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Understanding the "Woman Entrepreneur" Identity Construction in Different Socio-cultural Contexts

ABSTRACT

The concept of identity has been widely researched within the social sciences with increasing attention being given to the understanding of entrepreneurial identities. However, while existing studies have analyzed the concept from both a normative and interpretative perspective, many have viewed identity itself as an unproblematic concept, and few studies have examined the importance of the socio-cultural context for the identity construction process. Using an inductive multiple case study approach, and drawing from identity and identity work theories, we analyze the construction of the "woman entrepreneur" identity in two different socio-cultural contexts, namely Sweden and Tanzania. Our study contributes to the entrepreneurial identity literature by identifying five typologies of women entrepreneurial identities, namely: *born, know how, missionary, transition* and *solution seeker* entrepreneurs. Second, we find that women construct their entrepreneurial identities as either central or salient to their self-identity, which influences their perceptions of entrepreneurship and subsequent behavior. Third, while the socio-cultural context influences their identity construction, we also find that the level of influence by contextual factors varies depending on the typology of women entrepreneurs. Implications for policy and practice as well as suggestions for future research are highlighted.

Keywords:
Entrepreneurial identity, Identity work, Gender, Socio-cultural context

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship provides a venue for individuals to (re)define their identities through their activities and vice versa. The concept of identity has been widely researched within the social sciences with increasing attention being given to the understanding of entrepreneurial identities (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Research has shown that the entrepreneurial process plays a part in shaping entrepreneurial identities (Donnellon, Ollila & Middleton, 2014; Murnieks, Mosakowski & Cardon, 2014), while at the same time, entrepreneurial identities have an impact on subsequent entrepreneurial behavior (Alsos, Clausen, Hytti & Solvoll, 2016; Fauchart & Grueber, 2011). While existing studies have analyzed the concept from both a normative and interpretative perspective, many of them have viewed identity itself as an unproblematic concept (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Studies examining the importance of the socio-cultural context for the identity construction process (Ashe & Treanor, 2011) are equally limited.

Using an inductive multiple case study approach, this study aims to contribute to this limited knowledge by answering the following research question: *how is the "woman entrepreneur" identity construction influenced by the socio-cultural context*? Drawing from identity and identity work theories, we analyze the construction of the "woman entrepreneur" identity in two different socio-cultural contexts, namely Sweden and Tanzania. Contrasting two different contexts allows us to make salient the contextual factors (De Vita, Mari & Poggessi, 2014; Tillmar, 2006) that influence women's entrepreneurial perceptions (Delmar & Holmquist, 2004; Santos, Roomi & Linan, 2016) and the identity construction process (Garcia & Welter, 2011). Our focus is on understanding women's identity formation process as they shape and maintain

their self-identity within their social-identity as entrepreneurs in contexts with different gender role ideologies.

Identity formation can be viewed as a combination of self-determination (agency) and determination (structure) imposed by others (Garcia & Welter, 2011; Watson, 2009), with the entrepreneur identity reflecting societal expectations of behaviors attached to entrepreneurs as a socially recognized category of actors (Brush & Gale, 2015; Obrecht, 2011). However, each social identity has its own norms that are at times incompatible or in conflict with other identities (Chasserio, Pailot & Poroli, 2014), which we propose is the case of the "woman entrepreneur" identity.

Traditionally social norms and stereotypes have typically associated the "woman" identity with feminine traits such as *nurturing, caring,* and *dependent* (Carter, Marlow & Bennett, 2012), while the gendered entrepreneurship field and phenomenon has resulted in the "entrepreneur" identity being constructed in line with masculine traits such as *risk-taker, aggressive, competitive* (Ahl, 2006). Women entrepreneurs therefore have to simultaneously manage these conflicting identities as they are expected to conform to the masculine social norms in their roles as entrepreneurs and feminine social norms in their roles as mothers, spouses, daughters etc. (Chasserio et al. 2014; Garcia & Welter, 2011).

A society's gender role ideology determines the level of normative support and legitimacy women entrepreneurs receive (Baughn, Chua & Neupert, 2006). Sweden is an individualistic society with a long history of gender equality (Statistics Sweden, 2012). However, while gender equality is highly valued on an ideological level, structural hindrances still exist (Bjursell &

Mellin, 2011). On the other hand, Tanzania is mainly a collectivistic society, and while progress has been made to ensure gender equality, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes continue to subordinate women's position in society (Mori, 2014; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005). The selected contexts allow for a richer and more contextualized analysis of the identity construction process and a better understanding of the social cues that influence one's sense of belonging (Donnellon et al., 2014).

The construction of the "woman entrepreneur" identity as an anomaly weakens women's social legitimacy (Carter, Marlow & Henry, 2009) and creates barriers for female entrepreneurs (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggi, 2004; Garcia & Welter, 2011). Moreover, as perceptions and not objective facts are the main drivers for potential entrepreneurs (Radu & Redien-Collot, 2008, Arenius & Minniti, 2005), the portrayal of the traditionally idealized entrepreneur as a heroic risk taker, interested solely in making profits from new innovations, could create conflicts with potential entrepreneur's self-identity or social identities (Brush & Gale, 2015) and impede their engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Our study contributes to the entrepreneurial identity literature by building on the limited research focused on the process of identity formation and the concept of identity work (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). The in-depth interview method adopted in the study also helps us to understand the process from the women's viewpoint and to emphasize their "voice" (Garcia & Welter, 2011). First of all, we identify five typologies of women entrepreneurial identities, namely: *born, know how, missionary, transition* and *solution seeker* entrepreneurs. Second, we find that women construct their entrepreneurial identities as either central or salient to their self-identity, which influences their perceptions of entrepreneurship and subsequent behavior. Third, we find that

while the socio-cultural context influences their identity construction, the level of influence varies depending on the typology of women entrepreneurs.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss the theoretical background and context of the study. We then describe the methodology before examining the findings that emerged from the interviews with 56 women entrepreneurs in Sweden and Tanzania. In the last section, we have the discussion, implications and conclusions of the study. Study limitations and potential areas for future research are also highlighted

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Identity theories

The development of identity theories is based on two main schools of thought. The role identity theory by Stryker (1980) with roots in sociology focuses on the categorization of self as the occupant of a role, which incorporates the meanings and societal expectations on related behavior (Brush & Gale, 2015; Stets & Burke, 2000). On the other hand, the social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner (1979) with roots in psychology focuses on the process of identifying with a social group/category and involves the accentuating of perceived similarities between self and the group members (in-group), while at the same time differentiating with non-group members (out-group) (Powell & Baker, 2014; Stets & Burke, 2000).

