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(RE) VISITING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS:  
AN EMANCIPATORY IMPULSE

A critical inquiry

Hannah DEAN

Submitted for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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**(Re) Visiting Female Entrepreneurs: An Emancipatory Impulse**

**Keywords:** female entrepreneurs, economic growth, Schumpeter, oral history, postmodern feminist epistemology

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth which has created a false dichotomy of successful male entrepreneur versus an unsuccessful female entrepreneur. This aim is pursued through a multidisciplinary and critical inquiry that destabilises this metanarrative conceptually and empirically.

A critical interrogation of economic studies reveals the embeddedness of the metanarrative in neo-classical economic growth theory. Far from being a true reflection of the entrepreneurial experience, the theory has silenced the innovator entrepreneur in economic theory and replaced him/her with an economic rational manager.

Concurrently, a re-analysis of Schumpeter's theorising suggests that his theories do not subordinate female entrepreneurs as claimed by a number of critical theorists. In contrast, his theorising is emancipatory and offers an alternative theoretical framework to the oppressive neo-classical economic growth theory.

Oral history methods are used to capture the voices of female entrepreneurs which have largely been excluded from the literature. The oral history narratives challenge the oppressive homogeneity imposed by the metanarrative of economic growth and illustrate the negative influence of the theoretical foundation of neo-classical theory upon the entrepreneurial experience.

The study offers theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to female entrepreneurship studies by presenting a fresh interpretation of Schumpeter's theorising; including the voices of the female entrepreneurs; and

applying research approaches that break away from positivism which dominates entrepreneurial studies.

The study has implications for policy makers and practitioners as it generates knowledge that takes account of the current social and economic changes.

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# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how the research has been conducted to achieve the study's objective in terms of emancipating female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth. The study's main focus is female entrepreneurs in the context of ownership of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). For the exploratory purpose of this thesis, I adopt a broad definition for entrepreneur and entrepreneurship whereby the terms entrepreneur, business owner and self-employed are synonymous.

The research process followed in this thesis is in line with Daft (1983) who argues that scholarly research is a craft. Accordingly, the process was not only shaped by systematic procedures but by other elements including serendipity, surprise, mistakes, intuition and interaction with other researchers. Furthermore, throughout the project, I remained open and flexible about integrating new knowledge into the thesis. Consequently, the research process was not linear but messy and spontaneous. Daft (1983) emphasises that research projects carried out with the craft spirit offer strong contributions to knowledge as they stimulate innovative findings that question mainstream wisdom. In contrast, the contribution of studies that closely observe scientific and systematic procedures is often limited to extending existing knowledge as these procedures foreclose the possibility of radically challenging current knowledge. As this study aims to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth, Daft's approach was very beneficial. This is reflected in the ability of the thesis to generate new knowledge in the context of female entrepreneurs (illustrated later).

The chapter starts by briefly presenting the journey that led me to decide on the final focus of the thesis. In the remaining parts of this chapter, I explain the relationship between the research objective, research aim and research questions and how the study has been designed to achieve this objective. A brief summary of the subsequent chapters is then presented including a highlight of the main

findings. A summary of how this study contributes to knowledge is then offered before concluding the chapter.

## **1.1 The beginning of my journey**

When I embarked on my PhD journey almost four years ago, the UK was one year into the recession. My initial objective was to explore how the adoption of an Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) perspective could enable female entrepreneurs in the UK to survive the recession. I started my literature review by reading about EM in entrepreneurship journals. At the same time, in order to gain an understanding of how small and medium-sized businesses were conceptualised within the UK economy, I read the BERR (Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform) Economics Paper No.3 (2008). I was disappointed to see that very little was said in the report about female entrepreneurs. Moreover, when women were mentioned, they were portrayed as problematic because they owned a low percentage of high growth businesses compared to their male counterparts. For instance, the report said:

### *“GENDER*

*Studies which have examined the effect of the founder’s gender on growth performance, find that male founders have a positive impact on growth. Women entrepreneurs are also found to have lower growth ambitions than their male counterparts. The literature points to differences in work experience, contacts, financial resource and growth ambitions as the reasons behind the gender gap.” (BERR, 2008, p.28)*

This alleged inferiority in terms of growth is problematic because high growth firms are perceived to be important for the country’s economic growth as they increase productivity and employment rate. Governments, therefore, allocate more support and funding for high growth companies. The report mentioned:

*“High growth firms contribute a disproportionate amount to employment growth and have higher than average productivity levels. This combination of high productivity and employment growth implies that high growth firms are responsible for a substantial proportion of economic growth.” (BERR, 2008, p.50)*

Female entrepreneurs’ underperformance is therefore deemed to be a serious malfunction that needs to be addressed. As illustrated in the report (2008), this

deviance is rectified by transforming women through dedicated training centres which act more like special clinics that have been set up to treat chronic diseases.

*“Knowledge and skills*

*High growth entrepreneurs have been found to be highly skilled, experienced and well educated individuals. Supporting individuals to develop and improve skills and business experience will be important to increase the number of high growth firms in the UK.*

*Women entrepreneurs are particularly under-represented amongst high growth firms and increasing knowledge and skills for enterprise amongst women will be particularly important in order to re-address this balance. The enterprise strategy announced that the Government will be working with Regional Development Agencies to pilot women’s business centres. The results of this pilot will provide greater information about the impact that this has on business growth.” (BERR, 2008, p.52)*

The way in which the entrepreneurial experience has been equated to its impact on economic growth and has been reduced to mere numbers and figures has shocked me. For me, it is a highly flawed representation of the richness and complexity of the entrepreneurial experience. A representation that undermines the struggles, failures and successes embedded in the entrepreneurial experience of most of the entrepreneurs regardless of their gender. As a result of my frustration with this skewed representation, I decided to put on hold my reading for the literature on EM and to explore instead female entrepreneurship studies in leading entrepreneurship journals. Unfortunately, the exploration has only deepened my disappointment. As illustrated in the following four chapters, the literature accords with the findings of the BERR’s (2008) report. The studies are implicitly guided by the notion that female entrepreneurs’ performance is inferior to their male counterparts and thus their contributions to economic growth are problematic. The studies compete in offering explanations for this unhealthy phenomenon and suggest different ways in which women can be transformed so they can contribute more effectively to economic growth.

In response to my surprise and disappointment over the subordination of the female entrepreneur by the hegemonic logic of economic growth, I decided to shift the focus of my thesis. Thus instead of exploring how EM can enable

female entrepreneurs to survive the recession, my objective becomes how to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth.

My interaction with other researchers has also been very fruitful. While I was exploring the literature on female entrepreneurs in leading entrepreneurship journals, my supervisor; Professor Jackie Ford, introduced me to critical entrepreneurship studies. As illustrated in chapters 2 and 3, these articles are mainly published in organisation studies journals and non-leading entrepreneurship journals, and are therefore not part of the mainstream entrepreneurship discourse. The articles critique the gendering of the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. Authors blame Schumpeter's theorising and the narrow conceptualisation of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy for associating the entrepreneur with a hegemonic masculinity (Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004b; Ahl, 2006). In order to engage with the findings of critical entrepreneurship studies and to explore the relationships between economic growth, entrepreneurship and Schumpeter's theorising, I decided to visit economic studies.

The journey between these different bodies of literature has shaped the research process. The latter has also been influenced by my interaction with supervisors, researchers and participants. As I was open to knowledge coming my way from these different directions and flexible about integrating it into my thesis, my progress was non-linear. The flow of the writing and reading was interrupted at times as I had to take a number of U-turns. This led me to carry out extensive revisions and rewriting of my theoretical chapters as well as of my methodology. Although time consuming and at times frustrating, my efforts were – I feel - rewarded as the thesis offers new knowledge that challenges current wisdom about female entrepreneurs, the hegemonic logic of economic growth and Schumpeter's theorising.

Before concluding this section, it is worth pointing that although Daft (1983) encourages researchers to approach the research process as a craft, he does not address the problem of presentation. One of the toughest challenges I faced in this journey was how to reduce this rich and messy journey with its diversions,

halts and progression into a neat and clearly structured document. The conversion from the craft to the systematic mode was necessary given that the latter remains the most common format for presenting a thesis. During the conversion process, I felt that the end document took a life of its own that was not necessarily an accurate reflection of my journey, but like all good writing, is the best telling of the story. I hope that these few lines have shed some insights into my journey and that in the near future different forms of presentations will be widely accepted.

In the next section, I explore how the thesis's main objective dictates the research aim and the main research questions.

## **1.2 Research objective, aim and questions**

In order to achieve the study's objective in terms of emancipating female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth, the thesis aims to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience.

The thesis's aim is achieved by addressing the following research questions;

1. What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs? (given the centrality of this question to the thesis, it will be addressed in various chapters as illustrated in figure 1)
2. How can feminist theory contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs?
3. How relevant is the theoretical foundation of economic growth to the entrepreneurial experience?
4. What is the relationship between economic growth theory, Schumpeter's theories and the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy?
5. What are the narratives of female entrepreneurs in relation to their entrepreneurial experience?

6. What are the alternative conceptualisations of the entrepreneurial experience?

### **1.3 Research design**

In order to answer these questions, the thesis is divided into two main parts (see figure 1).

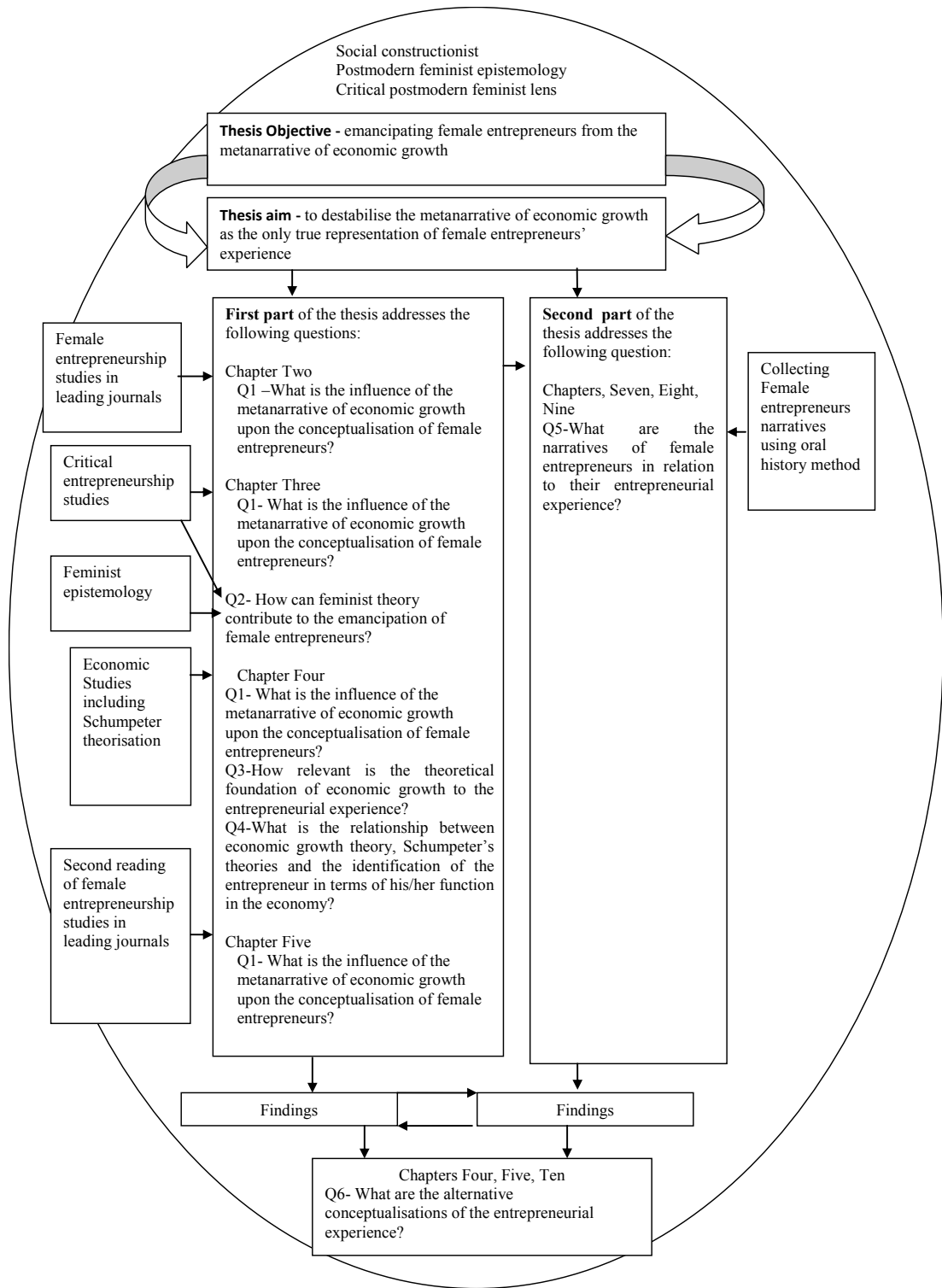
The first part of the thesis, which constitutes chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, answers the first four questions. This is achieved by adopting a multidisciplinary approach that critically examines:

- mainstream female entrepreneurship studies
- critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs
- feminist epistemologies
- economic studies with special attention to Schumpeter's theories of entrepreneurship and economic development

The fifth question is addressed in chapters 7, 8 and 9 which form the empirical part of this study. In this section, I collect oral history narratives from female entrepreneurs to incorporate their voices which have been silenced by the metanarrative of economic growth. The sixth question is addressed in chapters 3, 5 and 10 where Schumpeter's theorising is presented as an alternative for the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur including female entrepreneur.

The study is guided by a social constructionist view of the world (see chapter 6), postmodern feminist epistemology (see chapter 3) and a critical postmodern feminist theoretical framework (see chapter 6). Informed by this epistemology, the study differentiates between biological sex and gender. As illustrated later, the latter describes meanings allocated to femininity and masculinity by dominant discourses (Anderson, 2011). Furthermore, this critical inquiry perceives homogeneity as oppressive because it points to the suppression of female entrepreneurs' voices by dominant ideologies and discourses. The study, therefore, celebrates the diversity of female entrepreneurs and strives to include

their voices. Finally, in line with critical tradition, the thesis does not only seek to explore the experience of female entrepreneurs but aims to transform the social conditions that subordinate them. The study, however, rejects the notion that there is only one form of emancipation. Instead, it acknowledges the presence of multiple forms of freedom.



**Figure 1: Research design**

## **1.4 Thesis structure and main findings**

**Chapter 1** outlines the personal and theoretical rationale for the thesis's objective, aim and research questions. The chapter also presents an overview of the research design, a brief summary of the chapters including their main findings. The chapter concludes by highlighting the study's theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions.

**Chapter 2** offers an overview of female entrepreneurship studies published mainly in leading entrepreneurship journals. In this chapter, I argue that the metanarrative of economic growth has established in the literature a dichotomy of successful versus unsuccessful female entrepreneurs on the basis of economic performance. As a result, the various research areas on female entrepreneurs are governed by the "underperformance hypothesis". The studies, which are mainly comparative and quantitative, focus largely on analysing the individual female entrepreneur to identify how she differs from her male counterpart. These differences are sought to explain the reason behind her alleged underperformance. Moreover, the influence of feminist theory upon this body of literature remains very limited.

**Chapter 3** is divided into two parts. In the first part, I explore the different feminist epistemologies while in the rest of the chapter I review critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs. A detailed review of the latter has never been undertaken and therefore this chapter constitutes an important contribution to female entrepreneurship studies. Critical studies are mainly published outside leading entrepreneurship journals. They critique the theory of entrepreneurship for being gendered. Different reasons are offered as an explanation for this phenomenon including the influence of economic growth and Schumpeter's theorising. In order to challenge the taken for granted assumptions about female entrepreneurs, authors called for an epistemological shift in entrepreneurship studies notably the adoption of postmodern feminist epistemology. Authors also urged researchers to adopt research methodologies that can capture women's voices.

**Chapter 4** explores economic studies to understand the relationship between economic growth, entrepreneurship and Schumpeter's theorising. Previous studies including female entrepreneurship studies focused mainly on analysing the second chapter of Schumpeter's seminal book; *Theory of Economic Development* (1934). In order to gain an in depth understanding of Schumpeter's theories, this study broadens the exploration of his work to include not only the whole book of *Theory of Economic Development* but also his most cited book; *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943) as well as the majority of his journal articles.

The findings of this chapter form an important part of the thesis's theoretical contribution. The exploration of economic studies shows that there is no universal theory of economic growth but there is a dominant theory which is the neo-classical economic growth theory. This theory dominates not only entrepreneurship studies but also macroeconomic policies. Furthermore, far from being a true representation of the entrepreneurial experience and performance, the theory has been accused of silencing the innovator entrepreneur and replacing him/her with a rational economic manager. This transformation of the entrepreneur explains why the managerial discourse is so dominant in entrepreneurship studies and why the entrepreneur has been associated with a hegemonic masculinity that excludes women as well as other forms of masculinities (Nelson and Winter, 1974; Kirchoff, 1991).

At the same time, the re-visiting of Schumpeter's theorising provides new and important interpretations of his work. This study challenges the argument that Schumpeter's theories have contributed to the subordination of the female entrepreneur as claimed by a number of critical authors. The findings of this chapter indicate that on the contrary, Schumpeter's theories are in line with the current critical thinking on entrepreneurship studies.

**Chapter 5** - Informed by the findings of chapters 2, 3 and 4, I offer in this chapter a second reading of female entrepreneurship studies; reviewed in chapter 2. The main argument in this chapter is that under the metanarrative of economic growth, the female entrepreneur is conceptualised as a struggling

business owner and her entrepreneurial experience is strongly embedded in the managerial discourse. The chapter concludes with a summary of the thesis's theoretical findings.

**Chapter 6** discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. The chapter starts by presenting social constructionism. This is followed by an explanation of the rationale for choosing a theoretical analytical framework based on critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism. Narrative inquiry, including its application in entrepreneurship studies is then discussed before offering an overview of oral history research method. A brief analysis of the influence of postmodernism on oral history interviews is then presented. After discussing the process of data collection and data analysis, the chapter concludes with a brief note on research ethics.

**Chapters 7, 8 and 9** offer in-depth analyses of three oral history narratives collected from three female entrepreneurs operating in the North of England over a period of almost two years. The focus on a small sample, which is in line with oral history tradition, brought to the surface the complexity and multidimensional nature of the entrepreneurial experience. The narratives are structured around two main themes which emerged from the data. These themes are the messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life and the relationship and inter-relationship of power.

**Chapter 10** encompasses a detailed discussion of the theoretical and empirical findings of the thesis. The discussion critiques the current way of conceptualising the female entrepreneur and opens the door for new ways of theorising her experience.

**Chapter 11** is a detailed discussion of the thesis's contributions to knowledge on entrepreneurship notably on female entrepreneurs. The chapter also considers the implications of the findings for policy makers, funding bodies as well as practitioners. The thesis concludes by discussing the limitations of the study, offering an account on self-reflexivity and presenting recommendations for future research.

In the next section, I offer a brief note on the significance of this research.

### **1.5 Significance of the research**

This study is a critical inquiry that offers theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions not only to female entrepreneurship studies but also to entrepreneurship studies, as the supremacy of the metanarrative of economic growth is not limited to the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs (Gartner, 2013). This is reflected in the objective of the “European Tradition in Entrepreneurship” movement. This critical movement has recently been launched in a special issue of the journal of Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (Gartner, 2013). The movement held its first conference in Leeds in March 2013 with a strong presence from international critical entrepreneurship researchers. The main argument of this movement is that US led mainstream entrepreneurship studies are dominated by economics, management, psychology and positivism (Watson, 2013). The founders’ aim is to open entrepreneurship studies to new research areas and to shift the focus of the studies away from the analysis of the individual entrepreneur to the exploration of the entrepreneurial action and process (Down, 2013). In order to achieve this objective, the movement encourages researchers to adopt a multidisciplinary approach and to engage in particular with history, sociology, philosophy of science, feminist theory and narrative inquiry. This approach has been applauded because it enables researchers to look into the history of ideas that has shaped entrepreneurship studies; bring the voice of those who have been marginalised by mainstream studies; and apply new research methodologies that are distinct from the dominant positivist paradigm (Gartner, 2013).

This study speaks to this agenda as it adopts an emancipatory objective, embraces a multidisciplinary approach and is guided by postmodern feminist epistemology. In this sense, the thesis fills an important gap in entrepreneurship studies and contributes to the development of theory which can better reflect the diverse ways in which women and men enact entrepreneurship.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the development of the thesis including a presentation of the study's objectives, aims and research questions. An outline of the research design has also been presented together with a summary of the subsequent chapters. The chapter concluded with a brief note on the significance of this research.

The following chapter offers a critical review of female entrepreneurship studies which are mainly published in leading entrepreneurship journals. The review will be followed by a discussion of the main findings.

## **2 Mainstream female entrepreneurship studies**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I review female entrepreneurship studies which are mainly published in leading entrepreneurship journals. These articles are referred to as mainstream studies and are distinguished from critical entrepreneurship studies that tend to be published in a different set of journals as discussed in chapter 3 (Watson, 2013).

The chapter starts by offering an overview of female entrepreneurship studies. The themes around which this review is structured are then presented. This is followed by a discussion of the influence of feminist theory upon this research area including the choice of research methodologies. A critical analysis of each theme is offered before concluding the chapter with a discussion of the main findings.

### **2.2 Female entrepreneurship studies**

Female entrepreneurship studies are a relatively new research phenomenon (Moore, 1990). They emerged in the USA in the late 1970s with the first studies of Schrier (1975) and Schwartz (1976). In the UK, the first female entrepreneurship studies emerged with the research of Robert Goffee and Richard Scase in 1983 (Stevenson, 1986; Carter et al., 2001). During the next decade, the literature on female entrepreneurship studies started to grow in a significant volume of work, with Carter et al. (2001) identifying more than 400 articles and Neergaard et al. (2011) locating more than 700 articles in the field. The second half of the 1990s, however, witnessed a sharp drop in the literature published on female entrepreneurs (Baker et al., 1997). In 2000, female entrepreneurship studies started to flourish again before witnessing a second drop between 2007 and 2010 (Neergaard et al., 2011). The reasons behind this phenomenon are discussed at the end of this chapter and in the next chapter.

Mainstream studies on female entrepreneurs diverge from critical entrepreneurship studies as each stream offers different understandings and representations of female entrepreneurs. In order to offer a comprehensive view of the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs, it is therefore important to engage with these two distinctive bodies of literature.

It is worth mentioning however that the boundaries between what is known as mainstream and non-mainstream journals is becoming more blurred as a number of leading entrepreneurship journals has recently started to publish critical entrepreneurship studies. This is reflected in the special issues of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* journal (2006; 2007; 2012) where critical as well as non-critical studies were published. The same is also true for the special issue of *Entrepreneurship Regional and Development* (2013) journal where authors introduced a new critical tradition in entrepreneurship studies; The European School of Entrepreneurship, which I explored in the previous chapter.

In the next section, I will introduce the five themes around which the review of mainstream studies will be structured.

### **2.3 The main themes**

As mentioned earlier, this chapter reviews mainstream female entrepreneurship studies. These studies have mainly been published in leading entrepreneurship journals such as *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Small Business Economics*, *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *International Small Business Journal*, and the *Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research* which publishes the proceedings of the annual conference of Babson College. In addition to the above, some articles featured in various general business and managerial journals including the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Business Quarterly*, *Career Development International*, *Women in Management Review*, the *Academy of Management Review* and *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Given the large amount of articles on female entrepreneurs, it was not possible to do justice to so many studies in this short overview. The study, however, aims to

offer an overview of the literature by analysing recent as well as historical articles that were published since the inception of this field of study. This ensures that the review covers a large span of time and engages with the various debates in the literature. It also allows for patterns and trends in the literature to emerge. The studies that have recently been published in mainstream journals but have a critical stance will be analysed in the following chapter.

The review of mainstream female entrepreneurship studies is organised around five themes. The themes were selected based on the most common topics identified in the well-cited literature reviews of Stevenson (1986); Brush (1992); Carter et al. (2001); Greene et al. (2003); Carter and Shaw (2006) and Fenwick (2008). The grouping of the topics under the following themes is not however conclusive and should only be seen as one of many other possibilities.

1. The characteristics and motivations of female entrepreneurs
2. The management style of female entrepreneurs
3. Access to finance
4. Business network/social capital
5. Business performance

Before critically analysing each theme, I will discuss in the next section the adoption of feminist theory in this literature and its influence upon the choice of research methodologies. However, a more detailed analysis of the relationship between feminist theory and female entrepreneurship studies is offered at the end of this chapter and in the following chapter.

## **2.4 An overview of feminist theory and research methodology**

The literature on female entrepreneurship focuses largely on investigating differences between male and female entrepreneurs (Harrison and Mason, 2007; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The majority of the studies, therefore, compare female entrepreneurs mainly with their male counterparts using quantitative methods (Ahl, 2006; Fenwick, 2008; Neergaard et al., 2011). Early quantitative studies lacked rigour as the studies used descriptive statistics that did not link the research findings to theory (Brush, 1992; Greene et al., 2003). Furthermore, in

contrast with quantitative studies where a detailed explanation of the sampling is required, a large number of the studies did not give any information about their sampling. This made the comparison of the findings of different studies a very flawed exercise (Moor, 1990; Brush, 1992; Greene et al., 2003). The size of the samples was also problematic because it was very small (60 was the average size of the samples). This shortcoming in the methodology was exacerbated by a low response rate. Consequently, the studies lacked the validity and reliability necessary for the findings to be generalised to the population of female entrepreneurs (Moore, 1990).

In the 1990s, authors started to adopt feminist theory (Moore, 1990), notably liberal and socialist feminism. These two approaches remain to date the most commonly used feminist perspectives in the literature (Ahl, 2006; Neergaard et al., 2011). Liberal feminist theorists claim that women and men are essentially similar in terms of their rational ability (Calás and Smirch, 1996). Researchers informed by this perspective, as illustrated later in this chapter, focus on removing discriminatory and institutional barriers that limit female entrepreneurs' abilities (Neegard et al., 2011). In contrast, social feminist theorists perceive both sexes as essentially different. They seek to liberate women by granting epistemic superiority to female cognitive style because of its association with an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982). Researchers influenced by this stance emphasise the differences between female and male entrepreneurs notably in terms of adopting dissimilar management styles and pursuing different goals (Brush, 1992).

Under the influence of these feminist perspectives, researchers were encouraged to get closer to female entrepreneurs by adopting qualitative research methods including collecting the data through personal interviews (Brush, 1992). Researchers were also invited to carry out longitudinal studies to capture the changes in the experience of female entrepreneurs. Authors did not, however, reject quantitative methods but argued for rigorous statistical techniques and for the compiling of more comprehensive databases on women (Moore, 1990). As a result of their calls, the literature witnessed the adoption of more sophisticated

quantitative methods that addressed the methodological flaws of early studies (Greene et al., 2003). Furthermore, researchers started to focus on women only samples in order to capture the variation within this group. At the same time, a number of studies emerged in the literature using interpretivist approaches and favouring qualitative research methodologies or mixed methods.

Despite this development, most of the studies still adopt a positivist stance which relies on quantitative methods and the use of statistical analytical techniques (Taylor and Marlow, 2010). The studies remain mainly descriptive and comparative with a narrow focus on sex differences and limited attention to the influence of context upon the entrepreneurial experience (Fenwick, 2008). Longitudinal studies are still a scarcity and the majority of projects rely on small samples (de Bruin et al., 2007). Thus there remains an absence of voices and stories of female entrepreneurs in the literature and a failure to capture the heterogeneity of their experience (Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

In recent years, the literature has witnessed an increased number of studies moving away from the liberal and socialist feminist perspectives. Authors are increasingly rejecting the notion that there are essential and biological differences between males and females. The influence of these studies in terms of challenging the supremacy of positivism and opening the field for new research methodologies remains however limited (Neergaard et al., 2011). The reason for the limited influence of feminist theory and the grip of the positivist paradigm over female entrepreneurship studies will be critically analysed in last section of this chapter as well as in chapters 3 and 4.

Despite, its limited impact, feminist theory has nevertheless played an important role in raising the awareness of the influence of gender upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs (Greene et al., 2003). The adoption of feminist theory has opened up the literature to the critique of the “*maleness*” of the concept of the entrepreneur (Stevenson, 1986, p.31). Authors have also become more critical towards the adoption of male models to try to understand the experience and behaviour of the female entrepreneur (de Bruin et al., 2007).

In the next section, I will critically analyse the five themes which have been identified earlier.

## **2.5 Thematic findings from the literature**

### **2.5.1 The characteristics and motivations of female entrepreneurs**

Since its inception, the literature on female entrepreneurs has paid considerable attention to the theme of characteristics and motivations. In her literature review, Moore (1990) reported that more than half of the articles reviewed were dedicated to this theme. The same observation was noted by Greene et al. (2003) who undertook a comprehensive literature review of 300 articles published between 1976 and 2001 and found that half of the reviewed articles were devoted to this theme. The discussion of the characteristics of female entrepreneurs in the literature covered a number of topics including personal attributes and motivations, human capital and demographic factors (Carter et al., 2001; Green et al., 2003). The presentation of this theme will therefore be divided into three sections:

- Personal attributes and motivations
- Human capital (education and work experience)
- Demographic factors

#### **2.5.1.1 Personal attributes and motivations**

The entrepreneurial traits that are most cited in the literature are risk-taking, locus of control, needs for achievement, autonomy and independence (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Buttner, 1993). Despite the continuous search for differences between male and female entrepreneurs across these traits, a review of the literature on this theme suggests that there are more similarities than differences between both sexes. Masters and Meier (1988) and Caruana et al. (1998) found no difference in risk taking propensity between male and female entrepreneurs. Sexton and Bowman-Upton (1990) found that female entrepreneurs scored lower than their male counterparts in terms of risk taking but stressed that the differences were not significant enough to hinder the ability of female

entrepreneurs to manage a growing company. The authors added that female entrepreneurs risk-taking propensity was much higher than the general population. Sonfield et al. (2001) also confirmed that women similarly to men choose high risk strategies.

Female entrepreneurs, similar to their male counterparts, scored higher than the rest of the population in terms of achievement, autonomy, locus of control and being independent (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Scott, 1986; Neider, 1987; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990; Ljunggren and Kolvereid, 1996). Both sexes were motivated to start-up their own business venture by the need to be one's own boss, have more challenges and being more independent (Scott, 1986; Ljunggren and Kolvereid, 1996). Buttner and Moore (1997), who studied the motivation of female entrepreneurs who occupied professional positions prior to establishing their businesses, reported the same findings. The authors found that their respondents were seeking more challenge, control and self-determination.

Authors such as Scott (1986) and Buttner and Moore (1997) who examined monetary motivation also found that female entrepreneurs were similar to their male counterparts in this regard. Scott (1986) added that both male and female entrepreneurs attributed the same rating to flexibility as a motive for starting up a business. Sexton and Kent (1981) and Buttner and Moore (1997) asserted that female entrepreneurs rated profit and growth higher than achieving family work-life balance. These findings are in line with the literature on female managers which indicates that women's career choices are influenced by family concerns in the same way as men's (Buttner and Moore, 1997).

Despite the reported similarities, there is a strong assumption in the literature that female entrepreneurs cannot grow their businesses because their personal attributes diverge from the entrepreneurial traits of their male counterparts. In order to support this argument, the findings have usually been misinterpreted to overemphasise differences (Ahl, 2006). This is evident in the interpretation of Sexton and Bowman-Upton's (1990) study. As mentioned earlier, the authors confirmed that female entrepreneurs were more risk-averse than men but added that the difference was too small to constrain women's ability to grow their companies. The authors' findings have however been constantly used as

evidence that women cannot grow their businesses as men do because they are less risk taking (see for example Brush, 1992 and Fenwick, 2008). The reports ignore the rest of Sexton and Bowman-Upton's (1990) findings in terms of the fact that woman's score was still higher than the rest of the population and that the difference was not significant enough to have an adverse impact on her growth ability. Masters and Meier (1988) noted the stereotyping of female entrepreneurs as being risk-averse. Masters and Meier (1988), who as discussed earlier contested this assumption, called upon researchers to avoid stereotyping women as being more conservative than men. Brindley (2005) critiqued the research that investigated female entrepreneurs and risk propensity for treating women as one homogenous group. The author argued that attitude to risk should be explored in relation to other factors such as the person's level of confidence. Despite this, the stereotyping of women as being risk-averse still persists in the literature. As I will discuss later under the theme of access to finance, women's low risk propensity is frequently presented in the literature as an explanation for their undercapitalisation and subsequent poor performance.

Moreover, despite the findings, discussed earlier, which showed that both sexes shared the same motivations, the literature on female entrepreneurs is dominated by the assumption that the sexes are different. For instance, female entrepreneurs are believed to assess their success qualitatively using soft measurements (personal and non-monetary values) while male entrepreneurs measure their success quantitatively using hard economic growth measurements. Unlike men, who are mainly motivated by money, female entrepreneurs are said to perceive money only as a means to an end because they are mainly motivated by helping other people; adding value to their communities; and fulfilling their passion even if this leads to low income (Soldressen et al., 1998 ; Fenwick and Hutton, 2000; De Martino and Barbato, 2003; Manolova et al., 2012; McGowan et al., 2012).

The similarities between female and male entrepreneurs in terms of their motivations have also been overshadowed in the literature by the extensive focus on "flexibility" (Collins-Dodd et al., 2004) which is also referred to as "work-family balance" (Greene et al., 2003) or "work-life balance" (Brush, 1992). Although researchers initially studied this phenomenon as a potential obstacle for

both male and female entrepreneurs (Goffee and Scase, 1983; Honig-Haftel and Martin, 1986), soon flexibility became a “*woman’s issue*” (Greene et al., 2003, p.10). Female entrepreneurs were singled out in terms of their struggle to accommodate the conflicting needs of their businesses and their personal lives (Scott, 1986; Neider, 1987). The male entrepreneur, on the other hand, features as experiencing less conflict between family life and business while enjoying the support of his spouse/domestic partner (Stevenson, 1986). This is reflected in Stevenson’s (1986) study where she argues that although men and women set up their business to achieve financial independence, autonomy, self-determination and gain more control over working lives, their underlying motivation is different as flexibility is the main catalyst driving female start-ups.

The emphasis on flexibility is also mirrored in the interpretation of the findings of Cromie’s (1987) well-cited study. The author administered psychometric scales to a sample of 35 male and 34 female new starters and would be entrepreneurs to identify sex differences in their motivations. Both women and men expressed a strong desire to make money as they needed to make a living out of their ventures. Young men, however, expressed a stronger desire than the rest of the sample in terms of making money. On the other hand, females with young children were different in terms of their need to balance their work–life. Although the differences appeared to be more related to the age and the family circumstances of the respondents than it was to their sex, the author concluded that the money motive was not as strong for women as it was for men because women’s priority was to achieve work-life balance.

In the late 1980s, a number of studies started to look at the constraints of the job market and its relation to female entrepreneurs’ motivations (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Stevenson, 1986; Wees and Romijn, 1987; Carter and Cannon, 1988; Cromie and Hayes, 1988). This focus has overshadowed the similarities between female and male entrepreneurs in terms of their motivations. This research area has concentrated on discriminatory practices in the job market against female employees, notably in relation to the glass ceiling. This is reflected in Carter’s et al. (2001) argument which noted: “*Academic studies have highlighted the broad similarities between women and men in their characteristics and motivations to*

*start a business. Differences can be seen in...women's desire to start businesses as a means of circumventing the 'glass ceiling' (p.4).*

Flexibility and escape from the constraints of the job market as motivational factors are also known in the literature as push factors. These factors are distinguished from the pull factors which refer to motivations such as the need for being independent, have more freedom or exploit opportunities in the markets (Mallon and Cohen, 2001). Women who are pushed into self-employment, unlike those who are pulled into it, are believed to run small low growth companies because they are motivated by necessity and not by profit making (Morris et al., 2006). Although women's decisions to establish their businesses are driven by push and pull factors (Orhan and Scott, 2001; McGowan et al., 2012), very few studies focused on investigating how women are pulled into entrepreneurship (i.e. Bennett and Dann, 2000; Walker and Webster, 2007). This explains de Bruin et al.'s (2007) observation that the literature on female entrepreneurs did not engage with recent discussions in entrepreneurship studies on opportunities exploitation.

The majority of the studies focus on studying the push factors and their "negative" impact on women's performance. Women who, for instance, are pushed into entrepreneurship to achieve work-life balance, their business performance is expected to suffer because the need for flexibility is conceptualised as a source of conflict and thus an impediment for business growth (Shelton, 2006). Achieving work-life balance entails that women have to operate small scale businesses which are home-based so they are easy to manage (Carter and Shaw, 2006). Furthermore, female entrepreneurs, driven by the need to have more flexibility over their working life, do not evaluate their business in terms of monetary values but in terms of how well they succeed in achieving their aspired work-life balance (Holmquist and Sundin, 1990). A recent study by Powell and Eddleston (2013) has however contested the notion that the relationship between work and family has to be a source of conflict. The authors argue that the resources acquired in the family sphere can contribute to the economic as well as non-economic success of female entrepreneurs. Powell and Eddleston (2013) however conclude that family resources do not have any impact

on the success of male entrepreneurs. Thus despite the development presented by this study in terms of the conceptualisation of work-life balance, the findings nevertheless still imply that this concept is a “women’s issue”.

The performance of women who are pushed into entrepreneurship by the constraints in the job market is also perceived to be poor because the literature assumes that these women lack what it is believed to be instrumental to their economic success namely; managerial experience, business skills and financial resources (Hisrich and Brush, 1984, Carter and Shaw, 2006; Shaw et al., 2009).

In summary, the narrow focus of the literature on the motivations of achieving flexibility and escaping from the glass ceiling does not only silence the similarities of female and male entrepreneurs but also portrays women’s motivations as stable and universal. Thus, the influence of early studies that advocated the diverse and dynamic nature of the entrepreneur’s motivations, including female entrepreneurs, remains limited in the literature. Buttner and Moore (1997) for instance argued that woman’s motivation was a function of personal aspirations and organisational influences. Neider (1987) pointed to the relationship between age and motivation as she noted that the motivations of women over 50 years old were not similar to those who were under 50 years old. The former group launched their ventures out of marriage crisis such as divorce, death or bankruptcy of the domestic partner while the latter set up their businesses to achieve personal satisfaction, higher level of creativity, more control and to being one’s own boss.

In the next section, I explore human capital as another dimension of female entrepreneurs’ characteristics.

