2010), that are often overlooked, yet important for women entrepreneurs' experiences and wellbeing. Additionally, a more nuanced perspective on gender identity specifies at least four gender identities, including masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated gender identities, (Goktan & Gupta, 2015; Perez-Quintana et al., 2017), beyond the traditional binary of masculinity and femininity that dominates the current research. This diversity of gender identities is in line with emerging cultural trends that demonstrate increasing popularity of and social acceptance for diverse non-binary genders. Thus, given that identity is conceptualized as women entrepreneurs' self-views, it is important for these multiple self-views to be captured and explicitly studied in relation to wellbeing as well as to other phenomena, such as performance, through qualitative and quantitative cross-sectional and longitudinal designs.

## *Conclusions*

The findings of this review offer women entrepreneurs a reflective tool. The chapter demonstrates that identity-related experiences, such as authenticity and identity conflict, are an important factor that shapes women entrepreneurs' wellbeing. This synthesis of existing empirical research offers a framework for women entrepreneurs to consider how to remain authentic and what authenticity means to them across domains, while also limiting strain, stress, and burnout as multidimensional human beings. The chapter recognizes the importance of external influences, such as established discourses, norms, power structures, and expectations, that provide identity-sharpening feedback. However, it also portrays women entrepreneurs as active and creative agents who can navigate these norms through various strategies to maintain, strengthen, enact or revise identities in relation to other identities and in relation to claims, demands, and power relations imposed on them by others, such as family members, peers, and stakeholders. The chapter presents these strategies on a continuum and encourages women entrepreneurs to find and adapt the strategies that work for them based on their context and the individuals they engage with.

The findings of this review also highlight the need for individuals around women entrepreneurs, such as those in their social networks or actors in entrepreneurship ecosystems, to create more inclusive environments that consider women entrepreneurs as multidimensional human beings and legitimate entrepreneurial actors. Those around women entrepreneurs matter for the wellbeing of women entrepreneurs as they provide identity-sharpening feedback through interactions, lack of interactions, expectations, and enactment of norms that can either strengthen women entrepreneurs' self-views or create stress, tensions, and contradictions related to their identities. Such identity-sharpening feedback replicates existing power structures, devalues

certain identities, and limits women entrepreneurs' authentic expression of their salient identities. However, women entrepreneurs' non-entrepreneur and non-work identities are valuable sources of entrepreneurial opportunities that can be socially and economically beneficial. Additionally, the chapter suggests that women may find authenticity, meaning, and a positive sense of self through entrepreneurship activities after retirement or when they are stigmatized socially or devalued in traditional labor markets. Thus, creating inclusive environments for women entrepreneurs is not only beneficial for societies and economies, but also an ethical imperative toward social inclusion and better ageing.

Creating inclusive environments that enable women entrepreneurs to fully participate in entrepreneurship ecosystems and in daily life as multidimensional human beings is not just an individual action. Instead, it requires collective efforts to change existing power structures and social norms. Individuals around women entrepreneurs can take action by creating and enacting practices and norms that recognize and value women entrepreneurs' multiple identities. They can provide resources and support that enable women entrepreneurs to express and navigate their multiple identities with different goals and priorities. Finally, they can also work to change and limit practices, norms, discourses, and expectations that limit women entrepreneurs' expressions of their multiple identities due to interpersonal, reputational, and financial risks to enact currently marginalized, devalued, and invisible identities in authentic ways.

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