The process of identifying as a member of a social group/categories neither requires nor excludes interactions with others, while identification with a role is shaped by interactions with others (Powell & Baker, 2014). However, while each theory has different bases of identity i.e. categories or roles, these two theories are complementary in other aspects, such as the recognition

that the structured society impacts how individuals view themselves (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identities can be viewed as a combination of self-determination (agency) and determination imposed by others (structure) (Garcia & Welter, 2011). In addition, people simultaneously occupy roles while belonging to social categories, such as the identity of a woman entrepreneur or a male student, even though the salience of a particular identity depends on the given context (Brush & Gale, 2015). Stets and Burke (2000) therefore argue that merging the two theories will allow for a more general theory of the self. As we view the "woman entrepreneur" identity as being composed of both a perceived self-identity (who we characterize ourselves to be) and an ascribed social-identity (who others characterize us to be) (Watson, 2009), we combine the two theories in our analysis.

Identity has an important role to play in influencing different aspects of our lives related to meaning, motivation, commitment and group relations (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Entrepreneurial activities are infused with meaning as a result of the expression of an individual's identity (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Studies show that strong identification with the motherhood role acts as an enabler of women entrepreneurship and influences the venture identity as well (Ekinsmyth, 2014; Leung, 2011). Founder identity also influences the decision-making process and subsequent entrepreneurial behavior (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart & Grueber, 2011). At the same time, engaging in the entrepreneurial process can influence one's entrepreneurial identity as they internalize the external meanings of what it means to be an "entrepreneur" (Donnellon et al., 2014; Murnieks et al., 2014).

However, identity is a complex construct, as people have multiple identities that reflect social expectations on behavior (Obrecht, 2011). The multi-dimensionality of entrepreneurial identities

and the dynamic process of identity construction can be seen in the way women entrepreneurs' activities are intertwined with their personal and social life resulting in multiple social identities that are continuously and simultaneous interacting (Chasserio et al., 2014). Identities should therefore not be viewed as uni-dimensional, stable or categorizable, but rather as multi-layered and relational as individuals attach notions of self in an attempt to make sense of their socio-economic and cultural contexts (Kovalainen & Österberg-Högstedt, 2013; Orser, Elliott & Leck, 2011).

More recently, the focus has shifted from analyzing identities per se, to understanding the process through which identities are formed and shaped i.e. identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2009) – a concept that we discuss in the following section.

Identity work

The concept of identity work refers to people being involved in forming, maintaining, strengthening, or revising constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Watson (2008) further argues that whenever identity work is done there is an element of simultaneously working on both the external (social-identity) and internal (self-identity) aspects of personal identity.

The self-identity is defined as the individu*al's own notion of who and what they are* and social-identities as cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual may be (Watson, 2008, emphasis in original text). Identity work is conceptualized as follows:

> Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notation of personal self-identity and struggle to

> come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives (Watson, 2008:129).

The entrepreneurial identity is constructed socially, culturally and relationally through multiple discourses (Berglund, Gaddefors & Lindgren, 2016; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Gherardi, 2015; Hamilton, 2006) and is full of ambiguities (Bjursell & Melin, 2011). The construction of entrepreneurship as a manly pursuit (Ahl, 2007; Smith, 2010) and the portrayal of women entrepreneurship as "the other" (Nilsson, 1997) add to the complexities that arise for women developing an entrepreneurial identity (Bjursell & Mellin, 2011). Women entrepreneurs are expected to simultaneously conform to the masculine social norms associated with the entrepreneur role, and the feminine social norms related to womanhood (Chasserio et al. 2014; Garcia & Welter, 2011).

The gendering of entrepreneurship has resulted in women employing different strategies to resolve these potential conflicts and tensions (Essers, Benschop & Dooreward, 2010). In the care sector for example, studies show that women constantly slide between different identities and embrace multiple feminine selves in order to avoid negative stereotypes associated with business owners (Nadin, 2007). In the Netherlands, Turkish immigrant women embrace the dominant discourses of "othering" in order to differentiate themselves both from the Western context and their Turkish counterparts in their search for legitimacy (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014).

However, masculine and feminine entrepreneurial identities are more complex than the universalistic explanation of patriarchy may suggest (Hamilton, 2006). Studies find that the level of conflict experienced by women in the construction of their entrepreneurial identities is not uniform, but could be influenced by their social status (Garcia & Welter, 2011), the role conflicts

arising from life transitions (Lewis, Ho, Harris & Morrison, 2016), their geographical locations (Pettersson & Heidt, 2014) or socio-cultural contexts (Leung, 2011).

Despite the complexity of the identity construction process, in general individuals try to develop coherent identities in their attempt to understand who they are (Watson, 2008) through their behavior or discourses (Anderson & Warren, 2011; Watson, 2009). In some cases, in order to build their entrepreneurial identities, women have been shown to draw on both feminine and masculine discourses (Lewis, 2013). In addition, a case study carried out on a female entrepreneur in New Zealand found that she as involved in relatively less identity work as she perceived her entrepreneur and leader identities as being in synergy and inseparable (Lewis, 2015).

Deconstructing identities into collective (social-identity) and personal (self) identities would allow for a better understanding of the identity construction process (Anderson & Warren, 2011). The more important one views their social-identity for their self-identity the greater the influence the social-identity will have on their subsequent behavior. Hoang and Gimeno (2010) found that individuals holding the founder identity as central to their self-identity (i.e. identity centrality) were more likely to exit their work-roles and become founders. Similarly, those holding their entrepreneurial identity as important to themselves experienced greater levels of passion, which affected their self-efficacy and behavior (Murnieks et al., 2014). Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) also found that whether entrepreneurial identities were viewed as central or salient also differed amongst groups of entrepreneurs depending on their contexts.

Given the impact that identity centrality has on one's behavior, our study focuses on understanding how women entrepreneurs construct their identities by analyzing the perceived centrality of their entrepreneurial social-identity for their self-identity. We also examine how their construction process is influenced by their socio-cultural context.

Context for women entrepreneurship in Sweden and Tanzania

The context within which an entrepreneur operates is important as it impacts entrepreneurial outcomes (Welter, 2012). Moreover, as informal institutions are implicit in nature, analyzing two different socio-cultural contexts allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual factors (De Vita et al., 2014; Tillmar, 2006) that influence women's entrepreneurial perceptions (Delmar & Holmquist, 2004; Santos et al., 2010) and their identity work. The level of normative support and legitimacy women entrepreneurs receive will also be determined by a society's gender role ideologies (Baughn et al., 2006).

Sweden is an individualistic society with a long history of gender equality policies since 1845 (Statistics Sweden, 2012). Sweden is ranked 4 out of 144 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index that looks at the level of equal access that men and women have to health, education, economic participation, earning potential and political decision-making (World Economic Forum, 2016). However, while gender equality is highly valued by society, there are still structural hindrances that result in gender segregation in the labor market (Bjursell & Mellin, 2011).