#### **2.5.1.2 Human capital (education and work experience)**

Female entrepreneurs are found to be better educated than the general population (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986) and their male counterparts (Hisrich and Brush, 1984). In spite of this, studies conceptualise women’s education as problematic because it is perceived to be irrelevant to venture creation (Moore, 1990). Unlike men, her education is critiqued for being concentrated in liberal arts, rather than business, engineering or technical areas (Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Watkins and

Watkins, 1983; Hisrich and Brush, 1984). Women are, therefore, advised to gain more education in financial areas including how to deal with bankers and to study engineering and science. This type of education is believed to be necessary when it comes to setting up ventures in high growth industries (manufacturing, construction and communication) as opposed to low growth ones (ie. retail and services) (Hisrich and Brush, 1984).

In the same vein, woman's work experience is also portrayed as inferior to men's because it is deemed to be irrelevant to the area of business pursued by her venture. Unlike men who prior to setting up their ventures hold managerial, scientific or technical positions, women's experience are mainly in administrative jobs or in the service sector (Welsch and Young, 1982; Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Stevenson, 1986). Men are therefore believed to be more equipped to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavour (Watkins and Watkins, 1983).

A number of studies have challenged these findings. Scott (1986) reported that the majority of her respondents had prior managerial experience before setting up their ventures and were college graduates. Neider (1987) also found that the work experience of her respondents was in the same industry as their ventures and that over half of them were college educated. Moore (1990) urged researchers to move beyond descriptive quantitative research and to start distinguishing the first generation of female entrepreneurs from the second one. Westhead and Cowling (1995) who investigated gender differences in technology based companies in the UK found no significant differences between the sexes in terms of human capital. Cowling and Taylor (2001) noted that self-employed women are more likely to be highly educated than employed or home maker women.

More recently, Constantinidis et al. (2006) questioned the importance and the relevance of business qualifications and managerial experience to the entrepreneurial experience. The authors found that their participants relied mainly on their families' competencies and that business qualifications and managerial work experience were totally irrelevant to their entrepreneurial endeavours. Furthermore, Terjesen (2005) contested the assumption that all

human capital gained in senior managerial positions were transferrable to the self-employment experience. The author for instance noted that business models and corporate training were not always relevant in the context of self-employment.

Despite these critiques and the increased number of women in higher education as well as in managerial and professional positions (Heilman and Chen, 2003; Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2013), women's human capital is still portrayed as inferior to men's and a barrier to the growth of their ventures (Marlow and Carter, 2004; Carter and Shaw, 2006; Shaw et al., 2009; García and Brush, 2012). The persistence of this image is illustrated further in the discussion of the subsequent themes.

### **2.5.1.3 Demographic factors**

Early studies examined whether or not female entrepreneur's husband/domestic partner, is supportive of her entrepreneurial experience. The results were equivocal. While Hisrich and Brush (1984), Carter and Cannon (1988) and Aldrich et al. (1989) found that female entrepreneurs had supportive husbands, Watkins and Watkins (1984) and Goffee and Scase (1985) reported that the husbands were hostile to their wives' enterprises. Neider (1987) also found that female entrepreneurs' career was a source of tension in their family life. The majority of her respondents, although they were married at the time of the study, were divorced at some point of their life. The latter was part of the respondents' sacrifice to achieve career success. The tension between female entrepreneurs and family life was also reported by Buttner and Moore (1997) who found that the majority of female entrepreneurs who resigned from their senior corporate positions to set up their ventures were unmarried. Powell and Eddleston (2013) noted that female entrepreneurs who enjoyed family support were likely to achieve more economic and non-economic success. Greene et al. (2011) however asserted that the question of having or not having a domestic partner was irrelevant to the experience of female entrepreneurs.

The importance of these studies is grounded in the assumption (discussed earlier) that female entrepreneurs underperform because they are pushed into entrepreneurship. Women who set up their businesses due to divorce or death of a husband/domestic partner are believed to own low growth companies because they are not motivated by growth but by economic necessity (Minniti et al., 2005; Morris et al., 2006).

On the other hand, Hisrich and Brush's (1984) iconic study argued that the female entrepreneur, similar to her male counterpart, was first born, middle class and married with children. She had an entrepreneurial parent or a close member of her family who acted like a role model. Studies by others including Charbonneau (1981), Watkins and Watkins (1983) and Neider (1987) produced similar findings.

Despite recent studies looking at ethnic minority entrepreneurs (see for example Essers and Benschop, 2009) the image of the entrepreneur, including female entrepreneur, as a white middle class person remains largely intact (Marlow and Carter, 2004; Irwin and Scott, 2010). As a result, Marlow and Carter, (2004) encourage researchers to take into consideration other variables such as social class and ethnicity when investigating female entrepreneurs to reflect their heterogeneity.

It is worth mentioning here that the persistence of this image is a reflection of entrepreneurship studies in general. This field of study still uses the experience of white middle class men as a benchmark. This point will be further elaborated in the next chapter as part of the review of critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs.

In summary, the analysis of this theme shows that across the different variables discussed above, more similarities than differences are noted between female and male entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in the literature to support the notion that the sexes are different and that this difference disadvantages women. The difference is usually seen as a barrier to her economic growth. The strong emphasis on growth is reflected in Fenwick's comment; "*there is a*

*historic relationship between the studies of Women business owners' characteristics and their economic success"* (Fenwick, 2008).

Although recently the popularity of this theme has started to decline (Holmquist and Carter, 2009), the assumptions underlining this research stream continue to shape the findings of other research areas as illustrated later and reflected in Cliff's (1998) study. The author (1998), who carries out a qualitative study to explore the desire of men and women business owners in relation to growth, concludes that female entrepreneurs have a lower growth threshold than men. Cliff (1998) attributes her findings to women being more risk-averse and devoting less energy to their work because they are more focused on achieving work-life balance.

### **2.5.2 The management style of female entrepreneurs**

In the late 1980s, a new research area emerged with the studies of the management of women business owners. This stream, which is under-researched (Moore et al., 2011), is mainly driven by investigating the "*Increasing numbers of women (who) are becoming leaders of their own businesses and many are struggling to achieve success*" ( Fenwick, 2008, p.1). In order to understand their struggle for success, theorists focus on studying how different is the female entrepreneur's management style from her male counterpart. In line with the previous theme, the studies are mainly comparative investigations (Neider, 1987; Fenwick, 2008).

The literature is divided between two camps which Chaganti (1986) labels as the "feminine mode" and the "entrepreneurial mode". In her often-cited study, Chaganti, (1986) offers a detailed picture of how the behaviour of the entrepreneur within each mode is perceived. According to the feminine mode, the female entrepreneur adopts a feminine leadership/management style (both terms are used interchangeably in the literature) which is different from the one adopted by her male counterpart. Her management behaviour is therefore perceived to be deviant from the "*successful male entrepreneur*" (Chaganti, 1986, p.19). The female entrepreneur following the feminine mode is

conceptualised as emotional, lacking leadership qualities in terms of vision, long-term thinking and ability to manage a large workforce. She adopts a risk-averse approach and therefore her strategic direction is geared towards survival as opposed to high growth and high profitability. Her marketing strategy is narrowly focused on a small niche market where she acts as a service provider. Her company is small, unstructured, informal and does not have any information system in place. Her business is therefore poorly controlled with low profitability (Chaganti, 1986).

In contrast, a female entrepreneur, whose leadership style fits the entrepreneurial mode, is perceived to be similar to her male counterpart in terms of managing the venture according to the “*line of reasoning*” (Chaganti, 1986, p.19) and the “*masculine style of decisiveness and goal-orientation*” (Chaganti, 1986, p.22). Within this paradigm, the female entrepreneur is conceptualised as rational, bold and aggressive. She is driven by growth and therefore establishes her venture in high growth markets such as construction, manufacturing, finance and insurance. In line with the male entrepreneur, her company is well structured, result-oriented (as opposed to people oriented) and will therefore grow into a large organisation (Chaganti, 1986).

As discussed later, the distinction of a separate female management style is reinforced by authors who follow a socialist feminist perspective (Stevenson, 1986; Brush, 1992; Fenwick, 2008). According to these researchers, women adopt a management style that is more in line with their values as carers and nurturers and their inclination to pursue social, as opposed to economic goals (Brush, 1992). This is because women are said to be more concerned with achieving customer satisfaction and helping others (Brush, 1992). Furthermore, a female leadership style is described as informal, less hierarchical with communicative openness and participative decision making (Neider, 1987; Helgesen, 1990; Buttner, 2001). It has a low emphasis on formal power, strives to achieve mutual empowerment and encourages people to collaborate (Brush, 1992; Moore and Buttner, 1997; Moore et al., 2011). These characteristics of

female leadership style are perceived to have a positive impact on employees' motivations and retention (Carter et al., 2001).

The assumption that female entrepreneurs adopt a unique and/or problematic management style has been contested by a number of studies. Cuba et al. (1983) for instance, found that both female and male entrepreneurs had difficulty delegating to their subordinates. Pellegrino and Reece (1982) confirmed that female entrepreneurs did not encounter any special problems at the formation stage or during the operation of their companies. Mescon and Stevens (1982), who researched female entrepreneurs in the real estate industry in Arizona, reported that the majority of the firms were highly structured and had formal procedures in place. Van Auken and Rittenburg (1994) also found no difference between female and male entrepreneurs in terms of the effectiveness of their advertising campaigns. A recent study by Orser et al. (2011) indicates that female entrepreneurs' leadership attributes were only limited to those associated with the image of woman as nurturing and caring. The authors noted that their participants were action oriented with clear vision and strong determination to pursue their ideas. The authors also drew attention to the importance of culture in shaping leadership styles in different countries.

Despite the critique of women for running loosely structured informal organisations (Chaganti, 1986), this business model is presented in entrepreneurship studies as a viable option for small businesses. Cuba et al. (1983) for instance recommends that entrepreneurs carry out minimal organisation formalisation so they can adapt swiftly to unforeseen changes in the environment such as pulling out of unsuccessful ventures with minimum losses. The authors view formal planning and highly structured operations as barriers for flexibility and adaptation which they argue are the essence of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the lack of planning which has been associated with the "feminine mode" has been reported as a common feature of most small businesses (Stevenson and Gumpert, 1985).

The findings regarding financial problems are however contradictory. The reason seems to be embedded in the assumption that women have lower human

capital (ie education and work experience) than men. For instance, while Chrisman and Leslie (1989) asserted that female entrepreneurs faced the same financial problems as their male counterparts, Hisrich and Brush (1984) argued that female entrepreneurs encountered more financial problems than their male counterparts. The authors attributed these findings to women's poor human capital. The relationship between female entrepreneurs and finance, including financial problems, will be discussed further in the following section.

In summary, this theme remains underdeveloped as it has attracted a limited number of researchers. Furthermore, the studies, which are mainly comparative and quantitative, fails to explore the complexity of management in the context of SMEs (Fenwick, 2008). Moreover, the studies that investigated the process of running the business as opposed to women's management style are almost non-existent.

Despite the limitations of the findings, the stream is nevertheless guided by the assumption that women are different from men and therefore are less economically successful. Moreover, the association between the "entrepreneurial mode" and economic success implies that the entrepreneurial experience is one dimensional and it is equated with growing a business.

In the next section, I review the third theme; access to finance.

### **2.5.3 Access to finance**

The literature on female entrepreneurs comprises many studies that look into women's access to finance (Marlow and Patton, 2005), notably long-term debt finance (Harrison and Mason, 2007). The importance of this area of study lies in the relationship between the availability of finance and business growth (Carter and Shaw, 2006). In line with the previous theme, the research is guided by the assumption that women's businesses underperform compared to men's because of gender-based differences in terms of financing patterns (Carter et al., 2007). Unlike men, women's businesses have lower ratios of debt finance and lower levels of capitalisation which are believed to be detrimental for their long-term performance and growth (Carter et al., 2001). Despite the large number of

studies that have explored this theme, the research focuses mainly on investigating the reasons behind these differences which Carter et al. (2007) group in three strands; structural dissimilarities and gender discrimination (both reasons relate to the supply side), and higher level of debt aversion amongst women (this reason is related to the demand side).

Structural dissimilarities between the businesses of women and men are manifested in women's ventures being younger, smaller with lower profitability and lower growth (Carter et al., 2007; Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2013). Although the evidence for these dissimilarities is contradictory, as will be discussed further under the theme of "business performance", the notion of structural dissimilarities remains dominant in the literature. Authors who support this notion refer its presence to the rejection of female entrepreneurs' loan applications. Coleman (2000) for instance notes that banks reject women's loan applications because of the small size of their ventures as these institutions prefer lending to large businesses. Riding and Swift (1990) also assert that female entrepreneurs have more difficulty accessing bank loans because their businesses are smaller and younger with low rates of sales growth relative to men.

The assumptions (discussed earlier in the first theme) about women's poor human capital and the constraints they face in the job market are frequently used to explain banks' behaviour towards female entrepreneurs (Manning and Swaffield, 2008; Kwong et al., 2012). Marlow and Patton (2005) argue that female entrepreneurs have difficulty accessing bank finance because of their subordination in the workplace which confines them to low paid part time jobs. Consequently, when these women later turn to self-employment, they are low skilled and have limited financial resources. This lack of resources disadvantages their loan applications. Boden and Nucci (2000) also claim that women's access to finance is limited because their education and work experience are inferior to men. Fay and Williams (1993) blame not only women's poor human capital but also their weak social capital (which will be debated later under the theme of "Business networking") for the rejection of their loan applications. Moreover, Fay and Williams (1993) justify the behaviour of

the loan officers because the latter work in risk-averse institutions and asked female entrepreneurs to improve their human and social capital in order to have access to finance.

Some authors, however, attribute loan rejections not to women's poor human capital but to gender stereotyping. Marlow and Patton (2005) stress that the skewed representation of femininity, as being inferior to masculinity, hinders women's access to finance. The same observation is noted by Orser and Foster (1994) who establish that banks' decisions to lend money are carried out in a subjective manner to the detriment of female entrepreneurs.

A number of studies however challenged the findings regarding banks' discriminatory behaviour against female entrepreneurs. After undertaking a comprehensive quantitative study in the USA, Buttner and Rosen (1988) dismissed the idea that female entrepreneurs were discriminated against. The authors found no evidence of the influence of sex stereotyping upon funding decisions taken by both loan officers as well as venture capitalists. Their findings were shared by Irwin and Scott (2010) who undertook a telephone survey of 4000 SMEs in the UK and confirmed that women found it actually easier to raise finance than men because they were perceived as "less risky". Carter and Rosa (1998) and Irwin and Scott (2010) point to the complexity and myriad of factors that loan officers and venture capitalists take into consideration when they review loan applications. Carter and Rosa (1998) noted the influence of the industry upon the banks' lending decisions as they noticed in their study that the highest rate of loan rejection was allocated to the textile industry which was badly hit in the 1980s. Arenius and Autio (2006) reached the same conclusion as they noted that Finland's banks favoured loan applications from certain industries, notably high technology and high growth sectors regardless of the gender of the applicant. The authors attributed this discrimination to government's initiatives which promoted these sectors.

Buttner and Rosen (1989) indicated that the loan process was another factor influencing the decision of loan officers. The authors for instance noted that having an interview as part of the process worked in favour of female

entrepreneurs' loan applications. On the other hand, Buttner and Rosen (1988) pointed out that the gender of the loan officer had an influence upon the loan decision. The authors (1988) found that in the USA, female loan officers were more inclined to rate female entrepreneurs higher than male loan officers in terms of certain traits such as leadership, autonomy and endurance. In contrast with Buttner and Rosen (1988), Carter et al. (2007) found that in the UK female loan officers were more stringent than their male counterparts when assessing women's loan applications.

Similar to the research on the supply side, the research which examines the demand side also holds contradictory findings. This research area is governed by the assumption that the difference between female and male entrepreneurs regarding financing patterns is due to women being more risk-averse. They therefore avoid borrowing which hinders the growth of their ventures (Carter and Rosa, 1998; Cliff, 1998; Watson, 2006; Carter et al., 2007; Roper and Scott, 2009). These results contradict the findings discussed earlier in relation to women's risk propensity being similar to men.

The research on the demand side has been critiqued for failing to take into consideration the context in which female entrepreneurs operate. Constantinidis et al. (2006) stressed that the demand for finance depends on the firm's characteristics, the sector in which the firm operates and the owner's preferences. Irwin and Scott (2010) added that external borrowing was culturally bounded. The authors noted that in the UK most entrepreneurs, regardless of their gender, resorted to the use of their personal savings as opposed to long-term debt finance. Zimmerman and Scott (2006) also found that in Ireland both female and male entrepreneurs preferred informal finance. These findings are consistent with the literature on small business finance where Peterson and Shulman (1987) confirm that culture influences the demand for borrowing. Howorth (2001) also emphasised that UK small business owners preferred other methods of finance over external borrowing as there was a sense of pride associated with not borrowing.

Furthermore, the literature on finance to small businesses (SMEs) does not support either the assumption that women have different financing patterns from men or that external finance is positively related to business growth. The low level of accessing long-term debt finance is established in the literature as being a common practice amongst entrepreneurs regardless of their sex (Kotey, 1999). On the supply side, a combination of administration costs and high risk of default deters financial institutions from lending to small businesses (Kotey, 1999). While on the demand side, entrepreneurs in general prefer to avoid debt capital as it is perceived to be a threat to their control and independence in addition to the high cost associated with it (Howorth, 2001).

On the other hand, the assumption that there is a strong relationship between business economic growth and external finance has been debated in the literature on finance for SMEs. Planning cash flow is considered to be more vital for business survival and growth than accessing external finance. Moreover, small firms are known to use a wide range of bootstrapping methods of finance which offset the absence of external finance (Howorth, 2001). Despite the importance and the relevance of both cash flow and bootstrapping to the entrepreneurial experience, especially in the current economic climate, both topics are not explored in female entrepreneurship studies with the exception of Brush et al.'s (2006) study. In their study, the authors (2006) note that women use a wide range of bootstrapping activities to finance their businesses and that these activities vary according to which development stage the business is in.

In summary, despite the volume of research done on female entrepreneurs and finance there is no evidence that there are gender based differences in finance patterns which are detrimental to women's performance (Carter and Rosa, 1998; Harrison and Mason, 2007; Irwin and Scott, 2010).

#### **2.5.4 Business networking/social capital**

Research on female entrepreneurs' networking activities emerged in the late 1980s (Smeltzer and Fann, 1989; Greene et al., 2003). This area of study has its origins in exchange theory. According to this theory, small business owners are

faced with scarce resources and therefore they need to network with other agents in order to be able to increase their access to necessary resources (Aldrich, 1989). Networking is seen as a source of power (Smeltzer and Fann, 1989) and recently it has been identified as a cornerstone in social capital (Carter and Shaw, 2006; García and Carter, 2009). It enables entrepreneurs to identify opportunities (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2007), gain advice and insider knowledge (Linehan and Scullion, 2008). These factors are considered to be crucial for business growth (Johannisson, 2000; Hampton et al., 2011).

Despite the importance of business networking, the number of studies investigating female entrepreneurs' networking activities is limited (García and Carter, 2009; Hampton et al., 2011). The research has been carried out mainly through comparative studies that look for similarities and differences between male and female entrepreneurs (Carter et al., 2001; Fenwick, 2008). Despite finding similarities between men and women in terms of using and building networks (Aldrich et al., 1989; Smeltzer and Fann, 1989; Neergaard et al., 2005; Foss, 2010), the literature witnessed lots of debate around sex based differences regarding the composition and the quality of networking (Kwong et al., 2012).

There seems to be an apparent agreement in the literature that female entrepreneurs' networks are dominated by women (Cromie and Birley, 1992; Hampton et al., 2009). DeWine and Casbolt (1983) argue that women prefer to network with each other because women only networks offer them the right advice, support and role models. These findings are shared by Smeltzer and Fann (1989) who added that female entrepreneurs prefer to network together because in this way they access social support as well as instrumental information and resources.

The composition of women's networks has however been interpreted in the literature as a barrier to the growth of their businesses (Brush et al., 2004; Shaw et al., 2005). The reason is that women's only networks are perceived to be less instrumental than the "old boys' networks" (Reevy and Maslach, 2001; Fenwick, 2008). Moreover, there is a perceived positive relationship between the quality of human capital and that of social capital (Shaw et al., 2005; Murphy et al.,

2007). Consequently, women's poor human capital (debated earlier) implies that women only networks limit access to resources including finance (Uzzi, 1999; Greer and Greene, 2003; Delmar and Holmquist, 2004; Shaw et al., 2005; Fenwick, 2008). Female entrepreneurs have, therefore, been critiqued for working in a "*glass box*" (Canadian Advisory Council on the status of women, 1991) and have been urged to penetrate "*male bastions*" (Hampton et al., 2011, p.592).

The assumption that women only networks are problematic is reflected in the hypothesis of the most cited articles in this research area. The studies hypothesised that female and male entrepreneurial networks were different and that this difference impeded women's access to financial resources (Carter and Rosa, 1998), reduced the quality of resources obtained through networking (Smeltzer and Fann, 1989) and hindered the growth of their businesses (Aldrich et al., 1989). This hypothesis was however rejected as authors did not find that women's networking activities were detrimental to their performance. Carter and Rosa (1989) for instance denied that gender based differences in networking had an adverse impact on accessing financial resources. Smeltzer and Fann (1989) asserted that the quality of resources offered in women's networks were of great value and recommended that women only networks should be nurtured. After undertaking a survey in the USA and Italy to compare networking activities of both sexes in the two countries, Aldrich et al. (1989) noted that the differences were country based and not gender dependent. The Americans for instance had slightly more contacts than Italians while the latter spent much more time with their contacts. Moreover, Aldrich et al. (1989) added that women were as successful as men in terms of acquiring resources through networking.

A recent qualitative study by Hampton et al. (2011) confirmed the findings of these early quantitative studies. The authors, who interviewed female entrepreneurs operating in the science, engineering and technology (SET) sectors in Northern Ireland, concluded that women's networks were effective and gave them access to high quality resources. The study however noted that networking activities were dynamic. These findings led them to encourage researchers to

study these activities over a long period of time in order to capture their complexity.

In summary, the overwhelming similarities between female and male entrepreneurs in terms of their networking activities (Conway and Jones, 2006) have been overshadowed by the difference in the composition of their networks. This difference was overemphasised and used as an explanation for women's underperformance.

In the next section, I explore the fifth theme; business performance.

### **2.5.5 Business performance**

Business performance is an important theme for academics as well as policy makers (Carter et al., 2001). The latter are increasingly interested in SME start-ups and growth because they believe that this sector offers a strong contribution to economic growth by creating new employment opportunities (Holmquist and Carter, 2009). Business performance is, therefore, equated with growth and evaluated in terms of economic growth variables notably an increase in sales turnover, number of employees and profitability (Carter and Shaw, 2006). This is reflected in Carter et al.'s (2001) study where the authors call this theme; "*Performance and Growth*" (p.36).

Women are said to operate in the service sector especially in retailing which is presented as being both labour intensive and crowded with competitors (Carter and Shaw, 2006; Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2013). Consequently, this sector does not offer the opportunity for growth and high profitability (Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991). In contrast, men are presented as setting up their businesses in high growth, high profitable "non-traditional" sectors such as high technology, communication, construction, public utilities and manufacturing (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Carter et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2003). This image is however challenged by the findings of Stevenson's (1986) early study. In this study, the author noted that in USA "The State of Small Business Report (1985)", covering the period from 1977 to 1982, highlighted the increased participation of women business owners in non-traditional industries namely agricultural services,

forestry and fishing, mining, construction, and manufacturing. A later study by Heilman and Chen (2003) also undermines this prevailing assumption about the characteristics of women's owned businesses. The authors stated that according to the "National Foundation for Women's Business Ownership (NFWBO) (1999)" female entrepreneurs in the USA were increasingly operating in non-traditional industries such as construction, wholesale trade, transportation/communication, agriculture and manufacturing. Moreover, the association between low profitability and the retailing industry does not reflect current development in the market place where companies operating in this sector have made huge profits as a result of changing technologies (for example Amazon).

Moreover, it is well documented in entrepreneurship studies that the majority of entrepreneurs do not seek to grow their companies because of fear of loss of control and independence (Davidsson, 1989). Despite this fact the lack of growth is conceptualised as a woman's problem (Wilson and Tagg, 2010). This research area is, therefore, dominated by what is known as the "*underperformance hypothesis*" (Du Rietz and Henrekson, 2000). According to this hypothesis, female entrepreneurs underperform in comparison to their male counterparts in relation to economic performance measurements (Powell and Eddleston, 2008). Du Rietz and Henrekson (2000) formulated the underperformance hypothesis as follows; "*All else being equal female entrepreneurs tend to be less successful than their male counterparts in terms of conventional economic performance measures*" (p.1). The evidence used in these studies is mainly based on national statistics (Chell and Baines, 1998; Du Rietz and Henrekson, 2000).

Despite this research area being "*a long-standing concern of the research literature*" (Carter and Shaw, 2006, p.17), surprisingly only few empirical studies have tested the hypothesis (García and Brush, 2012). Moreover, the empirical findings suggest that there are more similarities than differences between male and female entrepreneurs' performance across the various economic variables.

Kalleberg and Leicht (1991) for instance undertook a longitudinal study in the USA of 411 companies operating in three different sectors; the computer sales

and software, food and drink, and health industries. Although the authors noted that women were less experienced than men and their businesses were smaller, both sexes were similar in terms of business growth. Johnson and Storey (1993) also reported no differences between women and men in relation to economic performance measurements. Du Rietz and Henrekson (2000) tested the hypothesis by carrying out a survey involving a large sample of 4200 entrepreneurs in Sweden. The authors found that female entrepreneurs only underperformed against one variable; sales, but their performance in terms of profitability and employment was similar to their male counterparts. Similar findings were presented by Watson (2002) and Johnsen and McMahon (2005) who analysed a large set of secondary data from a longitudinal survey carried out by the Australian Federal Government. Both studies stated that, after controlling for a number of variables including the type of industry, the performance of female and male entrepreneurs was similar.

Furthermore, this research area has been critiqued for assuming that there is always a positive relationship between large sized companies and profitability. Kalleberg and Leicht (1991) point out that this relationship is usually an inverse one as smaller sized companies tend to be more profitable than large companies.

Before proceeding to the final part of this chapter - discussion and findings - it is important to highlight that in contrast with the hegemonic logic of economic growth which equates business performance with linear progress, performance comprises two distinct concepts; survival and growth. These two concepts are determined by different processes (Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991). Furthermore, White (1984) who used survival, and not growth, as an indication of success, noted that the survival rate of women's owned businesses was higher than men's. When the author compared women's failure rate against other companies, he concluded that women's survival rate was consistently higher than men. White's study adds to the critique of the established assumption that female performance is problematic. Another interesting finding in White's study is that 50% of the women who survived had modest income expectations and were prepared to be more patient in terms of returns. Furthermore 36% of those who closed down

their businesses their income expectations were three times higher. This contradicts the notion that because female entrepreneurs have lower growth expectations, they end up owning smaller companies compared to men (Cliff, 1998).

Unfortunately longitudinal studies, like White (1984) and Kalleberg and Leicht (1991) are still lacking in the literature (Knowles, 2006) and therefore the findings offer only limited insight into the complexity of female entrepreneurs' experience. Moreover, researchers did not consider the influence of contextual factors upon performance (Constantinidis et al., 2006; de Bruin et al., 2006; García and Brush, 2012).

In the next section, I conclude this chapter by discussing the main findings of this review.

## **2.6 Findings and conclusion**

When I identified the themes in this review, I followed the tradition of the other literature reviews in the field in terms of analysing performance as a separate topic at the end of the review. The analysis, however, shows that performance, which is equated with growth, is not a standalone neutral theme. The topic's boundary extends to include the different research areas on the female entrepreneur. As discussed earlier, the significance of the growth of women's businesses emanates from the relationship established by policy makers between business growth and economic growth at the macro level in terms of jobs and wealth creation. Therefore, in contrast with what has been reported in the literature, in terms of the female entrepreneur being ill defined (Moore 1990), she has on the contrary been narrowly identified. The female entrepreneur is mainly conceptualised in terms of her function in the economy as an economic agent who contributes to economic growth. This definition is in line with Ahl's (2006) observation. The author (2006), after undertaking a discourse analysis of female entrepreneurship studies in mainstream journals, found that the majority of the articles justified their research in relation to the importance of women's entrepreneurship as an engine for economic growth.

Closely related to this definition is the assumption that female entrepreneurs underperform relative to men (Holmquist and Carter, 2009). Baker et al. (2003) attributed the fall in the research on female entrepreneurs, noted earlier, to this phenomena. The authors argued that the promotion of entrepreneurship as a source of economic growth led leading entrepreneurship journals and business school curricula to ignore female entrepreneurs. The notion that female entrepreneur's performance lags behind their male counterparts and that they are not motivated by economic success has rendered their experience not worthy of study (Langowitz and Morgan, 2003).

In contrast with the rules of quantitative studies, where the hypothesis has to be "rigorously" tested before it can be accepted or rejected, the underperformance hypothesis as discussed previously has not been subjected to this rule. It remains largely unchallenged in female entrepreneurship studies because at the aggregate level it is considered as an "established fact". As discussed earlier, the literature mirrors official statistics which portray the female entrepreneur as underperforming relative to her male counterpart in relation to the economic growth variables; sales turnover, profitability and increase in number of employees (for example see BERR, 2008).

The focus on economic growth has, therefore, reinforced the perception that the female entrepreneur is different from her male counterpart, despite the lack of supportive findings from female entrepreneurship studies and from other bodies of literatures as discussed earlier. The overwhelming similarities between both sexes are overshadowed by the image of a "different problematic woman". As the analysis demonstrates, studies that focus on the process and context, as opposed to the individual are rare. The focus of the studies has, mainly, been limited to the individual level whereby female entrepreneurs' problematic performance has been attributed to "feminine attributes" which diverge from those of the successful male entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006). These traits were overemphasised and blamed for acting as a barrier towards the realisation of her full entrepreneurial potential; of success in terms of economic growth. As noted in the literature review, almost every research area is dominated by an

underlying assumption that there is a “women’s issue” where her underperformance is grounded (a brief summary of the relationship between female entrepreneurs’ studies, the underperformance hypothesis and the economic growth is illustrated in figure 2 below).

In this sense, economic growth, through the underperformance hypothesis, has reinforced a psychological reductionism in female entrepreneurship studies. This has led to her exclusion as the other; the unsuccessful entrepreneur, until she realigns her attributes and personal characteristics to fit with those of the successful entrepreneur. Women have therefore to undergo a number of transformations (Ogbor, 2000). As discussed earlier, she was advised to do all the things that the successful man is assumed to be doing such as to be less risk-averse; obtain a university degree preferably in business studies; learn scientific and engineering subjects; gain more managerial experience; adopt a more masculine management style; borrow from banks; operate in non-traditional business sectors; and join the “old boys” networks.

Economic growth is therefore a gendered construct that has established in the literature a dichotomy of successful (male) entrepreneur versus unsuccessful (female) entrepreneur. Moreover, the lack of focus on the context and on the process as well as the absence of longitudinal studies and the supremacy of quantitative methods have reinforced the assumption that both the problematic and the successful behaviours are stable and universal. As a result, the complexity of female entrepreneurs’ experience has not been captured in the literature. The latter has been reduced to a number of economic variables. The heterogeneity and diversity of women’s stories are absent from the literature as women are portrayed as one homogenous group whose entrepreneurial experience is mainly gender related (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

Despite the emergence of feminist studies, the influence of economic growth, as a gendered construct, upon the subordination of female entrepreneurs has not been fully explored. Neither liberal nor socialist feminist writers have challenged the legitimacy of the metanarrative of economic growth.

Liberal feminist theorists who conceptualise women and men as essentially similar, have not challenged the assumption about women's underperformance but examined structural barriers that prevented her from growing her business in the same way as the successful male entrepreneur. Researchers influenced by this stance focused on discriminatory and institutional barriers including bank discriminatory practice; limited access to finance; exclusion from male networks; and report of the glass ceiling. Their aim was to redress the situation so that women can have the same opportunity of growing their businesses as men do (Ahl, 2003). Socialist theorists also did not question economic growth as a gendered construct. Their departure point is that biological differences between women and men determine their roles in the society including their economic roles (Chell and Baines, 1998). The research discussed earlier in relation to women's meaning of success and management style comes under this rubric.

Moreover, as discussed further in the following chapter, both liberal and socialist feminists have unintentionally contributed to the reinforcement of the "different problematic female entrepreneur". From a socialist stance, the reported similarities were rejected as the authors (see for example Brush, 1992 and Fenwick, 2008) questioned the validity of the findings, arguing that the adoption of male-based models cannot capture the experience of women. Furthermore, presenting female entrepreneurs as having a different cognitive psychology than men is problematic as it reinforces the presumed homogeneity of both men and women. The entrepreneurial experience of both sexes is heterogeneous and therefore cannot be homogenised based on their socio economic behaviour (Chell and Baines, 1998).

Studies influenced by liberal feminism stress the presence of differences between women and men as a reflection of persistent structural problems that disadvantage women. Therefore a number of issues, which were not supported by the findings, were overemphasised such as gender discrimination by banks, the limited access to capital, and the impact of the exclusion from male networks, glass ceiling and flexibility (see for example Marlow and Patton, 2005 and Fenwick, 2008). This approach is also problematic because it recognises man's

experience as the norm and tries to adjust women's traits and experience to fit in (Chell and Baines, 1998).

Drawing on my findings from the literature, the study's main objective is to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the oppression of economic growth. In order to achieve the study's objective, the research aims to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience. A summary of the research gap, objective and aim is summarised in the below table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of the research gap, objective and aim**

Mainstream female entrepreneurship studies	<b>Findings and gap</b>
	The metanarrative of economic growth dominates the literature and establishes a dichotomy of successful versus unsuccessful female entrepreneur
	All the studies are governed by the underperformance hypothesis
	Imposed a psychological reductionism which led to the exclusion of the female entrepreneur as the other
	The analysis remains largely at the individual level of the entrepreneur
	Positivism dominates this research area and the studies are largely comparative
	Limited influence of feminist theory
<b>Thus</b>	
<b>The research objective is</b> to liberate female entrepreneur from the oppression of the metanarrative of economic growth?	
<b>The research aim is</b> to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience	

The first part of this thesis (see figure 1) will achieve the research's objective and aim by addressing the following questions:

1. What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs?

2. How can feminist theory contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs?
3. How relevant is the theoretical foundation of economic growth to the entrepreneurial experience?
4. What is the relationship between economic growth theory, Schumpeter's theories and the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy?
5. Is there an alternative conceptualisation of the entrepreneurial experience?

The first question has largely been answered in this chapter. However the next chapter will shed further light on it. The remaining questions will be answered in chapters; 3, 4 and 5 by adopting a multidisciplinary approach. In chapter 3, I explore feminist epistemologies with a special emphasis on how postmodern feminist epistemology enables me to achieve the research objective. This will be followed by a review of critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs which are mainly published outside the realm of mainstream entrepreneurship journals.

In chapter 4, I explore economic studies on entrepreneurship. As the review of critical entrepreneurship studies brings to the surface the influence of Schumpeter upon the subordination of female entrepreneurs, the exploration of economic studies will be broadened to include a re-visit of Schumpeter's theorising.

Informed by the findings of chapters 3 and 4, I will re-visit briefly in chapter 5 mainstream studies on female entrepreneurs. The chapter will then conclude by offering a summary of the thesis's theoretical findings.

Finally, I close this chapter with a quote from the first piece of research on female entrepreneurs and wonder how far has the research moved since Schrier's (1975) article "*Women differ slightly from men on the personal characteristics and background which seem to relate to successful entrepreneurial activity*" (p.13).

## Economic Growth

Underperformance hypothesis		
Research areas	Examples of women's issue	Outcome
Personal traits	Risk-averse Low level of energy	<b>Underperformance</b>
Motivations	Glass ceiling Flexibility Different meaning of success	
Demographic	Divorce Single	
Human capital	Poor business education	
	Poor scientific education	
	Poor managerial experience	
Finance	Undercapitalisation Lack of external finance	
Management	Female management style	
Network	Women's only network	
Industry choice	Traditional women industries	

**Figure 2: The influence of the metanarrative of economic growth**

## **3 Critical entrepreneurship studies**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The chapter seeks to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth by answering the following questions;

1. What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs?
2. How can feminist theory contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs?

In order to answer these questions, the chapter presents an overview of different feminist epistemologies. This will be followed by a review of critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs and a brief rationale for (and critique of) adopting a postmodern feminist epistemology. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the main findings and justification for exploring economic studies in the following chapter.

It is worth mentioning that critical studies on female entrepreneurs have not been reviewed before as a separate body of literature. This chapter, therefore, fills an important gap in female entrepreneurship studies. Given the critical stance of the thesis, it was vital to engage with the findings of these studies as they offered further insights into the critique of the theory of entrepreneurship and the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth. Moreover, the influence of feminist theory upon this stream is more visible (Ahl, 2006).

### **3.2 Critical analysis of different feminist epistemologies**

Feminist theory focuses on bringing to light as well as critiquing the subordination of women (Cudd and Andreasen, 2005). According to these authors, feminist theorising can be divided into three waves. The first wave was motivated by the Enlightenment which is considered to be the starting point in the history of the Western feminist tradition. Although the Enlightenment did

not promote women's rights, its advocacy for people's right to oppose any form of authorities has inspired early feminist philosophers. The first wave of feminism was marked by the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792) "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman". The effort of liberal feminists, which was influenced by the nineteenth century liberal political philosophy, focused on women's legal, economic and political equality. The significance of this wave diminished after the ratification of the "Nineteenth Amendment" which granted women more rights including a wider access to education and the right for property ownership.

The second wave was seen to have been initiated by Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work (1949) "The Second Sex". This wave was not limited to reforming the political institution but to radically transforming every aspect of social life. Theorists therefore looked beyond economic subordination and brought into focus other areas in which women were oppressed, including marriage and sexuality.

The late 1980s marks the beginning of the third wave of feminism which located diversity, including the diversity of feminist's goals, at the heart of feminist theory and political agenda. In recent years, however, feminist researchers have increasingly been influenced by postmodernism (see further elucidation later in this chapter). As a result feminists started questioning the unified categories of "woman" and "women's oppression" (Cudd and Andreasen, 2005) and paid attention to the exploration of the ideological processes that legitimate and perpetuate women's subordination (Flax, 1992). Thus despite the common goal of feminist theorists in terms of addressing women's subordination, the three waves of feminism differ on how this may be achieved (Crotty, 2009).