The promotion of entrepreneurship has been a constant feature of the European Union employment policy as it is considered to drive innovation, competitiveness, and growth (Canizare & Garcia, 2010). Women entrepreneurship became a top priority in Sweden and the European

Union from the beginning of the 1990s (Tillväxtverket, 2009). The Swedish government has implemented several support programmes targeted at promoting women entrepreneurship since 1993, through the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (NUTEK) (GHK Technopolis, 2008). These have included programmes on capacity building, network development, mentorship, training of business service providers, increasing visibility of female role models, and setting up a women's ambassador network (GHK Technopolis, 2008; Tillväxtverket, 2009).

Sweden is internationally ranked as an innovative leader with society placing a high cultural value on innovation (Swedish Institute, 2011). However, the Swedish country profile report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicates that while the number of startups has doubled since 2010, low ambitions regarding internationalization, growth, and innovation are still characteristic of the Swedish mindset. Perceptions of opportunities are high (64%), but those of capabilities and entrepreneurial intentions are lower at 39% and 10% respectively (GEM, 2013). Even though the younger generation ages 18 to 21 are more positive about becoming entrepreneurs (77%) (Tillväxtverket, 2009).

On the other hand, Tanzania is a collectivistic society, which only began focusing on gender mainstreaming of government policies in 2000 (Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005). Tanzania is currently ranked 53 out of 144 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2016). The Tanzanian government has passed various economic reforms since the mid-1980s when it made a major shift from a government-led to a private sector-led economy (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2013). In order to deal with the high unemployment rates

and the limited capacity of the formal sector to absorb the growing labor force, the government turned to the micro and small enterprise sectors (Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005).

Given women's key role in the micro, small and medium enterprises sector (Mori, 2014; Nkirina, 2010), various initiatives were focused on fostering their entrepreneurial activities. These included the adoption of the *Women and Gender Development Policy* in 2000 to ensure gender mainstreaming in all government programmes, incorporating gender equality and empowerment in the *National Development Vision 2025,* and making amendments to the Constitution in support of women's economic and social well-being (Ellis, Blackden, Cutura, MacCulloch & Seebens, 2007). While some progress has been made to close the gender gap in Tanzania, the patriarchal attitudes and gendered institutional structures continue to subordinate women's position in society and to create barriers to their participation in entrepreneurial activities (Mori, 2014; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005).

With regards to the entrepreneurship culture, we find that similar to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the societal outlook towards entrepreneurship is changing (Omidyar, 2013). A survey of African entrepreneurs carried out by Omidyar in 2013 indicated that: more people view entrepreneurship as a desirable career choice (64% of Tanzanian respondents), and that starting a business has a higher level of respect than being a manager in the corporate world (55% of Tanzanians). In addition, there is increased media visibility of entrepreneurs, and failure is becoming more acceptable (63% in Tanzania) (Omidyar, 2013). However, a stereotypical view of success still exists, with business people being celebrated for their wealthy lifestyles rather than their acumen and entrepreneurial flair, leading to "copycat" entrepreneurs and inhibiting innovation (Omidyar, 2013).

While economic, social and cultural dissimilarities exist between the two countries, both contexts present various opportunities for entrepreneurial growth. The employment sectors in both countries are segregated with regards to gender, and this seems to have spilled over to the entrepreneurial scene, resulting in male and female-dominated sectors. At the same time, we find that the governments in both contexts have actively participated in the promotion of women entrepreneurship as part of the economic agenda. This political discourse will have an effect on society's perception of the women entrepreneurship phenomenon and the level of social legitimacy and normative support that women entrepreneurs receive in both contexts.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A qualitative multiple case study approach was chosen as an exploratory study was necessary to gain an understanding of how contextual factors influence the identity formation process, given the limited existing research in the area. The in-depth interview method also allowed us to understand the identity construction process from the women's point of view and to emphasize their "voice" (Garcia & Welter, 2011). The approach also allowed for a more fine-grained analysis (Zahra & Wright, 2011) of the identity construction process in two different socio-cultural contexts with different gender role ideologies.

Purposeful sampling and the snowballing technique were used to identify female entrepreneurs who were at different stages of the entrepreneurial process and were working in various business sectors. Participants were located in the capital cities of Sweden and Tanzania (i.e. Stockholm and Dar-es-Salaam), and data was collected through semi-structured interviews held by the first

author during the period January 2015 to July 2016. The interviews were conducted in English (Sweden) and English or Kiswahili (Tanzania).

A total of 56 women entrepreneurs were interviewed (29 in Sweden and 27 in Tanzania). The entrepreneurs in Sweden were in the age range of 22 to 47 years old, and were a mix of established (5) new or nascent (13) and potential (11) entrepreneurs. There were involved in various sectors such as retail, food processing, business consultancy, education, publishing and beauty products. The entrepreneurs in Tanzania were in the age range of 24 to 67 years old and comprised established (21) and new or nascent (6) entrepreneurs. They were also involved in different sectors such as retail, food processing, agribusiness, textile, mining, tourism and construction. A detailed profile of the women entrepreneurs is presented in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Data analysis

To facilitate the data analysis, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the four cases (D001; D003; D004 and D007) in Tanzania where this was not feasible, two people took detailed notes and compared notes shortly after. In addition, quotes used in the study are solely based on the audio-recorded interviews. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity in order to encourage sincerity in their responses. The data analysis was carried out using the MaxQDA coding software, and the coding process included the development of a codebook and analytic memos used to capture the coding process (De Cuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). In the first stage of analysis, attribute coding was carried out to capture the demographic details of interviewees and their firms such as age, marital status, level of education, business sector etc. During the second stage of analysis

each interview was coded into general topics and themes that were guided by the semi-structured interview guides. In the third stage, in-vivo coding was carried out in order to prioritize the participant's voice (Saldana, 2013). In the fourth stage, second cycle coding was carried out that involved the organization of codes into broader categories and themes.

Within case analysis was carried out before focusing on cross-case analysis. This included a comparison of the influence of contextual factors on the identity construction process in the two socio-cultural contexts of Sweden and Tanzania. The iterative coding process utilized in analyzing the data is similar to the process used by Garcia and Welter (2011) and is presented in Figure 1 below. The progressive coding cycles used helped to highlight salient features in the data, and to generate themes and concepts that are useful for building theory (Miles et al. 2013; Saldana, 2013).

Insert Figure 1 about here

FINDINGS

Identity construction and entrepreneurial identity hierarchy

In this study we analyze how women construct an understanding of their social-identity as entrepreneurs based on their perceptions. Similar to the study by Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) we also focus on understanding whether the entrepreneurial social-identity is perceived as central or salient for their self-identity. Our analysis enabled us to identity five typologies of women entrepreneurs based on their construction of their entrepreneurial identities. These groups are not mutually exclusive and in many cases women entrepreneurs could fall into two or three different typologies. An overview of the different typologies of women entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial identity hierarchy are presented in Table 1 below.

Insert Table 1 about here

The first category comprised of the *born entrepreneurs* and these were women who viewed entrepreneurship as a way of life, an inborn trait, a gift or talent, or a life long dream.

> *Therefore starting from there you can sense that it is something that is there, I mean it is there….in one's heart (D009)*
>
> *That's my dream…I will do it. It's not a dream…. Nothing can stop me now. This is my meaning in life (S008)*

These women view entrepreneurship as something that comes naturally for them, and is the only alternative for them. In this case, the entrepreneurial identity is viewed as being central to one's self-identity, and is to be pursued for one's self-fulfillment.

The second category is *know how entrepreneurs.* For these women, the perception of entrepreneurship is influenced by previous practical or work experience in a given sector, or exposure to different entrepreneurial activities either at home or in school.

> *Yeah, because I was teaching people in [place]… I was teaching people how to open up tourism businesses, so I knew how to go about it. I just started…(D006)*
>
> *But I think I chose the path just because I tried out to run a business in high school and it went very well (S003)*
>
> *And I think it's because I've had the opportunity to be an intrapreneur in different organizations (S010)*

In this group, the entrepreneurial identity can be viewed as salient or central depending on how long the individual has been involved in entrepreneurial activities. We suggest that the more time women spend in entrepreneurship, the more likely they are to view their entrepreneurial activities as a way of life, leading to the entrepreneurial identity being more central to their self-identity.

The third category of women entrepreneurs is adapted from Fauchart and Grueber's (2011) categorization of founder identities i.e. *missionary entrepreneurs*. This group of entrepreneurs view entrepreneurship as a means of impacting society with their services or enabling societal change through community work.

> *So this is what motivated…you see people they have more needs… we can help in this, we can help in this…. Let's try to organize them (D026)*
>
> *So my vision has always been to build organizations that can make a social impact and drive change, but do it from a market perspective (S004)*

For this group, the entrepreneurial identity is viewed as salient to the self-identity. These women can be viewed as being mainly driven by the desire to make a social impact.

The *transition entrepreneurs* form the fourth category, and they primarily consist of women entrepreneurs who are involved in entrepreneurship on a part-time basis. These women do not fully engage in entrepreneurial activities because it is viewed more as a recreational activity, or because they seek some sort of safety net.

> *It was kind of part-time, and you see the dream was to have mangoes but in between growing something else. So it wasn't really business. I didn't care whether I sold or not, yeah….but slowly with years it became a business (D017)*
>
> *Cause I wanted to keep my business…cause sometimes it's different projects that I want to be able to do (S006)*

These women put limited effort into the venture, and generally view losses as acceptable. In this case their entrepreneurial identity is viewed as being salient to their self-identity as it is mainly activated when they are directly involved in the ventures.

The last category comprising the majority of women entrepreneurs is the *solution seeker entrepreneurs.* The women in this group view entrepreneurship as providing a solution to their different needs. They engage in entrepreneurial activities because it allows them to be creative, gives them independence and autonomy, provide financial resources, provides a solution to a personal problem, is a stepping stone, or feels like the right fit.

> *He got fired, but he was the one I wanted to work with, so instantly me and him and another woman called L… started to talk about doing something together again…(S017)*
>
> *But then in future of course, I want to have something, okay I will not leave my second hand clothes business but then I'm dreaming of having like a microfinance forum and debt collection. But that's my future planning (D027)*
>
> *Um…I decided to do the insurance thing after, because I have big dreams and the problem is the capital as usual (laughs) Then I said I had a plan of starting big, big things, then I said, because my capital is not enough let me start slowly. Then I decided to start a small business… an agency is a very small thing (D010)*

Similar to the previous category, the entrepreneurial identity is viewed as being salient to their self-identity, as it is likely to be activated primarily in instances where they perceive entrepreneurship as the only solution.

Women entrepreneur typologies categorized by socio-cultural context

In order to analyze how women's entrepreneurial identities may be influenced by their context, the women entrepreneurs were further categorized based on their typologies and socio-cultural contexts i.e. Sweden and Tanzania. An overview of this categorization by the socio-cultural context is presented in Table 2 below

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Insert Table 2 about here

We find some similarities and differences amongst the five typologies of women entrepreneurs in the two contexts. *Born entrepreneurs* are similar in the two contexts, in terms of the number of

women entrepreneurs and their perceptions regarding their entrepreneurial identities. In the case of *know how entrepreneurs*, we find that there are more women entrepreneurs in Tanzania, whose perceptions are influenced by exposure to entrepreneurial activities, while those in Sweden are mainly influenced by practical or work experience. The majority of *missionary entrepreneurs* are found in Sweden, while a similar number of *transition entrepreneurs* can be found in both contexts. However, those in Tanzania view entrepreneurship as a recreational activity, while those in Sweden seek a safety net. Lastly for the *solution seeker entrepreneurs*, we find that the majority of those who engage in entrepreneurial activities because it provides a solution to their personal problems, allows them to try something new, or is the right fit, are found in Sweden. On the other hand, those in Tanzania mainly engage in entrepreneurial activities because it provides financial resources or keeps them occupied. There are no differences in the two contexts, for those who view entrepreneurship as providing independence or autonomy, or allowing for creativity.

Contextual factors and the identity construction process

A further analysis was carried out on a subset of the women entrepreneurs in order to understand how the identity construction process is influenced by the socio-cultural context. This included a) analyzing whether an individual had family members, relatives or peers who were involved in business and could act as role models, b) analyzing the perceived support they received from family, peers or others in pursuing their entrepreneurial activities. Both role models and perceived support have been shown to have an influence on women's entrepreneurial intentions (Falck, Heblich & Luedemann, 2012; Laspita, Breugst, Heblich & Patzelt, 2012; Santos et al., 2016). In order to capture the entrepreneurs' view of their social-identity as women entrepreneurs, we also analyzed c) their view of the gender equality, and d) their perception of

the entrepreneur identity. A conceptual model of the contextual factors influencing the women entrepreneurs' identity construction process is presented in Figure 2 below.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In general, while family support is viewed as important for entrepreneurial intentions, we find that for women categorized as *born entrepreneurs*, a lack of support has little influence on their decision to pursue their dreams as can be seen in the case of D020, S008 and S018. We also find that support from peers can be important when such support is lacking from immediate family members. This can be seen in the case of *solution seeker* S013, who pursues entrepreneurship out of curiosity. Additionally, family role models can play a vital role in influencing women's perception of entrepreneurship, especially where such activity is viewed as going against cultural norms. In the case of D020, her grandfather is a main inspiration for her interest in business and teaches her to value money from a young age, something that is not common for young children, and especially girls in her society.