There are many different ways in which feminist theories can be classified (Crotty, 2009). The majority of these classifications are, however, carried out from a theoretical perspective, as opposed to an epistemological perspective (Flax, 1992). The classifications usually take into consideration the different accounts given for gender inequalities and the political actions suggested in order to address these problems (Gibson-Graham, 1994). The boundaries between

these different perspectives are, nevertheless, artificial and blurred and can be distorting due to their degree of overlap (Tong, 1995; Calás and Smircich, 1999). For instance, the two well-cited typologies of feminist theories, Tong (1995) and Calás and Smircich (1999), group feminist theories into seven perspectives. However, Tong labels her categories as follows; liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist and postmodern. Calás and Smircich (1999), on the other hand, do not allocate a separate category for existentialist theories but instead they add a category of third world/post-colonial. Moreover, some of these categories overlap epistemologically. For instance, in the work of Calás and Smircich (1999) the Marxist and the socialist perspectives are both rooted in the same epistemology. As a result of this overlap and blurred boundaries, Tong (1995) recommends that these typologies should only be used as an analytical tool. Moreover, the attempt to offer a detailed categorisation of feminist theories has been criticised by postmodern feminist theorists for reinforcing the very masculine norms of scientific knowledge that it seeks to critique (Crotty, 2009).

In order to overcome some of the limitations associated with the above methods of categorising feminist theories, this study offers a broader classification by following Anderson (2011) who adopts an epistemic perspective. Anderson's (2011) investigation into the situatedness of knowledge has been carried out within three different feminist epistemological traditions namely; feminist empiricist, feminist standpoint theory and postmodern feminist epistemology.

Before proceeding with the explanation of these different epistemologies, it is important to note that the definition of feminist epistemology is not without debate and critiques. The term has been associated with different meanings such as "*women's ways of knowing*", "*women's experience*" or "*women's knowledge*" (Crotty, 2009). In line with Anderson (2011), who follows Harding (1986) in part of her analysis, feminist epistemology is identified in this study as seeking to address knowledge claims that subordinate woman by exploring how gender influences our knowledge and situates knowing subjects. Framed in this way, feminist epistemology can be part of social epistemology and thus examines "*the*

*influence of socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experience on the production of knowledge*” (Cudd and Andreasen, 2005, p.190). This way of framing feminist epistemology is therefore in line with the thesis’s critical stance as it enables researchers to challenge taken for granted assumptions and accepted knowledge with a view to reform theoretical practices that perpetuate women’s subordination (Anderson, 2011).

### **3.3 Feminist empiricist epistemology**

Feminist empiricists’ main aim is to bring to light the role of scientific research in reinforcing an androcentric bias where men’s lives or predicaments are represented as the norm for human life. While classical empiricists emphasise the primary role of experience in obtaining fixed and neutral knowledge, feminist empiricists, influenced by Quine (1963), reject the notion that experience yields fixed and neutral knowledge. In line with Quine (1963), they argue that the findings of any experience may be revised as the result of subsequent experience. Feminist empiricist epistemology opposes the sharp division between facts and values as it acknowledges the role of value judgement, notably feminist values, on empirical inquiry (Nelson, 1990; Campbell, 1998). This acknowledgement has, however, created a paradox of bias as there is a conflict between attacking androcentric biases as bad bias while advocating feminist values. In order to deal with this conflict, feminist empiricists argue that not all bias is necessarily bad (Antony, 1993). This led to the adoption of a pragmatic approach which undermines the sharp division between fact and value and accepts/rejects any theory based on empirical investigation (Antony, 1993).

For feminist empiricists both sexes are perceived in similar ways as knowing subjects. Differences between women and men are due to early socialisation and structural barriers that prevent women from behaving in the same way as men. So structure and not sex is the focus of the research carried out within this stream (Ahl, 2002).

### **3.4 Feminist standpoint epistemology**

The problem of situated knowledge is approached differently in standpoint epistemology, which holds that women and men are essentially different knowing subjects. Feminist standpoint theorists seek to empower oppressed women by granting them epistemic privilege over the theories and practices that subordinate them. For this reason, feminist standpoint theory has been classified as a type of critical theory (Anderson, 2011).

Feminist standpoint epistemology is closely related to Marxist standpoint theory and therefore there is similarity between claims for women's epistemic authority and that of the proletariat. Centrality, collective self-consciousness, cognitive style and oppression which are key concepts in Marxist standpoint theory are cornerstones in feminist standpoint theory (Anderson, 2011). As workers, for instance, are central to production within Marxism, so too are women central within the system of reproduction. Women who attend to everyone's needs in the household are privileged in their ability to notice how patriarchy subordinates the others (Rose, 1987). At the same time feminine cognitive style is granted an epistemic superiority by feminist standpoint theorists because an ethics of care, which is associated with femininity, is privileged over an ethics of domination, which is embedded in masculinity. The former produces knowledge that has an interest in universal humanity while the latter generates knowledge that solely serves the interest of the dominant group (Gilligan, 1982). Collective self-consciousness, which is also related to the Marxist concept of objectification, involves making a subordinated group conform to the ways of the dominant group. According to Marxist theorising, workers achieve their epistemic privileged positions when they become autonomous agents and have control over their actions. This position is possible with the rise of collective consciousness that makes workers aware of their role in capitalism and its history. Similar to Marxist theorists, feminist standpoint theorists seek to liberate women by unmasking sexist practices that subordinate them (MacKinnon, 1999). Finally, experiencing oppression is considered by standpoint theorists as a source of epistemic privilege which reflects Marxist theory whereby the oppressed is

privileged in terms of any knowledge claim about the oppression. Women who are oppressed by patriarchal society enjoy a superior knowledge claim in terms of this form of oppression.

### **3.5 Postmodern feminist epistemology**

Postmodernism emerged in the 1950s as a new type of literary experiment against cultural modernism but it was not until the 1980s that the movement was broadened to include other practices. Postmodernism critiques the foundations of the Enlightenment theory of knowledge which constitutes the analytical basis for modernity and the social sciences, notably; rationality, universalism and materialism. In this sense, postmodernism challenges the claim made by Enlightenment thinkers for objective and universal truth. Furthermore, postmodernism attacks the Enlightenment's advocacy for value-free scientific knowledge and the stability of self and value (Waugh, 1998). As it perceives knowledge to be socially constructed through interactions with others, it replaces the unity of the self with fragmentation, instability and plurality (Firat and Shultz II, 1997). Thus social identities, including gender, are fluid, partial, ambiguous and context-dependent (Ahl, 2003).

Postmodern feminist epistemology distinguishes between biological sex and gender. Gender refers to the socially constructed meanings assigned to masculinity and femininity by different cultures and dominant discourses. It is, therefore, conceptualised as a mode of social situation as it is what societies make of sexual differences in terms of assigning different norms and roles to men and women on the basis of real or imagined sexual characteristics (Anderson, 2011). For instance, early socialisation attributes different norms of behaviour to the bodies of boys and girls. These norms are then internalised by each sex and will determine their phenomenology of embodiment (Anderson, 2011). In other words, postmodern theorists claim that bodies are differently gendered because gender is performative as opposed to having an inner essence (Butler and Scott 1992; Harding, 2013). Masculinity and femininity are not therefore fixed by nature and embedded in the behaviour of separate gender roles. Instead, they are historically and culturally bounded and can be performed by men or women in

almost any role (Keller, 1992). In short, the classification of traits as feminine and masculine “*is a process whereby something that is not a thing is posited as a thing*” (Creswell, 2007, p.179). As a result of this process, prevailing assumptions of “*what it means to be a woman and how women ought to live and act*” are established (Creswell, 2007, p.179). However, since the society is a patriarchal society which favours masculinity over femininity, postmodern feminist theorists are suspicious of these assumptions. They therefore invite critical researchers to question those meanings that have been imposed upon womanhood in a hegemonic fashion. Within this perspective, the study of gender focuses on social and cultural categories as well as discursive practices that classify the person within the binary system of masculinity or femininity (Keller, 1992). Under the rubric of postmodernism, feminist researchers, therefore, shift their focus from the studies of differences between masculinity and femininity to the exploration of how these meanings are constructed. Researchers look at how the labels of male and female affect the way the world is structured around each sex and what values are assigned to different domains (Singer, 1992).

Unlike standpoint and empiricist theorists, postmodern feminist researchers critique the category “woman” for being essentialist. It implies that gender identity is unified, universal and ahistorical (Flax, 1992). Furthermore, postmodern theorists claim that women’s oppression and experience is complex and influenced by a multitude of factors including gender, class, sexual orientation and race. This has led feminist theorists to explore how different attributes and social categories such as race, religion, ethnicity and age intersect with gender and how these intersections shape people’s lives (Harding et al., 2013).

Moreover, postmodernism argues that the two feminist epistemologies; standpoint and empiricist, reinforce gender bias as they do not question the male norm which remains the standard against which women’s activities are still implicitly judged (Calás and Smircich, 1996). Postmodernism for instance critiques standpoint theorists for granting epistemic privilege to women’s cognitive style as this supports existing gender relations and social orders, instead

of challenging them. On the other hand, influenced by Foucault, postmodern feminist theorists assume that any claim for epistemic authority and truth is a discursive strategy that aims to maintain power relations in an established hierarchy (Gibson-Graham, 1994). Postmodern theorists problematise gender norms and homogeneity including that of female identity as a discursive practice that maintains woman's subordination (Jackson, 1998). They argue that the promotion of an ungendered sameness which silences the diversity and plurality of meanings is oppressive as it universalises the experience of the white middle class and excludes other groups including women. As the oppression of the excluded groups is made invisible, their subordination is perpetuated and their difference is turned into deviance (Keller, 1992).

Postmodernism critiques of standpoint epistemology led to the rejection of a single feminist standpoint in favour of a more pluralistic approach that takes into account different marginalised groups, such as BME men and woman (Harding, 1991). On the other hand, postmodernism has led feminist empiricists to acknowledge the partiality of the knowledge generated and to dismiss the fact that knowledge can be ahistorical. Thus, despite the remaining differences between the three epistemologies, they are nevertheless becoming increasingly aligned with postmodernism in terms of embracing pluralism and rejecting totalising theories (Anderson, 2011).

In the next section, I review critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs including their recommendations to carry out an epistemological shift in female entrepreneurship studies and their emphasis on the adoption of a postmodern feminist epistemology.

### **3.6 Review of critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs**

As mentioned earlier, critical studies have largely been published outside mainstream entrepreneurship journals such as *Gender, Work and Organization*; *Organization Studies*; *Organisation Change*; *Organization and the International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship (IJGE)* which was launched in 2009 (Neergaard et al., 2011). However, as noted in chapter 2, recently a number of

mainstream journals have published critical studies such as the special issues of *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (2006, 2007, 2012) and of *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* (2013). These critical studies will be reviewed in this chapter as well.

This stream critiques female entrepreneurship studies for contributing to the “*process of othering*” (p.3) the female entrepreneur and for portraying her as inferior to men (Bruni et al., 2004a). Authors within this stream focus on identifying discursive practices (Ahl, 2006; Foss, 2010), gender subtexts (Bruni et al., 2004b) and instruments of ideology control (Ogbor, 2000) that maintain the image of female entrepreneurs as inferior to her male counterpart.

Critical authors attack the concept of the entrepreneur for being male gendered (McAdam and Marlow, 2011). Ahl (2006) undertook a discourse analysis of 80 articles published in mainstream entrepreneurship journals, and compared the words describing the entrepreneur to those on the Bem’s masculinity and femininity index. She noted that the entrepreneur was described only with words related to masculinity traits (Ahl, 2006). In line with these findings, Smith and Anderson (2003) confirm that the entrepreneurial identity is constructed primarily as masculine. García and Welter (2013) also note that there is a conflict between the discourse on womanhood and entrepreneurship.

The discourse on entrepreneurship has therefore been critiqued for being biased towards men and masculinity (Ogbor, 2000; Burni et al., 2004a). An “*important mark of this masculinity is that he is a self-made man who strives to be rich*” and therefore hedonism is closely associated with the entrepreneur (Smith, 2010, p.31). Ogbor (2000) argues that the discourse on entrepreneurship is governed by the ideology “*of the heroic rational man*” (p.616) that is “*rooted in the heroic myth which defines the dominant, rational, European/North American male model*” (p. 609).

In line with the findings of chapter 2, the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy is critiqued for reinforcing the focus on the individual (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006). Authors such as Tolson (1977) and

Seidler (1991) point to the close relation between the psychology of the entrepreneur and capitalism, as the latter promotes a hegemonic masculinity based on “*competitiveness, aggressiveness and the non-articulation of emotion*” (Smith, 2010, p.31). In this sense, the entrepreneur is associated with a universal and ahistoric model of economic rationality which excludes all those who do not fit (Calás et al., 2009) as well as multiple forms of masculinities (Smith, 2010). The absence of studies that explore the influence of the context upon the entrepreneurial experience has turned the male gendering of the entrepreneur “*invisible and uncontroversial*” (Bruni et al., 2004b, p.259). As a result, in order to become an entrepreneur, woman had to “*go through a process of masculinisation*” (Ogbor, 2000, p.626).

With this regard, authors point to the influence of classic economic theorists notably Schumpeter (Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004a; Ahl, 2006). As the most influential economic theorist to date in entrepreneurship, his conceptualisation of the entrepreneur is critiqued for reinforcing the gendered ideology of the “*heroic rational man*” within the theory of entrepreneurship (Ogbor, 2000). Schumpeter’s critiques focus mainly on his conceptualisation of the entrepreneur’s motivations (which will be explored in the next chapter), as well as his description of the entrepreneur as a person with “*super-normal qualities of intellect and will*” (Schumpeter, 1934, p.82), (for these critiques see for example Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004b; Ahl, 2006). Furthermore, Schumpeter’s theorising has been blamed for encouraging the analysis of the individual entrepreneur. The reason behind this attack lies in the belief that his depiction of the entrepreneur as a heroic self-made man has incited researchers to investigate the traits of this figure (Ahl, 2006).

The emphasis on female entrepreneurship as a positive economic activity has been attacked for advancing the studying of performance related issues while foreclosing the field to the critical analysis of gender power relations (Ahl, 2006; Calás et al., 2009). Furthermore, the narrow focus on women’s entrepreneurial experience in terms of its role in stimulating the economy is critiqued for silencing the heterogeneity and the complexity of women’s experience (Bruni et

al., 2004b). In line with the findings of the previous chapter, Ahl (2006) noted the role of economic growth in reinforcing women's inferiority to men. By turning women's "alleged" underperformance into a major problem, economic growth discourse has maintained the notion of gender differences to her detriment (Ahl, 2006). This led Ahl (2006) to describe economic growth as a strong discursive practice whose role in maintaining women's subordination requires the attention of researchers.

Critical authors also point to the role played by institutions in gendering the concept of entrepreneur (Ahl and Nelson, 2010; Foss, 2010). Bruni et al. (2004b) attack the institutionalisation of the enterprise as "*a rational economic activity*" and blame it for excluding female entrepreneurs (p.259). At the same time, Ogbor (2000) emphasises the role of the research community as an institution in subordinating female entrepreneurs by favouring certain research questions over others. The author elaborates that "*the socio-political relevance of research issues*" (p.612) is an influential instrument of ideological control because it favours theories, research questions and methodologies which are compatible with the wider political environment. He adds that this process creates truth effects that turns the institutionalised ideology, including its myths, into taken for granted assumptions. The publication of critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs outside mainstream entrepreneurship journals is seen as an example of the role played by the research community in reproducing asymmetric gender relations (Ahl, 2006). In the same vein, Ahl notes that both liberal and socialist perspectives, which dominate mainstream journals, are referred to implicitly. Ahl (2006) refers the limited influence of feminist theory upon mainstream studies to this phenomenon. She argues that the lack of explicit referral to feminist theory has stripped it of its collective power and perpetuated the focus on the individual.

Critical studies, therefore, encourage researchers to engage with critical and institutional theories to demystify the oppressive roles of various institutions (Ahl and Neslon, 2010; Smith, 2010). Only few studies to date have responded to this call. Ahl (2007)'s study for instance exposes the role of the educational

institution in maintaining gender power relations by reviewing a teaching case study referred to as “Toy Story”. The case study outlines the story of two entrepreneurs who, after overcoming a number of obstacles, establish a highly profitable business by selling a toy called “Marvel Mustang”. Ahl (2007) critiques the way in which women are portrayed in this case study as they are only known as wives. They are represented as weak, emotional and a barrier to their husbands’ entrepreneurial success. This representation gives their husbands the right to deceive them in order to succeed. The men, for instance, lie to their risk-averse wives so they can use their home savings to establish the business. Ahl (2007) concludes her analysis by calling upon researchers to collect stories that defy the current discourse on entrepreneurship notably in relation to gender social relations and the importance of material success.

Another example is Bourne’s (2010) study where the author draws upon cultural anthropology to explore how Swedish institutions construct women’s entrepreneurial experience. Bourne (2010) looks in particular at the impact of the gender ideology, the welfare system and the environment. She collects different types of primary and secondary data to support the analysis of her case study which depicts a Swedish female entrepreneur who operates a domestic services company. The author finds that although Sweden enjoys an international reputation for its support of gender equality and small businesses, its welfare system nevertheless reinforces gender power relations. Moreover, the author notes that her participant is suppressed by the Swedish system but at the same time plays a part in reproducing the existing system of social relations. Bourne’s findings confirm Ahl and Nelson’s (2010) comment that “*entrepreneurship – and women’s entrepreneurship – is never neutral or a-political*” (p.7).

Few studies have focused on the role played by the media in subordinating female entrepreneurs (Hamilton, 2013). After analysing how the entrepreneur has been portrayed in the UK media between 1989 and 2000, Nicolson and Anderson (2005) point out to how the media has reinforced the masculine image of entrepreneur by silencing the stories of female entrepreneurs. The same observation is noted by Baker et al. (1997) who, after analysing USA business

periodicals and elite national newspapers, confirm the invisibility of female entrepreneurs in USA media. In a more recent study, Achtenhagen and Welter (2011) undertake a discourse analysis of the German media. In line with the previous studies, the authors indicate that the media discourages women from being entrepreneurs by portraying entrepreneurship as a rare career path for women.

Critical theorists attacked the focus on flexibility, which was discussed in the previous chapter, for being a gendered notion (Bruni et al., 2004b). The authors (2004b) note that the concept, which is not discussed when male entrepreneurs are studied, acts as a legitimate reason for discrimination against women. Furthermore, the need to achieve work-life balance homogenises women's experience by presenting their family life as static (Mirchandani, 1999). This gendered picture of female entrepreneurs is reinforced in the literature because of the lack of studies that defy these social relations (Ahl, 2006). It was not until recently that a study by Holt and Popp (2013) has challenged the binary of work and family and its strong historical association with women. The authors after analysing two hundred letters written by John and Elizabeth Shaw, who established a high growth business in the nineteenth-century, note the disappearance of this binary from the experience of the married couple. The letters show that the entrepreneurial experience of the pair was weaved into their family life and both of them were driven by care and love for the family.

The push and pull dichotomy (explored in the previous chapter) has also been critiqued for being reductionist (Mallon and Cohen, 2001). After interviewing women who occupied middle and senior positions in organisations prior to setting up their own ventures, the authors found that the move to self-employment was perceived by the participants as liberatory. The participants contrasted self-employment with organisational life. The former was portrayed as a boundaryless career and offered the participants an alternative career path to "*the normative climbing of the organizational hierarchy to develop a career*" (p.224). The participants therefore felt they were "*career pioneers in leaving their organizations*" (p.224). Furthermore, self-employment offered the

participants an escape route from their subordination as for different reasons participants felt “*alienated and marginalised*” (p.224) by their organisations.

Patterson and Mavin (2009) have also analysed four life history narratives of UK female entrepreneurs who made the transition from employment to self-employment to explore whether or not the move was emancipatory. The authors found that the participants were motivated by a web of factors and the decision to leave employment in favour of entrepreneurship was triggered by a number of events. In contrast with Mallon and Cohen (2001), Patterson and Mavin (2009) noticed that the move to self-employment has not always been liberatory. Although, participants found entrepreneurship empowering as it freed them from the constraints of the job market and offered them the opportunity for personal and professional development, they were nevertheless stifled by gendered barriers. For instance, some participants faced gendered perceptual barriers as sometimes male clients and employees did not take them seriously.

Critical authors critique mainstream studies for being dominated by quantitative studies that predominately compare female entrepreneurs with their male counterparts. The authors argue that these studies subordinate female entrepreneurs because their scientific claims of neutrality and universal applicability reinforce a hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, these methods maintain the focus on the individual and essentialise gender differences. Thus there remains an absence of voices and stories of women entrepreneurs in the literature and a failure to capture the heterogeneity of their experience (Foss, 2010).

In line with the concluding comment in the previous chapter, authors note that despite the lack of supporting findings, the notion of gender differences persists within mainstream studies (Taylor and Marlow, 2009; Hamilton, 2013). As entrepreneurship is governed by a normative masculine discourse, the notion of gender differences is thus presented as a discursive practice that subordinates female entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006). Moreover, the focus on gender based differences is critiqued for anchoring the focus on the individual as it ignores the role of the wider social context upon the experience of both sexes (García and

Welter, 2013). As Mirchandani (1999) points out mainstream studies offer “*highly individualistic strategies through which female entrepreneurs can mimic the male norm*” (p. 228).

Authors accuse the essentialism of the categories men and women, promoted by both liberal and socialist feminist theories, for reinforcing the notion of gender based differences (Foss, 2010). Despite the influence of liberal and socialist feminism upon female entrepreneurship studies, the focus of the studies remains limited to the individual female entrepreneur without challenging the androcentrism of the male norm (Calás et al., 2009). The liberal perspective is associated with feminist empiricist epistemology (Anderson, 2011). Studies undertaken from this perspective, therefore, claim that female entrepreneurs are essentially similar to their male counterparts in terms of their rational ability. As illustrated in the previous chapter, researchers within this group focus on discriminatory and institutional barriers that hinder women’s ability to grow their businesses (Ahl, 2003; Calás et al., 2009). These studies were critiqued for failing to investigate how social structures should be changed in order to eliminate discrimination (Foss, 2010). The studies’ underlying argument is that discrimination will disappear when women gain access to the same opportunities as men because this will enable both sexes to behave in the same way (Calás et al., 2009). Thus, even when structural barriers are identified, the individual female entrepreneur has to improve her skills, education, networking activities and managerial experience in order to access the same opportunities as her male counterpart (Bruni et al., 2004b). In short, from this perspective, the barriers faced by women can only be eliminated through individual actions (Mirchandani, 1999).

Studies attacking the stereotypical image of women (discussed in the previous chapter), whereby women are portrayed as misfit with entrepreneurship, are also problematic because they do not investigate how social structures perpetuate these stereotyping images (Calás et al., 2009). Calás et al. (2009) warn against the investigation of barriers at the individual level, as opposed to the macro level, as this leads to the creation of more barriers. Such a perspective is in line with

the findings of the first chapter where it was argued that the focus on the individual exacerbated the assumptions about the presence of “*women’s issues*” that hindered the performance of female entrepreneurs. Calás et al. (2009) critique these studies for valorising male norms within female entrepreneurship studies and for failing to engage with recent developments in feminist empiricist epistemology. According to these developments, researchers assume that the way to liberate women from their subordination lies in the reform of social structures (Calás et al., 2009). The authors (2009) therefore call upon researchers to eliminate “*male-dominated structuring of society*” (p.554) and to reveal the “*hidden rules that structure discrimination*” (p.556).

In contrast, the socialist feminist perspective which is closely related to feminist standpoint epistemology, celebrated the difference of female entrepreneurs from her male counterpart (Ahl, 2002). These studies were also critiqued for failing to challenge the male norm embedded in an androcentric society where the feminine is devalued (García and Welter, 2013). The promotion of a woman’s way of doing business does not destabilise the superiority of the male norm governing entrepreneurial behaviour. Thus, despite this research, female entrepreneurs remain at worst secondary or at best complementary to her male counterparts (Ahl, 2006). This is reflected in Changanti’s (1986) study (explored in the previous chapter), where, the “*feminine entrepreneur*” is contrasted with the “*successful entrepreneur*” as two different entrepreneurial modes (Mirchandani, 1990). Calás et al. (2009) paid tribute to the work of Bird and Brush (2002) in moving these studies forward by presenting an entrepreneurial mode that is gender balanced as it incorporates the values of both masculinity and femininity. Calás et al. (2009) nonetheless point to the limited influence of this concept because the feminine will remain devalued until society witnesses structural changes that turn it into a more just place where both masculinity and femininity become equally appreciated. Until this development takes place, women have to accept their deficit. This argument is well rehearsed within the entrepreneurial field and indeed, informs much of the contemporary policy agenda (Marlow et al., 2008).

Bruni et al. (2004b) add that the research celebrating women's differences reinforces gender differences but in terms of "*feminisation at all costs*" instead of masculinisation (p.264). The authors point especially to research on female leadership style which (as discussed in chapter 2) emphasises women's adoption of a transformational leadership style that differs from the masculine rational, logical and transactional style. Calás et al. (2009) critique studies influenced by socialist feminist perspectives because they do not engage with recent developments in standpoint epistemology where women's values are not celebrated without destabilising gender power relations that devalue the feminine.

Critical authors argue that the categorisation of people into the binary system of masculinity and femininity is not neutral but constitutes an important part of "*symbolic systems*" (Bruni et al., 2004b, p.264) that oppress people by identifying them according to their differences. The destabilisation of these categories is paramount in exposing gender power relations as well as the role of culture, institution and history in maintaining women's subordination (Ahl, 2006). In order to address the subordination of female entrepreneurs, Bruni et al. (2004b) advocate studying gender as a fluid construct that is socially constructed and not as an essentialist division between sexes. Marlow et al. (2009) however argue that studying gender as socially constructed can only benefit entrepreneurship studies when gender theory informs the analysis. Otherwise, the absence of a feminist theoretical lens "*legitimizes the gender blindness which renders masculinity invisible and turns it into the universal parameter of entrepreneurial action*" (Bruni et al., 2004a, p.410). This form of analysis is still missing in mainstream female entrepreneurship studies despite the increased number of researchers claiming that gender is socially constructed.

Amongst these few studies that adopted an analytical framework guided by gender theory is the ethnographic study of Bruni et al. (2004a). The authors studied two small firms in Italy with a view to exploring how entrepreneurs; men and women, construct their identities. The authors noted that different forms of gender identities and entrepreneurships co-existed alongside the dominant model

of hegemonic masculinity. This observation led them to conclude that entrepreneurship and gender are fluid constructs that are “*constantly moving between different symbolic spaces*” (p.407) and that “*doing gender and doing business are interrelated practices*” (p.412).

García and Welter (2013) also applied gender theory as an analytical framework to explore how Spanish female entrepreneurs interact with the conflict between womanhood discourse and entrepreneurial discourse. The authors found that some women distanced themselves from the womanhood discourse and associated themselves with the image of the male entrepreneur. Others instead tried to reconcile both discourses by claiming that they were motivated by growth but at the same time emphasised their conformance to their ascribed gender role as the main family carer. Another group of participants however challenged the notion that there is a conflict between being a woman and an entrepreneur. Some participants however shifted between these different identities and adopted various practices in different situations. García and Welter (2013) concluded that gender identity was a dynamic process as female entrepreneurs constructed their identities in a variety of ways.

Welch et al. (2008) also explored how gender identity and gender relations shaped the experience of female entrepreneurs in the context of export activities. The authors found that participants had different perceptions of how being a woman affected their experience. The authors referred this difference to the varied contexts in which the participants operated including their foreign markets and industries. The authors added that women’s perception of their experience was not fixed and changed with the evolution of their businesses. Lewis (2006), however, reported a more subordinated image of female entrepreneurs as her participants stressed their similarity with male entrepreneurs and emphasised the neutrality of business standards. The author warned against the negation of differences and biased standards as this would perpetuate the gendered nature of entrepreneurship. In contrast, Nadin (2007) reported different findings. Her research investigated the narratives of two female entrepreneurs in the care industry to explore how they negotiated their identities in the light of the

stereotyping of women business owners in this industry as ruthless owners who made profit out of vulnerable people. She found that her participants distanced themselves from the profit motive and mobilised the image of woman as carer (Nadin, 2007). Finally, Wilson and Tagg (2010) explored how female and male entrepreneurs construct the image of each other. The authors reported that both sexes used the same attributes to describe the opposite sex and that neither women nor men identified themselves as heroes or entrepreneurs.

Informed by these findings on gender identity, critical authors argue that gender cannot be perceived as a fixed and essential category as advocated by positivism and objectivist epistemology (Bruni et al., 2004b). Authors therefore call for an epistemological shift in female entrepreneurship studies notably the adoption of postmodern feminist epistemology where gender is conceptualised as a fluid construct (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Moreover, Ahl and Marlow (2012) attribute the fact that mainstream studies are mainly descriptive and slow in terms of theory development to the lack of critical inquiries. They make a plea for more critical studies that question current wisdom on entrepreneurship including female entrepreneurs. Critical authors claim that postmodern feminist epistemology and a critical feminist analytical framework will bring to the fore new knowledge that challenges existing assumptions about female entrepreneurs and will pave the way for the adoption of new research methodologies (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). As discussed further in chapter 6, such authors called in particular for the adoption of narrative inquiry. This method is praised for its ability to offer new insights into the experience of entrepreneurs including their diversity, the process of running the business and their interactions with the institutions (Gartner, 2007).

In line with these calls and in order to achieve the thesis's main objective which is emancipating female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth, this study will be guided by postmodern feminist epistemology and a critical postmodern feminist analytical framework. In chapter 6, I will illustrate in detail how the choice of this analytical framework is in line with the thesis's objective and how the three perspectives namely; critical, feminism and

postmodernism inform each other. In the next section, however I explain further how adopting a postmodern feminist epistemology contributes to the destabilisation of the metarranative of economic growth. This will be followed by a brief note of the critiques raised against the adoption of this epistemology.

### **3.7 The rationale for adopting a postmodern feminist epistemology**

As illustrated earlier, by advocating a social constructionist view of knowledge, postmodernism promotes plurality of perspectives. It rejects objectivity as a reflection of vested interests and attacks metanarratives as an exercise of power that enables certain possibilities while silencing others (Jackson, 1998). Postmodernism aims to destabilise taken for granted meanings and assumptions by bringing to light alternative realities that have been suppressed by dominant knowledge claims (Firat and Shultz II, 1997). It, therefore, replaces metanarratives with little narratives that can best capture the interests of oppressed groups (Flax, 1992). Furthermore, postmodernism critiques theories that promote differences between men and women as natural or claim that *“women have an essence that explains and justifies their subordination”* (Anderson, 2011, p.19). From a postmodern perspective, these theories reinforce women’s subordination as they turn *“discursively constructed facts into norms, difference into deviance”* (Anderson, 2011, p.20). Politically then, postmodernism is considered to be both liberatory and critical as it delegitimizes dominant ideas by challenging their neutrality and exposing their situatedness (Gibson-Graham, 1994).

As argued in chapter 2, the metanarrative of economic growth has reinforced a hierarchal dichotomy in the literature to the detriment of women. In order to maintain women’s subordination, the metanarrative has silenced female entrepreneurs’ voices and conceptualised them in a collective way. The adoption of a postmodern feminist epistemology is, therefore, in line with the study’s emancipatory objective as it will enable the destabilisation of the metanarrative of economic growth by dislodging many of the certainties that underline it. Furthermore, it will capture female entrepreneurs’ narratives and allow for the

exploration of their diversity away from the oppressive homogeneity that has been imposed on them by the metanarrative of economic growth (Keller, 1992; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Stewart, 1994). In addition, postmodernism portrays theory as a genre and a political activity and therefore it facilitates the generation of more reflective and critical knowledge, and introduces new insights to existing theories (Calás and Smircich, 1999). The ability of postmodernism to open gendered theories for criticism and to pave the way for new modes of theorising has been witnessed in organisation studies which experienced the introduction of postmodern theory towards the end of 1970s (Calás and Smircich, 1999).

In summary, in order to liberate female entrepreneurs from their subordination within the theory of entrepreneurship, critical postmodern theorists call researchers to challenge dominant paradigms and unexamined assumptions with a view to explore their role in maintaining female entrepreneurs' subordination (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006; Calás et al., 2009). In line with this call, and based on the findings of the previous chapter, this study adopts a postmodern feminist epistemology with a view to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth.

### **3.8 Critiques of postmodern feminist epistemology**

The liberatory notion of postmodern feminist epistemology has been contested in the literature at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the idea that reality is socially constructed has been critiqued for foreclosing woman's agency as it makes her trapped by cultural values and prevents her from constructing her own reality (Anderson, 2011). While at the macro level, the destabilisation of the meanings of masculinity and femininity is accused of disempowering women politically by dislodging the concept of women (Brown, 1991; Anderson, 2011). These critiques have, however, been addressed by scholars in the field. First at the micro level, critics argue that the fragmentation of the self means that 'woman' occupies a myriad of social identities, which may well be in conflict and in tension with each other. This tension will then disturb the discursive systems that construct us and pave the way for new constructions (Anderson, 2011). In this sense, woman's agency is not lost as she will make new decisions

that will enable her to resist her oppression (Stewart, 1994). Moreover, the idea that a woman is imprisoned by her own culture was critiqued because it implies a stability of social identities. This claim goes against postmodernism which advocates the fluidity of a self that is constantly shifting and in doing so embraces a plurality of perspectives (Anderson, 2011).

### **3.9 Discussion and conclusion**

In line with the findings of chapter 2, critical authors attacked the economic growth discourse for being gendered and called upon researchers to explore its role in subordinating female entrepreneurs (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006). Furthermore, the narrow definition of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her economic function has been blamed for silencing the complexity and the dynamic process embedded in the entrepreneurial experience (Calás et al., 2009). The difference between this research study and the findings of critical studies is the emphasis accorded to the role of economic growth. This research argues that economic growth is not just a strong discursive practice amongst the other discursive practices (Ahl, 2006) but it is the macro discursive practice.

In summary, the current research argues that the metanarrative of economic growth has established the myth of the underperformance hypothesis in the literature. Due to the strong influence of the metanarrative, this hypothesis became the departure point for all research areas on female entrepreneurs and not just performance related studies. Consequently, the literature is governed by the assumption that the female entrepreneur is problematic because she is different from men. Guided by this unexamined assumption, researchers focused narrowly on the identification of “women’s issues” to decode her underperformance. In this sense, economic growth reproduces an asymmetric gender power relation as it establishes in the literature, a dichotomy of a successful male entrepreneur versus an unsuccessful female entrepreneur. The argument of this study is more in line with Calás et al.’s (2009) observation that as long as the “*business and economic imperative stays at the center*” (p.559) of entrepreneurship research, all studies, including those that aim to benefit female entrepreneurs will reproduce the dominant masculine norms. The reason is that “*all other possibilities are*

*prejudged from it*” (p. 559). Calás et al. (2009) point, however, to the influence of business and economics in general while this study focuses on the impact of economic growth.

The findings of critical entrepreneurship studies have added new insights about the influence of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs. In their critiques of the positioning of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy, authors pointed to the role of classical economic theorists notably Schumpeter. As discussed earlier, the influential economic theorist has been attacked for associating the entrepreneur with a hegemonic masculinity and for reinforcing the focus of the studies on the individual entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004a; Ahl, 2006). Furthermore, critical entrepreneurship studies bring to the fore the importance of exposing the role of institutions in subordinating female entrepreneurs. This is achievable by shifting the focus of the analysis from the individual level to the institutional level (Calás et al., 2009). Critical authors also pointed to the role played by positivism and the objectivist epistemology in maintaining the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur within the “*logic of economic rationality*” (Calás et al., 2009, p.553). In order to open this field of study to new conceptualisations of the entrepreneur, authors called for an epistemological shift, notably the adoption of postmodern feminist epistemology (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Authors also urged researchers to use new research methodologies that can capture women’s voices.

In order to achieve the study’s objective, it is necessary to engage with these new findings. As illustrated earlier, the study will therefore adopt a postmodern feminist epistemology. Moreover, as discussed further in chapter 6, the thesis will collect oral history narratives to incorporate female entrepreneurs’ voices.

In the following chapter, the thesis will review economic studies, including the re-visiting of Schumpeter’s publications, to explore the following:

- The relationship between economic growth and entrepreneurship in economic studies
- Schumpeter’s theories of entrepreneurship and economic development.

- The relationship between economic growth and Schumpeter's theories

Chapter 4 will therefore address the following questions:

1. How relevant is the theoretical foundation of economic growth to the entrepreneurial experience?
2. What is the relationship between economic growth theory, Schumpeter's theories and the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy?

Informed by the findings of the critical historical analysis of economic studies, I will re-visit briefly in chapter 5 female entrepreneurship studies to explore how the story of the female entrepreneur has been told in the literature.

## **4 Economic studies**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I review economic studies notably Schumpeter's theories on entrepreneurship and economic development. The chapter's main objective is to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth by answering the following questions;

1. What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs?
2. How relevant is the theoretical foundation of economic growth to the entrepreneurial experience?
3. What is the relationship between economic growth theory, Schumpeter's theories and the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy?

The chapter explores the relationship between economic growth and entrepreneurship and re-visits Schumpeter's main publications. In order to understand the relationship between neo-classical economic growth (which is the dominant economic growth theory), and Schumpeter's theory of economic development, I contrast the theoretical and methodological foundations of these two theories and conclude with a discussion of the main findings.

### **4.2 (Neo-classical) economic growth and entrepreneurship**

The exploration of the economic literature on entrepreneurship reveals that in direct contrast to what has been portrayed in female entrepreneurship studies, economic growth is not a singular and universal theory. On the contrary, there are different types of economic growth theories (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). However, the neo-classical economic growth theory is the one which dominates mainstream entrepreneurship studies, including female entrepreneurship studies. The theory, originally developed by Marshall in 1886, is highly influential as it informs macroeconomic policies (Kirchhoff, 1991).

The neo-classical economic theory defines individuals as ‘homo economicus’ and conceptualises their behaviour according to the axioms of the rational economic man (Baumol, 1968). Accordingly, sellers and buyers are autonomous, independent and self-interested economic agents who are motivated by profit maximisation. The behaviour of the sellers and the buyers is therefore governed by price mechanisms. In other words, at the demand side of the market, rational buyers will always respond to the lower price and on the supply side, rational sellers will always adjust their prices to meet buyers’ demands. This is achievable because the preferences of the rational economic man are well-ordered, (he) has access to free information about all the alternatives and will always choose the product with the lowest price (Kirchhoff, 1991). As all the economic agents in the market access the same information, the market will be in a status of perfect competition. The main force in this static market is therefore the price mechanism which brings the market to an equilibrium point where demand equals supply. The equilibrium point changes when an exogenous force takes place and alters the economic environment. The equilibrium point then remains the same until the cycle is repeated.