Regarding their social-identities, we find that views on gender role differences vary amongst the different typologies with some perceiving inequalities while others do not. Most women in Tanzania are aware of the barriers that cultural expectations can place on women. However, some view this as part and parcel of normal daily life, with women being expected to balance their work and family responsibilities (D002 and D020), while others see the need for educating society, and especially family members, on ways in which to support women (D017 and D026). Women's lack of social legitimacy in the business environment is also acknowledged by most of the women entrepreneurs in Tanzania. In Sweden, the majority of the women only perceive gender inequalities in accessing venture capital (S015 and S06) and in the number of role models

available (S013 and S018). Only in two cases, do women perceive inequality with regard to the socialization of children (S008), and with the labor market and family responsibilities (S001).

Looking at women's perception of the "entrepreneur" identity, we find that the women in both contexts view entrepreneurs as being driven by intrinsic motives and having a positive outlook in general. Moreover, we also find that in both contexts, women's perceptions are mainly a reflection of their own motivations for engaging in entrepreneurial activity. The perception of the entrepreneur could therefore be viewed as a reflection of their own identity as women entrepreneurs and points to the multi-dimensionality of the entrepreneur identity (Chasserio et al., 2014). Table 3 below presents the findings from the subset of women entrepreneurs on the contextual factors influencing their identity construction process.

Insert Table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

Our study builds on existing entrepreneurial identity literature by examining how women's identity construction is influenced by the socio-cultural context. We identity five typologies of women entrepreneurial identities, namely *born, know how, missionary, transition and solution seeker* entrepreneurs. However, these typologies are not mutually exclusive, with women being categorized into two or more typologies. This points to entrepreneurs' multiple identities (Obrecht, 2011) as well as the dynamic nature of the identity construction process, which can be influenced by their stage in the entrepreneurial process or their socio-cultural context. As in previous studies (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016) we also find that women perceive their entrepreneurial identity as either being central or salient to their self-identity.

Those women who perceive their entrepreneurial identity as central (mainly *born* and some *know how* entrepreneurs), are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial activity regardless of whether they receive support or not. This is in support with Murnieks et al. (2014) finding that those who hold the entrepreneurial identity as central are more likely to exhibit passion, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial behavior. These entrepreneurs can be viewed as searching to be authentic or true to their self-identity (Lewis, 2013), and their identity construction process would be least affected by the family, societal, or economic contexts. For *know how* entrepreneurs, who perceive their entrepreneurial identities as salient, the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities can be viewed as mainly influenced by their family context, as this would have an impact on their level of education, work or practical experience. Their identity construction may also be affected by the wider societal context, as this will determine their level of exposure to, and perception of, entrepreneurial activities.

Missionary entrepreneurs are mainly driven by their desire to make a societal impact (Fauchart & Grueber, 2011) and thus view their entrepreneurial identities as salient. Their identity construction will be mainly influenced by the societal and economic contexts rather than by the family context. On the other hand, both the family and societal contexts will influence the identity construction process of *transition* and *solution seeker* entrepreneurs. The perceived level of support from their immediate family context, and the economic context will influence the activation of their entrepreneurial identities and subsequent pursuit of entrepreneurial activities.

Regarding women's social-identities, we build on the study by Garcia and Welter's (2011) findings concerning women's perception of womanhood and gender roles. We find that cultural norms play a role in influencing women's expectations about gender roles. This in turn

influences whether or not women perceive dissonance. While the women entrepreneurs in Tanzania seem more aware of the gender role differences in both the family and work place, they only seem to perceive dissonance in the business setting. Similarly, perceived dissonance by the women entrepreneurs in Sweden is mainly focused in the business setting and particularly with regard to the venture capital sector. We suggest that this could be due to the fact that women are more involved in identity work (Watson, 2009) in the business setting, where they are still portrayed as "the other" due to limited social legitimacy and representation.

However, in both contexts, we find that the entrepreneur social-identity is perceived as being driven mainly by intrinsic motives and having a positive outlook. Even though some of the descriptions could be viewed as masculine, we find that in both contexts, women's perceptions are a reflection of their own motivations for engaging in entrepreneurial activity. We suggest that the globalization process and the role of the media in influencing societal perceptions (Radu & Redien-Collot, 2008) could influence the entrepreneur social-identity across different contexts. Our study further confirms the multi-dimensionality aspect of the entrepreneurial identity (Chasserio et al., 2014).

Implications for theory and practice

Our findings highlight the fact that policy makers and educators need to consider the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs, and especially with regard to their entrepreneurial identities. Looking at the different typologies, we suggest that *born* entrepreneurs are least likely to be impacted by general entrepreneurship programs, and are more likely to benefit from specific skills training based on their needs. *Know how* and *missionary* entrepreneurs are likely to benefit from such programs as they result in increased knowledge and self-efficacy levels. On the other

hand, the impact of entrepreneurship programs on *transition* and *solution seekers* may be mixed. The acquired knowledge could either attract or impede their identification with the entrepreneurial identity and thus influence their subsequent engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Promotional initiatives should therefore be more specific in targeting potential entrepreneurs based on their perceptions of entrepreneurship.

Limitations and areas for future research

As in previous studies, our study has some limitations. One limitation is the possibility of hindsight bias that occurs when respondents recall past experiences and attempt to reconstruct their stories in a way that makes sense to them (Garcia & Welter, 2011). Another limitation is the fact that a group of women entrepreneurs identified in Sweden were part of a social entrepreneurship training program. The possible self-selection bias may have resulted in an over representation of *missionary* entrepreneurs in this context. Further longitudinal studies could be carried out in order to gain a better understanding of the contextual factors influencing the identity construction process over time. Such studies could also focus on the identity construction process of male entrepreneurs in different contexts. Lastly, future research can also focus on understanding how other factors such as entrepreneurship education and training could influence women's entrepreneurial identity construction process.

CONCLUSION

Our study contributes to the entrepreneurial identity literature by building on the limited research focused on the process of identity formation and the concept of identity work (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). The in-depth interview method adopted in the study also helps us to understand the process from the women's viewpoint and to emphasize their "voice" (Garcia & Welter, 2011).

Our first contribution is the identification of five typologies of women entrepreneurial identities, namely: *born, know how, missionary, transition* and *solution seeker* entrepreneurs. Second, we identify whether their entrepreneurial identities are perceived as central or salient to their self-identity and the subsequent impact on their behavior. Third, we also analyze the socio-cultural context influences, and how this impact varies depending on the typology of women entrepreneurs.

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Table 1: Typology of women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial identity (EID) hierarchy

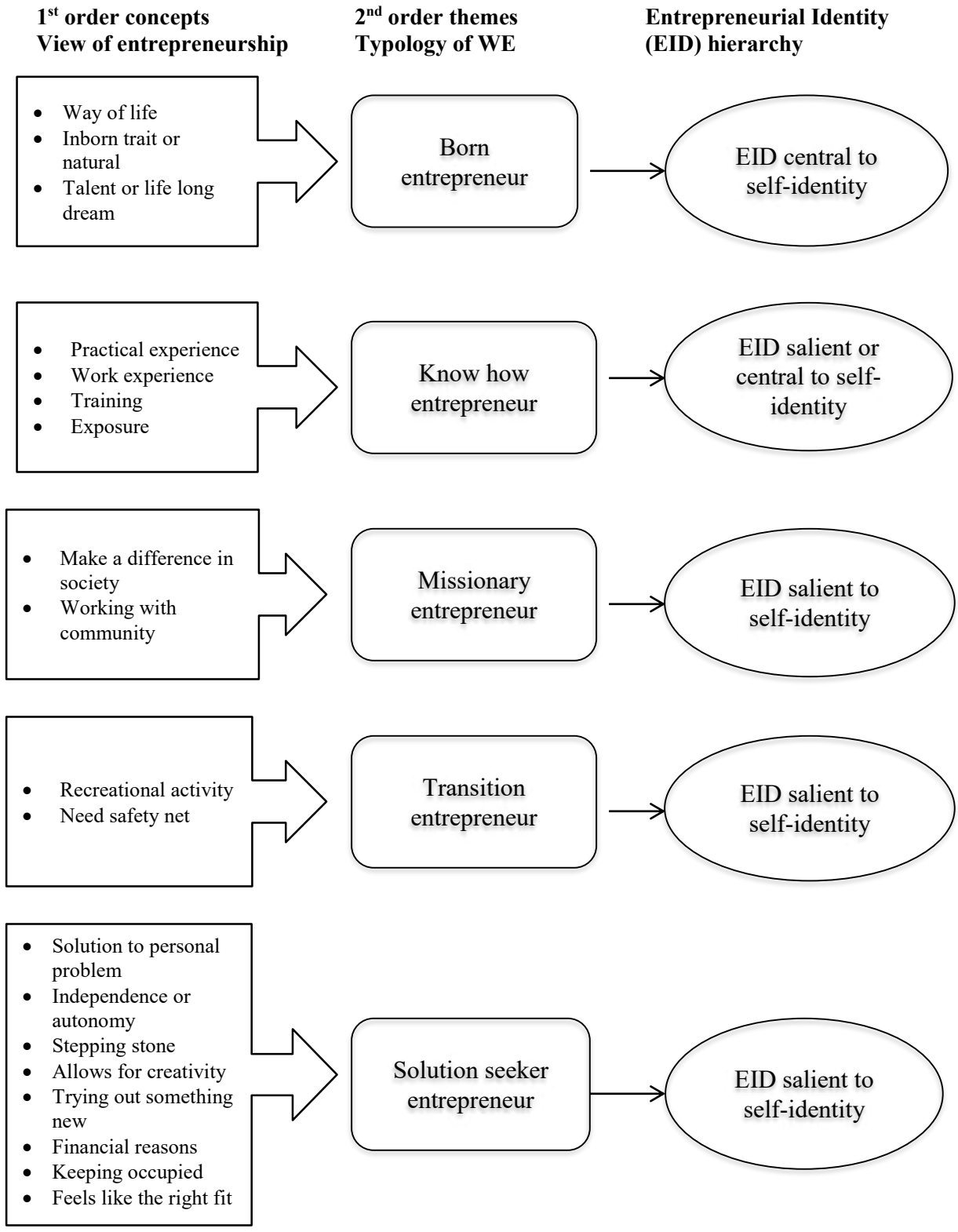


Table 2: Typology of women entrepreneurs categorized by socio-cultural context

Typology	1st order concepts	Sweden	Tanzania
Born entrepreneur	Inborn trait or natural	S009; S027	D009
	Talent or life long dream	S008; S009; S018	D002
	Way of life	S028	D020; D022
Know how entrepreneur	Exposure	S011	D005; D016; D023; D026
	Practical experience	S003; S026	D024
	Work experience	S007; S010; S015	D006; D018
Missionary entrepreneur	Make a difference in society	S001; S002; S003; S004; S006; S007; S008; S011; S026	
	Working with community		D006; D026
Transition entrepreneur	Need safety net	S006; S019	
	Recreational activity		D017; D019
Solution seeker entrepreneur	Allows for creativity	S006; S017	D027
	Feels like the right fit	S024; S025; S029; S030	
	Financial resources		D003; D007; D008; D010; D012; D015; D018; D024; D025
	Independence or autonomy	S001; S004; S016; S028	D011; D013; D017; D021
	Keeping occupied		D001; D004; D014
	Solution to personal problem	S005; S013; S014; S017; S018; S020; S023	
	Stepping stone	S022	D027
	Trying out something new	S010; S013; S021; S024	

Table 3: Contextual influences of women entrepreneurs' identity construction (select cases)

	Born entrepreneurs				
Case No	**Family/Immediate context**		**Social-identities**		**Individual agency**
	Knowledge of family/ relatives/ peer entrepreneurs	**Perceived support family/peers/others**	**Perception of womanhood/ gender roles**	**Perception of entrepreneur**	
D002	Brother and spouse are self-employed	None mentioned	Women have to balance work and family roles Women lack social legitimacy	Driven by intrinsic motives - risk-taker, determined, hard working	Pioneer in different ventures started in male dominated sectors. Initiating programs to empower other women entrepreneurs
D020	Parents – employed Grandfather, sister and brother in law are self-employed	Grandfather – main role model growing up Brother in law – gives advice and role model	Family responsibilities have priority. Women are not fighting for financial independence Lack of social legitimacy in business	Risk taker, creative, ready to change	Pursues venture despite resistance from family and peers
S008	Parents – working Peer – few were self employed	Parents – not supportive.	Different socialization of children	Motivated, wants bigger impact, has idea and sees it through, thinks big and crazy	Seeks other women entrepreneurs for inspiration. Pursues venture despite lack of family support
S018	Parents – self employed Boyfriend – long time entrepreneur Very few peers	Mother – not for the idea as is risk averse Father – a bit more positive	No differences	A little naïve, driven, takes initiative, positive outlook, wants to prove oneself	Driven by desire to do something on her own.