According to neo-classical theory, economic growth takes place because economies of scale in production lead the market to expand. In other words, growth is mainly achieved as a result of accumulation of production and exogenous factors (Baumol, 1968; Nelson and Winter, 1974; Kirchhoff, 1991; Van Praag, 1999).

The neo-classical theory has been critiqued for inhibiting entrepreneurship by promoting a false image of rationality and limiting human behaviour to a set of rules that impedes entrepreneurs’ initiative (Baumol, 1968; Kirchhoff, 1991). The theory presents entrepreneurship as a mechanical act that is governed by mathematical calculations (Casson, 1982) and turns the entrepreneur into a passive person who operates in a stable, unchanging environment. He/she decides on the optimal choice after investigating all the options available to him/her. The entrepreneur carries out the same task until an alien (exogenous) force changes the environment in which he/she operates (Van Praag, 1999; Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). In short, the role of the entrepreneur, as the

person who contributes to long-term wealth creation through innovation, is ignored by the neo-classical economic growth theory (Casson, 1982).

The neo-classical theory is therefore blamed for silencing the entrepreneur in economic theory (Baumol, 1968). Authors argue that what is present in the economic literature is not the innovative entrepreneur, but rather the economic rational manager whose main focus is on calculations, efficiency, optimisation and maximisation (Baumol, 1968; Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). This is illustrated in Baumol's (1968) quote where he describes the entrepreneur in economic theory as "*a shadowy entity without clearly defined form and function...he has virtually disappeared from the theoretical literature...the Prince of Denmark has been expunged from the discussion of Hamlet*" (Baumol, 1968, p.66).

Moreover, the market where the rational economic man exchanges his goods is assumed to be of perfect competition. In other words, the market does not offer any profit opportunity for the entrepreneur who is supposedly solely motivated by profit maximisation (Nelson and Winter, 1974).

Economic theorists who are keen to link entrepreneurs' performance to economic growth and wealth creation use other economic growth theories (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). In the next few sections, I will discuss Schumpeter's theories including his theory of economic development which he presented as an alternative to the neo-classical theory.

### **4.3 Schumpeter and entrepreneurship**

Despite the influence of Schumpeter on entrepreneurship studies and the increased amount of literature on his work, our knowledge of his theory of entrepreneurship is still limited as most of his work has not been reviewed (Swedberg, 1991). Researchers, including authors in the field of female entrepreneurship studies (see for example Ahl, 2006), have mainly focused on analysing the second chapter of his seminal book; "Theory of Economic Development (1934)", whilst ignoring much of his other writings. In order to avoid this pitfall and at the same time be able to offer new insights into Schumpeter's work, the review of his work will be broadened to include the

whole of the “Theory of Economic Development (1934)”, his well-known book; “Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (1943)” as well as the majority of his journal articles.

Schumpeter (1934) identifies the entrepreneur as an innovator whose main function in the economy is to carry out “new combinations”<sup>1</sup> which can be any of the following:

1. The introduction of a new product or new quality.
2. The introduction of a new method of production (does not have to be a new scientific discovery).
3. The opening up of a new market whether or not this market existed before.
4. The acquisition of new supplies (raw material or half manufactured goods).
5. The creation of a new organisation.

Schumpeter (1934) argues that by adopting this definition, he broadens as well as narrows the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur in relation to the neo-classical theorists. He broadens the concept of entrepreneur by including anyone who carries out any form of new combinations and he narrows the definition by excluding all those do not, even business owners. Schumpeter distinguishes the innovative entrepreneur from the neo-classical rational economic man who performs a managerial role. He says; “*the opposition of two types of conduct which following reality we can picture as two types of individuals: mere managers and entrepreneurs*” (Schumpeter, 1934, p.82).

For Schumpeter (1934), the entrepreneur is a leader in the sense that he drives economic development through “creative destruction” because by introducing new combinations into the market, the entrepreneur destroys existing firms. In this way, the entrepreneur leads the way for other producers who, in a

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<sup>1</sup> From now on I will use in the thesis the term new combinations to refer to any of the activities that Schumpeter associates with this concept. I will minimise the use of alternative terms such as product development as these terms may have other connotations which may not necessarily be a true reflection of what Schumpeter intends to say. It is also important to use Schumpeter’s term of new combinations given the controversy and the confusion surrounding the interpretation of his work.

competitive market, will keep copying him/her until they gradually erode his/her entrepreneurial profit. Far from being a purposeful act, this leadership may be against the entrepreneur's own will. Schumpeter (1934) argues that new things are always around but what makes the entrepreneur a leader is his/her ability to get things done which would otherwise die away (Schumpeter, 1934).

The new combination carried out by the entrepreneur is the main force shaping the market and not price mechanisms. This is in contrast with the reactive manager whose behaviour is governed by price mechanisms. The innovator entrepreneur is proactive as he/she is freed from the control of this mechanism. It is in this emancipatory context that Schumpeter contrasts between the entrepreneur who is "*making a road*" and the manager who is "*walking along it*" (Schumpeter, 1934, p.85).

According to neo-classical economic growth theory, the satisfaction of consumer's needs is the departure point for any economic activity. Schumpeter opposes this notion. He argues that it is the entrepreneur who initiates economic change by carrying out new combinations. The introduction of a new product/service into the market leads the consumer to subsequently develop a need for this innovation; the consumers are "*taught to want new things*" (Schumpeter, 1934, p.65). It is worth mentioning here that this argument made by Schumpeter reflects his forward thinking as his view mirrors the concerns of current critical postmodern theorists in marketing. These theorists attack the concept of consumer sovereignty which claims that marketing's main objective is to satisfy consumers' needs. Critical authors argue that it is the producer and not the consumer who leads the market (Brown, 1995).

In contrast with the metanarrative of economic growth where there is a lot of emphasis on the size and type of business activity, Schumpeter (1934) stresses that the leadership of the entrepreneur is achieved regardless of the enterprise size or type of business. He emphasises that any new combination is good enough to grant leadership to the entrepreneur. As mentioned earlier, his definition of "new combinations" incorporates a wide range of change-oriented activities that are not limited to venture creation (Schumpeter, 1947a).

Given the difference between the function of Schumpeter's entrepreneur and the neo-classical rational economic manager, it is not surprising that the author differentiates the traits of his entrepreneur from those of the neo-classical manager. For Schumpeter (1934), the assumption that rationality is a trait of the entrepreneur, who undertakes new combinations, is a fiction. As the innovator entrepreneur deals with the new which "*is only the figment of our imagination*" (p.85), he/she has to take actions without working out all the details. The entrepreneur, therefore, relies on his/her initiative, intuition, authority and foresight.

The divergence between the innovator entrepreneur and the neo-classical rational economic manager is not limited to their functions and traits as Schumpeter (1934) differentiated between the motivations of the two types. Schumpeter criticises the narrow focus of the neo-classical theory on maximisation, which he calls "*fiscal radicalism*" (p.94), for overshadowing more important stimuli. Schumpeter emphasises that non-financial motivations are the main forces driving the entrepreneur. He argues that for the entrepreneur, financial gain is not an end in itself but an indication of success.

The economic theorist contrasts the non-hedonistic character of the entrepreneur against the hedonistic one of the rational economic manager who is motivated by maximisation and optimisation. In order to understand the entrepreneur's behaviour and motivations, Schumpeter (1934) therefore resorts to a psychology of non-hedonistic character. He identifies three motives that drive individuals to be entrepreneurs. The first one is the dream and the will to found a private kingdom which is associated with a strong sensation of power and independence. Although the achievement of this dream may be illusionary, it is nevertheless a strong motive for the entrepreneur especially when it is the only way available for the individual to achieve social distinction. Far from being deterministic, Schumpeter points out that social distinction can take a variety of forms; "*from spiritual ambition down to mere snobbery*" (p.93). The second motive is the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others and to succeed for the sake of it. Finally, he argues that the entrepreneur likes to venture and to seek out difficulties, therefore he emphasises the motive of getting

things done, exercising one's energy and experiencing the joy of creating. In short, Schumpeter's entrepreneur is not motivated by maximisation but by social mobility, making an impact and being independent.

Schumpeter stresses that when the entrepreneur introduces his/her new combinations to the market, he will face resistance. Schumpeter argues that there are different forms of resistance. The first one is manifested by the individual who may find it hard to break away from his/her routine and innovate. Schumpeter acknowledges the strength of this inner form of resistance and stresses that entrepreneurs need to enjoy a high degree of mental freedom in order to overcome this barrier. The other form of resistance is mounted by all the institutions whose interests lie in maintaining the status quo and whose powers are likely to be undermined by the innovation (Swedberg, 1991). Schumpeter, therefore, describes the entrepreneur who overcomes this resistance as a person with "*super-normal qualities of intellect and will*" (Schumpeter, 1934, p.82).

Recently Rindova et al. (2009) have presented a special issue titled "Entrepreneurship as Emancipation" in the journal of Academy of Management Review where they argue entrepreneurship is emancipatory when it enables individuals to achieve social mobility, be free and independent or make changes. Rindova et al. (2009) encourage researchers to explore this liberatory potential of entrepreneurship by understanding how entrepreneurs carry out changes, the reasons that push them to achieve their dreams and how they use their agencies to face resistance to the changes they introduce. In this sense, Rindova et al.'s (2009) argument is very similar to Schumpeter's. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that any person carrying out new combinations, regardless of his/her sex, will face resistance. This person has, therefore, to use his/her agency, or what Schumpeter (1934) called "*super-normal qualities of intellect and will*" (p82), to overcome this resistance.

As discussed in chapter 3, Schumpeter's conceptualisation of the entrepreneur's motivations together with this quote were the main reasons why he was accused of gendering the theory of entrepreneurship. Based on the above analysis, I would suggest that the interpretation of his work was taken out of context.

It is worth pointing out that one of the reasons behind the misinterpretation of Schumpeter's work lies in the ways that quotes from Collins and Moore (1964) have been used to prove that his theorising is gender biased. This observation is illustrated in the below extract from Ogbor's (2000) article;

*"Such people, according to Schumpeter (1934), have 'super-normal qualities of intellect and will'*

***And, hence 'essentially more masculine than feminine' whose 'values and activities have become part of the character of America and intimately related to our ideas of personal freedom, success, and above all, individualism'.***(Collins and Moore, 1964) (Ogbor, 2000, p.616).

In the above extract, Ogbor has first mentioned Schumpeter's sentence. The author then links this statement using "and hence" with Collins and Moore's (1964) (underlined quote) to illustrate how Schumpeter has gendered entrepreneurship. The review of Collins and Moore's (1964) book; "The Enterprise Man" reveals how Ogbor has inaccurately linked the two sentences together.

In their book, Collins and Moore used this sentence as part of their historical analysis of the roots of the entrepreneur in America. The authors argue that the image of the entrepreneur is embedded in the American folklore which is dominated by rags to riches theme. This theme has at its core a masculine heroic figure; the entrepreneur. The authors then describe this heroic figure by saying; "essentially more masculine..." (p.6). As mentioned earlier, Schumpeter (1934) did not discuss gender when he mentioned the entrepreneur has "*super-normal qualities of intellect and will*". His focus instead was on the qualities that the innovator entrepreneur would possess in order to face any resistance to the change he/she is bringing forward. Furthermore, Schumpeter's use of "he" and not "she" cannot be seen as a gendered practice given the fact that this was the norm in his era.

Given the divergence between the rational economic manager and Schumpeter's innovator entrepreneur, the theorist developed his theory of economic development as an alternative to neo-classical theory. In the next section, I

explore the theoretical and methodological differences between these two theories.

#### **4.4 Theoretical and methodological differences between the neo-classical economic growth and Schumpeter's theory of economic development**

Neo-classical growth theory is based on an objectivist ideology which emphasises rationality, consistency, stability, uniformity and orderliness. Inspired by Newtonian mechanics, the theory presents the material as the real and the world as structured and stable. Growth, like any other phenomena, is explained by smooth, linear and deterministic models. The neo-classical growth theory, therefore, carries scientific bias towards classical determinism which assumes that growth is linear, incremental and progressive as long as certain conditions are continuously taking place. It is a mechanical act that can be predicted and measured using mathematical formulations (Bygrave, 1989b).

Schumpeter critiques the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical growth theory -which is based on a rational mechanistic ideology - as an ideological fantasy (1947a). He denies the notion that growth proceeds like a tree in a steady and continuous way. Instead, he argues that this notion, which is endorsed by neo-classical economic growth theory, is nothing but routine change (Schumpeter, 1947a). Schumpeter does not talk about economic growth but about economic development where changes are discontinuous, radical and spontaneous (Schumpeter, 1934). He (1943) attributes these changes to entrepreneurs who are constantly destroying old establishments by introducing new combinations to the marketplace.

The nature of the market and the economy where the innovator entrepreneur operates is, therefore, different from the static and stable environment endorsed by neo-classical theory (Pittaway, 2005). Capitalism for Schumpeter is therefore theorised as an evolutionary system where changes take place from within by the entrepreneurs. In such a dynamic economy, uncertainty, booms and recessions are all part of the process of economic change and development (Schumpeter, 1934). In other words, the boom is not caused by an increase in consumers' needs, as claimed by neo-classical theorists, but by the entrepreneurs' new

combinations. However, before benefiting the economy, new combinations will first distress old producers until they catch up with the new entrepreneur and start offering the same product/service. As more and more producers enter the market, prices come down putting an end to the boom, leading to the erosion of the entrepreneurial profit and ultimately causing depression (Schumpeter, 1934). Thus, according to Schumpeter's theory of economic development, the success and failure of the entrepreneur are interlinked "*both business success and business failure are ideally precise. Neither can be talked away*" (Schumpeter, 1943, p.65). In contrast with the neo-classical growth theory which critiques depression and failures, Schumpeter (1934) presents these phenomena in a positive light. He argues that although these processes cause losses and pains in the short term, in the long run they are beneficial. He explains that these events force businesses to reorganise themselves, take corrective measurements and find solutions in order to survive. In this context, profit and losses are not conceptualised as standalone cases. Instead they are strongly interlinked to other players in the economy.

In order to capture the dynamic experience of the entrepreneur, Schumpeter (1943) recommends that researchers analyse the processes of change over a long period of time using historical methods and analytical frameworks. Historical analyses allow researchers to capture the present, the past and give indications towards future trends. Such analysis offers in-depth insights into the messy entrepreneurial experience which otherwise cannot be captured. For Schumpeter (1943) entrepreneurship research that does not take into consideration past as well as present changes is "*meaningless*" (p.74) because changes in terms of process and effects occur over a long period of time. In this sense, he describes as useless such causal research, which limits the appraisal of performance to a certain point of time and investigates the relationship between limited numbers of variables (Schumpeter et al., 2005).

Schumpeter (1974a) blames the supremacy of the neo-classical economic growth theory for reinforcing quantitative methods, including causal research, in entrepreneurship studies. The author argues that the theory promotes these methods in order to endorse its theoretical foundations in terms of rationality,

uniformity and objectivity. By reducing growth and entrepreneurship into a limited number of variables that can be measured and analysed using statistical techniques, the methods maintain the authority of the neo-classical theory over entrepreneurship studies. Schumpeter therefore attacks the neo-classical theory for hindering the analysis of economic change as well as of entrepreneurship and for generating knowledge through snap shot studies that narrow the interpretation of the findings to profit maximisation.

Furthermore, unlike neo-classical theory, but similar to current critical thinking, Schumpeter (1949) acknowledges “*ideological bias*” in social science and attacks economists who “*don’t admit that it is an inescapable curse and that it vitiates economics to the core*” (p.349). He contests the notion that social science researchers can be detached from the phenomena under study. In line with Gummesson (2001), he argues that the choices of the research problem and research approach as well as the interpretation of the findings are not objective decisions but subjective ones. He, therefore, rejects the claim for universal and objective truth in social sciences because “*a given proposition is true only with reference to the social location of the men who formulated it*” (Schumpeter, 1949, p.348-349).

Schumpeter’s critiques resonate also with critical entrepreneurship studies which attack the supremacy of quantitative methodologies for its failure to capture the richness and dynamic nature of the entrepreneurial process and experience (Gartner, 2013). By exposing the role of the neo-classical economic growth theory with this regard, Schumpeter illuminates this critique. Schumpeter’s theorising addresses therefore many concerns of critical theorists as discussed further in the next section.

#### **4.5 Discussion and conclusion**

The analysis of the theoretical foundation of neo-classical theory indicates that the metanarrative of economic growth is embedded in this theory. In line with the theory, the metanarrative, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, equates entrepreneurship with linear, on-going growth and does not appreciate failures or set-backs. The two terms (the metanarrative of economic growth and the neo-

classical economic growth theory) will therefore be used interchangeably in the rest of the thesis. The review also exposes the lack of theoretical link between the neo-classical economic growth theory and the conceptualisation of the innovator entrepreneur. As discussed earlier, the axioms of the neo-classical economic growth theory, in terms of rational behaviour, economies of scale and market equilibrium, does not include the entrepreneur in its models. As a result, the innovator entrepreneur has been silenced in economic theory and replaced with an economic rational manager (Baumol, 1968; Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). This transformation in the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur explains the supremacy of the managerial discourse over entrepreneurship studies.

The supremacy of the neo-classical theory over entrepreneurship studies also clarifies the reason behind the narrow focus on the individual entrepreneur and the lack of studies capturing the dynamic nature of the entrepreneurial experience and process (Schumpeter, 1943). The exploration of Schumpeter's theories (1947a; 1949) also demystifies the role of the neo-classical economic growth theory in maintaining the grip of positivism over entrepreneurship studies. Schumpeter's observation is in line with critical theorists who acknowledge the influence of positivism in reinforcing the control of dominant ideologies as this paradigm ensures that the same research questions are formulated so that the same answers are provided (Calvert and Ramsey, 1992).

In contrast with Schumpeter's critics who accused him of subordinating female entrepreneurs by diverting the focus of researchers to the studying of the individual entrepreneur (see for example Ahl, 2006), Schumpeter called economic theorists to understand the entrepreneur within his/her wider social environment (Schumpeter, 1934). For Schumpeter (1947b) the entrepreneur's experience can only be understood in relation to other players in the market. As discussed earlier, this shift is paramount for addressing the subordination of female entrepreneurs within the theory of entrepreneurship (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). In line with critical authors, Schumpeter also encourages entrepreneurship research to be more sensitive to the diversity, complexity and fluidity of the entrepreneurial experience (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Gartner, 2013).

Furthermore, the exploration of Schumpeter's theorising shows that he distances his entrepreneur from the rational economic man. In this sense, it is the neo-classical economic growth theory, and not Schumpeter, which imposes in entrepreneurship studies a hegemonic masculinity based on rationality (Bruni et al., 2004b). By theorising the entrepreneur according to the axioms of the rational economic man, the neo-classical economic growth theory has reinforced a hegemonic masculinity that is aligned with the homo economicus species. This form of masculinity, which is alien to the reality of human behaviour, marginalises both women and men (Kirchhoff, 1991; Nelson, 1995).

Based on the above analysis, I argue that Schumpeter's theorising does not subordinate female entrepreneurs as claimed by a number of critical theorists such as Ogbor (2000), Bruni et al. (2004b) and Ahl (2006). In contrast, his theorising is emancipatory and offers an alternative theoretical framework for female entrepreneurs away from the oppressive paradigm of the neo-classical economic growth theory. In divergence from the metanarrative of economic growth which only celebrates high growth businesses, Schumpeter opens entrepreneurship for any person who can carry out new combinations. His definition of the entrepreneur incorporates any person, regardless of his/her sex, the size of the business or the type of business he/she is operating in. Furthermore, his definition of new combinations includes a wide range of change-oriented activities which are not limited to venture creation.

In summary, the re-visiting of Schumpeter's theorising challenges the authority of the neo-classical economic growth theory in entrepreneurship studies, including female entrepreneurship studies. Furthermore, his writings open the door for a more encompassing theory of the entrepreneur and of entrepreneurship. In line with the aspiration of critical entrepreneurship studies (Ogbor, 2000; Calás et al., 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012) Schumpeter's theories, can lead to a paradigm shift in the studies of entrepreneurship (Kirchhoff, 1991), where new methods and new epistemologies can flourish.

It is worth mentioning that Schumpeter's theories are increasingly adopted in different contexts including culture studies. Schumpeter's theory of creative

destruction has been celebrated in terms of its potential to open existing theories for new modes of knowledge which are more in line with a postmodern spirit in terms of fragmentation, construction and re-construction. This is reflected in the organisation of a conference on Creative Deconstruction in July 2013 which encouraged theorists in organisation studies, management and entrepreneurship to adopt Schumpeter's theorising (31st Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism, Warsaw, Poland July 13th - 16th 2013 Creative De-Construction).

I conclude this chapter with a reflection on the contradiction between the rhetoric adopted by Western governments regarding the importance of the entrepreneur to economic growth (see for example the BEER, 2008) and macroeconomic policies. As discussed earlier, the neo-classical economic growth theory, which silenced the entrepreneur, forms the basis of macroeconomic policies (Kirchhoff, 1991). This paradox in governments' stance has raised the alarm amongst economic theorists who argued that the influence of neo-classical economic growth over macroeconomics policies would disseminate an anti-entrepreneurial culture that would inhibit the acceptance of failure, curiosity and openness to new ideas (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999) (as discussed later, the empirical findings of the thesis support this observation).

From a critical perspective, the contradiction between governments' rhetoric and macroeconomic policies can be explained by the findings of Kenny and Scriver (2012). The authors analysed how the entrepreneur was portrayed in Ireland after the recent recession which started in 2008. The authors noticed that the Irish government positioned the entrepreneur as a saviour and rescuer following the collapse of the economy. They argued that this positioning was a discursive practice that aimed to maintain current power relations. The authors noted that by emphasising the role of the entrepreneur in economic growth, the Irish government neutralised the anger of the people and diverted their attention away from the failure of the economic and political systems to an utopian future made of success and possibilities (Kenny and Scriver, 2012).

The next chapter concludes the theoretical part of this thesis by offering a second reading of mainstream literature on female entrepreneurs. The reading will be informed by the findings of this chapter as well as of the previous chapter.

## **5 Re-visiting female entrepreneurship studies**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a second reading of mainstream female entrepreneurship studies. This re-reading sheds new light on the following research question:

1. What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs?

The final section of the chapter offers a summary of the theoretical findings of the thesis.

### **5.2 Re-visiting mainstream literature on female entrepreneurs**

As illustrated in chapter 2, the main reviews of female entrepreneurship studies have structured the literature around a number of distinct themes namely;

1. The characteristics and motivations of female entrepreneurs
2. The management style of female entrepreneurs
3. Access to finance
4. Business network/social capital
5. Business performance

The exploration of economic studies brought to light the difference between neo-classical growth theory and Schumpeter's theorising regarding the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. The former presents the entrepreneur as a rational economic manager and entrepreneurship as a mechanistic process driven by linear progress. The latter, however, theorises the entrepreneur as a person whose main function is carrying out new combinations and views entrepreneurship as a dynamic, messy and complex process. When I re-visited the female entrepreneurship studies after being informed by these a different picture emerges. Mainstream female entrepreneurship studies is strongly influenced by neo-classical economic growth theory as the literature clearly narrates the story of women business owners whose ownership experience is strongly embedded in the managerial discourse.

Moreover, informed by the findings of chapter 2, where I argued that the underperformance hypothesis underpins the research on female entrepreneurs, what also emerges in this re-visit is that women are portrayed as owners who are struggling throughout the ownership journey. Furthermore, the underperformance hypothesis acts as a thread that links together the different studies on female entrepreneurs as there is a strong tendency for such writers to draw upon each other's findings to confirm the hypothesis.

In order to reflect this reading, in the next section the literature is presented as the story of a struggling business owner/manager. I have chosen to narrate this story as a series of events that take place when a person starts and establish a business. This chapter does not intend to give an extensive review of female entrepreneurship studies as this has already been carried out in chapter 2. The main purpose of this chapter is to illustrate further the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the theorising of female entrepreneurs.

### **5.3 The story of a struggling female business owner/manager**

The first event in the business life of any owner/manager is to demonstrate their strengths and achievements. However under the influence of the underperformance hypothesis, the literature mainly focuses on women's weaknesses.

#### **5.3.1 Personal attributes, human capital and demographics**

As mentioned earlier, since its inception, the literature on female entrepreneurs has focused on female business owners' characteristics to identify the "*typical female entrepreneur*" (Carter et al., 2001, p.24). This typical image is, however, built mainly through comparative studies that look for differences and similarities between female and male entrepreneurs across various characteristics. It is, therefore, suggested that the underlying assumption guiding this theme is not the identification of the typical female entrepreneur per se but rather the detection of those "feminine" characteristics which diverge from the "masculine" ones of their male counterparts. This detection can then be used to explain female underperformance and poor economic growth.

This argument is reflected in the early influence of the metanarrative of economic growth on portraying the female entrepreneur as problematic in relation to men. In the pioneering studies of Schrier (1975) and Schwartz (1976), both authors investigated female entrepreneurs' characteristics in relation to the "successful entrepreneur" without even including men in their sample. Nevertheless, both Schrier (1975) and Schwartz (1976) concluded that there were few differences between the characteristics of women owners and successful entrepreneurial activities. As illustrated in chapter 2, similarities were noted across the various characteristics (Charbonneau, 1981; Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Watkins and Watkins, 1983; Sexton and Bowman, 1984; Neider, 1987; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990; Caruana et al., 1998). These similarities have not, however, deterred researchers from looking for and finding a "few" differences that justify female's underperformance (see for example Stevenson, 1986).

This research stream has been criticised for focusing on the individual female entrepreneur without taking into consideration the context in which she operates (Ahl, 2006) or the personal meanings allocated by respondents to different traits (Fenwick, 2008). This has led Carter et al. (2001) to describe it as a "*Fruitless Theme*" (p.4) and to question its popularity. This review, however, argues that the answer to this question lies in the supremacy of the metanarrative of economic growth which overemphasises the few differences in order to justify the underperformance hypothesis.

Furthermore, women's experience, which is one aspect of human capital, is said to be mainly in the service sector which is viewed as less relevant to entrepreneurial activity than men's experience in venture management, scientific or technical positions (Watkins and Watkins, 1983; Marlow and Carter, 2004; Carter and Shaw, 2006; Shaw et al., 2009; García and Brush, 2012). This critique is paradoxical because as illustrated later female entrepreneurs are known to operate mainly in the service sector. Hence, having any experience in this sector should be seen as a strength.

### **5.3.2 Business start-up**

After highlighting the traits and work experience of the female business owner this section looks into her motivations for starting up a business. This is particularly important as there is a strong belief in the literature that women's motivations have a negative impact on their long-term performance (Cliff, 1998; Carter and Shaw, 2006).

#### **5.3.2.1 Motivations for starting up a business**

In line with the previous strand, the investigation of women's motivations for starting up their own businesses has been carried out mainly through comparative studies that lacked in-depth analysis (Fenwick, 2008). As illustrated in chapter 2, this field of research highlights the presence of common start-up motives between women and men as they are both looking for a sense of autonomy, independence and control over their working lives (Carter et al., 2001; Fenwick, 2008). The findings regarding similarities are, however, overshadowed in the literature by the extensive focus on "flexibility" and an escape from the job market constraints. Both motives are re-visited in the following sections.

#### ***Flexibility***

Flexibility as a "woman's issue" fits well with the underperformance hypothesis as it means a deviation from the successful male entrepreneur. Hence it is portrayed as a barrier. In this sense, flexibility has shifted from being a start-up motivation to an explanation for female entrepreneurs' low profitability as it meant increased responsibility for the family (Longstreth et al., 1987), less energy for the business, less time (Rouse, 2005) and more conflict (Greer and Greene, 2003). Given its important influence on female entrepreneurs' performance, a lack of it, as argued by Williams (2004) may lead women to exit their businesses. Moreover, flexibility has opened the door for the investigation of more "women-related" barriers including pregnancy, maternity and child and other care.

### *An escape from the job market constraints*

Despite the overemphasis on the glass ceiling (discussed in details in chapter 2), Carter et al. (2001) conclude that: “*there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of this (the glass ceiling phenomenon) as yet there is insufficient research evidence quantifying the importance of this factor and clarifying the exact processes involved*” (p.5). In the light of Carter et al.’s (2001) comment, I argue that the overemphasis on the glass ceiling has been inspired by the underperformance hypothesis rather than by the findings of various studies. As a gendered construct (Cotter et al., 2001) the glass ceiling provides a clear explanation for women’s problematic performance. Carter and Shaw (2006) for instance argue that the pay gap may be linked to female entrepreneurs limited access to financial resources and potentially poor performance.

The analysis also substantiates the argument made in this review that under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth, women’s underperformance is the thread which links together the various research strands on female entrepreneurs. Vertical segregation, for instance, in terms of limited access to high paid jobs and senior management positions, was linked to female entrepreneurs’ irrelevant work experience mentioned earlier. This link was then used to confirm women’s underperformance (Carter and Shaw, 2006).

After examining the motivations for starting up a business, the next step in this journey is the writing and formulation of the business plan.

#### **5.3.2.2 Business planning**

Writing a business plan is a well-established practice in business management especially at the inception phase as it is usually a bank’s requirement when applying for a business loan. Its formulation also enhances business credibility as it indicates good organisation and planning including the identification of clear goals and growth objectives (Fenwick, 2008).

The absence of a business plan can therefore imply the opposite; less credibility, poor planning and ultimately poor performance. Drawing attention to female entrepreneurs' lack of "skills" or "will" in relation to writing a business plans fits well with the underperformance hypothesis and the best way to check it out is by comparing her against men. This trend emerges strongly in Fenwick's (2008) study as she allocates a considerable part of her review to the relationship between the female entrepreneur and business planning. Authors such as Buttner and Rosen (1992) as well as Alsos and Ljunggren (1998) confirm that the female entrepreneur lags behind her male counterpart in terms of business plan writing.

As this review argues, studies of the female entrepreneur are linked by the underperformance hypothesis, the difficulties in the business planning elements are mirrored in other research areas. Buttner and Rosen (1992), for instance, linked the problem with the business plan to women's difficulties in accessing start-up capital. Fenwick (2008) also pointed out that the lack of work experience and education reported in the early studies provided a good explanation of the poor skills in terms of preparing a business plan.

These findings and relationships are not without contradictions. Despite promoting the lack of writing a business plan as problematic, Alsos and Ljunggren (1998) did not find - after interviewing over 9,000 female entrepreneurs - that such a shortage had any impact on business success. Moreover, Buttner and Rosen (1989) stated that loan officers did not perceive any differences between male and female entrepreneurs in relation to the quality of business plans presented. It is also worth mentioning that the whole notion of writing a business plan has been condemned for being counterproductive and for excluding alternative approaches by featuring it as the only right way of doing business (Fenwick, 2008).

Another research area that emerged strongly in the studies on female business start-up, is the barriers facing female entrepreneurs; notably financial ones. These barriers are therefore the focus of the next stop in the journey of women business owners.

### 5.3.2.3 Financial barrier to start-up a business

The exploration of financial barriers and their impact on long-term economic success is a strong theme in female entrepreneurship studies (Stevenson, 1986; Brush, 1992; Carter et al., 2001; Fenwick, 2008). The influence of the metanarrative of economic growth on this research area is quite eminent which explains the emphasis on the problematic female entrepreneur as Brush (1992) rightly noted that “*financial difficulties are seen to be exacerbated for women*” (p.14). This influence has led to the belief that the financial barrier is a feminine barrier that is not experienced by the male entrepreneur (Carter et al., 2001). Their research offers four reasons to explain this feminine phenomenon.

The first reason refers to women’s lack of skills and expertise in raising start-up finance (Schwartz, 1976; Carter and Cannon, 1988; Carter and Rosa, 1998). The second reason is that female entrepreneurs lack personal assets and credit records (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Riding and Swift, 1990). The third reason is poor financial networking (Greene et al., 1999). Under the umbrella of the underperformance hypothesis, the first two reasons mentioned above are consistent with what the analysis reported earlier in terms of female entrepreneurs’ perceived inferiority due to irrelevant work experience and poor practice in relation to the formulation of a proper business plan. The third reason is also consistent with the problematic female networking which will be discussed later.

While the first three reasons are attributed to female entrepreneurs’ characteristics, the fourth one is caused by external factors; namely discriminatory practices within the banking institutions (Buttner and Rosen, 1989). However, given the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth in reinforcing a taken for granted assumption about the problematic female, any problem somehow ended up being “essentially feminine”. This is reflected in the interpretation of the findings of a study carried out in New Zealand by Fay and Williams (1993). In this study, the authors confirm the discriminatory practices of loan officers against the female entrepreneur and yet blamed her for having

irrelevant work experience and education in relation to her venture as this makes her too risky for the banks to lend her money.

Moreover, Stevenson (1986) pointed out that beyond the start-up phase, both male and female entrepreneurs face the same financial problems and that as the organisation grows these problems are overtaken by others including marketing and human resource issues (Hisrich and Brush, 1984). It is worth mentioning here that research outside the start-up stage is limited as this review discusses later on.

In summary, there is a strong and unquestioned assumption in the literature that starting up a business is more difficult for female entrepreneurs as they face more obstacles (Stevenson, 1986; Carter et al., 2001; Ahl, 2006). The prevalence of this assumption endorses the argument presented by this review that because of the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth, the underperformance hypothesis is the departure point for studies on female entrepreneurs. This influence is also reflected in Carter et al.'s (2001) concluding comment that: *“A key debate, however, is whether the barriers encountered by women at start-up have a long-term effect on business performance or whether these constraints dissipate after start-up has been successfully negotiated”* (p.29).

After starting up a company, the next event is managing it. The next step will therefore focus on management.

### **5.3.3 Management**

This research area is in line with the trend reported earlier as the studies are mainly comparative investigations that focus on the individual characteristics of the female entrepreneur; but this time as a manager. As a result, the research remains underdeveloped (Fenwick, 2008) with a narrow focus on two main areas; female management style and networking (Brush, 1992; Carter et al., 2001). At the same time, studies of the process of managing the established company are almost non-existent in the literature.

### **5.3.3.1 Female management style/feminine style**

This research area has been reviewed in detail in chapter 2 where I argued that the underlying assumption guiding these studies is that female entrepreneurs adopt a feminine management style which is different from that of “the successful male entrepreneur” (Brush, 1992). The persistence of this negative stereotyping that features women as different from the successful entrepreneur is thus problematic. Furthermore, it is consistent with the previous findings in relation to the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of the female entrepreneur.

### **5.3.3.2 Networking**

An assumption about women’s problematic attributes also guides the studies on female networking. Although male and female entrepreneurs are found to be similar in terms of using networks (Aldrich et al., 1989), there is an overemphasis in the literature on the differences regarding the composition of both networks. As female networks were reported to have few men, they are less important than the “old boy networks” and thus a barrier for their economic success (Fenwick, 2008). This one dimensional way of evaluating women’s networking led Fenwick (2008) to call for studies that take into consideration the values of female entrepreneurs and the contexts in which their networks operate.

The next step should have examined the process of managing the company. However, studies on process in general are still missing from entrepreneurship studies (Gartner, 2013). The findings of the previous chapter shed some light on the reasons behind this phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, Schumpeter (1934) accused neo-classical growth theory for hindering the progress of entrepreneurship studies. He argued that the theory has silenced research into the process because the theory’s theoretical foundations cannot capture its dynamic nature.

### **5.3.4 Evaluation**

At the end of any managerial plan comes the evaluation of the performance which is usually undertaken by comparing the outcome in relation to the pre-set objectives of the business owner. Under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth the performance of the female entrepreneur does not follow this pattern as she has not been granted the freedom to set up her own objectives. As discussed in chapter 2, the metanarrative of economic growth has imposed economic growth variables as the only measurements for entrepreneurial success.

### **5.4 Discussion and conclusion**

The findings reflect how the theoretical foundation governing female entrepreneurship studies has been shaped by the neo-classical economic growth theory. In line with the theory, female entrepreneurship studies portray the experience of the entrepreneur as static, objective and mechanistic. Consequently, female entrepreneurs are homogenised and their diversity and heterogeneity have been ignored. The neo-classical economic growth theory has also reduced the mapping of the literature to the individual female entrepreneur as the studies lack the focus on the context and the external environment in which women operate. This narrow focus has hindered the progress of female entrepreneurship studies. As mentioned earlier, different research areas have been critiqued for being “atheoretical”, “anecdotal” and “fruitless”.

As this chapter concludes the first part of the thesis, the next section offers a brief summary of the theoretical findings for the first four research questions in tables 2; 3 and 4.

**Table 2: Summary of the theoretical findings for research question 1**

Research question 1	Discipline approached	Findings
<p>What is the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs?</p>	<p>Mainstream female entrepreneurship studies</p> <p>Critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs</p> <p>Economic studies including the re-visit of Schumpeter's work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The metanarrative of economic growth establishes a dichotomy of successful versus unsuccessful female entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• The underperformance hypothesis is the departure point for all research areas</li> <li>• The female entrepreneur is mainly conceptualised as a struggling business owner /manager.</li> <li>• Imposed a psychological reductionism which led to the exclusion of the female entrepreneur as the other and maintained the analysis at the individual level of the entrepreneur</li> <li>• Positivism dominates this research area</li> <li>• Limited influence of critical feminist theory</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Summary of the theoretical findings for research question 2**

<b>Research question 2</b>	<b>Discipline approached</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<p>How can feminist theory contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs?</p>	<p>Critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs</p> <p>Feminist epistemology</p>	<p>The adoption of postmodern feminist epistemology emancipates female entrepreneurs because it destabilises the metanarrative of economic growth by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejecting the categories; man and woman it enables the exploration of gender power relations.</li> <li>• Shifting the analysis from the individual to the institutional level.</li> <li>• Opening the door for new research methodologies that capture women’s voices and stories.</li> <li>• Celebrating the narratives of the oppressed women.</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Summary of the theoretical findings for research questions 3 and 4**

Research questions 3 and 4	Discipline approached	Findings
<p>How relevant is the theoretical foundation of economic growth to the entrepreneurial experience?</p> <p>What is the relationship between economic growth theory, Schumpeter's theories and the identification of the entrepreneur in terms of his/her function in the economy?</p>	<p>Economic Studies including a re-visit of Schumpeter's theorising.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The metanarrative of economic growth is embedded in the neo-classical economic growth theory.</li> <li>• The mechanistic and rational ideology of this theory has silenced the entrepreneur and replaced him with a rational economic manager.</li> <li>• Schumpeter's theorising advocates entrepreneurship as dynamic. He argues that the main function of the entrepreneur is to carry out new combinations.</li> <li>• Schumpeter's theorising addresses many of the recommendations of critical entrepreneurship studies and therefore may offer an alternative conceptualisation of female entrepreneur</li> </ul>

In the next chapter, I present the philosophical assumptions and the theoretical lens governing the thesis as well as the research method used to collect female entrepreneurs stories. The chapter will then be followed by three data analysis chapters which will address the following question; what are the narratives of female entrepreneurs in relation to their entrepreneurial experience?

## **6 Methodological approach, research design and data collection method**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The primary objective of this thesis is to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth. The study therefore aims to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth as the true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience. This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted with a view to achieve the thesis's aim and purpose. The first part of the chapter offers an overview of social constructionism as the philosophical assumption underpinning this research. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the findings and the rationale for choosing this analytical lens which is informed by critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism.

The second part of the chapter discusses the research methodology followed in the empirical part of this study. This section starts by introducing narrative inquiry with a focus on its application in entrepreneurship studies. This is followed by a detailed discussion of oral history method as the form of narrative inquiry adopted in this study. A brief analysis of the influence of postmodernism on oral history interviews is then presented. After discussing the process of data collection and data analysis, the chapter concludes with a brief note on research ethics.

### **6.2 Philosophical assumptions - Social constructionism**

The research process begins by explaining the philosophical assumptions influencing the research design and leading to different claims about knowledge making (Creswell, 2007). The author identifies four different world views that inform qualitative research practice; postpositivism, social constructionism, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism.

As discussed in chapter 3, to achieve the emancipatory objective of this study, I adopt a postmodern feminist epistemology which views the world as socially

constructed. The research is, therefore, framed within a social constructionist ontology. Social constructionist research is, however, surrounded by heated debates and has been associated with contradictory concepts, methods and even philosophical assumptions (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). It is not the intention of this thesis to discuss these debates. It is, however, important to clarify how social constructionism is perceived in this study.

Social constructionist research in this project advocates that meanings and interpretations differ from one person to another and are context dependent. Social constructionism is presented in this study as an alternative view of the world to positivism and objectivist epistemology. Positivism, which dominated Western science and flourished with the Enlightenment, argues that there is an independent objective truth that can be discovered providing the researcher uses appropriate methods of inquiry, mainly scientific methods (Crotty, 2009). Social constructionism opposes this knowledge claim. It argues that meanings are not inherent in the objects but are socially constructed by human beings through their interactions with the world (Blaikie, 2007). People's realities are shaped by their experience, cultures, religions and history (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This view of the world entails that there is not one "*valid*" interpretation or "*true*" interpretation but several interpretations that are contextually, culturally and historically bounded (Crotty, 2009, p.48). In this sense, social constructionist research entails respecting the unique individual experience of each of us including our different ways of making sense of the world. Within this paradigm, researchers therefore aim to capture the dynamics of social reality and the processes which shape it (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008).

Not all social constructionist research takes a critical stance. Researchers may opt to celebrate cultures uncritically by ignoring the role of institutions in shaping meanings (Crotty, 2009). The focus of these studies will be limited to the intersubjectivity of meanings without taking into consideration the social and historical context in which these meanings are embedded. Critical research on the other hand focuses not only on understanding and explaining the social world but also on advancing progressive social change (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008).

As this study is not limited to the celebration of female entrepreneurs' diversity but seeks to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the oppression of the metanarrative of economic growth, I approach social constructionism with a critical spirit. Accordingly, the social construction of meanings is perceived to be liberating as well as limiting. When meanings constitute an important part of our freedom, they are considered to be liberating. However, construction of meaning can also be limiting when prevailing norms and understandings turn humans into victims of the "*tyranny of the familiar*" (Crotty, 2009, p.59). In other words, these understandings can prevent people from engaging with the world as they form a repository of theories through which any new knowledge is filtered. This process, which is known as sedimentation, leads people to live "*on top of a culture that has already become false*" (Gasset, 1958, p.100).

This critical stance of social constructionism which inspired postmodernism and critical feminist theorists (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008), usually refers to the work of Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and Berger and Luckmann (1967). Crotty (2009) however argues that Marx's radical critique of economic power holds a social constructionist worldview. This is evident in Marx's claims that "*social being determines their (People's) consciousness*" (Marx, 1961, p.67).

In the next section, I discuss the main ideas of Marx as well as the relationship between critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism as these three traditions form the theoretical lens guiding this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

### **6.3 Theoretical perspective/lens - Critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism**

Theoretical perspectives operate at a lesser philosophical level (Creswell, 2007). They offer qualitative researchers different interpretive lenses which impact the research design and process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Given the objective of the study, its underpinning philosophical assumption and epistemology, this research is a critical inquiry which differs from interpretivist research. Critical inquiry challenges the status quo with a view to bring changes while an interpretivist research accepts things as they are and seek only to understand the

phenomenon under study (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Critical inquiry, therefore, analyses the research problem “*in terms of conflict and oppression*” (Crotty, 2009, p.113) while an interpretivist researcher examines the situation “*in terms of interaction and community*” (Crotty, 2009, p.113).

In this study, I draw upon three theoretical analytical frameworks; critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism. The three perspectives will enable me to achieve the research objective as they all hold a critical stance and focus on “*societal issues and issues influencing marginalized groups*” (Creswell, 2007, p.24). This multitheoretical approach is in line with the recommendations of Denzin and Lincoln, (1994) who argue that social constructionists should draw upon their creativity and knowledge to bring together different perspectives that can best address the research problem in hand.

In the next few paragraphs, I explore critical theory as the basis for modern critical inquiries. I then move on to investigate the link between critical theory as an evolving theory, postmodernism and feminism. I conclude by showing how the three perspectives are interlinked and how they fit with the research objective.

### **6.3.1 Critical theory**

Critical theory focuses on issues of power and justice. It is mainly preoccupied with empowering individuals as it holds an emancipatory consciousness and strives to be transformative (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). Social critique is not a new phenomenon but the roots of the current version of critical theory in Western social science are strongly embedded in Karl Marx’s work and the post-Marxian Frankfurt School (Crotty, 2009). The reason is that Marxist analysis offers critical insights into the Enlightenment and the modern order which emanates from it. As a result, Marxist theories have informed a large number of current critical perspectives including the Frankfurt School, feminism as well as postmodernism (Bradshaw and Firat, 2007). It is, therefore, important to start this section with a brief overview of Marx’s main theories and concepts.

Marx links philosophy to history and economics as he argues that philosophy should not be idealistic but action led. He believes that economics; “*the material*

*conditions of society*” are the basis of individuals’ consciousness including their understandings of the world (cultural, political and intellectual); their values; as well as the way they formulate their relationships (Greetham, 2006, p.176). For Marx, social organisations, which he calls the relations of production, are the results of the division of labour into a hierarchy of productive tasks. These hierarchies create social classes which in turn determine the structure of all other institutions. The structure of social classes differs from time to time to reflect changes in the relation of productions. Marx presents slavery, feudalism and Capitalism as examples of how social organisations changed across time (Crotty, 2009).

Marx, however, argues that Capitalism alienates workers more than any other system. The industrial revolution has reduced workers to mere machines and factors of productions. This allowed Capitalism to alienate workers by depriving them from the ownership of the final products and by isolating them from other workers. Thus the capitalist, who owns the end products and sells them at a profit, also controls the labour of workers. Marx argues that the relation between the various factors of production gives rise to certain ideologies which in turn will shape the way people understand the world or what Marx refers to as the forms of consciousness. Under the capitalist system however ideologies will lead to formation of false consciousness because its representations of the world reflects the material conditions and practices prevailing in the society (Greetham, 2006).

In Marx’s theory of ideology, ideology is not therefore a neutral construct but an oppressive mechanism that reinforces existing power relations (Marx, 1961). The relations of production or social organisations are maintained by ideologies that provide the rationale and justification for dominant social and economic conditions.

Marx, however, does not conceptualise human beings as fixed and stable entities. Workers can emancipate themselves from oppressive social and economic arrangements by overcoming the ideological distortions of class society as this will lead them to the attainment of true consciousness (Greetham, 2006). For

Marx (1961) emancipation is, therefore, closely related to overcoming alienation; it “*is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself*” (p. 236). In other words, emancipation is achievable by destroying the inhuman conditions that prevail in society. Thus workers are not passive creatures but active agents who can change the conditions of their lives and free themselves through praxis. For Marx, this means establishing a classless society through a revolution led by the proletariat against their capitalist owners (Greetham, 2006).

Marx argues that the progress towards individual freedom has always been the result of an on-going class struggle. For instance, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie (capitalist) and the proletariat in Capitalism is the result of the previous conflict between the aristocracy and the peasants in feudal time. The latter is, in turn, the result of the conflict between free persons and slaves (Crotty, 2009). In this sense, Marx’s theory of history, similar to Hegel, is a dialectical theory where reality is not constructed through linear and isolated events that can be explained in terms of causal relationships but as complex and interactive. However, unlike Hegel who believes ideas are the force shaping historical change, Marx attributes life’s complexity to the conflict between different social classes, as workers can be transformed through a “*dialectical relation between their nature and the conditions in which they live*” (Greetham, 2006, p.261). Marx’s theory of history is, therefore, based on dialectical materialism where history is conceptualised as “*the process through which the human mind grows in consciousness and freedom*” (Greetham, 2006, p.262). Although, Marx acknowledges the role of institutions in oppressing people, for him economic alienation is the root for all sorts of alienation. Given the central position Marx allocates to class struggle, he has therefore been associated with economic determinism (Crotty, 2009).

Critical theory, as a post Marxian school of thought, has been associated with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. The institute emerged before the second world war with its influential theorists; Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Its initial focus was on exploring

Marxian concepts. However, the rise of Stalinism in the former Soviet Union, and the Third Reich in Germany, created a strong hostility against Marxism. As a result, members of the Institute fled to the USA and under the suspicion of the FBI; some theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer advocated a critical theory which was free from praxis. Not all Frankfurt School theorists, however, adopted this approach as Herbert Marcuse for instance emphasised the role of praxis. This development has nevertheless weakened the influence of critical theory notably in the 60s when the theory was unable to contribute actively to the revolutionary movements that took place at that time (Jäger, 2004; Bradshaw and Firat, 2007).

Critical theory has multiple strands and different emphases. These strands are guided by competing epistemological conceptions (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). Thus, despite Marxist's concepts of domination, alienation and emancipation remaining at the heart of critical thinking, their meanings have changed over time and across disciplines (Bradshaw and Firat, 2007). Critical theory has therefore become an umbrella term where Marx and the Frankfurt School are only a variant as the theory is currently informed by a large number of critical movements such as critical race theory, feminism, critical management, critical marketing and postmodernism. (Schroeder, 2007)

In the next section, I explore in more details the synergy between critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism.

### **6.3.2 The Synergy between critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism**

Informed by a social constructionist perspective which underlines this research, I approach critical theory in this study as an evolving theory. Accordingly, the theory is not perceived as a static, universal revolutionary theory that offers "*objectified strategies*". Instead it is conceptualised as a fluid theory that constantly captures new forms of oppressions and power structures (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005; p.305). An evolving critical theory is usually adopted in conjunction with other analytical frameworks as this multitheoretical approach

brings to the fore new research questions and sheds new light on existing research problems (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe and Berry, 2004).

An evolving critical theory is strongly influenced by other perspectives including postmodernism and feminist theory. The influence and the synergy between critical theory and these perspectives have led to the reconceptualization of the concepts of power, hegemony, ideology and language. Critical researchers for instance have rejected Marx's economic determinism as they argue that economic factors are only one of many other forms of oppressive forces (Gibson, 1986; Kincheloe, 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1999). At the same time, postmodernism advocates the multidimensional aspect of knowledge and feminist theory is increasingly emphasising the oppressive roles of class, gender and race (Crotty, 2009). Thus class struggle is no longer the only source for false consciousness but one of many other factors that shape individuals' consciousness (Keller, 1995). Postmodernism and postmodern feminist theory have transformed critical theory as they advocated the inclusion of the voices of marginalised people; the "Other". Homogeneity becomes a sign of oppression as it suppresses the voice of those who have been marginalised by dominant power structures (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, postmodernism perceives social identities, including gender as fluid, partial, ambiguous and context-dependent (Ahl, 2003). Under an evolving critical theory, the notions of diversity and multiplicity are therefore privileged over unity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Postmodernism also acknowledges the power of ideas and language (Creswell, 2007). It understands language, not as an objective and neutral construct, but as a social practice whose meanings are context dependent. Postmodernism demystifies the ways dominant discourses are used to legitimate certain power structures by exploring the multiple meanings of language (Ogbor 2000). A critical analysis informed by postmodernism therefore focuses on exposing the role of metanarratives and discourses in establishing hierarchies and in hiding any contradictions that can undermine dominant ideologies (Crotty, 2009). The attention to the role of metanarratives in subordinating people features strongly in

postmodern feminist theory and is in line with this study's claim about the oppressive nature of the metanarrative of economic growth.

In short, as critical researchers shifted their focus to the exploration of multiple forms of oppressive powers and their effects on shaping people's consciousness, the conceptualisation of power has changed. Power, which is an integral part of critical theory, is no longer viewed as a simple and a standalone phenomenon but as a complex and multidimensional one (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

In line with Marxism, postmodernism argues that oppressive powers dominate by establishing ideologies that gives them legitimacy by presenting them as natural and unavoidable. In this sense, ideologies not only prevent subordinated people from challenging their status quo but make them consent to their own subordination (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Postmodernism extends the critique of ideologies beyond Marx's ideology of struggle focused on the ownership of capital, as it scrutinises any theory or methods that claims authority over the others. Thus under the influence of postmodernism, ideology is no longer a "*monolithic, unidirectional entity that was imposed on individuals by ruling class*" (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2007, p.37). Instead, it is conceptualised as a fluid construct that is constantly moving to validate emerging oppressive social structures. In this way, within an evolving critical theory, the notion of "*hegemonic ideology*" (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2007, p.37) is extended beyond class struggle to cover different cultural representations, contexts and venues (Brosio, 1994; Steinberg, 2001).

As discussed earlier, emancipation is at the heart of Marxism which advocates a transformational research agenda. The notion that people are not passive and they can emancipate themselves from the conditions that oppress them is carried out by an evolving critical theory (Lemke, 1995). Informed however by postmodernism and postmodern feminist theory, critical researchers acknowledge that there are different emancipatory interpretations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Thus an evolving critical approach acknowledges that there are different forms of freedom (Bensaid, 2002).

Informed by an evolving critical theory and in line with a social constructionist world view guiding the study, postmodernism in this research is conceptualised as a resistant perspective. Postmodern influence is not therefore limited to “*reporting the diversity of meanings, exposing power relations and the contradictions underlying accepted knowledge*” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p.321). Instead, it holds a critical perspective as it aims to “*confront, transform and emancipate*” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p.321). Feminist theory in this study also holds an emancipatory stance as it aims to liberate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth by bringing new understandings that break free from those imposed upon them (Anderson, 2011).

As this study adopts a theoretical lens that is informed by an evolving critical theory, a resistant postmodernism and a critical postmodern feminist theory, its focus is on critical enlightenment and critical emancipation (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). Critical enlightenment entails destabilising the metanarrative of economic growth as the “only true” representation for female entrepreneurs’ experience while critical emancipation seeks to liberate female entrepreneurs from the conditions that oppress them.

In summary, the above analysis indicates that the three chosen theoretical perspectives are interlinked as they extend and inform each other. As mentioned earlier, this multitheoretical approach is embraced by critical researchers because it offers new insights on the way different forms of oppressions and power relations are interconnected. Moreover, this approach projects human agency under a “*new level of sophistication*” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p.320). In short the adoption of this theoretical lens enriches the study’s critical stance.

In the following section, I will explore the research methodology adopted in this thesis.

## **6.4 Research methodology**

### **6.4.1 Narrative inquiry**

There are many different types of interpretive/critical approaches. According to Creswell (2007), the most common ones in social science are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. As this study aims to include the voices of female entrepreneurs, I choose narrative approach as this encourages the exploration of the experience of individuals through their narrated stories (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Moreover, a narrative approach has been favoured by critical feminist researchers because it enables them to counter oppressive notions of women's homogeneity. By including women's stories, feminist researchers succeed in capturing both the diversity and the contradiction of women's voices (Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Chase, 2005). Furthermore, narrative inquiry enables critical postmodernist researchers to delegitimize metanarratives by collecting and celebrating multiple small narratives that are context dependent (Lyotard, 1984; Czarniawska, 2004). In this sense, narrative inquiry fits with the theoretical lens guiding this study; namely critical theory, feminist theory and postmodernism.

Narrative inquiry is nevertheless a broad research area that includes a wide range of epistemologies, theoretical frameworks and definitions (Riessman, 2008). The term has been operationalised in a variety of ways. Consequently, there are multiple definitions of personal narratives in social sciences which led to a considerable variety of research methodologies (Riessman, 1994). It is beyond the scope of this study to engage with this debate but it is however important to explain how narrative inquiry is adopted in this study.

In this study, I engage with narrative inquiry using interdisciplinary theoretical lenses which are informed by critical theory, postmodernism and feminist theory. In line with the philosophical assumptions governing this research, narrative inquiry is carried out from a social constructionist perspective. Within this perspective, the narrative becomes a mode of knowing that leaves the meanings open for negotiation (Czarniawska, 2004). Given the study's focus on collecting

female entrepreneurs' stories in relation to their entrepreneurial experience, I choose to adopt oral history method as a form of narrative inquiry. Plummer (1995) defines oral history as those studies where the researcher gathers personal reflections from one individual or a group of individuals, regarding certain life events. However before explaining in more detail the reasons for adopting an oral history approach and engaging in a thorough exploration of this method, I will first review briefly the adoption of narrative inquiry in entrepreneurship studies.

#### **6.4.2 Narrative inquiry in entrepreneurship studies**

The adoption of narrative inquiry in the small business literature, including female entrepreneurship studies, remains under-developed as such studies are predominantly quantitative (Hamilton, 2006). An exception to this tradition is the special issue of the Journal of Business Venturing (2007) on entrepreneurial narrative. In this issue authors were invited to use critical narrative approaches to analyse a case study called the "Toy Store". The case depicted two American entrepreneurs who in 1965 opened a toy store. The special issue argues against the Harvard case method and the supremacy of the positivistic paradigm in entrepreneurship studies. It invites researchers to adopt a narrative approach in order to address the "*story deficit*" in entrepreneurship studies (Gartner, 2007; p.624).

As discussed earlier, entrepreneurship studies, including female entrepreneurship studies, still focus mainly on analysing the individual entrepreneur as opposed to analysing the entrepreneurial process. This narrow focus has been attributed by Schumpeter (1934) to the supremacy of the neo-classical economic theory over economic and entrepreneurship studies (illustrated in chapter 4). In line with Schumpeter, critical entrepreneurship authors critiqued the focus on the individual for silencing the entrepreneurial process and its complexity including the process of creating new opportunities.

In order to problematise this dominant approach and bring in new knowledge, authors recommend the adoption of a narrative approach as it is hailed for its

unique ability to offer new insights into how entrepreneurship is practised (Baker, 2007). As narrative methods enable researchers to get closer to the entrepreneur, authors argue that it is the best approach in terms of offering a better understanding of the entrepreneurial process. Hjorth (2007) in particular emphasises the ability of narrative approaches to shift the research focus from studying the entrepreneur as a rational manager entrepreneur to studying the entrepreneurial process. Moreover O'Connor (2007) praised narrative approaches for enabling researchers to gain in depth insight into how entrepreneurs make sense of their own experience and of how their narrated stories are related to the dominant metanarratives. In this sense, the adoption of a narrative approach is perceived of great value as it can open this field of study to new research areas and generate knowledge that is a better reflection of practising entrepreneurs (Baker, 2007; Fletcher, 2007; Hjorth, 2007; Steyaert, 2007). The adoption of narrative inquiry in this study, therefore, fills an important gap in the research methodology in entrepreneurship studies. This gap is reflected in Gartner's (2007) urge for the adoption of a narrative approach by stressing that; *an understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship begs for the narrative mode*" (p.622).

The widespread adoption of narrative approaches in entrepreneurship studies however remains a challenge given the current requirement of mainstream American journals on entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2007). The format of these journals cannot accommodate narrative methodologies as for instance they insist that researchers include a discussion on the reliability and validity of the research. These requirements cannot be met by narrative approaches which deal with complex data (Stayaert, 2007). The recent launch of the "European Tradition in Entrepreneurship" (discussed in chapter 4) which has been formed largely by the authors of this special issue is likely, however, to create an alternative avenue for the publication of narrative led studies.

In the next section, I explain in detail the oral history approach; the narrative method that will be adopted in this study.

### **6.4.3 Oral history**

Oral history places emphasis on interviewing people about their past experiences. It differs from other forms of narrative inquiry in its interdisciplinary roots which emanate from history and sociology, and the value it attributes to orality. Oral history, which is also known as ‘history from below’ has a strong critical stance as it seeks to address imbalanced power relations by offering a central place to the experience of ordinary people (Thompson, 2000). It rejects the notion that the experience of ordinary people can be reduced to statistical aggregates as professed by the discipline of history. It considers this reduction to be political and oppressive as it reinforces certain power structures and the standpoint of authority. This is true of the experience of female entrepreneurs which has mainly been documented and evaluated over the last forty years as part of statistical aggregates on economic growth (see also chapter 2 for more elaboration). In other words, oral history opens history to new areas of inquiry and gives back to ordinary people their voices so they can re-write their own history based on their own experience (Thompson, 2000). It is, therefore, considered to be transformational and emancipatory as it gives voice to marginalised groups (Dahl and Thor, 2009).

Feminist researchers resort to oral history method to address women’s invisibility. By attending to women’s voices, researchers can revisit the knowledge received about women and challenge dominant ideologies (Anderson and Jack, 1991). In this sense oral history method fit with the emancipatory objective of this study. The method contributes to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth by offering them the opportunity to narrate their stories and by challenging accepted knowledge about economic growth (Anderson and Jack, 1991; Thompson, 2000).

Although the oral history method has increasingly been adopted in almost all social science disciplines for its transformational potential (Jessee, 2011), the method has rarely been used to research private business in Europe (Keulen and Kroeze, 2012) including the UK and is notably absent from teaching in UK business schools (Perks, 2010). Perks (2010) refers this omission to the close

association of the UK oral history movement with the socialist movement that depicts the corporate world as the oppressive elite. As a result, UK oral history projects have been limited to the studies of trade unions, working class people and the political role of organisations with no projects to-date on entrepreneurship, management and organisation history. The absence of these projects are perceived as a major gap in oral history studies notably following the current economic crisis which has a great impact on the life of people. Perks (2010) therefore urges researchers in the UK to adopt the oral history method to demystify and understand the complexity of business related activities including its influence upon individual's agency. Therefore, by adopting an oral history method, the current study addresses an important gap not only in entrepreneurship studies but also in oral history literature.

The main form of oral history method is interviews (Abrams 2010). In the next section, I present a brief note on the oral history interview including the interviews that were carried out as part of this study.

#### **6.4.4 Oral history interviews and postmodernism**

The generation of new meanings is key to oral history interviews. This is achievable by encouraging the narrator to reflect deeply on his/her life story. When the story is told with much reflection, it can then generate new information for the researcher and be transformational for the participant (Atkinson, 2001). An important part of emancipating and empowering female entrepreneurs resides, therefore, in carrying out an oral history interview that gives them the chance not only to tell their stories but to also reflect deeply on related events (Anderson and Jack, 1991). This is, however, not easy to achieve given the power relation between the researcher and the researched which may hinder the ability of the participants to reflect deeply on their experience. In order to avoid this pitfall, I emphasised at the beginning of the interview that I was not the expert and that I was here to learn about their experience. I also undertook the oral history interviews in line with Atkinson's (2001) recommendations in terms of being open, flexible and adaptable to the emerging story. This was achieved by meeting the narrators face to face as this enabled me to get closer to female

entrepreneurs to explore the meanings of their experience (Belk, 2008). I also offered each participant the freedom to tell her story on her own terms as explained further in the next section (Thompson, 2000).

Furthermore, I did not pretend to be an objective detached researcher. At the same time, throughout the interview I established a good rapport with the narrators by expressing interest in what they were saying and sympathising with their emotions when they were narrating their stories (Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Fontana and Frey, 1994). I listened deeply without categorising emerging stories according to prevailing ideologies and taken for granted assumptions (Anderson and Jack, 1991). I also gave up my control over the research by asking very open questions as illustrated in the next section. My intervention was limited to probing which was carried out without infringing the participant's privacy and with respect to their choice to hold back parts of their stories as they deemed necessary (Davies and Elliott, 2006).

By following these steps, the participants appeared to feel comfortable about expressing their feelings and exploring their subjectivities (Anderson and Jack, 1991). As a result, the data collected were rich as they captured participants' stories in their own words and at the same time encouraged them to extend their reflections (Atkinson, 2001). This is reflected in the comment made by one of the participants, Dawn; *“Well you're very interesting. You ask the most incredible questions, it's like being with Freud.”*

Despite the above, there remains no such thing as a transparent interview (Armitage and Gluck, 1998). In line with the postmodern feminist epistemology guiding this study, the interaction between the interviewer and the narrator in a given context privileges some stories over the others. Furthermore, my intervention as a social researcher cannot be neutral. My political location in terms of destabilising the power of the metanarrative of economic growth and opening the space for alternative narratives has shaped my intervention and probing (Harding, 1991).

Moreover, the interpretation of these narratives can only be viewed as partial and temporary as there is no right or singular story. The interpretation I offer does not enjoy any privileged status, it is just one possible narration from many other possibilities. In this sense, my interpretation is not part of an oppressive discourse but a liberatory one that acknowledges its limitations, its partiality and its contextuality (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008).

#### **6.4.5 Data collection**

The study offers a reading of oral history narratives of three participants who were interviewed twice over a period of 18 months. Initially, I conducted eleven interviews with eight female entrepreneurs as three participants were interviewed twice. However, as this study is an in-depth qualitative study, where the research process is both inductive and iterative (Malhotra and Birks, 2007), after collecting the data I decided to analyse only the six interviews that were generated from three participants. This decision was influenced by the research objective and the complexity of the emerging themes as illustrated later in this chapter.

The decision to focus on a small number of participants and to interview them more than once is also consistent with Thompson's (2000) recommendation for researchers using oral history method. The approach actually dominates oral history literature. In their commentaries on oral history projects, the well-cited feminist oral historians, Armitage and Gluck (1998), asserted that the focus on few oral history narratives is the dominant practice within this tradition. In fact, the practice is so common that debates around what constitutes the right number of narratives are almost non-existent in this body of literature. This is reflected in the large number of oral history articles that do not include a justification or an explanation for their recourse to small samples.

What is however more important for oral historians, as well as for this study, is the ability to capture the uniqueness of each narrative and the wealth of meanings embedded in it. This includes the narrator's subjectivity in terms of how he/she makes sense of their life events (Abrams, 2010). Oral history projects should

also include the voices of marginalised people and explore the fluidity of their experience or identities. In order to enrich the critical stance of oral history projects, authors are also encouraged to research the interaction between the narratives and with their wider social environment (Armitage and Gluck, 1998). All these abilities are believed to be enhanced dramatically when the research analyses a very small sample of narratives (Guy, 2010) (see table 5 for examples from oral history literature). In this light, the question of how many female entrepreneurs should be interviewed become less pertinent to this study. What is more eminent however is the degree to which these narratives can emancipate female entrepreneurs by including their voices and destabilising the metanarrative of economic growth (Guy, 2010).

The three participants were interviewed twice as oral history researchers considers one interview to be insufficient when it comes to generating rich accounts of a person's experience (Thompson, 2000). In the first interview, the three participants were asked one question; tell me your story as a female entrepreneur. This question sought to put the participant in a relaxed mode and initiated a long and personal account of her story. As mentioned earlier, my intervention was limited to keeping the story going, seeking clarification or to encouraging the narrator to reflect more deeply upon her experience. The second interview, which took place almost a year later, started by asking the participants about happened in their lives since our last meeting. The interview concluded by asking the participants the following four questions:

1. How do you define an entrepreneur?
2. How do you define success?
3. Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur?
4. Do you see yourself as successful?

The reason for asking these questions was to gain insights into some contradictory comments that emerged in the first accounts of the stories, notably between the voice of the participants and the metanarrative of economic growth.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes which ensured the richness of the data collected through oral history interviews (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). The interviews were audio recorded and were fully transcribed. This resulted in 67,366 words. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, they were all given pseudonyms and their personal data were removed from the analysis. As mentioned in chapter 1, this study focuses on female entrepreneurs in the context of SMEs business ownership, the participants were therefore identified on the basis of business ownership regardless of the size of the business or the number of their employees. The participants are British female entrepreneurs who are based in the North of England.

Table 5: Examples from the Oral History Review

<b>Author's name and year of publishing</b>	<b>Focus of study</b>	<b>No of oral history narratives</b>	<b>Justified the adoption of small sample</b>
Guy (2010)	bring the voice of Appalachian women migrants in Chicago	Focus on three and a fourth interview is brought in rarely	Yes
Cuádriz (2006)	to debunk the myth of achievement regarding Mexican descent	three oral history narratives.	No
Čvorović (2009)	fluidity of the identity of Serbian's Gypsy	one narrative	No
Dahl and Thor (2009)	identities are negotiated in different contexts by Jewish women Sweden	one narrative	No
Leavy and Ross (2006)	Explore the interaction between the experience of women suffering from anorexia and the wider social environment	one narrative	No

#### **6.4.6 Sampling**

I adopted in this study a non-probability sampling technique as opposed to a probability sampling technique as the latter is associated with positivism (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). Access to female entrepreneurs who were willing to give up their time for the interviews was limited because of their work and personal commitments. I, therefore, used snowballing sampling by resorting to my personal contacts as well as the School of Management's (SOM) Enterprise Centre. For confidentiality reasons, SOM did not provide contact details of their members until the latter expressed an initial willingness to help me with my research.

Snowballing sampling has served well the progress of the study because of the ease and speed of accessing the participants as well as the increased potential of their cooperation as trust and rapport was established prior to the interview (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). This also enabled me to collect in depth rich data as reflected in the analysis of the participants' narratives.

#### **6.4.7 Field settings**

Within my epistemic stance, context plays an important role in the construction of meanings. It was, therefore, important to get closer to the participants; Helen, Kate and Dawn within their own environment and work setting (Creswell, 2007). The aim was, therefore, to interview the participants in their work place. However, this preference was not imposed upon the interviewees as they were invited to choose the venue that suited them best. Helen who had her own office preferred to conduct the two interviews there as this enabled her to fit the interviews within her daily workload. Having the interview in Helen's office was highly beneficial as it enhanced my understanding of her entrepreneurial experience. This was especially important as Helen moved offices between the two interviews and this move, as illustrated in chapter 7, formed an important part of her experience. In this way, the location of her interviews provided me with additional insights that might have been lost if the interviews were carried out elsewhere. As a result, the richness of the data collected was enhanced and has better informed the data analysis.

In contrast, Kate and Dawn who both worked from home preferred that the interviews take place away from their offices. Kate's interviews took place at the University's meeting room. Dawn's first interview also took place at the University's meeting room while the second one took place at one of my friend's houses. Dawn had recently been travelling regularly between various cities in the North of England and this location was the most convenient one for her. These remote locations from the participants' workplace may have impacted on the richness of the data collected.

The timing of the interviews was determined by the interviewees and all six interviews were carried out with minimal interruption.

#### **6.4.8 Data analysis**

As discussed earlier, critical inquiries move the analysis beyond the exploration of the individual to the investigation of the role of the environment in shaping the person's experience (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). This shift increases the

complexity of the analysis. In this study this complexity is further intensified by the richness of the data gathered through oral history interviews. In order to deal with this complexity, it is common in critical narrative tradition that researchers do not use all the collected data (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998; Atkinson 2001). I, therefore, applied in this study Gubrium and Holstein's (1998) notion of "*Analytic bracketing*" (p.165) whereby the analysis focuses only on certain aspects of the story. The decision regarding which parts to analyse was determined by the study's emancipatory objective, main research question and the theoretical lens guiding this study (Riessman, 2008). The analysis of the experience of female entrepreneurs was therefore carried out against the backdrop of the neo-classical economic growth theory (including its close ally the managerial discourse) using a critical, feminist and postmodern lens.

The analysis which was iterative and interpretative was carried out using thematic analysis. Two themes emerged from the data namely; a) the messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life, and b) the relationship and inter-relationship of power. The first theme flags the strong contradictions between the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical economic growth theory, the managerial discourse, and the experience of the entrepreneur. Moreover, the theme points to the negative impact of the metanarrative of economic growth and the managerial discourse upon the entrepreneurial experience. This theme is consistent with the theoretical findings of this thesis which exposed the divergence of the neo-classical growth theory from the entrepreneurial experience. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial experience emerging in the stories is more in line with Schumpeter's theorising of the entrepreneur and of entrepreneurship. Given this close relation between the participants' experience and Schumpeter's theories, I used in the analysis the theorist's term; new combinations to describe the introduction of new ideas, products or services.

The theme also challenges the accepted knowledge about female entrepreneurs' underperformance. As illustrated in chapter 2, the literature is dominated by the assumption that the female entrepreneur underperforms in relation to her male counterpart. A number of reasons have been given in the literature to explain her

underperformance including the lack of a university degree; managerial experience; external finance as well as discrimination at the work place; work-life balance; and operation in non-profitable service sectors. The participants' stories defy the relevance of such reasoning to their entrepreneurial experience.

The second theme emerging in these narratives is the relationship and inter-relationship of power, as narrators assume different roles; namely the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed. This theme served well the critical stance of this study as it captured the interaction between the experience of the entrepreneur and the wider society, including the metanarrative of economic growth. In addition, the analysis sheds new light into female entrepreneurs' agency and the fluidity of their experience.

Given the richness of the narratives, the complexity of the stories and the way the themes are interwoven, I have analysed each oral history narrative in a separate chapter namely; chapter 7 (Helen), chapter 8 (Kate) and chapter 9 (Dawn). The chapter starts with a brief summary of the participant's story which is then followed by a detailed analysis of the narrative. The analysis is structured around the two different themes. Given the heterogeneity of the participants and the uniqueness of each story, the sub-headings of each theme vary from one story to the other. The chapters conclude with a discussion of the findings.

This in-depth analysis of each narrative is common in oral history tradition where researchers resist any attempt to fragment and summarise the narratives (Armitage and Gluck, 1998). Moreover, this mode of analysis enabled me to overcome the concern raised against the narrative approach in terms of perpetuating the focus on the individual at the expense of the process (Steyaert, 2007). As discussed earlier, entrepreneurship studies have been critiqued for its narrow focus on the individual and its failure to capture the entrepreneurial process and experience (Gartner, 2013). Furthermore, the absence of studies that explore the interaction between the context and the entrepreneurial experience has perpetuated the male gender of the entrepreneur as the norm (Bruni et al., 2004b). What is more, under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth, the focus on the individual has reinforced in the literature a dichotomy of

successful male entrepreneur versus unsuccessful female entrepreneur. In order to achieve the emancipatory objective of this study, it was therefore important that the analysis enables this shift of focus.

The comprehensive analysis of each narrative brought strongly to the surface the diversity, fluidity, complexity and dynamic nature of the experience and the process of the entrepreneur. This vibrant picture of the entrepreneurial experience stands strongly against the uni-dimensional image of the entrepreneur as painted by the metanarrative of economic growth. Furthermore it highlights strongly the political role of the story as it reflects how female entrepreneurs resist, reproduce and are subordinated by oppressive discourses including the metanarrative of economic growth.

In summary, the data analysis of the empirical findings contributed to the achievement of the study's objective by playing an important role in destabilising the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience.

#### **6.4.9 Ethical considerations**

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), ethics in qualitative research can be divided into two dimensions; procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Both dimensions were observed in this research. Procedural ethics includes obtaining the necessary approvals from the relevant ethics committees and from the participants prior to collecting the data. In this study, the interviews were conducted according to Bradford University School of Management ethics code and followed the School's procedures with this regards (Bradford University 2013). The interviewees consented to undertaking the interviews beforehand. The participants were provided with an information sheet outlining my field of study and my research objectives. A consent form was presented at the beginning of the interview outlining their rights and was signed by myself as well as the participant. Moreover, I made sure that the language used in the forms was free from jargon and understandable by the audience. The information collected was treated as confidential. Towards this end, personal data such as names and

locations were not disclosed at any point in the thesis and pseudonyms were used instead. The interviews were audio taped only after receiving the participants' permission to do so.

The second dimension identified by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) is ethics in practice. This dimension covers the process of doing the research. As mentioned earlier, when carrying out the interview, I made sure that I interacted with the participants without being exploitive. For instance, when I probed participants, I respected their privacy and their desire to hold back parts of their stories. Moreover, in line with Malhotra and Birks (2007), I did not hassle the participants or try to make them feel uncomfortable at any time.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the philosophical assumption and the theoretical perspectives guiding this thesis. The chapter also explored the reasons that motivated the choice of narrative inquiry and oral history. An overview of the data analysis was also offered in this chapter before concluding with a brief note on the research ethics.

The three subsequent chapters will offer an in-depth analysis of the oral history narratives collected from female entrepreneurs operating in the North of England over a period of almost two years.

## **7 Oral history narrative - Helen**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the first of three chapters which together form the empirical part of this study. As discussed in chapter 1, the aim of this part of the study is to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth by answering the following question:

What are the narratives of female entrepreneurs in relation to their entrepreneurial experience?

The chapter starts by introducing Helen. A detailed account of her oral history narrative is then presented through two themes as illustrated later on. Each theme is broken down into a number of subthemes. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the findings.

### **7.2 A brief summary of Helen's story**

Helen is a 53 year old white woman, married with three daughters. She owns a Human Resource consultancy firm in the North of England. Helen graduated with a law degree, which she recounts she did not enjoy because she was not allowed to do things differently. She did not, however, leave it for another degree as she did not want to let her family down. When Helen graduated, she joined one of the major high street banks and then progressed through the career hierarchy until she occupied very senior positions in HR.

*“I did a law degree which is a very defined degree and I went into law I found I was stifled and I didn't like it and not wanting to disappoint my family I stuck at it for a while and I was okay. I wasn't great because my heart wasn't in it. I felt stifled by the confines of the discipline. You know you just had to do things in a certain way and every time I tried to suggest a quicker or a slicker way or a different way it was oh no you can't do it like that because in the law we work in a certain way. So what I decided to do is to try and get into a different environment because I didn't have the instinct to do that and I joined a big bank and I became part of the employment team but I worked my way into HR.” (Helen 1)*

When she had her three daughters, Helen did not give up her career. Instead, she continued to work as a senior manager at the bank while bringing up her family. As a result of this decision, Helen describes how she faced discrimination at the work place.