Key: D = Dar-es-Salaam; S = Stockholm

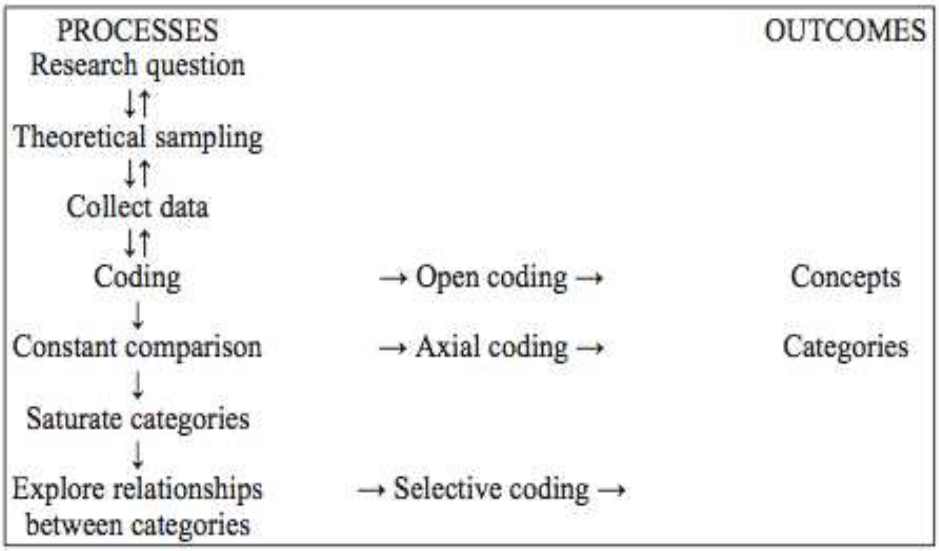
	Know how entrepreneurs				
Case No	**Family/Immediate context**		**Social-identities**		**Individual agency**
	Knowledge of family/ relatives/ peer entrepreneurs	**Perceived support family/peers/others**	**Perception of womanhood/ gender roles**	**Perception of entrepreneur**	
D018	Father – employed Mother – business farmer	Mother – main role model/ inborn entrepreneur Family - entrepreneurs Mentor at work	Discrimination exists but is fading away	Dreamer with focus, hard worker, basic knowledge	Identifies opportunity through work and resigns in order to pursue venture
S015	Father – runs dental clinic Mother – medical doctor Spouse – project leader	Parents – not supportive Friends - supportive	Women lack equal access to finances. Fewer women entrepreneurs	Doesn't see obstacles only opportunities, Takes action	Identifies opportunity through work. Pioneer female entrepreneur in her area/amongst friends
	Missionary entrepreneurs				
D026	Parents – employed Relatives – some are self-employed	Co-founder – was mentor Relatives who are role models	Cultural expectations can be barrier. Set gender work roles result in segregated labor market Marriage as possible barrier	Innovative, creative, offers something new, patient, research on market needs	Desire to help meet community needs
S001	Father – employed Mother – real estate agent Spouse - employed	Family -provides support in carrying out tasks etc.	Inequality still existing in labor force and family responsibilities	Only those taking constant risks Serial entrepreneurs	Desire to impact society Continues with venture despite obstacles faced in starting up

Key: D = Dar-es-Salaam; S = Stockholm

	Transition entrepreneurs				
Case No	**Family/Immediate context**		**Social-identities**		**Individual agency**
	Knowledge of family/ relatives/ peer entrepreneurs	**Perceived support family/peers/others**	**Perception of womanhood/ gender roles**	**Perception of entrepreneur**	
D019	Parents – employed Siblings - employed	Mother – supportive Siblings – advised to pursue part-time	Women have to balance family responsibilities and business. Lack of social legitimacy in business	Passionate, have a vision, be focused	Seeks to pursue her interest in business even though on part time basis
S006	Parents – were employed. Father – involved in business	None mentioned	Equal family responsibilities. Unequal access to financing for women	Previous – only those who invent. Current – anyone who wants to make a change.	Desire to make a change for others in society but also needs a safety net
	Solution seeker entrepreneurs				
D017	Parents - farmers	None mentioned	Cultural expectations as barrier. Women have to manage power dynamics in family	Has a dream. Takes action in whatever circumstances	Business is solution to her need for independence. Involves community in her initiatives
S013	Father – employed/part-time business Mother – employed Boyfriend - entrepreneur	Father – risk averse so neutral Mother – supportive Boyfriend – very supportive	No differences despite claims of difference characteristics. Few female mentors	More diverse portrayal needed. Positive, happy, enthusiastic.	Started business out of curiosity