*“I am 51 now, the laws weren’t as good as they are now and they are still not as good as they ought to be but every time you left to have a baby and I have got three I had to come back and I had to prove myself all over again.”*  
(Helen 1)

After almost twenty years working in the banking sector, Helen resigned because she was undermined by a newly appointed executive who would not give her the freedom to do things as she wanted to.

*“Then I got a boss that tried to stifle me and it was back to being like when I was in law and I thought I didn’t want that...So at the age of 40 I took redundancy. I was looking after a huge HR department in a bank”* (Helen 1)

After leaving the bank, Helen did not start her own business straightaway. She initially applied for other executive jobs but she depicts how she was hesitant about accepting job offers as she perceived that joining another organisation was not the right thing for her. At the same time that she was wrestling with this dilemma, her husband was misdiagnosed with a serious disease which led her to study psychology and subsequently to embark on a PhD. Her husband’s illness provided a trigger for her to reflect more on her own needs in terms of future employment and paved the way for her decision to start-up her own business.

*“My husband got a health condition that I didn’t understand. Since then we realised he was misdiagnosed; he didn’t have it, but it was a couple of years later before we realised that. But that started me looking into psychology and I thought I will do a degree through the Open University just for fun which I did. And then I spoke to my professor and I told him about some of the ideas that I had and the way I was thinking about it - organisational psychology and he said that is PhD stuff. During that time what happened was, I applied for various jobs and I got offered a few of them and I didn’t want them because it was like somebody was going to be clipping my wings. So I would go for the interview. I was getting head hunted and then I would think, do I want to be in this environment? No I don’t. But I didn’t know what environment I wanted to be in really. So doing my PhD gave me a little bit of space to think about it and having a bit of money to give myself that space.”*  
(Helen 1)

The unforeseen nature of Helen's decision to start-up her business meant that she did not know straightaway what services or products she would offer to the marketplace. In order to clarify her offering, she turned to reliable people for advice. This informal research helped her to formulate which "new combination" she would introduce to the market.

*"So when I decided to work for myself I didn't quite know what I wanted to do. I knew I could slip back into law because I still have the qualification, I could still do that, but that again felt stifling. So I started my own business, started it off from my bedroom. I did not know what I was going to offer to the big world out there and so what I did, I went to some trusted people and I said what if you were running a business, if you were going to employ me, what are the five things that you would value that I could provide for you. And from that, what they told me I went off and developed my business. It is a completely different view on human resources delivery and I want it to be that way. We are an outsourced provider. What you have, you either have the big providers who do it all over the telephone or the individual practitioners. What was nobody doing, was a bit of that, and bit of that really and delivering it better so basically what I have done is I have created the company that sits in between those two disciplines." (Helen 1)*

What appears to be emerging from her account is that the gap between the two worlds of corporate and entrepreneurial life has had an adverse effect on Helen's ability to make a clear decision. Driven by her fears of the entrepreneurial unknown, Helen decided to appoint a business partner that she subsequently acknowledged she did not need. She approached Mia, who used to work for her and was on maternity leave at the time of the launch, to be her business partner. This decision, as the story unfolds, will turn out to be a big mistake. Helen goes on to explain why she sought security through her decision to go into partnership:

*"So really why have I had her (Mia) – like a comfort blanket really isn't it? Never having been in business before coming from a corporate environment, but realising that all my time living in that world I was constantly pushing the boundaries and going into places that women hadn't been. But it was still a protective environment to a greater or lesser extent. When I decided I was going to work for myself it was suddenly, all of sudden you feel very exposed. I never doubted my ability, but I just didn't know how I could put myself out to market. I just didn't understand it. And so what I felt I needed was a sounding board, somebody to work with and Mia had worked for me many years ago. She'd actually been somebody who reported in to me and she was at home with her children and so I went and said come into business with me and it was more having that sounding board and that other person and that is what I mean by comfort blanket. Because at that point I thought that I needed*

*that. For all my boldness and all my fool hardiness at times; at that moment in my life it was such a big switch from corporate into my own business I didn't know whether I was good enough to go it alone. I just didn't know. I maybe thought I wasn't good enough because despite me pushing all the boundaries and doing everything in the corporate world and being successful there was still structures there. There were still comfort blankets there and the only way I could get her to sign up and not go back after maternity to her job was to give her 20% of the business. It was a big mistake, I didn't need her.” (Helen 1)*

After four years of working together, Helen and Mia parted company and Helen had to buy Mia's shares out.

I met Helen twice over a period of 18 months. My first meeting with her took place straight after her separation from her business partner; Mia and, therefore, this partition formed a major part of her story. After the first interview, as discussed later, Helen moved offices and therefore the interviews took place in two different venues.

Helen's oral history narrative is told through the following two themes:

- 1) The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life
- 2) The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed.

### **7.3 The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life**

Helen's entrepreneurial experience is nicely summarised in the below quote:

*“I went off and developed my business and it changes all the time because that is me.” (Helen 1)*

Helen's entrepreneurial experience, including the environment in which she operates, has been anything but static, linear or predictable. She did not, therefore, fit the mould of the text-book version of the economic rational manager who ran her business based on formal long-term planning. Furthermore, Helen reported that the entrepreneur needs to be able to respond quickly to environmental changes and that long-term planning cycles actually hinder this ability.

*“I haven’t got a five year plan. I think they’re useless for small companies. Big companies yes, because they’re like turning a huge oil tanker, but small companies can move a lot slicker than that. I’ve got a two year plan and I’ve got like a six month plan for those two years broken into four chunks of six months, and I don’t always do that. I just thought two years was as far ahead as I could probably predict. But I know where I’m going and I know the journey I’m gonna go on, but I have to face the challenges as they come up really.” (Helen 2)*

Helen’s entrepreneurial experience is very much evolutionary and dynamic as she drove her business by constantly developing and introducing new combinations into the marketplace.

*“I tend to do get really creative about one particular idea and all the ideas that have taken our company from being a little tiny company that provides a good income, to a bigger sized company, to the next size, the next level. And we are just about to take another leap into another level and sometimes I think, why hasn’t anybody else had this idea? Because it is so flipping obvious to me.” (Helen 1)*

Helen’s new combinations of business services come in different forms. Sometimes, she develops an existing service.

*“Then as I am delivering stuff, I am constantly improving it, I am constantly coming back to the team and get their feedback, and change the way we do things. So this happens all of the time.” (Helen 1)*

Sometimes, she introduces a totally new idea to the market.

*“I will think of a different way of delivering something, a better way of delivering something, a new innovative way, another income stream. There is a little niche in the market there that has not been filled and I am going to fill it. So that is the way I have been.” (Helen 1)*

Helen describes how she develops her new business combinations in an accidental and spontaneous way.

*“The biggest one (idea) I have just had just recently which will take us into another stratosphere came to me. I was at a dinner sat next to a lady who was an accountant and as you know accountancy do bookkeeping, payroll and all those things. And out of politeness I said to her what do you do? What is it that you offer your clients? So she told me and so out of the blue I just said do you not offer human resources? and she said well no and I said would you like to? she said I would love to and I said right let’s talk. I am making this product up as I am sat next to this woman, all the way home I am excited about it. I was in Manchester and I had to pull the car over twice to jot down ideas that I was having. By the time I got home, I was buzzing with it, I*

*couldn't sleep. By the time it got to one o'clock in the morning I had this product, I had these ideas."* (Helen 1)

The successful launch of this service has led to another serendipitous development in Helen's business - and possibly the most important development yet. A few months before our second interview, Helen was approached by a large corporation and was asked to offer their clients, who are mainly accountants, a similar service. As she explains:

*"The accountancy thing took a very strange twist, because what happened was I had a telephone call from a company called X. Now X are huge, they are the biggest provider of XX. They've got about 18,000 clients or something like that. And all their clients are accountants. And what X was doing, being a bit more forward thinking, thinking that they would like to offer HR to the accountant and they were looking for a provider to do that. So I think they must have just Googled and it grabbed it off my website and I came up. So they interview me and a couple of other much bigger players than me, but they liked the way that I do the HR because they know it would fit in with their kind of clients better than the bigger providers. So we're at the stage now where we're just drawing up the legal contract to work together. I mean it has taken a good 8-9 months to get to that position because they're a huge company and they wanted to check me out. And they wanted to make sure that I was as good as I said I was before they started to invest a lot of time in finding a collaboration. So we're going to be launching HR for X and that is gonna be phenomenal because of the amount of clients they've got. And I'm gearing up for that because I've got two new staff starting and we're so stretched at the moment and yeah, this thing could take us to somewhere else."*(Helen 2)

In relation to the market in which she operates, Helen indicated that the performance of new combinations in the marketplace had not always been easy to predict. Intuition, therefore, replaces rational choice as Helen relied on her initiative, authority and foresight to carry out new combinations. As she notes:

*"Where does my business come from? I mean intuitive you know where it comes from."* (Helen 2)

*"It was tough, but it was intuitively, I knew I needed to do that."* (Helen 2)

Helen's experience was driven by self-belief, leaps of faith, gut feeling and determination. As she suggests:

*"It's the dilemma of any small business. It's the chicken and egg thing, what do you do? Get the staff in first and hope that your ideas are right or do you do the idea and test it and then get the staff? Well to be honest I've got bigger*

*faith in myself that this will work and even if it doesn't I'll find a way of making it work. So I've taken a leap of faith and I've taken on two extra staff and they start after Christmas and I'm hoping that the business will flood in. The new lad, he's never worked in this environment before so I'll be carrying that cost. He'll not actually be earning me any money for probably a year. So you have to carry that cost and have the courage of your convictions and the foresight to know. A gut feel that this is gonna work, and there's a market for it out there, and yes I've done some research and yes I've done a bit of testing of it, but a lot of it is gut instinct, just bloody mindedness, sheer determination that this is gonna work.” (Helen 2)*

She believed that the inhibition of small business entrepreneurs to deploy these traits has an adverse effect on business growth.

*“So many people that I know who run small businesses have that dilemma and they restrict their own growth because they don't seem to either have the courage of their convictions to just jump in and just do it.” (Helen 2)*

Helen's story demonstrates that traits are not stable, but fluid. This is reflected in her story about her relationship with Mia (to follow below). Helen for instance pointed out that over time she has become more risk taking, ambitious and confident, whereas her business partner was heading in the opposite direction:

*“As the business started to grow and I got more and more ambitious and more and more risk taking, if you like, calculated risks not foolhardy risks, she became more and more conservative.” (Helen 1)*

However, even with self-determination, strong self-belief, intuition and foresight, Helen's business did not grow in a linear way, as she faced setbacks and made mistakes along the way. Failure was an integral part of her entrepreneurial experience as the following two quotes indicate:

*“So you know, in 18 months an awful lot has happened with my little business and it has been very successful, though there has been a few mishaps along the way, because you know you don't get it right every time.” (Helen 2)*

*“Why are we doing it that way? Surely there is a better way. Let's give it a go and if it fails, as long as nobody dies, then try again.” (Helen 1)*

Helen believed that mishaps enhanced her learning and were important to the long-term development of her business.

*“I say a mistake, it's a learning curve as well, because I learned from it and it made me grow the business through it. I made mistakes. Yes of course, because if you are bold and you are going to try things, you are going to get*

*them wrong sometimes. But it doesn't stop me from being bold and trying things and getting things wrong. And when I do get it right, I get it right big style and it takes the business from being a one man band to a two man band. With some admin now I have got eight fully operational people who are all out there.” (Helen 2)*

As hinted earlier, one of Helen's perceived mistakes was her business partnership with Mia, as Helen indicated that this partnership had stifled her.

*“My business partner was a big mistake. It became apparent after a short time that I didn't need her and over the years as the business started to grow and I got more and more ambitious and more and more risk taking if you like, calculated risks not foolhardy risks, she became more and more conservative. So while I was pushing it that way she was pulling it that way.” (Helen 1)*

Nevertheless, Helen's story holds contradictory accounts about her relationship with Mia. These contradictions, which I seek to explore in the section below, capture another aspect of the fluidity of Helen's entrepreneurial experience.

### **7.3.1 The shifting of Helen's experience in relation to her ex- business partner**

When I met Helen for the first time, she had just parted company with Mia. In this first interview, Helen emphasised repeatedly her friendship with Mia and how their business separation was the best option available in order to save their relationship.

*“It became inevitable that our friendship would be worth nothing if we didn't sit down and say where we are going.” (Helen 1)*

*“Mia and I had parted ways and we had not fallen out. We had parted ways because, and it is Mia's own words here, that I wear her out and she can't keep up with me and she felt that she was letting me down and she was holding me back. So I bought her shares off her 1<sup>st</sup> April this year and **she has gone off to do her own little thing** because Mia hasn't got my ambition and my drive and that doesn't make her a bad person. It just makes her the way she is and our friendship would have been jeopardised if we had carried on working together. But we had some good years together.” (Helen 1)*

Although the emboldened words above signal Helen's unease with Mia, this feeling remained subtle in the first interview as she highlighted the importance of their friendship even if this was at the expense of the business performance.

*“Well the biggest thing I did and despite me liking her very much was to take Mia as a partner. That was a big mistake. I didn’t think it was at the beginning and it took me a couple of years to realise it. And another big mistake was to not tackle that head on because I didn’t want to hurt her, because I like her. So we ended up working together for four years and she worked in the business and she worked hard but she didn’t add anything to it she didn’t add any value to it. And I chickened out and I should have tackled it as I would in any other area but because I like her and care for her that was a mistake. Even though I still like her and we are still friends she just wasn’t the right person for me to be in business with, and I realise that now.”*  
(Helen 1)

In the second interview, I was surprised to hear that Mia’s departure was recounted as a scary experience for Helen. When I probed her, Helen gave me a totally different account about her relationship with Mia.

*“Me: Could you please tell me more about this period? How did you first split? You said it was so scary and you were scared that the business was going to close down.*

*Helen: Well because when Mia left I didn’t know whether she’d try and poach the business away you see.*

*Me: But has she started her own business?*

*Helen: Yeah, yeah. Did I not tell you about the break up? No?”* (Helen 2)

Mia was then portrayed as a sneaky enemy and no reference was made to their friendship.

In the interval between the two interviews, Helen suffered from numerous setbacks in her personal life as well as in her business due to Mia’s departure. These setbacks may account for why Helen attributed different meanings to her experience with Mia.

*“The breakup with my business partner affected me more than I perhaps wanted to admit at the time. The six months after Mia and I split up was so difficult that I’d lost the fun out of it. Well because when Mia left I didn’t know whether she’d try and poach the business away you see. Well Mia went into business with one of our clients. They went off and set up their own business. Not doing HR, it was doing training for the care industry. Because this client has a care business where they put care workers into people’s homes. They set up a training school for care workers, thinking that loads of people would send their care workers to them to be trained. And I don’t know what’s happened but it folded after six months. Now I knew then that she would want to earn a living somehow, that she would come and try and poach*

*some of my clients. So what I decided, I didn't trust her after what happened and how she'd been sneaking behind my back. When she left, she said oh I don't want to do the HR, because she hates HR you see. She likes training, where I like HR, so, she said I'm not gonna go after any of the clients but I didn't believe her."* (Helen 2)

Taking this point further, Helen complained that she was stifled by Mia's presence because she faced strong resistance from Mia every time she wanted to introduce a new idea into the market.

*"So for instance when I was creating that product, what I needed to do was I needed to have other people's input. The first thing I did was, I said to Mia what do you think about this? And straight away she said it won't work I don't want anything to do with it. And that is where we were like Ying and Yang really."* (Helen 1)

### **7.3.2 Helen constantly shifting between the role of an innovative entrepreneur and an administrative manager**

The distinction between an innovative entrepreneur (qua leader) and a manager was clear in Helen's mind when she differentiated herself from Mia, as is reflected in the emboldened text below.

*"But when I look back to what has been created, every single idea, every single way we deliver, what we give to the market, everything, everything without a lie was my idea. There hasn't been a single idea come from Mia. Now I don't want that to sound like I am bitter and twisted about it because **Mia worked very hard. But she works, as opposed to creates.**"* (Helen 1)

Helen did not like to assume the managerial function whether in terms of managing staff or clients. Helen perceives that her strengths as an innovative entrepreneur made her less successful in a managerial role.

*"I am difficult to work for I know that which is why I have an office manager that travels between me and the staff. I know that I am not the world's greatest manager...I also know that I am quite demanding, I also know I want things yesterday, I also know that my communication isn't as it should be because I have sometimes got everything in my head and it doesn't always come out. I know that sometimes my staff have not delivered exactly what I want them to do but that is my fault because I haven't communicated it well enough."* (Helen 1)

For Helen the delegation of the managerial tasks was, therefore, the best way to progress her business, she adds:

*“It’ll be less for me to do. Because I will be able to draw back and do what I do best, which is thinking about different products and things that we can do, which is really my strength. I know I can do the HR and I know I can do the legal stuff, they’re my skills, they’re not necessarily my strength for the business. My strength for the business is to keep developing it, and if I free up my time to keep doing that, then the business can keep moving forward. If I don’t, then I’ll just get bogged down working. And the dilemma of a small business as well, is the balance between working in a business and working on a business, because if you work too much in a business you’re not working on your business. If you’re spending too much time working on your business without being mindful, so you know that’s really the dilemma I’m talking about.” (Helen 2)*

Helen previously delegated the management of her clients and staff to Mia.

*“I didn’t have a relationship with anybody else (clients and staff) but Mia.” (Helen 2)*

Immediately following Mia’s departure, Helen delegated the staff management role to Sam, who was an existing staff member. This move was not a success as Sam could not cope with the pressure. When Sam did not succeed in her new task, Helen had to take a step backward to rectify the situation. As Helen reports:

*“What happened was, Sam became the line manager, Mia had line managed the staff, and so Sam put herself forward and said ‘I used to be a manager in XX, I’m really good at managing staff. So I said ‘right ok then’. It didn’t work because, Sam can’t cope with pressure, Sam is a really good HR person, and she does a very good job and the clients love her, but she likes to have an in tray and an out tray. And, you know if you’re a good manager, not only have you got to be good with people you’ve also not got to be worried too much about your work load, and she would be quite snappy and, her personality changed. It was really affecting her. She couldn’t cope and she’d have to leave and go and work somewhere else. And so I sat her down and said well do you want to leave? And she said no, and I said well what do you want? And she said well I wish I’d never been a manager. And I said well why not just go back to what you do before. And lots of people if they take a backward step, they feel they’ve lost face and they’ve, you know it’s an ego thing really. So, what I did with the other staff I just made it sound as if, Sam has been doing it now for six months which is great, I’m back now, it’s only a temporary period while I was making sure I saved the company and I went did I not explain that to you all very well? And they all went no. And I said oh silly me, so make it sound like I hadn’t explained it very well, and it saved Sam’s embarrassment. It meant she could go back to doing what she’s doing and she’s absolutely fine now. So I line manage everybody, which is a bit of a challenge.” (Helen 2)*

Helen was worried, however, that assuming this responsibility would hinder both her performance as well as her health.

*“I manage everybody now. I don’t think I can, because I’m going to get less effective, because I can’t spread myself too thin or I’m gonna end up being poorly again. I can’t be everything to everybody. I’m much better driving the business forward than managing them, but equally, I don’t want to break what I’ve already built, because I’ve got a really loyal staff.”* (Helen 2)

Mia was also the one person in the business who regularly contacted the client moreover she was directly in charge of the work of a third of them.

*“So about a third of the clients that we had when we split up, Mia had the relationship with and I didn’t. They all knew who I was and I’d see them occasionally and every now and again I’d do something certainly if it was legal work, but Mia had the regular contact.”* (Helen 2)

After Mia’s departure, Helen had to take on Mia’s role to fill in this gap. This was exacerbated by Helen’s worries that Mia would seek to poach them, worries that later proved to be correct. Helen spent considerable time managing her clients and building strong relationships with them.

*“So it was that period when I was working you know 14 hours days, 7 days a week, visiting the clients, explaining to them what had happened without, making sure that I didn’t sound bitter and twisted and I wasn’t being too horrible about Mia you know just saying look we’ve split up Mia doesn’t wanna do any HR she’s set up a business with another lady this is what she’s doing now I hope you’re gonna stay with me, explaining who Neil was and Sam was and Ian was because they didn’t have a relationship with anybody else but Mia,.. I did some breakfast seminars inviting people, and I’ve got uh, got closer to them. So that was that period that I was talking about and that was really tough.”*(Helen 2)

Earlier quotes refer to the considerable workload generated by Mia’s departure and Helen became seriously ill as a result of this work intensity. One consequence of her illness has been the introduction of a new business process as she decided to stay in the office every Friday to finish off all internal work. However, she recounts how she was unable to sustain this new process as it emerged that her clients liked to come in and had a chat with her. Helen reports that:

*“The downside is I’ve got quite a distinctive car, I’ve got that duck egg blue mini, and it’s an unusual colour, and my clients know that and if they’re*

*driving past and they see it they pop in which is great they think oh Helen is there I'll just pop in and say hi. So last Friday all I seemed to do is chat to people and give them more cups of tea, but I suppose that's all about relationships and, yeah, you can't begrudge that." (Helen 2)*

Helen's account of her relationship with Mia stands against the notion that female entrepreneurs are homogenous, as clearly her experience, aspiration and motivation are different from Mia's. Furthermore, Helen's narrative sheds light on the tension that may exist between female entrepreneurs. This phenomenon has not been explored in the literature which as discussed in chapter 2 assumes that women are also supportive of each other and that their main problem is with the outsider, including male entrepreneurs or discriminatory institutions.

### **7.3.3 Growing the business is not always the right strategy**

Mia's departure has allowed Helen to pursue some innovative ideas and develop the business further. She narrated that:

*"Um, a couple of the ideas that I implemented after we moved here and the dust settled and I could start focussing on growing the business and not just protecting and saving it, I introduced other things that Mia was dead set against. One of them was, a product to the very small employer, because she, Mia was very much of the idea that the small employers, people who employed less than 10 staff weren't worth going after, and I was never convinced about that so I produced cost effective products that have gone out to market and people have lapped it up, absolutely lapped it up and we've had phenomenal success with this. But what is quite interesting is that all those ideas that I had that Mia squashed and said oh that's stupid and um, because we're a partnership I thought well if she's not happy I won't push it through. They've all worked. Every single one. I mean not even one's failed. It's my ideas since that have failed, a couple of them you know, but they've done, they've worked." (Helen 2)*

This was not, however, easy to achieve as Helen could not focus straight away on growing the business because she was more concerned about the business's long-term survival. She recounted:

*"It was six months of hell making sure that the business didn't dissolve and I really was working seven days a week fourteen hours a day, to make sure that the business didn't disappear. What I did is I went into, very much into protecting my business mode, I very much went into making sure I didn't lose any clients, being very proactive you know, and making sure that the business survives." (Helen 2)*

Helen's reaction, in terms of shifting her focus from growing to maintaining the business, was necessary for business survival, as Mia had made contact with those clients seeking to convince them to switch their business from Helen to hers. She adds:

*“and I'm so glad I did that because when the business that she had with this other lady folded and she was then scrabbling around for work, she did start ringing up some of these clients, and I only lost two. Two did decide to go with her, and only very little ones. But everyone else would just ring me up and say oh I've had Mia on the phone and you'll never guess, she wants to come and see me and so, so I've told her no I'm happy with you.”* (Helen 2)

Moreover, Helen's reflection on her business model following Mia's departure may be an indication that achieving on-going growth is incompatible with certain models and might even make the business vulnerable in the long-term. Helen's business model makes her employees a serious threat to the survival of her business, as she highlights below:

*“because, what happens in and I've built the business like this anyway and I do know that this is a risk, but because I look after my staff so well, I don't think it's that big a risk, but, you tend to get a bank of clients that only deal with Linda (Helen's employee). Now they will use me, Neil, Sam, if, you're on holiday or something, but they get a relationship with one person. That makes me vulnerable from a business point of view because theoretically if that person left me you'd think that client would go with them and I've got all the legal papers in place to make sure that doesn't happen, but you can't stop a client if a client suddenly decided oh I want to be with you and you want to be with them”.* (Helen 2)

So an over-reliance on the growth discourse runs the risk of ignoring the very survival of the business as it faces multiple and competing pressures.

#### **7.3.4 Helen moves offices**

After her business separation from Mia, Helen decided to move offices.

*“And, the premises that we were in before were never my choice, they were the choice of my business partner, and whereas I didn't disagree with it and I went along with it, and they were ok, they, when we split up and I allowed myself to actually feel the split as a human being as opposed to as a business person because it's very difficult to split the two really, I realised that what I needed to do was to get out of those premises and find new premises because it was almost therapeutic, I needed to stamp my mark on it, this is my business this is how I want it to be and this is how, what I think it should be.*

*So leaving the other premises was as much about, it wasn't really practical to be perfectly honest with you but it was as much about the cleansing of the soul almost and, drawing a line in the sand and saying that was the end of that business and this is the evolution of my business now. When we moved here, we had a lot of expense to, get it decorated and carpeted and buy furniture, and, because I didn't want their furniture I wanted my own furniture. And, I wanted it to have a, my feel about it you know, that it belonged to me. So um, so that was an expense.” (Helen 2).*

Helen's move was not, therefore, planned for. Moreover, the move was not in the company's best interest as it created a burden on the business cash flow (not the business turnover as the business continued to be profitable). Helen moved for a therapeutic reason. The move was, therefore, good for the long-term development and “evolution” of the business as it helped Helen to come to terms with Mia's departure.

### **7.3.5 More changes in preparation for retirement**

Although, Helen was still in her early fifties when we met, the future of her venture was preoccupying her. It seemed that her business would go through lots of changes in the near future in preparation for her retirement.

*“My challenge for now is to make the business stand on its own without me, and you know it will do, you know 70% of it does, but it needs to be to the point where I really am a figurehead, and I can drive it from the board room but not necessarily so hands on. And that excites me too, because, that's starting to use bits of my strategic brain that I kind of put to bed really in some ways, because I got very hands on because you have to when you're running a business” (Helen 2)*

In summary, Helen's entrepreneurial experience and process diverges from the static and managerial experience promoted by the neo-classical economic growth theory. Her narrative sheds light into the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience, which appears to be fluid and dynamic. Far from being linear, Helen's experience is made up of both progressions and failures. Setbacks are an integral part of her entrepreneurial process, even to the extent of being valued for the learning experience they provide. Helen's oral history narrative paints a picture of an entrepreneur whose main function is innovation and the carrying out of “new combinations”. Despite, being a senior executive prior to establishing her venture, Helen does not believe that managerial paradigm governing

corporate careers is applicable within the entrepreneurial context. Subsequently, formal planning becomes a barrier for the entrepreneurial decision making process and managerial rationality becomes an obstacle. The latter is replaced by intuition and foresight. Helen's narrative points to the gap between the two worlds which makes stepping into entrepreneurship a scary move. The emerging picture of Helen's entrepreneurial experience and process is more in line with Schumpeter's theorising as illustrated further in the final section of this chapter.

In the next section, I explore how the relationships of power shape Helen's experience.

## **7.4 The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed**

### **7.4.1 Helen the free agent**

#### **7.4.1.1 Challenging the institutional discrimination and turning it into a positive experience**

Helen's agency is manifested in her fight against work-related discrimination as she used her agency to manipulate the rules of the game to her own benefit. Despite the supportive infrastructure at home, Helen described how she had been a victim of discrimination at the work place as a result of her decision to bring up her children whilst also holding a senior managerial post. Helen chose to counteract this discrimination by seeking to make herself invincible by obtaining lots of extra qualifications. She states:

*"I joined a big bank, I worked my way into HR and along the way what I did was I kept getting lots and lots of qualifications because at that time in my career...every time you left to have a baby and I have got three I had to come back and I had to prove myself all over again. So what I did was kept getting more and more badges more and more qualifications to make it impossible for people to not take me seriously. I was in a very male environment working in a bank in a very senior level and over the years I got myself up there up the tree and what I should mention is that during my corporate life there were two positions that I was the first woman to ever hold those positions in that environment ever and I really had to bat against some a particularly thick glass ceiling in those days well you know it made it impossible for them not to promote me because it would have been stupid for them not to." (Helen 1)*

Moreover, Helen's fight against discrimination has positively shaped her entrepreneurial endeavour as it has made her more resilient and determined.

*“Well it has made me resilient because there has been many times in life when I was in the corporate world where I had been told well this is about as high as you can get Helen because jobs after this really go to men, twenty years ago when we didn't have the legislations that prevent people talking to you like that and I would be going why? Well you are going to leave one day and have children. So what has that got to do with my ability? So it made me more resilient and it certainly made me more determined. And if anybody tells me I can't do something I have almost got this instinctive well watch me mate because I can, that kind of determination. You know it is that belief that you are going to be successful that you are going to do it. So did it affect me? Probably yes it probably made me the person I am today because I didn't give in; I didn't just accept the status quo; I didn't accept the fact that women didn't do those top jobs; It would almost be an invitation for me to take the challenge and I did all the time.” (Helen 1)*

These traits as illustrated earlier were essential for her entrepreneurial success as they enabled her to deal the setbacks she faced as an entrepreneur.

#### **7.4.1.2 The development of a highly profitable service**

Helen's detailed accounts on how she developed a new service for accountants illustrates how Helen was able to successfully use the institution's potentially oppressive role to her own benefit as she turned a potential barrier into a highly profitable service.

*“One of the things that I thought was that a lot of small businesses restrict their own growth, because they're afraid of employing people because of the scariness of employment law. So thinking about all these barriers and being a natural problem solver I just thought of solutions to get over these barriers. I know from a survey that I did, that the vast majority of accountants get asked advice about staff all the time. I've got all this work coming in should I employ somebody, or, I want to recruit somebody else how do I do it. And the accountants give their advice as best they can but they're not qualified to do it really. They're giving what they think is a friendly advice. So I did a campaign where I worried the accountants that this advice could lend them in trouble because if they advise somebody to do something and they ended up in an employment tribunal and they lost, not only could potentially their client sue them for bad advice, they'd probably lose that client, so, it was very dangerous not to offer good HR advice. So I started to think about all the different offers that I could offer the different accountants and I produced some products that have gone out to market for accountants, and that's been successful, because that means that I'm getting clients that I haven't actually*

*had to go out and find, because they're already a client of the accountant, so their accountant is saying this is the person that needs to help you, so we don't have to sell the service it's already sold, and we split the commission with accountant or depending on what deal I've done with them. So that's been very successful.” (Helen 2)*

Helen's oral history narrative portrays the role of the UK government in terms of shaping the entrepreneurial experience. As illustrated previously at various points in this thesis, UK governments since the 1980s have been trumpeting the role of small businesses in growing the economy, especially in terms of reducing unemployment by hiring new people. Surprisingly, however, Helen's story reveals that employment legislation deters entrepreneurs from employing people. This is in line with Chittenden et al. (2005) who found that some UK small firms will not employ people because of the high costs involved in operating and complying with tax regulations.

Rather than accepting a negative relationship between the plight of female entrepreneurs and the institution, Helen however took responsibility for her future and grasped the opportunities that her expertise presented.

In the next section we explore Helen as an oppressor.

#### **7.4.2 Helen the oppressor**

This is reflected in the following.

##### **7.4.2.1 Helen's reflections on other women**

When reflecting upon other women at work, Helen used on numerous occasions gendered notions and discourses that can have the effect of oppressing other women.

When talking for instance about her experience of working in a male dominated environment, Helen distanced herself from the womanhood discourse before associating herself with the male figure. Helen then moved on to use gendered discourses to reinforce women's stereotypical image, in terms of being unfit to work outside the home because they are emotional.

*“I do work more effectively with men than women, which is why a lot of the more corporate and senior companies always want me, and the reason is because I spent so much time working in a male company that I am comfortable in it. I don’t get either over girly or over protective. I survive in it, and they feel comfortable with me being with them there, and I feel comfortable in it.” (Helen 2)*

Helen also resorted to the gendered and normative notion of economic growth to exclude Mia from the entrepreneurial experience. In order to justify her critique of Mia, Helen emphasised the material success of her business as an indication that she was right and that Mia was wrong. She pointed out that her business was worth millions of pounds and that she had five potential buyers seeking to have a stake in it. Helen also stressed the importance of logic and rationality to the entrepreneurial experience and argued that Mia lacked these qualities. This contradicts Helen’s accounts of her own experience as discussed earlier in this chapter.

*“When I was creating that product I needed to have other people’s input. The first thing I did was I said to Mia what do you think about this? And straightaway she said it won’t work I don’t want anything to do with it. People can say to me I don’t think it will work Helen because and I will listen but as soon as they say I don’t think it will work that is just flies against my natural instincts and I will go why won’t it work and if they don’t come back to me with some logical or rational reason I just dismiss it because I will make it work. And I know it sounds very arrogant but when I decide I am going to do something I will make it work. I have got five people who want to buy into my business because it is a good and profitable business. You know for not so many people we are turning over just short of a million so it is fair business. I don’t really want a business partner. I want somebody who is either going to stand up to me and challenge me logically.”(Helen 1)*

In the second interview, Helen denied that Mia worked hard. In order to reinforce Mia’s inability to devote enough time to the business, Helen portrayed her as a mother of young children.

*“So from then what I did is I started to think about my business in a different way, because there’s good and bad about having a business partner. The good part about having a business partner is you’re not alone. You’ve got somebody to bounce ideas off, you’ve hopefully got a likeminded soul who’ll work as hard as you will to get the business successful, though that wasn’t necessarily how it was with Mia and I accepted that because her children were small and mine were grown up that she couldn’t dedicate so much time.” (Helen 2)*

This gendered image implies that owing to family commitments, women cannot perform well as entrepreneurs.

Despite been an oppressor, Helen has also been oppressed by the system as explored in the next section.

### **7.4.3 Helen the oppressed**

In Helen's oral history narrative, oppression by the system is manifested in the following:

#### **7.4.3.1 The association between wealthy entrepreneurs and good entrepreneurs**

Helen felt victim to the false association that the metanarrative of economic growth has established between being a "good entrepreneur" and showing material wealth. In her words, Helen reported:

*"A couple of mistakes I made, one was down to an accountant who had a big premises very flashy, and we started doing the HR for his firm, and had to keep chasing him for the money all the time. This guy was getting silly. And I pulled the plug eventually with him you know a small business like us owing us about £28,000 something like that, and had to threaten legal action and he eventually paid it, but I learned from that because I looked back and thought, was I taken in by the flashy premises? I mean I'm not normally taken in by such superficial things but, maybe I was. Really he's got problems in his own business, he's clearly got cash flow issues himself, and so maybe I was taken in a bit, maybe I was flattered because such a big practice looked like they wanted me, and then I thought yeah the biggest mistake I'd made, was I didn't keep on top of the invoicing and making sure that the money was coming in." (Helen 2)*

Helen's account of how she had completed some work for an accountant without taking the necessary precautions to ensure he would pay her for her services, shows how she was seduced by his ostentatious offices. This mistake had placed considerable strain on her cash flow and was a real threat to her business especially that Helen rejected bank finance and saw it as a threat to business survival

*"Small businesses have the bank breathing on them putting them under a load of pressure so I haven't got any of that, so that's really good." (Helen 2)*

*"Cash is king, it really is in small business." (Helen 2)*

### 7.4.3.2 The friction between the metanarrative of economic growth and Helen's inner voice

When asked to define what an entrepreneur is, Helen identified the entrepreneur as someone who brings change by constantly introducing new ideas.

*“The good entrepreneur is probably someone who can solve problems. I think that entrepreneurs are ideas people. I think they have lots of ideas, but, I don't know lots of people never put their ideas into practice”* (Helen 2)

Helen saw herself as successful because she identified herself with this definition

*“Yeah I think so (I am successful), yeah, I'm very much a change merchant. Change doesn't faze me at all, never has done.”* (Helen 2)

However, when I asked her directly whether she saw herself as an entrepreneur, Helen used the testimonies of others to prove that she was one.

*“I don't know really... And did I ever tell you about XX (an author who published a number of books on entrepreneurship)? He saw those traits in me and I still see XX and I normally, couple of times a year when I go, I go to London all the time but a couple of times a year we'll meet and have some tea or something together. And XX sees that in me more than I see that in me. Do I think I'm an entrepreneur? Probably, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.”* (Helen 2)

Helen's inability to strongly identify herself as an entrepreneur seems to be due to the different images associated with the entrepreneur as illustrated in the examples she gave of the entrepreneurs living in her time.

*“There's the obvious ones there's the Alan Sugar's and the Richard Bransons of these worlds, but I guess one of the people I would think of is somebody that you don't even know because he's retired now, and, he was exceptionally entrepreneurial and he ran his, he ran a succession of businesses in XX and as I say he's retired and he owns a lot of property, he's a multimillionaire, and he's a lovely humble man, he's not, you know, flashy. Got nice cars got a nice house all that but, you know he's not lost his touch with humanity, but he started with nothing. You know he had to leave school at 14 to, to support his family because his dad had died, but he kept seeing opportunities and taking them and developing things into businesses and he's had loads of businesses he's had, you know about 12 businesses and his most successful he sold for the most amount of money, which was a manufacturing business and he's probably still at the point when manufacturing was really at its peak then went into property.”* (Helen 2)

She continues

*“Who owns Chelsea? He is a Russian oligarch, and I only know what I’ve read about him in the press. He made his billions on the back of exploiting other people by the gas lines and the oil lines in Russia. And it’s just the way it worked in Russia at that time probably still does, I don’t know, but in a corrupt way, in as much as, you know paying the right officials at the right time to get the right kind of thing, and you could say he was entrepreneurial he saw an opportunity he went for it, but he’s made his billions in my view, by selling his soul because he’s made it on the back of other people’s suffering.”*  
(Helen 2)

The different images associated with the entrepreneur have deepened Helen’s inability to see herself as an entrepreneur such as the image of the rags to riches myth, the ruthless rich entrepreneur and the unethical and corrupt rich entrepreneur. It is worth mentioning that despite this variety of images, they all portray wealthy male entrepreneurs which reflect the strength of the gendered metanarrative of economic growth. Helen’s quote also reflects the role of the media in maintaining women’s subordination as most of the images she draws upon are taken from the media.

Although Helen associated the entrepreneur with innovation and the ability to face setbacks in order to implement these ideas were the most important attributes for being an entrepreneur, none of the examples she gave were in line with her stance. This shows how the gendered metanarrative of economic growth has robbed Helen of her voice as they did not offer an alternative image to the wealthy male figure.

In the next section, I conclude this chapter with an overall discussion of the findings.

## **7.5 Discussion**

Helen’s story challenges a number of assumptions about female entrepreneurs’ underperformance. As illustrated earlier, Helen occupied senior positions in the corporate world before setting up her own business as she continued to work while bringing up her family. This very progression is at odds with much writing on entrepreneurs which assumes that female entrepreneurs underperform because they leave their corporate career without gaining managerial experience, owing to

a desire to achieve work-life balance or have more flexibility (Morris et al., 2006).

Helen's story also rejects the assumption that female entrepreneurs underperform because they resign from their corporate career at an early stage due to work related discrimination (Marlow and Patton, 2005). Instead of giving up, Helen used her agency to turn the situation to her own benefit. Helen's fight against discrimination has also shaped her entrepreneurial experience as she became more resilient and determined. Such characteristics played an important role in enabling her to face setbacks and develop her business - as discussed earlier. This also reflects the impact of the context in which the corporate experience is embedded in the future entrepreneurial endeavour. This relationship has not been explored in female entrepreneurship studies which assumed that the level of seniority achieved in previous employment is the most important factor shaping the entrepreneurial experience (Marlow and Patton, 2005).

Helen left her corporate work when she felt her freedom to create and develop things in her own way was undermined by a newly appointed executive. Under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth which portrays female entrepreneurs in the negative light of being problematic, this positive motivation driving women to turn into entrepreneurs remains largely unexplored. As discussed in chapter 2, the literature has mainly focused on the push factors such as flexibility and escape from job constraints to explain women's underperformance. Pull factors such as the need for freedom did not receive much attention in the literature as it is believed to be exhibited only by male business owners who run high growth companies. Helen's dream of having more freedom and being able to create new things is in line with Schumpeter's conceptualisation of the entrepreneur's motivations discussed in chapter 4.

Furthermore, Helen's account illustrates that the skills and knowledge gained in a managerial job are not necessarily transferrable in the context of entrepreneurship. Indeed as discussed earlier, Helen's previous executive career seems to have made her transition into entrepreneurship a daunting move. Despite gaining various business qualifications and having been an executive,

Helen did not perceive these as essential criteria for being an entrepreneur. In contrast with female entrepreneurship studies (Carter and Shaw, 2006), Helen suggested that being an executive in the corporate world could actually hinder a person's entrepreneurial ability. She argues that "people who are coming out of long-term employment and they'll have been institutionalised" (Helen 2). Helen's use of the word "institutionalised" implies that corporate experience hinders the entrepreneurial experience by narrowing the person's creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and exposure to the wider world.

Moreover, Helen's story illustrates that, far from dominant accounts of entrepreneurship studies, starting up a business is not necessarily a purposeful act. Unpredictable events in Helen's life, such as the illness of her husband, have led her to set up her own business. What is clear is that the mechanistic and rational ideology reinforced by the neo-classical economic growth theory (Schumpeter, 1934), has diverted the attention of researchers away from the exploration of serendipity and quotidian life events and their influence upon the entrepreneurial experience.

The narrative also stands in contrast to female entrepreneurship studies, which assumes that there is a strong relationship between business growth and access to external financing especially at the start-up stage (see chapter 2). In line with the literature on finance to small business (Howorth, 2001), Helen critiqued bank finance and saw it as a threat to business performance. She celebrated the fact that she did not have to borrow any money from banks. As mentioned earlier, for her, cash flow was paramount for her business survival and yet this is not a topic that has been pursued in the female entrepreneurship literature.

Blinkered by the underperformance hypothesis, (as illustrated in chapters 2 and 5), such mainstream studies assume that female entrepreneurs adopt a different management style from that of their male counterparts. The literature then focuses narrowly on the impact of this difference upon business performance and growth and ignores completely the complexity of the managerial role in an entrepreneurial context. First of all, Helen, again in accordance with Schumpeter's theorizing (Schumpeter, 1934), distinguishes clearly in her

narrative between her role as an innovator entrepreneur and an administrative manager. Helen thought her strength is to bring in new ideas to the business. Moreover, she thought that this quality is the most important when it comes to developing her business. In contrast, she did not like assuming the managerial role which she saw as a distraction from innovation. The tension between the two roles has strongly shaped Helen's management practice. In order to resolve this conflict, Helen decided to delegate the managerial role, first to her former business partner Mia then to Sam although the latter was unsuccessful.

Helen's narrative also challenges the notion that female entrepreneurs adopt a participative management style because of their caring nature. Helen delegated the managerial role not because she wanted to motivate Mia or Sam but because this practice was in her own interest as it would enable her to innovate. Helen's reflections on her clients' visits to her office also challenged entrepreneurial thought which assumes that female entrepreneurs, because of their alleged feminine traits, are more likely to nurture business relationships (Fenwick, 2008). As mentioned earlier, after recovering from illness, Helen professed that she preferred not to have any meetings on Fridays but that it was her clients who dropped in for an informal chat when they knew she was in the office. This incident indicates that nurturing relationships may be deemed by some clients as an important part of the entrepreneurial experience whether the entrepreneur is male or female.

Moreover, Helen shows that the managerial practice in the entrepreneurial context is different from the one adopted in a corporate environment. Helen's accounts of Sam's failure to assume the managerial position shows that taking a step backward within the small business context can be part of long-term business development. When Helen realised that Sam could not cope with the extra work associated with the newly assigned managerial role, Helen decided to free Sam from this managerial role. This way of developing the business by taking a reflexive backward step has also never been considered in female entrepreneurship studies because of the metanarrative of economic growth which promotes a narrative of on-going progress.

Helen's recount of her business relationship with Mia also demonstrates that female entrepreneurs are not homogenous. This contradicts most female entrepreneurship studies which - under the influence of the neo-classical economic growth theory - portray female entrepreneurs as one homogenous group (as chapter 2 refers). Helen's relationship with Mia throws a challenge to these assumptions that female entrepreneurs have similar experience and traits. These stereotypes have served to silence not only women's diversity (as discussed at various points in this thesis), but also the conflicts and tensions that may exist within this group. Moreover, the literature fails to explore how business partnership between female entrepreneurs might influence, either negatively or positively, the entrepreneurial experience.

Helen's narrative also provides an illustration on how women can play a role in excluding and marginalising other women by using gendered notions and discourses that can have the effect of oppressing other women. The phenomenon of women oppressing other women, which is known in organisation studies as the "queen bee" syndrome (Mavin, 2008) has not yet attracted any research in female entrepreneurship studies which still homogenises and subordinates female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, Helen's oral history narrative indicates that the notion of resistance to new ideas is a strong barrier facing entrepreneurs. Yet this barrier to entrepreneurial success is absent from the literature on female entrepreneurs, which has been influenced so heavily by the discourses of neo-classical growth theory in which the entrepreneur is turned into little more than a manager. In contrast however, Schumpeter (1934) highlighted this barrier and praised the courage of the entrepreneur in showing a deviant behaviour from others in terms of developing new ideas that break away from the routine. For Schumpeter (1934) it is this characteristic that makes the entrepreneur a leader, an unusual figure that distinguishes him/her from managers (as chapter 4 refers).

Interestingly, Helen's entrepreneurial experience is very much in line with Schumpeter's theorising in terms of being dynamic, unpredictable and context dependent. Helen's comments on the fluidity of both her experience and the

context governing this experience, stands in contrast to neo-classical economic growth theory which conceptualises the entrepreneur's experience and his/her environment as both static and universal.

Moreover, Helen's experience and practice are in clear contrast to the neo-classical growth model, which assumes that both performance and growth are planned, linear and predictable. In line with Schumpeter's theorising (Schumpeter, 1934), Helen drove her business by constantly developing and introducing new combinations of products into the marketplace. This process was carried out in an accidental way. Helen's comment on how hard it is to predict the performance of new combinations accords with Schumpeter's (1934) writing which noted that such prediction could only be a "*figment of imagination*" (p.85). Failure was an integral part of Helen's experience including the long-term development of her business. Although, Schumpeter (1934) acknowledged failure as an important part of the entrepreneurial experience and highlighted the importance of relying on foresight and intuition to drive the business forward, these areas have not been explored in the literature on female entrepreneurship studies as they go against the theoretical foundation of neo-classical economic growth theory (Bygrave, 1989a). Moreover, traits such as intuition and foresight which are necessary to carry out new combinations have been inhibited by the neo-classical growth theory which reflects the negative impact of the theory upon the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur.

Helen's story also challenges neo-classical economic growth theory which promotes on-going business growth as being always a positive business attribute. After Mia's departure, Helen's shift of focus from growing the business to maintaining it shows that this notion is misleading and can result in business insolvency. As discussed earlier, Helen's business model also challenges the neo-classical economic growth theory which always presents an increase in the number of employees as a strong indicator for business material success.

From the narrow perspective of economic growth, Helen's decision to move offices would be celebrated. It would be considered as an indication of business growth especially that Helen moved to bigger and more modern offices. Helen's

story exposes the inability of the economic growth discourse to both account for and evaluate business performance. As illustrated earlier, Helen's move was not necessarily good for the company in the short term as it created a burden on the business cash flow. The relocation was good (in a cathartic sense) for the long-term development of the business as it helped Helen to recover from Mia's departure. Given the mechanistic nature of the neo-classical economic growth theory (Pittaway, 2005), the impact of cathartic motive in relation to business performance has not yet been explored in female entrepreneurship studies.

In the same way that Helen's move would have been mistakenly celebrated through the lens of an economic growth discourse, her story about the deceiving accountant with flashy offices showed that she herself falls victim to this misleading signal. In this sense, the entrepreneurial experience is influenced by contextual and institutional factors. Helen's narrative shows that the wide spread of the metanarrative of economic growth has made her more vulnerable. The false association that economic growth has established between being a "good entrepreneur" and the demonstration of material wealth can lead certain types of business owners to prey on other entrepreneurs as was the case of this accountant in Helen's story. This phenomenon accords with Baumol's (1990) research. The author after studying entrepreneurship activities throughout history argues that institutions shape the conduct of entrepreneurs, including the encouragement of unethical and illegal activities. Once again this area of study has not been explored in female entrepreneurship studies.

Finally, under the influence of the neo-classical growth theory, female entrepreneurship studies did not look at the future of the female entrepreneur and the changes in her venture when she reaches the retirement age. The focus on achieving on-going growth has diverted researchers away from this critical phase in the experience of the female entrepreneur as is mirrored in Helen's oral history narrative.

In summary, the detailed account of Helen's oral history narrative shows the extent to which the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs (illustrated in chapter 5) diverges from her experience. Helen's narrative stands in contrast

with the neo-classical economic growth theory and its conceptualisation of the entrepreneur as a rational economic manager. Her narrative brings to light the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience and process. Furthermore, it captures the fluidity of her experience and the different meanings she attributed to this experience. Helen's narrative also shows that far from being a standalone phenomenon, her entrepreneurial experience has strongly been shaped by the institution and other contextual factors.

Furthermore, Helen's narratives reveal the social role of the story and how it flows with and against dominant power structures (Plummer, 1995). Helen's story indicates that as a female entrepreneur she has not always been an oppressed person as on some occasions she used her agency to resist the oppression while on other occasions she assumed the role of the oppressor. The narrative also shows the fluidity of gender as Helen has first distanced herself from womanhood before subordinating other women by reinforcing the stereotyping image of women as emotional and thus unfit for work.

In line with the theoretical findings of this thesis, Helen's story illustrates how the metanarrative of economic growth, which is embedded in the neo-classical economic growth theory, has hindered female entrepreneurship studies. First, by reinforcing the underperformance hypothesis as a departure point for the various research areas, the neo-classical growth theory has diverted researchers' attention away from the exploration of a large number of research areas that are pertinent to entrepreneurial practice. Secondly, Helen's narrative shows how the metanarrative of economic growth has also inhibited practitioners' performance.

The contradiction between Helen's voice and the metanarrative of economic growth destabilises the latter. Moreover, as her experience is very much in line with Schumpeter, the oral history narrative opens the door for his theorising an alternative theory for the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs. In this sense, Helen's oral history narrative contribute to achievement of the study's main objective in terms of emancipating female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation for their experience.

## 8 Oral history narrative – Kate

### 8.1 Introduction

The chapter starts by introducing Kate who works as a marketing and PR consultant in the North of the UK. A detailed account of her oral history narrative is then presented through two themes as illustrated later on. Although, these two themes are the same ones as those explored in Helen's story, the sub headings are different as they manifest in Kate's experience differently. This difference reflects the diversity of women's entrepreneurial experience. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the main findings.

### 8.2 A brief summary of Kate's story

Kate is a 43 year old white woman who owns a marketing consultancy firm in the North of England. Kate has two children aged 16 and 18. She did not go to university. When she was eighteen years old, she joined a retailing organisation in the public sector. For almost twenty years, Kate worked in various departments within this organisation until she became a regional business development manager in charge of sixty-nine branches.

*“I didn't end up going to university. I Joined XX when I was 18. Well the first two or three years were spent working on the counter, serving the public and you learn a lot about customer service. I was then promoted to my first managerial role when I was 20. I was absolutely as green as grass, didn't know the first thing about managing people or have any management skills. My first managerial job was as a branch manager and basically you were pretty much responsible for everything that went on. After that I moved more behind the scenes then I worked in the communications team, so I was organising quite a lot of events. I then went to work in health and safety, not because I knew a lot about health and safety but because they needed processes putting in place and that's what I'm good at, I'm a real systems freak [laughs]. I then worked in the commercial development team dealing with senior managers. My last job with them I was an area manager and I had sixty nine offices to oversee.” (Kate 2)*

After getting married and having two children, Kate resigned from her post and became a full time housewife.

*“I had a very successful and happy career. I got an opportunity to leave and figured it would be a good time to spend more time with the kids because the kids were still quite young, so leaving after having worked for them for 18 years and having had a very enjoyable and varied career with them, that was a pretty big step, and I was fortunate that financially we were in a position where I could do that so basically I just spent some time being a mum.” (Kate 2)*

As her children were getting older, Kate started working from home as part time researcher and editor for a number of publishers producing family guidebooks.

*“As the kids were getting a little bit older, I wanted to do other things. I’d always been interested in writing and in tourism. I got a part-time job writing and researching a family guidebook which was basically when I first started dealing with tourism business, and that must be going back 10 years now. So that was the perfect job for a mum, because as long as you met your editor’s deadline, you could basically work on your script pretty much whenever you wanted to so it’s very easy to fit around the kids and to fit around Mike (her husband). And I worked for them for 7 years, and it was during that time that I was in touch with a lot of visitor attractions.” (Kate 2)*

Through this part time job, Kate established strong ties with businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector and gained a good understanding of their marketing needs. Kate then decided to set up a marketing consultancy company that focuses on addressing these needs.

*“I set up in business four and a half years ago because I saw a lot of small independent tourism businesses who for whatever reason I didn’t feel they were marketing themselves as best they could. And sometimes that’s because the skills and the experience aren’t there in the business, and sometimes it’s because actually they’ve got other priorities, you know running a successful visitor attraction is not easy and sometimes marketing might take a back seat because they’re just always fire fighting, you’re wrapped up in the day to day operational needs of running a business. And that’s basically why I set up (name of her first company) because I felt I could do a better job for them, than they were doing themselves.” (Kate 2)*

When Kate’s business became well established, she decided to give up her part time job and to focus solely on her business.

*“So for a couple of years I carried on working for the publishers on a part time basis but begun to build up my own little business and then it got to the stage after about 2 years, where the money I was earning way in excess of what I was earning from the publishers and basically it was time to let go you know.” (Kate 2)*

After setting up her company, Kate applied for a marketing professional qualification which she completed in three years.

*“Didn’t end up going to university, I mean I got my marketing diploma since then” (Kate 2)*

Kate’s entrepreneurial experience has been shaped by the ethos of her previous employer because similar to her previous employer, Kate’s passion and core competence as an entrepreneur was to offer a good customer service and add value to her customers.

*“So yeah it’s all, good retail management experience really but I still find, probably not consciously but I still think I draw on it today. It’s definitely the sort of service aspect to it. If you are brought up in a business that wants you to focus on service, you know when I was an area manager I’m still focusing on service, I might not be delivering it personally but I’m there supporting a team that’s delivering service, and as long as you that’s an ethos that’s never left me.” (Kate 2)*

*“I certainly hope I have had added value to other peoples businesses, that is entirely what I exist to do really. If I wasn’t doing that I wouldn’t be doing my job so I would just pack up.” (Kate 1)*

After my first interview with Kate, she was unexpectedly approached by a HR consultant called Linda, to join forces and work together. One day after Kate delivered one of her training session at a local SMEs network, Linda, who was one of the attendees came and asked her if she would be interested in working together. Kate accepted Linda’s offer and then invited Steve, who was a financial consultant, and at the same time her mentee on a SME network group, to join them. So by serendipity, Kate expanded her entrepreneurial experience and became the owner of a second company.

*“Well Linda who’s the HR consultant, I met her actually when I was running some marketing sessions for small businesses through the XXX network, and Linda was one of the businesses who came as a delegate onto one of those sessions. So that’s where I met her. And Steve the accountant, actually I used to be Steve’s business mentor. It was Linda’s idea. We were all delivering training or presenting on our own specialist topics and Linda felt it would be a good idea to, basically join forces so we could go into businesses and offer them a more comprehensive training package. I mean to be absolutely honest, if Linda hadn’t approached me to go into business, I’d still be just running (the first company) and I’d be very, very happy with that.” (Kate 2)*

Kate and her two business partners spent lots of time deciding on the scope of their new company and how it should work in relation to their existing businesses. After long working hours, the three partners agreed that the new venture would deliver a full range of training programmes. Towards this end, they hired six more associate trainers with different specialism. Furthermore, they agreed to keep their existing companies separate from the new venture and to divert any training related business to the new company.

*“The thing is that as individuals we would never have been in a position to go to really large companies and offer them a comprehensive training package and we’re now in a position where we can do that because there’s enough of us to be able to do that. We took on six associate trainers earlier on in the year, so basically we’re a team of nine people now which makes a big difference in terms of the sort of businesses that you can help. Well basically what’s happened now is that, some of the training that I used to do myself I am now doing through the XX (second company). People still get me, they still get that same service, it’s just that we felt, we really we should be putting any training related offering through the training company. So XXX (first company) still doing what it’s always done in terms of supporting individual businesses and individual clients with their marketing and public relations. But anything I previously did that sort of had a training element to it is now delivered through the XX (second company).” (Kate 2)*

Kate and her partners operated both businesses from their homes.

*“All three of us are home, are home based, quite how long that’ll continue I don’t know, because we meet very regularly and we’re on the phone to each other every day.” (Kate 2)*

I met Kate twice over the period of 18 months. As Kate works from home, she preferred that we meet at one of the university’s meeting rooms. Kate set up her second company accidentally after the first interview so the first interview focused only on her marketing consultancy company while the second interview included her accounts of the setting up of her second business.

Kate’s oral history narrative is told through the following two themes:

- 1) The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life
- 2) The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed.

### 8.3 The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life

Kate pointed to how her entrepreneurial experience has been led by an accidental development of business opportunities. Kate was not initially aware that serendipitous development would form an integral part of her entrepreneurial experience. Kate's lack of preparation to the importance of serendipity to her entrepreneurial experience is not surprising, as this notion has been silenced by neo-classical growth theory which associates the entrepreneurial experience with planning and predictability (Bygrave, 1989b). Kate, however, succeeded in following these opportunities. Her adaptability may have been enhanced by her working experience in the retailing organisation as she had constantly to assume different roles. She says:

*"I think one thing that I have found, is that business opportunities come along and they are not always where you think they are going to come from. I never really saw myself working for businesses other than in the tourism and leisure sector but as I go out and you know meet people, you know, the opportunity to do work for other businesses comes along so it's not really a problem, that's, that's one thing that I've found."*(Kate 1)

Kate's experience was not guided by pre-established long-term plans as she saw them to be irrelevant in an entrepreneurial context. They would on one hand hinder her ability to meet deadlines and on the other hand divert her from delivering quality service to her customers. Kate noted that short term plans were more relevant to her experience. She adds:

*"My work scheduled in like a few months in advance. So I know what broadly my work commitments are going to be over the next few months. I've got some work commitments that take me into next year. So I know I've got work coming up. But I would rather focus my efforts really on getting the day to day right, delivering for clients and if I get that right then I hope that the future will take care of itself."*(Kate 1)

Given the supremacy of the managerial discourse which has been reinforced by the neo-classical growth theory, Kate thought that she was unique in this regard and that it was uncommon for small businesses to operate in a similar way. She notes:

*"I think in theory every business should know where they're, where they're heading but I'm not."* (Kate 1)

### **8.3.1 The launch of her first business**

Kate's close ties with the businesses in tourism enabled her, unlike most entrepreneurs, to secure contracts from the first day of launching her business.

*“And literally woke up in the middle of the night thinking, you know, I could really help some of these businesses and basically my business started when I woke up the following morning, made half a dozen phone calls. Went to a couple of meetings and picked up my first couple of clients. It's not how I would recommend someone starts-up in business, but that was how I set up. So I went to my first client meeting without a business card. Never mind a web site. So it goes totally against the grain what I would normally recommend. So that's basically how I got started.”*(Kate 1)

Despite the fact that this spontaneous approach was successful, Kate did not believe in it and therefore would not share this experience with any potential or existing entrepreneurs.

### **8.3.2 Expansion of her business**

Within four years of establishing her business, Kate expanded her business by offering new services to new markets. In addition to offering marketing services to the tourism sector, Kate delivered presentations and training workshops for different sectors. It seems that the wide variety of tasks carried out by Kate during her employment has given her the confidence and the ability to expand her business rapidly. She describes her business as follows:

*“(I am) What I would describe as a general marketer. I started off working just for visitor attractions and that's really where my passion is if I'm honest. I'm very interested in hospitality, leisure, tourism but along the way I've had enquiries from other businesses. How my business has ended up developing now? Is from just being basically really absolutely microscopic business just working for 2 or 3 visitor attractions and I have still kept them as clients. What has also happened is I've had opportunities to deliver workshops and present for people. So I run quite a lot of workshops through the “XX program”, for the various different local enterprise agencies. I'm now working for the “XX Network”. So really, my business has two main areas. My private clients, and presentations and workshops. Those are the sort of 2 main threads to my business. I also do some sort of like some funded consultancy work. So I guess I've got 3 strands really to my business and I think that's a good position to be in. So that's something I never really expected.”* (Kate 1)

The diversity of Kate's markets and services enhanced her ability to face the recession that hit the UK in 2008. Unlike the majority of small businesses in the North of England, the profitability of Kate's business was not initially affected by the recession.

*"the recession has not affected me at all a fair chunk of my work is funded in presentations, workshops and things like that which are funded to support small businesses A big problem for many businesses at the moment is getting paid. I've been quite fortunate that has not really been an issue for me. But there will be millions of businesses out there that will tell it differently."*(Kate 1)

### **8.3.3 Government policies and loss of revenue**

However, when the coalition government came into power, the funds allocated to various agencies and institutions in the North of England dried up drastically. As result, Kate's revenue was strongly affected.

*"Well if we go back to sort of say end of the financial year this year, in the twelve months prior to that, I would say 50% of my income had come from funded sources. People who wanted me to deliver training, workshops or presentations, and basically it was public funded. And of course, you know come the end of March this year, all of that dried up. All of that stopped. So basically that's 50% of my income gone overnight. Now obviously, you know, I didn't just basically wait for that to happen you know I knew that this was coming, six months nine months previously so I had been taking some steps to sort to try and replace some of that work with other private client work, which wasn't funding dependent. The challenge is with that of course they're all experienced in recession, same as everyone else. So the early part of this financial year was pretty quiet in terms of paid work, but I was still busy working on business development stuff, getting myself out and about, you know sort of creating alliances with people. I was still out there looking for work."* (Kate 1).

### **8.3.4 The launch of a second business**

While Kate was looking for new sources of revenues, she was approached accidentally by Linda who initiated the idea of working together to reach to a wider customer base. Unlike her first business, the start-up of the second company required lots of efforts.

*"from sort of January this year up until I would say the last couple of months, it has been a lot of late nights, a lot of extra hours but we all believe in what we're offering, we think to be able to go into a company and offer them any*

*type of training without them having to go to individual training companies that specialise in particular areas, we think that's a real bonus". (Kate 2)*

Kate and her partners have also consumed lots of energy deciding on the scope of their businesses as the business idea evolved a lot over the period of one year.

*"It has taken us time to really understand what services we should be offering. When we first set up the business, it was basically with the idea of delivering one particular training product and now we're in a completely different place really." (Kate 2)*

Kate and her partners have also to allocate lots of time and effort to carry out necessary administrative tasks. These tasks are usually framed by government's policies and legislations which indicate the institution's role in shaping the entrepreneurial experience. Kate recalls:

*"It's pretty much, not so much financial, we all had to make an investment into the (new company) I mean you can't set up any business without it costing something, not if you want to look professional anyway, so we did all make an investment but to be honest with you it was relatively small, and we're about to get that back, our director's loans. I think administratively there has been quite a bit to do." (Kate 2)*

### **8.3.5 Poor performance of Kate's ventures**

Despite the expansion of Kate's entrepreneurial experience in terms of becoming the owner of two companies, Kate's income has fallen drastically.

*"I miss the money." (Kate 2)*

As a result of devoting lots of energy and time to the setting up of their second ventures, Kate and her partners could not fully focus on their businesses which had a negative effect on the income of their first ventures.

*"The main challenge for all three of us on that has been trying to keep our own individual businesses running while still setting up a second company, that has been a real challenge because we all feel that we just split ourselves too thin we've spread ourselves too thin. I think it's fair to say all three of us have not been able to give our own businesses the focus that we would have liked. I have to say I've taken my eye off the ball because I've just had too many other things to do, so (first business) was just ticking over if you like while we've been setting the (new company) up. I mean you know I'm still servicing my regular clients but not necessarily going out looking for new work. That's sort of beginning to change now, as things start to get a little bit easier with things become business as usual and there's just less stuff to set*

*up. It's sort of getting a little bit easier, and it means that I can give a little bit more focus to my own company.”(Kate 2)*

Furthermore, after one year of hard work setting up the second company, no profits were recorded. Kate was not, however, worried about the lack of profits. She perceived the knowledge gained during the process of setting up her second venture as an integral part of the long-term development of the business. Kate adds:

*“So although the financial rewards aren't there just yet, they are beginning to come through. And we're learning a lot. Not, from each other but also from the process of setting the company up. So yeah it's been stressful but hopefully it'll be rewarding.” (Kate 2)*

### **8.3.6 Failure part of the entrepreneurial process**

As Kate faced a number of setbacks, she acknowledged that failure was an important part of the entrepreneurial experience as mirrored in her comments on what makes an entrepreneur:

*“Another aspect of being an entrepreneur is an ability to handle failure because things don't go right in business, particularly not at the moment with the economic climate being as it is, you know things are going pretty pear shaped for a lot of people, and sometimes it's not of their own making, often it's not of their own making, but I think the ability to deal with failure, basically to keep going, turn things around is a part of being an entrepreneur.” (Kate 2)*

### **8.3.7 A partial coming back**

Kate was aware of the fluidity of the entrepreneurial experience. Kate believed that learning is part of the process and the entrepreneurial experience is fluctuating. She was therefore very confident that lack of profitability would only be temporary, as reflected in her comments on the future of her second venture:

*“Times are hard at the minute but recession aside, I think there's the potential for that to grow. I, it's certainly, it can be a lot more than it is at the moment, but I mean we're still in our first 12 months of trading so you know, and we've still, there's still a lot more we can, we can do to build the company, to improve services, so on and so forth.” (Kate 2)*

Kate's optimism was well placed as a week before having the second interview her first business was awarded a long-term PR contract.

*"I've just won a tender for two years' worth of PR support, which is great because that's basically gonna be a regular amount of work for the next couple of years, and it's with a client who I've worked with before, who I've really enjoyed working with, so I'm delighted about that, just found out about that last week. So yeah, chuffed to bits and it's gonna be a really good chunk of work to get my teeth stuck into."* (Kate 2)

In summary, Kate's entrepreneurial experience, similar to Helen's, has not been linear and progressive but evolutionary and dynamic. This is highlighted in the way she contrasted her executive career against her entrepreneurial experience. Kate says:

*"I was climbing the ladder. You know sometimes you take a sideways step, but always on a stepping to the next stone, to get to the next one, to get to the next one. And that's very different to how I am now."* (Kate p16)

The discrepancy between the structured corporate world and the messy one of the entrepreneur has turned the process of setting a business into a scary experience. Kate's accounts of how her best friend helped her when she was setting up her first business shed light on the fear she experienced when she was going through this process for the first time. Similar to Helen, Kate resorted to someone she trusted for support.

*"She helped me to set up (her first company), just sort of convinced me I could do it and gave me some practical support as well. She believed in me and I needed that."* (Kate 2)

Interestingly, Kate's narrative reveals that the expression of fear is not restricted to women. Kate's reflections on Steve, her mentee and currently her business partner, showed that the start-up stage could be a scary experience for both men and women.

*"Basically they run a great mentoring scheme, where they match up people who have some experience of business with a mentor and a mentee, and they matched us two up, and actually over time it's been really great to see Steve's sort of confidence grow, because actually, he always knew his stuff, it's just setting up your own business is a bit of a scary deal, and I'd already gone through it."* (Kate 2)

Kate's oral history narrative points out that, regardless of the entrepreneur's gender, the neo-classical growth theory is unable to represent or evaluate the entrepreneurial experience. The hard work deployed by Kate and her partners to establish their second company will not be acknowledged by the neo-classical theory until the company grows. Even the learning acquired during the process of setting up this venture will not be appreciated despite being an integral part of the business long-term development as stressed by Kate.

## **8.4 The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed**

### **8.4.1 Kate the free agent**

#### **8.4.1.1 Institutional expectations of woman's role in the society**

Kate's account of how she dealt with the drop in her income sheds lights on her relationship with the society's expectation of woman's role. Instead of being subordinated by these expectations, Kate turned these expectations to her own benefit. As the institution did not expect Kate to be the main bread winner, Kate freed her entrepreneurial experience from any financial pressure.

*"The last nine months have been a challenge but, personally, not so much financially, because in spite of the fact that I'm running two businesses now, I'm not the main bread winner in our household, so we haven't had the financial burden, it's just been the time and effort really."* (Kate 2)

Initially, Kate used the lack of pressure on her income to establish her first business. This is reflected in Kate's statement on those who had influenced her entrepreneurial experience the most.

*"My husband, because without his financial support I wouldn't have been in a position where I could set a business up from scratch."* (Kate 2)

Kate's pushed her freedom from any financial worries further by establishing her second venture. As Kate did not have to consider the consequences of this expansion on her income, she was able to invest the time and effort necessary to establish her second company.

*“Well like I say, I’m lucky in so far as we’re not dependent on my income, I’m not the main bread winner in the household, so it’s not disastrous in the way that it would have been had I been the main bread winner. I mean to be honest with you this year if we’d have been, if we’d have needed to have the income that I’ve earned in previous years I would probably got myself a part time job somewhere just to keep my income topped up while I went out and found more work. But yeah I’ve been lucky that I haven’t had to do that.”* (Kate 2)

Furthermore, Kate took advantage of the situation by deciding to carry out only the jobs that suit her best.

*“But it really isn’t about the money for me. And I guess that’s one thing that’s perhaps different for many women in business in that, in often, the woman in business is the second income within the household and that’s the case with my husband, and my husband runs his own business. So I don’t have the pressure of being the sole breadwinner which also allows me to pick and choose the people that I work with and the jobs that I do which is a wonderful position to be in.”* (Kate 1)

#### **8.4.1.2 The entrepreneurial experience is a source of empowerment**

In contrast with female entrepreneurship studies which assume that women set up their businesses when they have young children to achieve work-life balance (Carter and Shaw, 2006), Kate’s entrepreneurial experience takes a different meaning. Kate set up her business when her children have grown up.

*“My work is important to me, from a point of view of self-worth. I know a lot of women are very happy just to be a mum, and that’s absolutely fine, that was never gonna be enough for me. I’m glad I finished work with XX (the name of organisation) when I did, and for that time when the kids were young it was great to have all that time with them and let them be the focus, but they’re 18 and 16 now, so as far as they’re concerned they don’t need mum at all. And of course you never stop being a parent, but the focus isn’t there like it used to be, and I don’t know, I think some mums that have only ever just been a mum, how they cope when the kids get to be like 18 years old and all of a sudden this massive part of your life, you’ve basically, you’re redundant?. I’m glad I’m not facing that because I think I’d find that really traumatic. It’s important to my happiness.”* (Kate 2)

Her business becomes therefore a source of empowerment as it emancipates her from the hollow feeling that a mother may feel when her children grow up and their needs for her motherhood diminish.

This emancipatory meaning attached to Kate's entrepreneurial experience has been silenced in the literature by the metanarrative of economic growth which narrowed the experience female entrepreneur to business growth.

## **8.4.2 Kate the oppressor**

### **8.4.2.1 Kate's reflection on potential entrepreneurs**

As discussed earlier, Kate's entrepreneurial experience did not conform to the oppressive metanarrative of economic growth and its adjacent managerial discourse. Kate, however, used this discourse to the "Other", the less experienced entrepreneur, and to associate herself with the oppressive elite. This is reflected in her comments about one of her mentees where she used the marketing managerial discourse to subordinate this person. As illustrated later, Kate emphasised how important it was for her to pursue her passion through her entrepreneurial experience. She however negated this right to her mentee. She says:

*"Last year I was involved in running a couple of sessions at an entrepreneurs boot camp over in XX and it was basically a bit like Dragon's Den but it was a week-long boot camp for graduate entrepreneurs. As part of the boot camp there was one person that I thought, you know when I found out about his business idea, to me it didn't seem like a goer. And I think that's because he was too wrapped up in what he was capable of doing physically and not focussed enough on actually whether there was a demand for what he was offering. Sometimes you've got to be, you can't afford to get too personal about a business. You really can't. You've gotta be delivering what people want, and what people are prepared to pay for. So if you want to spend all day doing X but nobody wants to buy X they only wanna buy Y then you know, learn how to deliver Y because otherwise all it ever is a hobby."*(Kate 2)

Based on her own experience, Kate was expected to encourage this person to turn his passion into a business idea or a new combination. As a mentor, Kate was supposed to try to understand his idea, its potential and then advise him accordingly. Instead, she wore the expert hat and used the managerial discourse to distance herself from this person whom she destined for failure before he even started. This also reflected in the way she compared the camp to Dragons Den, the TV program which features entrepreneurs as a ruthless elite.

In this sense, female entrepreneurs can play an oppressive role in terms of perpetuating the subordination of other entrepreneurs, including male entrepreneurs, by resorting to dominant and oppressive metanarratives and discourses.

### **8.4.3 Kate the oppressed**

#### **8.4.3.1 The friction between the inner voice and the metanarrative of economic growth**

Under the influence of the neo-classical growth theory, entrepreneurship studies, including female entrepreneurship studies, focus mainly on growth. Kate's experience however diverged from this notion of growth as she valued her business in terms of emotion and passion. This was manifested in how she used a relational metaphor when she described her first business as her baby. Kate's passion for her first business was so strong that she did not want to grow it, as she wanted it to remain solely associated with her name. In this sense, the neo-classical economic growth theory is irrelevant to Kate's entrepreneurial experience. Her voice has, however, been overshadowed by the metanarrative of economic growth which rendered growth the "*natural reason*" for being an entrepreneur.

The friction between Kate's inner voice and the metanarrative of economic growth is mirrored in the way she told her story. As Kate was aware that her desire not to grow her first company was against the metanarrative of economic growth, she expressed her desire against her intention to grow the second venture.

Throughout the second interview, Kate contrasted her existing small consultancy firm against her new and potentially high growth training business.

*“(The first company) is still remaining quite small, I don't have any particular desire to grow that, to take on staff, I quite like it being my baby, I think people associate the business name with me and I want it to stay that way. So I get a lot of satisfaction from helping individual businesses and I basically just see myself continuing to work with a small number of businesses and organisations, specifically on marketing and PR. So the (second company) I think times are hard at the minute but recession aside, I*

*think there's the potential for that to grow. It's certainly, it can be a lot more than it is at the moment,. The marketing and PR consultancy is really my baby, that's my own personal area of specialism and I think of it in terms of it being my baby, I would not give it up. It may well be that I have more financial success through the (second venture) because that's potentially a much bigger company but I wouldn't ever want to give up my marketing consultancy. And I think also I've been trading as (name of first company) for five years now, and I do feel that it's taken me a little while to get my name known, I wouldn't want to give all that up. The (second company) will be there to serve any business from any sector, you know large or small, and (first company) will be there primarily for tourism and hospitality businesses, SME's." (Kate 2)*

In the same vein, Kate who was not willing to share her first company with anyone emphasised that her entrepreneurial experience in relation to her second venture was enhanced by the presence of business partners.

*"I'm in business with two really great people, who are very talented and who I get along with well and I know that I can achieve more with them than I can on my own, so I'm pretty sure they feel the same. It's just the old adage that two heads are better than one, and three heads are better than one, and we all bring our own personal experience, we're all bringing that into one company and in the same way that has benefitted us in setting up our own business, we are in a position where we can bring that combined advantage to help other businesses, you know who may need training or development products. So I just think, as a threesome we're a lot sort of stronger than us all going individually" (Kate 2)*

Given the strong association that Kate has established between entrepreneurship and growth, she could not, at the time of the interview, associate herself with entrepreneurship.

*"I don't see myself as an entrepreneur, I think entrepreneurship is something, it's for other people to see that in you. It's not something I particularly see about myself. Maybe other people they see aspects of it in me I don't know*

*Me: So you see yourself more as self-employed?*

*Kate: Certainly yes, well certainly for (first company) yes, I do. I'm not there looking to grow that into some massive organisation. I'm happy with it largely as it, you know, as it is." (Kate 2)*

Kate could not also see herself as successful. For her success will be achieved in the future when her second company become a growing company.

*"So the next chapter would be working full time in (first company) and the next chapter after that would be getting the (second company) off the ground.*

*And then hopefully the next chapter will be success, many successful years training with the (second company).” (Kate 2)*

This part of Kate’s narrative reflects the oppressive role of the metanarrative of economic growth which has robbed Kate of her voice.

#### **8.4.3.2 Institutional expectations of woman’s role in the society**

Kate’s accounts on how hard she worked in order to set up her second company sheds a different light on her relationship with the society’s expectations of women’s role. Kate pointed out how her husband, Mike, felt uneasy when she was working long hours. In contrast with the literature on female entrepreneurs, Kate’s narrative shows that it is not woman’s characteristics that may hinder her performance but societal expectations (Calás et al., 2009). A society that expects woman’s main role to be a housewife may not allow her the opportunity to allocate enough energy into her business.