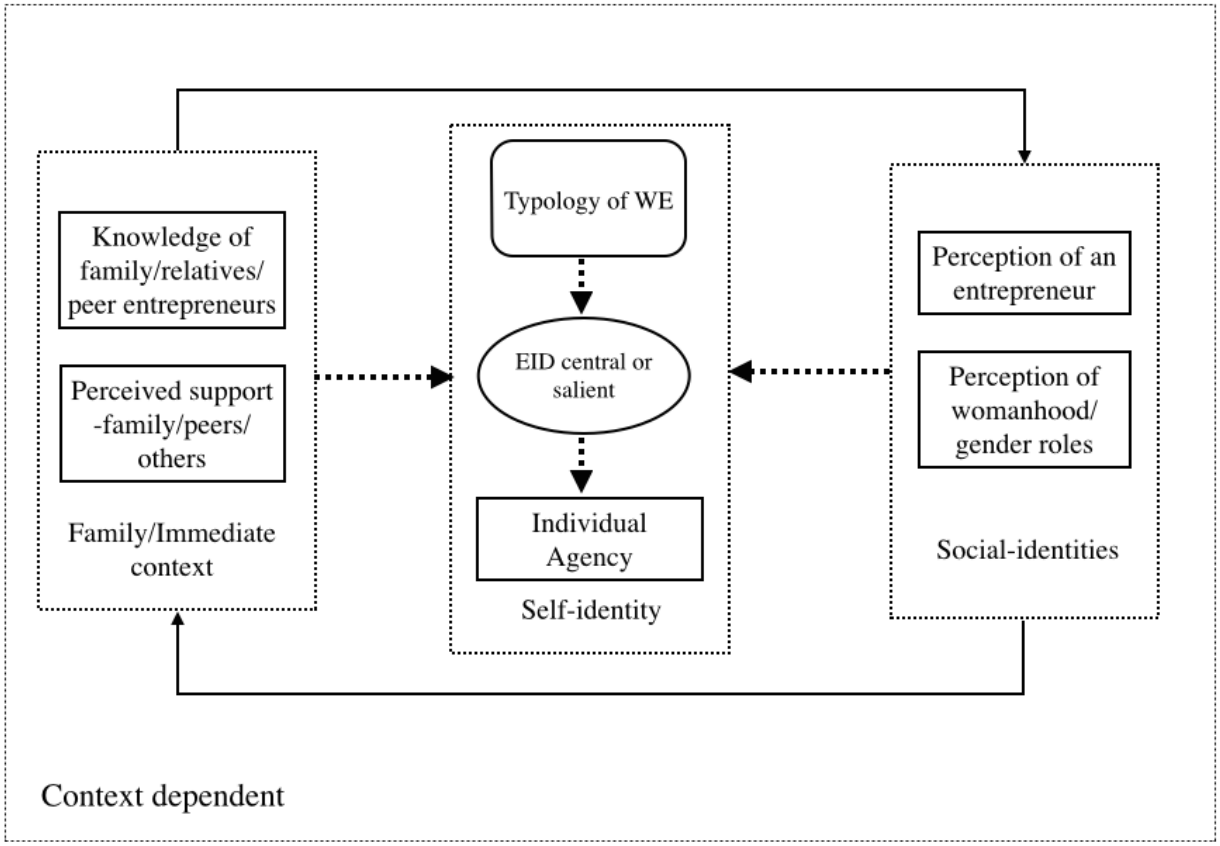
Key: D = Dar-es-Salaam; S = Stockholm

Figure 1: Coding process adapted in the study



Source: *Adapted from Garcia & Welter, 2011*

Figure 2: Conceptual model of women entrepreneurs' identity construction process



Source: *Authors' illustration*

APPENDIX A

Table A1 – Profile of women entrepreneurs interviewed

Location:		**Dar-es-Salaam,**	**Tanzania**				
Case no	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Marital status**	**Founder Type**	**Co-founder**	**Highest level of education**	**Sector of venture**
Case D001	54	Tanzanian	Married	Established	Spouse	Form four (O levels)	Textile
Case D002	44	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Form four (O levels)	Construction, Furniture
Case D003	59	Tanzanian	Married	Established	None	Postgrad diploma	Agribusiness - dairy farm, processing
Case D004	62	Tanzanian	Married	Established	Spouse	Postgrad diploma	Agribusiness - food processing
Case D005	50	Tanzanian	Widow	Established	Spouse	Certificate	Tourism
Case D006	60	Tanzanian	Married	Established	Sisters	Masters	Tourism
Case D007	57	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Form four (O levels)	Textile, Agribusiness
Case D008	64	Tanzanian	Married	Established	None	Masters	Agribusiness - food processing
Case D009	24	Tanzanian	Married	New, Serial	Spouse	Diploma, Undergrad on-going	Retail - stationery
Case D010	37	Tanzanian	Married	Nascent	None	Bachelor	Retail - fashion
Case D011	55	Tanzanian	Separated	New, Serial	None	Masters	Agribusiness - farming
Case D012	40	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Certificate	Agribusiness - poultry
Case D013	34	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Diploma	Food industry - bakery
Case D014	67	Tanzanian	Widow	New	None	Bachelor	Agribusiness - poultry
Case D015	42	Tanzanian	Married	New	None	Form four (O levels)	Retail - printing, supplies

Location:		Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania					
Case no	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Marital status**	**Founder Type**	**Co-founder**	**Highest level of education**	**Sector of venture**
Case D016	44	Tanzanian	Married	Established	None	Certificate	Food industry - catering
Case D017	64	Tanzanian	Separated	Established	None	Masters	Agribusiness - food processing
Case D018	44	Tanzanian	Single	Established, Serial	None	Advanced certificate	Business consultancy, Retail - printing
Case D019	35	Tanzanian	Single	Established, Serial	None	Advanced certificate	Retail - flowers, food supplies
Case D020	43	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Diploma	Retail - decorations, supplies
Case D021	35	Tanzanian	Single	Established, Serial	None	Masters ongoing	Food processing, Horticulture
Case D022	65	Tanzanian	Widow	Established, Serial	Colleagues	Bachelor	Mining - manufacturing, retail
Case D023	44	Tanzanian	Single	Established, Serial	None	Certificate	Agribusiness - poultry
Case D024	54	Tanzanian	Married	Established, Serial	None	Diploma	Agribusiness - food processing
Case D025	58	Tanzanian	Separated	Established, Serial	None	Certificate	Fashion industry, Food processing
Case D026	44	Tanzanian	Married	Established	Colleague	Masters	Community work
Case D027	39	Tanzanian	Married	New	Friend	Postgrad diploma, Masters ongoing	Business consultancy

Location:		Stockholm,	Sweden				
Case no	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Marital status**	**Founder Type**	**Co-founder**	**Highest level of education**	**Sector of venture**
Case S001	34	Swedish	Married	New	Friend	Bachelor	Renovation - Education
Case S002	44	Swedish	Married	Nascent	None	Masters	Publishing - children books
Case S003	29	Swedish (Columbian)	Single	Established, Serial	Friend	Certificate	Business/Education consultancy
Case S004	32	Swedish	Single	Established, Serial	Friend	Masters	Educational services
Case S005	25	Swedish	Single	Intention	None	Masters	Cosmetics
Case S006	35	Swedish/ Moroccan	Married	New	Friend	Certificate	Renovation - Education
Case S007	30	Swedish	Single	Intention	Friend	Masters	Community work
Case S008	30	Swedish	Single	Intention	None	Bachelor	Business/Education consultancy
Case S009	33	Swedish (Somali)	Separated	Established	None	Certificate	Business/Education consultancy
Case S010	43	Swedish	Married	Nascent	None	Masters	Business/Education consultancy
Case S011	25	Swedish	Sambo	Intention	Friend	Bachelor	Community work
Case S013	26	Swedish/ French	Single	Nascent	Friend	Bachelor	Food industry - dairy
Case S014	30	Swedish	Sambo	New	Friend	Masters ongoing	Business/Education consultancy
Case S015	34	Swedish (Iran)	Married	Established, Serial	Colleague	Masters	Cosmetics, Retail - lenses

Location:		Stockholm,	Sweden				
Case no	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Marital status**	**Founder Type**	**Co-founder**	**Highest level of education**	**Sector of venture**
Case S016	31	Swedish	Single	Potential	None	Masters	Business/Education consultancy
Case S017	35	Swedish	Married	Established	Colleagues	Bachelor	Retail - online footwear
Case S018	31	Swedish	Single	New	Friends	Masters	Business/Education consultancy (online)
Case S019	23	Irish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S020	47	Egyptian/ Swedish	Married	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S021	25	Swedish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S022	22	Swedish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S023	23	Finnish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S024	23	Finnish	Sambo	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S025	23	German	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S026	23	Finnish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S027	25	Brazilian/ Swedish	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S028	25	Rwandan	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S029	24	German	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None
Case S030	25	Chinese	Single	Potential	None	Bachelor	None