*“That’s still a problem if you interviewed my husband he’d have something to say about it. No I mean joking apart, this year in particular has been difficult, from that regard. Mike, my husband is just absolutely fed up of seeing me at the computer. And I think that’s something that’s different for women than it is for men because men working long hours women just by and large accept it. When it’s a woman working long hours, men don’t wanna accept it. Not many men anyway. Still like their tea on the table, so that is sort of a constant battle and that’s basically down to me to keep it in check.” (Kate 2)*

Interestingly, however, when Kate contrasted her brother’s attitude towards work and money against her husband’s, she seemed to be very happy that her husband was not similar to her brother. The latter was only motivated by money and therefore worked long hours. Moreover, when probed further, it did not seem that Kate’s husband had really prevented her from putting in the hours. Kate mentioned how over the last nine months she had been working far more than her husband did.

*“Kate: he (her brother) is just totally driven, he’s one of these people who will work 100 hours a week, and thrive on it. You know he thrives on it. But that’s not for me*

*Me: Is he (your husband) like your brother or is he different?*

*Kate: No. No he isn’t. Work is not the be all and end all to Mike. It matters to Mike to do a good job for his clients. And he’s very diligent, and sort of*

*honest in his dealings with people, but he doesn't bring work home. When he gets home at half six, you very rarely see him on his laptop on an evening and a weekend. And you know, I'm sort of eternally grateful that is how he is really. Generally, we do keep work and business separate, and you know not everybody can do that. Mike finds it easier to do than I have done this past nine months. But in general work's work and home's home.*

*Me: So have you been working more than him?*

*Kate: Well I've been working longer hours, I haven't been bringing in the money, but I've certainly been putting the hours in. But like I say hopefully I do see that easing off now." (Kate 2)*

The contradiction in Kate's accounts indicates that women may perpetuate their own subordination by conforming to oppressive norms that may not strongly exist in their immediate environment.

## **8.5 Discussion**

Kate's oral history narrative is very interesting in terms of shedding some light on how the same entrepreneur can have two distinctive entrepreneurial experiences. As discussed earlier, Kate's entrepreneurial experience of her first business stands in contrast with her experience of the second venture. This contrast includes the way each business was set up, their structures and Kate's future expectations from each venture. In this sense, Kate's story emphasises the fluidity of the entrepreneurial experience.

Similar to Helen, Kate's narrative shows that the gap between the well-structured corporate world and the messy entrepreneurial world makes the start-up stage a scary event. Moreover, Kate's oral history narrative points out to the influence of the culture of previous employers upon the entrepreneurial experience. As discussed, Kate's core competence as an entrepreneur matched the vision of her previous employer which aimed to offer high quality service to customers. Moreover, the wide variety of tasks that Kate has to undertake as part of her previous employment has prepared her to be flexible and adaptable when faced with unforeseen circumstances as an entrepreneur. These qualities that Kate gained from her previous employer, which were important to the progress of her business, have not been explored in female entrepreneurship studies.

In Kate's oral history narrative, the positive impact of part time jobs upon the entrepreneurial experience emerges. Unlike most entrepreneurs, Kate earned money from her first day of launching her business because of the part time job she carried out prior to setting up her venture. As female entrepreneurship studies assume that only the executive career can be paramount for the subsequent entrepreneurial experience, the importance of part time jobs and voluntary work have not been explored. As discussed in chapter 2, part time jobs have in fact been associated with women and portrayed as a great barrier for their future performance as entrepreneurs (Marlow and Patton, 2005). Kate's narrative also challenges the literature on female entrepreneurs which scorns retailing in general (Carter et al., 2001). The literature associates this sector with women and portrays it as a crowded sector with low skilled people and low profitability. Any experience gained in this sector is therefore labelled as poor (Greene et al., 2003). Kate's narrative however indicates the richness and the diversity of this sector.

Furthermore, Kate's story contests the importance of business qualification to the entrepreneurial experience (Carter and Shaw, 2006). Kate did not get a university degree until she set up her company. In line with Schumpeter (1934), what was important for Kate's experience was her ability to develop a new combination. Kate set up her first business after she combined the marketing knowledge she gained from her previous employment with the knowledge she gained from her part time job; access to tourism sector.

Although, Helen's story fits with female entrepreneurship assumption that female entrepreneurs give up their career because of work-life balance, Kate did not however resign until she was in a very senior position. In this sense, Kate challenges the explanation given in this literature that female entrepreneurs underperform because they resign at an early stage of their career due to family commitments (Carter and Shaw, 2006). Moreover, Kate's story challenges the assumption that women underperform because their energy is mainly consumed by managing their work-life balance (Shelton, 2006). Kate's profitability in her first business was reduced because of the energy she devoted to the setting up of

her second venture. Moreover, the underperformance of Kate's second venture was not due to lack of bank's finance as assumed by female entrepreneurship studies (Carter et al., 2007) but to the effort she deployed to carry out necessary administrative and related tasks. As a great part of these logistics are framed by government's policies and legislations, Kate's narrative brings to light the hidden role of the institution in shaping the entrepreneurial experience. As discussed at different points in this thesis, the neo-classical growth theory has silenced the role of the institution in shaping women's entrepreneurial experience. The theory has reinforced the assumption that woman's underperformance is due to the divergence of her characteristics from those of the successful male entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). Far from being a standalone experience as claimed by the neo-classical economic growth theory, Kate's experience has been shaped in different ways by her wider environment.

Kate's narrative, similar to Helen, illustrates on various occasions the inability of the neo-classical growth theory to represent the entrepreneurial experience. For instance, the metanarrative of economic growth, which evaluates any business in terms of an increase in the number of employees, does not reflect current business models which favour outsourcing over hiring. Moreover, business owners, regardless of their gender, are increasingly working from home as modern technology has reduced the needs for offices. Working from home cannot, therefore, be used as an explanation for women's underperformance as assumed by female entrepreneurship studies (Carter and Shaw, 2006) (illustrated in chapter 2).

Kate's narrative stands against the determinism governing female entrepreneurship studies; *"I hope that the future will take care of itself."* (Kate2). Her entrepreneurial experience is neither static nor linear as portrayed by the neo-classical theory but more in line with Schumpeter in terms of being evolutionary and dynamic. Kate's experience is made out of struggle, success and failure. The start of her business was very spontaneous; *"I sort of fell into my business"* (Kate 1). Similar to Helen, Kate did not have a business plan when she launched her business. The process of running her business remained spontaneous and

was guided by serendipity as opposed to planning. Similar to Helen, the major development in Kate's entrepreneurial experience happened accidentally. This development, however, did not generate any profit for Kate up to the time I met with her.

The normative managerial narrative reinforced by the neo-classical economic growth theory has robbed Kate of her voice. Kate thought her experience is not worth celebrating or sharing because it contradicted this mainstream narrative. Kate was aware that her experience did not conform to the metanarrative of economic growth and the managerial discourse. She was not therefore confident that she was doing the right things and as a result she would not share her experience with other people. Kate will, therefore, continue to preach something that she is not really practicing. In this sense, stories challenging the metanarrative of economic growth will remain silent.

In line with Kate's narrative, Cardon et al. (2005) noted that the representation of business in terms of the metaphor 'baby' is very commonly used by entrepreneurs regardless of their sex. Moreover, Cardon et al. (2005) noted that entrepreneurs who are strongly attached to their business do not prefer to grow their company as this may lead to a loss of control. The exploration of relational metaphors has not attracted much attention in female entrepreneurship studies which ignored the exploration of the emotional side of female entrepreneurs. Such exploration, which cannot be captured by the metanarrative of economic growth, offers a better representation of the entrepreneur's experience.

On the other hand, the contrast Kate establishes between her brother and her husband challenges the notion that all men are homogenous and that they are all driven by money and growth as assumed in female entrepreneurship studies. It is evident from Kate's story that this assumption ignores the presence of different forms of masculinities (Ford et al., 2008).

Finally, Kate's narrative similar to Helen shows that female entrepreneurs can be oppressed by dominant metanarratives but can also use the same metanarratives

to oppress other entrepreneurs. Moreover, they can use their agency to turn an oppressive metanarrative into their own benefit.

## 9 Oral history narrative - Dawn

### 9.1 Introduction

The chapter starts by introducing Dawn who is a white British lady that currently lives and works in the North of England. A detailed account of her oral history narrative is then presented. The presentation is structured around the two themes illustrated earlier in Helen's and Kate's stories. The sub headings emanating from these themes are, however, different from those presented in the two previous chapters. This is another indication to the diversity and heterogeneity of female entrepreneurs. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the main findings.

### 9.2 A brief summary of Dawn's story

Dawn is a white female entrepreneur in her late forties, currently living and working in the North of England. Her oral history narrative sheds light on the complexity and the richness of the entrepreneurial experience as she closed down three businesses before setting up a property management venture.

Her first two businesses were run jointly with her ex-partner; David. She was, however, making all the decisions.

*“My previous entrepreneurship experience, or the majority of it was with my male partner, my boyfriend at the time, David, and we always remained friends throughout our life and still am today. And he's very talented, he's very creative and I was always the business side of things. I've always supported his creative work as a creative artist.”* (Dawn 2)

Her control over the decision making process has made her very happy.

*“It was always my decision to do everything. David was very happy to go with the decisions, which was good.”* (Dawn 1)

Dawn portrayed herself as a “true” entrepreneur by on the one hand associating herself with the management side of the business and, on the other hand by distancing herself from other female entrepreneurs. This indicates how the discourse on entrepreneurship is embedded in a gender biased managerial

discourse. The latter as discussed earlier has been reinforced by the neo-classical economic growth theory.

*“I think as a female entrepreneur because I was very much about running the business and my partner was very much the designer. Quite often it is the other way around isn't it? But I was much more interested in the overall business, the management; what we were going to do next, and how we were going to do it.”* (Dawn 1)

Straight after her graduation from university, Dawn started designing and producing garments with David who would become the father of her now 20 years old daughter. The pair started by selling the clothes at the local market. Over a period of ten years, the business gradually grew and Dawn and David ended up exporting their products and owning a small factory in the North of England as well as two shops in London. In 1991, when the recession started to hit their business, Dawn decided to close it down.

*“After university and starting the whole fashion business that took me up to my first child at the age of 28.”* (Dawn 1)

Using their in-depth knowledge of the fashion industry as well as their close networking ties with various parties in the industry, the pair opened up a shop to sell designers' wear. After a while, they decided however to close down the shop and Dawn and David separated from each other. They nevertheless remained good friends.

*“the next experience was I opened a shop. After the shop then me and my partner we split up.”* (Dawn 1)

Dawn then decided to open a gift shop by herself.

*“I opened a gift and card shop.”* (Dawn 1)

A few years later, Dawn closed down the gift shop and pursued an MBA.

*“Then there's the MBA that was very much a different chapter.”* (Dawn 2)

After the MBA, Dawn worked for two years as a business advisor for one of UK universities offering support and mentoring service for students wishing to establish their own business. While working at the university, Dawn started a real estate business whereby she bought a number of properties and offered them as

rented accommodation for students. She currently owns six properties and aims to extend her portfolio over the next few years.

*“So I’ve gone from one property to six and I’m looking at buying another one probably after Christmas now in the New Year.”* (Dawn 2)

In addition to running her property business, Dawn decided to go back and work as part time research associate at a leading business school. She notes:

*“I’ve got some part time work at XX University teaching, so I’m working there 9 hours a week which is perfect, gives me freedom and it gives me some structure as well and it keeps my brain active and you know I like education it’s a nice environment.”* (Dawn 2)

Meanwhile, Dawn’s ex-partner started making jewellery out of ancient remains. As illustrated later, Dawn proposed to be part of this business but her proposal was rejected by Sally who was David’s business partner and at the same time Dawn’s best friend.

I met Dawn twice at the University’s meeting rooms. In the first meeting, Dawn was very upset about the closing down of her first business to the point that she cried when she recalled this event. In the second meeting, she was, however, more relaxed about discussing this part of her experience. This has led to deeper reflexivity and richer accounts of her story as illustrated in the analysis. The shift in her attitude was because Dawn narrated how she found the interviewing process therapeutic.

Dawn’s oral history narrative is told through the following two themes:

- 1) The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life
- 2) The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed.

## 9.3 The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life

### 9.3.1 The first venture; the fashion business

Neither Dawn nor her partner had any relevant qualification or work experience prior to establishing the first business.

*“I started my business with my boyfriend at the time and it was a fashion business but neither of us knew anything about fashion. I did a geography degree and he didn’t even have any qualifications.” (Dawn 1)*

Dawn’s motivation for launching this business is multidimensional.

The launch was driven by her passion for fashion and also by social mobility. Dawn believed that setting up a business was the only route available for David to achieve a social status that would make him worthy of her.

*“We both had a passion for dressing up and creative clothing, so that is what attracted us in the first place, and we didn’t have any future that I could see, so to help him find a place in the work place, because if he was going to be my partner he needed to be able to earn a living and fulfil his latent talents. So I was very happy when he wanted to do fashion design.” (Dawn 1)*

Dawn was also driven by money and the need to achieve.

*“Well it was to help him but it was also for us to become famous. We wanted to be famous and rich, famous and rich both of us but I very much needed to be successful so that I could be with him yes. I think to prove to myself that I could do something remarkable.” (Dawn 1)*

Furthermore, Dawn started the fashion business in defiance of her mum who pushed her into formal education. Dawn wanted to prove to her that success can be achieved outside the box of the education system. The irony is that later on, when things were not progressing according to her expectations, Dawn sought refuge in the formal education system.

*“My mother really pushed me into education and I did what she wanted me to do, and I think opening my own business was a rebellious thing to do because at the end of my education I went okay I have fulfilled your part of the bargain now I am going to do something absolutely mad with no prospects, no income, I am just going to do my own thing and see what happens, and I think subconsciously that was a reason too. I have always been really ambitious. I was ambitious as a girl at school. I was a really*

*hard worker. I wanted I don't know prove to my Mum that I was you know to be proud of me but I wanted to do it my way not her way.*" (Dawn 1)

Similar to Kate and Helen, Dawn's businesses were not guided by a well-defined business plan and clear long-term objectives as reflected in her comments on the launch of her first venture.

*"we started it wasn't very conscious, it was let's make some clothes, and then our friends liked them, and we sold them on a market stall once a week and our friends would come down and visit us."* (Dawn 1)

The development and growth of the business was spontaneous. The initial success at the local market gave Dawn and her partner the confidence to try to reach to shops. This in turn led them to think more about customers, prices and suppliers.

*"That fuelled the passion and the interest and then we started seeing if we could sell off to shops so that meant we needed to buy fabric wholesale. So it was a process of investigation. You know finding suppliers, finding customers, and putting our ideas into fabric, and creating them and selling them, and it was a real buzz and we did that."* (Dawn 1)

Even the expansion of the production facilities was carried out in a casual way as Dawn expanded the business by relying on her mother's premises.

Furthermore, Dawn's narrative shows that the unstructured and informal nature of the business has made their entrepreneurial experience enjoyable. The fun surrounding their experience had a positive impact on their performance as it fuelled their energy and minimised the stress caused by working long hours.

*"We worked from home like a cottage industry for a couple of years together, that was great fun, a very all consuming. We were growing out of our house. Our house became our workplace. And I phoned my mother up and said we need more space and we can't afford it. At the time my mum had quite a big house, so she said well come back and live at home, so we did and we turned her house into a factory with industrial sewing machines, and bolts of fabric in the hall way, and cutting out patterns in the hall way at midnight, and things like that and we were there for a year."* (Dawn 1)

In the context of Dawn's business, it was irrelevant for David, who was in charge of the design side of the business, to have a business degree. What was important for him, however, was the enhancement of his designing talent. Dawn

has, therefore, arranged for him to go to London to be trained at the London College of Fashion. This step was a turning point in the business performance as noted by Dawn.

*“I knew that we couldn’t carry on the way we were and I wanted to play to our strengths and David was very into design and cutting patterns, so I looked around for a course for him, and he went to London College of Fashion, and learnt how to do it properly. So I stayed in (their town) and he went down to London to study and he adored it, he got so much from it which we then ploughed back into our business, and our product changed massively and improved massively” (Dawn 1)*

Similar to Kate’s second business, Dawn and David’s hard work up to this point would be unrecognised by official statistics as the pair did not formalise their business until they moved to London to open a shop.

*“We eventually moved to London and opened a small studio and a shop. Then started formalising the business process and the public law.” (Dawn 1)*

Dawn and David then started exporting their products to various markets.

*“We wholesaled eventually, we ended up selling our designs all over the world, and were mainly exporting at the big trade shows in London and Paris.” (Dawn 1).*

Similar to Helen and Kate, serendipity played an important role in Dawn’s entrepreneurial experience.

*“We worked really hard, but I think it was the right time right place as well.” (Dawn1)*

### **9.3.1.1 The opening of manufacturing facilities**

The rule of the game in the fashion industry became a strong barrier for the expansion of the business as factories rejected their orders because they were relatively small compared to the main players in the market. In order to overcome this barrier, Dawn and her partner decided to open a small factory in the North of England.

*“The one thing that was holding us back was the methods of production and operation. A lot of the factories in London were not interested in doing business with us because we were so small, they wanted large production runs and we would find ourselves beating our head against a brick wall because they didn’t want to do our small orders. And we had these orders*

*and we couldn't fulfil them. So we decided that we would open a small factory in (the North of England) and we got machinists and we put a supervisor there.” (Dawn 1)*

The opening of the factory gave them the lead over their business and enhanced their products which made them more competitive.

*“It gave us that control over manufacturing times, we could be flexible, we could even use the production techniques as a way of informing our design. So a scalloped machine would give a scalloped edge and that would help with the next collection. So it really gave us that extra special USP as well as good quality under control.”(Dawn 1)*

According to the metanarrative of economic growth, Dawn's business at this point was very successful as she was exporting, manufacturing as well as employing people (BEER, 2008).

*“We went from 1983 to 1991 so eight years enough to sustain us and we bought a small house (in the North of England) and we had a flat in London and two shops in London as well and 13 people worked for us.” (Dawn 1)*

The reality behind this glamorous facade of growth was, however, more gloomy.

### **9.3.1.2 The closing down of the fashion business**

In 1991, recession hit the UK and the rest of Europe. Despite this, Dawn had a very successful season in terms of sales. One day, however, one of her big clients cancelled a big order. Consequently, Dawn panicked and decided to close down her business suddenly. She says:

*“So what happened in the recession of 1991, we had ironically a very successful season, and we had sold all over the world, and one particular customer in France had about seven shops, and he phoned up whilst we were in production for his order and said I am really sorry but I need to cut my order by two thirds, and I panicked because I thought this is going to be the beginning of the tip of the iceberg. We are going to be left with lots of very specific garments for specific clients with nowhere to sell them, and the fashion industry the way it works is you work six months ahead of schedule so it is very difficult to find a new client for your product once it is made well it is impossible really at that level.” (Dawn 1)*

Other parts of Dawn's narrative however showed that the closing down decision had deeper roots that went beyond the cancellation of the order by the French client.

### 9.3.1.3 Failure is a complex phenomenon

First, the expansion of the business was not supported by healthy cash flow as reflected in her narrative about the closing down.

*“We were relying on that man’s money to come in to pay our workers.”*  
(Dawn 2)

She continues:

*“Over the weekend we decided that we would have to close the business down, and so on Monday morning we walked in and we told our staff, and we had just moved premises to a really big lovely top floor factory premises, and said we are sorry but we are going to have to close down. We can pay you to the end of the week and then that is it, and I was absolutely in tears, I was really upset. I can get really quite upset about it now. So the next week I had my baby and we sold everything off, all the machines off, we delivered what we could to various people, we got rid of all our fabric, told the landlord we had to break our lease. I had to go round all our suppliers and say I have got no money to pay you and tried to make myself do two or three phone calls every day to suppliers that we had built up a relationships with for years, so you know we can’t pay you or we can pay you a little bit you know negotiating a rate to pay like a barter economy back to that. Some people were like don’t worry it doesn’t matter for the small amounts, and for the larger amounts pay 50% or pay 50% over two years, and that was sort of how we managed to negotiate our way out of the financial situation that we found ourselves in.”* (Dawn 1)

Secondly, the decision to expand the business by opening a small factory was not without its problems.

By opening the manufacturing facilities in the North of England, Dawn and David had to travel a lot. Similar to Helen who was run down after working hard following Mia’s departure, Dawn felt really exhausted. Being so tired may have reduced Dawn’s ability to evaluate the situation correctly and to take the right decision.

*“So we put a supervisor there (in the factory). While we were in London they ran it up here, and we drove up and down the motorway every week with fabric, picking up orders, making sure everything was okay. I had taken all my paperwork in a big box up and down the motorway all of the time, eating at Little Chef’s at midnight that kind of thing.”* (Dawn 1)

What is more, this exhaustion was exacerbated by Dawn's pregnancy. Moreover, Dawn found pregnancy a very daunting experience as she was not sure how having a baby will fit with her business.

*"When I panicked and we closed down, I was nine months pregnant at the time so that probably had an impact. You're frightened and you don't know what's gonna happen next, you know with a big bump in front of you it's a frightening experience especially if you've not been trained for that."* (Dawn 2)

In contrast with what Dawn claimed earlier in terms of gaining control over the production after opening the factory, the pair seemed to have lost control. Excited by the machines' facilities, Dawn and David wasted their resources experimenting with and implementing new possibilities.

*"The massive thing that went wrong was our product range grew ridiculously and exponentially for the size of company we were. We should've really focussed on a capsule collection of say, no more than 15-20 items. But each season we got really excited and we'd do like, oh let's do another coat. We were starting a new business every six months with new product from scratch all the time and not benefiting from the economies of scale and the experience that we'd gathered from perfecting a particular jacket."* (Dawn 2)

Another reason behind this lack of focus was the influence metanarrative of economic growth which promotes constant growth as the norm. Consequently, Dawn felt that in order to prove her success she had to constantly produce new products. She adds;

*"We wouldn't capitalise on what we'd learnt, we'd move on, and that's lack of experience and that's lack of confidence. That's trying to prove that you are talented."*(Dawn 2)

In line with Helen, the metanarrative of economic growth has also made Dawn and David vulnerable in the marketplace by endorsing a false relationship between good entrepreneur and wealthy entrepreneur. Deceived by this association, Dawn did not take any precautionary measurements when dealing with her French client as he was a well-known retailer.

*"There are lots of other things that went wrong, we should have had legal terms, we should have asked for a deposit, because we were exposing ourselves to a huge risk by working with one company, it's a classic business failure isn't? That businesses fail because their major client gives up on them."*

*But we didn't because it was one of the best shops in Paris to sell to. People were amazed that they wanted our stock, we were very proud of this company wanting to stock our clothes because it moved us into another bracket, we were being taken more seriously, we were being given a higher platform of exposure, and that was worth it really, and we were very inexperienced and we trusted that.” (Dawn 2)*

Dawn's reflection on other entrepreneurs who failed for the same reason indicates the widespread nature of the negative influence of this association upon business survivals. Moreover, as Dawn is not aware how the metanarrative of economic growth has shaped her consciousness, she took sole responsibility for these mistakes and blamed herself.

As turmoil and failures are not acknowledged by the neo-classical economic growth theory as being part of the entrepreneurial experience (Schumpeter, 1934), Dawn was unprepared for any downturns. This lack of anticipation accentuated her panic and speeded up her decision to close down the business. It was not until late in life that Dawn realised that the entrepreneurial experience does not equate linear and smooth progress.

*“Lack of preparation, thinking you have to go up all the time and of course it's not like that. It's up and down and sideways.” (Dawn 2)*

Similar to Kate, Dawn used the metaphor of the baby to portray how strongly she loved her fashion business. In line with Kate, her excessive love for her business led her to reject any form of cooperation with other investors or delegation of responsibilities. As a result, Dawn became completely exhausted and missed out the opportunity of having invaluable input from an experienced partner. She says:

*“We were insular, we wouldn't listen to anyone else. We had many people approaching us and saying we want to be part of it. Older people, mentors, investors, I can think of a few now. There was a Belgian couple, there was a French couple, or was it German couple? Who were coming over to London and taking us out. They were saying we could do this, and we've got this amount of money, and you could be doing that, and David could be doing that, and your strengths are being dissipated let's formalise them. And we were like no this is our business keep away. This is our baby, we're not going to let you look after our baby, or nurse it, and we were a little bit arrogant and inexperienced really. This is why I'm always amazed when young people do come and ask for help and go to Business Link and places like that and*

*actually literally ask for help, because that's something that I, we never did."*  
(Dawn 2)

Again, Dawn criticises herself for being “*arrogant and inexperienced*” for having this feeling towards her business. She does not know that these emotions are very common amongst entrepreneurs. Moreover, by comparing herself to new entrepreneurs, Dawn does not do herself justice because the sense of ownership becomes stronger as the business becomes more established (Cardon et al., 2005).

### **9.3.2 The evolution of the first business into a second business**

While the pregnancy was scary for Dawn and influenced the closing down decision, the birth of her child drove her to open a new business. After closing down the fashion business, Dawn and David opened up a shop in a city in the North of England. The new business idea capitalised on their knowledge of the fashion industry and their close connections with various parties in the industry. Having suffered as a business owner from having to store unsold items, Dawn's new business was to free designers' warehouses from these items by selling them on their behalf for a commission. This indicates how failure can still be inspirational and should not be studied as a standalone event.

*“But of course being a survivor, and having a new baby, I was motivated to try and find another way of earning a living, so straight away with no hesitation we started another business that was in the same sector. It was utilising our contacts in the fashion industry, and so remember me from XX (the name of the fashion business) well I am not designing anymore but I am doing designers' sales and we would pick up, and ask if we could sell their products that they couldn't sell such as old samples, orders that hadn't been fulfilled, that kind of thing, and turn it into money for them because it represented a blockage in their cash flow. And all designers have a huge amount of clothes in a corner which they are sick of looking at. It takes up space, it represents a lot of resources tied up in clothing and I knew that because I had been in that position so I said we will sell it on your behalf and take a percentage.”* (Dawn 2)

Dawn did not go in any details about this experience. The way she summarised her whole experience in one sentence showed that she did not feel very proud of it.

*“That went on for a few years. That was fairly standard just running as a shop type environment.” (Dawn 1)*

This lack of pride is due to the gap between her dream which is driven by hedonistic motivation and her actual entrepreneurial experience.

*“We always thought big and I always wanted to not just have a shop I wanted to have a chain of shops, I wanted it to be a high street brand.” (Dawn 1)*

After few years, Dawn and David closed down the business. Dawn attributed the failure of this business to a lack of passion. She argued, however, that David would have blamed the business failure on the wider macro economy that they were facing owing to the influx of major competitors in the locality. In order to justify her observation, Dawn resorted to the notion that female entrepreneurs are different from their male counterparts. This assumption distorted her ability to reflect deeply on the closing down of the business. It is more likely that similar to the first business, this event was triggered by a web of reasons.

*“I was still very ambitious, but we were running it in a very half-hearted manner. Both of us did not really enjoy retailing. It didn’t enthuse us, it didn’t motivate us, and that is a killer in business. And it was no surprise to either of us that business just died off and sunk. Now my partner, if you were interviewing him, he would have a completely different point of view. He would blame the external environments. The competition, the landlords with their exorbitant rents, the fact that Harvey Nicholls came in and all the huge giants came in and we didn’t stand a chance and he can justify that with some quite interesting stories.” (Dawn 1)*

After closing down this business Dawn and David separated but nevertheless remained good friends. Dawn then opened a gift shop.

### **9.3.3 The launch of a third business**

Dawn’s narrative about the reasons why she opened this shop brings to light a different perspective to the relationship between the corporate and the entrepreneurial worlds. In contrast with Kate and Helen who became entrepreneurs after being executives, Dawn was looking to shift from self-employment to employment. After closing down her second business, Dawn initially planned to find a job but she thought that her skills as an entrepreneur

would not be valued by the corporate world. Consequently, she decided to remain self-employed and opened a gift shop.

*“After the shop I thought well what am I going to do now? So I opened another shop because I thought no one will ever employ me because I do my own thing, I make my own decisions, I have got no particular skills or as I saw it I thought of myself as unemployable so I thought the only option open to me was to create my own business. I had been doing this since I was 19 and I was now mid 30’s. So I opened in (another city in the North of England) a gift and card shop.” (Dawn 1)*

Similar to the two other businesses, the process of opening the business was very spontaneous.

*“No market research I just wanted to do it. It felt like a good idea.” (Dawn 1)*

A few years later, Dawn closed down the business. By this time, Dawn has lost her confidence in her entrepreneurial ability. Dawn did not mention any details about this business which again reflects her lack of pride.

*“So I did that for a few years, and then I thought it wasn’t very successful, and I knew I was not running it properly. In fact I wasn’t running any of it properly ever, it was always just propelled by passion, interest and just sheer hard work.” (Dawn 1)*

As discussed earlier, Dawn was looking forward to being rich, famous and having a chain of shops. She summarises her expectation from her entrepreneurial experience as follows:

*“I wanted to be whatever I did in my business to be on a grand scale.” (Dawn 1)*

Her inability to achieve this dream made her feel as if she was a failure. In order to solve her problems in terms of understanding her experience and being able to get a job, Dawn went for an MBA.

#### **9.3.4 Having an MBA and working as a business advisor**

*“The MBA was very much a different chapter. That was like I’m sick of this whole thing, I need to get some clarity, I need to step back and understand it, the MBA was great, but also I felt very much a failure as an entrepreneur, so I felt I had to get a job, so the MBA was a way of understanding my*

*experience as an entrepreneur, but also equipping me with a qualification to get a job as an employee. Which it did that for me.”* (Dawn 2)

Dawn thought that the MBA would offer her a scientific explanation for why her entrepreneurial experience did not go as she expected.

*“I thought I will do an MBA because that would give me the theoretical perspective on running businesses which it did.”* (Dawn 1)

Dawn claimed that the MBA succeeded in providing her with the right answers and the necessary explanations for why her entrepreneurial experience went wrong. As a result, she felt that the MBA was more than just a qualification as it played an important therapeutic role and restored her confidence.

*“I used my own experience as case studies for assignments, which was great because it allowed me to look at my business from a theoretical objective point of view, and it helped me learn a lot retrospectively about my own business, and to put that to bed really. To close the door on that, and to realise where we had gone wrong, so that was very cathartic, and allowed me to get over that period in my life, and it also gave me the confidence I needed because I thought I was not very good at anything.”* (Dawn1)

Dawn’s claim about the therapeutic role of the MBA is questionable. For instance, when Dawn initially recalled the closing down of her first business she burst into tears.

Dawn’s statement about gaining more confidence as a result of her MBA is also debatable. The qualification did not lead her to appreciate the richness of her entrepreneurial experience. Instead, she found that the one year MBA programme was more stimulating than her diverse entrepreneurial experience.

After the MBA, Dawn decided to become an employee.

*“I enjoyed my MBA so much, I thought it is great to get my brain working again. So that then led me into doing business support and teaching entrepreneurs with their marketing, and helping students at (University X) to start their own business.”* (Dawn 1)

Paradoxically, Dawn’s unsuccessful experience became an important part of the success of other entrepreneurs as she used her own experience to warn potential entrepreneurs against common pitfalls. This is another indication that failure

should be conceptualised according to Schumpeter (1934) in terms of being part of an evolutionary and complex process.

*“A lot of students come to me and they want to open a shop, and I always say to them you do realise that rents are huge, and they you have got council tax, and all your utilities, you have got your insurances, you have got your shop fit, and you have got your stock, and your staff, then you have got shoplifting and that is all before you get a penny. Everybody else gets paid you are the last to get paid if there is any left over and quite often there isn't.”* (Dawn 1)

Once employed, Dawn found it hard to be full time self-employed again as employment offered her the safety of regular income. This sheds a different light on the contrast between the two worlds and the negative impact that the corporate world may have on the entrepreneurial experience.

*“I have no problems taking risks although that has modified itself over the years, and I have enjoyed having a regular income over the last five/six years. Knowing that the same amount of money is coming into my bank account, it has been quite relaxing and I have got used to that.”* (Dawn 1)

Far from being static, Dawn's experience started to shift again towards self-employment as Dawn launched her property business before leaving her job at the university. In this sense, Dawn can also be seen as a serial entrepreneur.

### **9.3.5 Property business**

At the time of the second interview, Dawn owned six properties which she let to students.

*“I've got a property company now, I've started buying properties and renting them out to students in (town X). Now I've got four properties in (this town), one in (city X) and one in (another big city) so that's six”* (Dawn 2)

This business is discussed further as part of the second theme. In this section, I will only point to the influence of the environment upon her experience and the fluidity and subjectivity of meanings.

#### **9.3.5.1 The influence of the environment**

The expansion of Dawn's property business, similar to the fashion business, was partly shaped by changes in the macro environment. Dawn recognised that

through the recent increase in university's fees this will reduce demand for rented accommodation in small towns, so she therefore decided to expand in cities.

*“When the changes in education, this is an environmental factor and a political factor, it's like the PEST analysis. When the education reforms happened a year ago and turned the whole further and higher education system on its head, and students had to pay suddenly nine thousand pounds, I suddenly thought there are going to be more students living at home and will not require rented accommodation and I thought (Town X) is small so maybe move out of it now, so I've moved over to (City X). So I'm going to do the same thing over there because it's bigger and there's a bit more going on there.” (Dawn 2)*

This illustrates that growth is not necessarily a purposeful act as Dawn's expansion was in reaction to institutional changes.

In the next section, I explore the subjectivity and fluidity of meanings

### **9.3.5.2 The subjectivity and fluidity of meanings**

Dawn's reflections on her property business indicate the subjectivity and fluidity of the meanings associated with her experience. In her accounts, Dawn initially mentioned that she started her property business because she perceived it to be a safe option.

*“I thought property is safe.”(Dawn 2)*

However, later on when Dawn reflected on the capital needed for this business and on her previous experience, she argued that this business was very risky.

*“It is a huge risk because it is a huge amount of money. In fact when I think about it, it's probably the riskiest of all of them. It would have actually been much less risky to open a café bar, or go into fashion again. They are the things that I know but I went and did something that I didn't know anything about.”(Dawn 2)*

Dawn's different accounts on the safety of her property business also illustrates that the definition of traits such as risk taking is highly subjective and fluid.

Finally, there was the potential of Dawn having a joint business with her Ex-partner 25 years later. This experience will be explored briefly under the following section. A more detailed analysis of this part of her narrative is offered under the second theme.

### 9.3.6 David's jewellery business

Twenty five years after the closing down of the fashion business, David started making jewellery out of ancient remains.

*“Over the last five years David has been making jewellery out of ancient artefacts dug up from the ground such as roman antiquities that aren't actually valuable to a museum because they've got more than enough of the appropriate medieval girdle rings or whatever it happens to be there. So he make them into pieces of jewellery so people are wearing a piece of history So in a way it's not jewellery and it's not antiquities it's a sort of hybrid between the three and it seemed to me like an incredibly unique product”.*  
(Dawn 2)

Dawn then put him in touch with Sally who was one of her best friends. Over the years David and Sally built a strong business relationship based on trust and divided the workload between them so David was in charge of design and production while Sally carried out the marketing and sales functions. Then gradually Dawn started to get herself involved in the business until she eventually proposed to be formally part of it. Sally, however, rejected Dawn's proposal. As a result, Dawn decided to retreat temporarily while keeping a close eye on the evolution of the business.

*“So I wanted to formalise it, we could never really come to an understanding of how I would fit in, what percentage I would get, how we would buy into her business was it her business was it David's business, it was just lots of piecemeal things and in the end I pulled away from it and we'll see what happens next.”* (Dawn 2)

In Line with Helen who allocated contradictory meanings to her relationship with Mia, so did Dawn.

Dawn initially thought that partnering with David will enrich her entrepreneurial experience as both of them will bring a wealth of knowledge to their new venture.

*“formalising our relationship again 25 years later thrilled us both actually because there was a great deal of trust that had been built up over the decades and a great deal of understanding into how he works and vice versa, so to me it felt like a superb business marriage again and I thought it was a gift from god that this opportunity should come to us both again. So basically we bring into the present moment what we'd learned from our mistakes in the*

*past and our successes and failures in the past and bring the whole thing to a point where we could really understand the bigger picture and make it work. So we got very excited about that.” (Dawn 2)*

When Dawn’s intervention in the business was rejected by Sally, Dawn drew a different picture of David and Sally and presented a pessimistic view of their business relationship. Her account sheds light on the fluidity of networking and human relationships which has not been explored by female entrepreneurship studies. She adds:

*“Lots of stressful conversations, David is a very difficult person to work with and I knew that, and Sally is very difficult. We’re full of idiosyncrasies and she has her way and he has his way and I have my way. It made me think about personal relationships and business that in itself is a huge tricky area. You need good personal relationships of trust, ethics, history, in order to build a great solid business. Yet these contributing factors were not working. It made me think how businesses ever move forward with the human element always being in there as a barrier.” (Dawn 2)*

### **9.3.7 Learning**

Dawn mentioned that learning was an integral part of the entrepreneurial experience.

*“I’m learning all the time.” (Dawn 2)*

She stressed the importance of being open to new knowledge and new opportunities.

*“I’m open, I’m like a sponge. I’m trying to just sort of absorb and see what seems to hit me as a good idea.” (Dawn 2)*

Paradoxically, the most important concepts that Dawn learnt about in her life, including how to be open, came from best friend Ruth and not from her business qualification/MBA. What is more, the philosophical stance adopted by Ruth contradicts the theoretical foundations of the metanarrative of economic growth and the managerial discourse which Dawn identified herself so strongly with. Ruth rejected the notion that we can control the flow of events in our life as they do not progress in a linear and predictable fashion. Ruth therefore advised Dawn to accept her limitations as a human being and be flexible, to adjust her sail when life changes its direction.

*“My friend Ruth is very influential to me probably more on life but entrepreneurship and life it’s the same thing really to me, in her attitude is very much like, we just don’t know how the story’s going to end, but we have to realise, we have to trust that everything will work out, that kind of philosophy you know going with the flow looking for the signs looking for opportunities, being receptive and open to whatever comes your way yeah, being brave enough to not know but be open because a lot of people are not brave, and they’re very closed and they want to regulate their life and make it, they want to be in control, and of course I want to be in control but she’s helped me realise that let go a little bit and let the universe help you that kind of thing.” (Dawn 2)*

Dawn also learnt that the entrepreneurial process is rarely linear. The importance of this lesson to the long-term survival of the business is mirrored in her comments about her property business. She says:

*“I’ve seen about three recessions now in my lifetime so I know they happen. And I’m already seeing the downturn in the property thing because we’ve already started to see that in the last few years. I’ve bought my first couple of properties four years ago when they were at their highest prices and since then I’ve seen the value fall but that hasn’t put me off because as long as the income is greater than the outgoings then in the short term that’s fine. Growth in property is in much more of a long-term thing so I’m not letting that fall in value worries me.” (Dawn 2)*

Unfortunately, Dawn learnt this lesson later in life. Her lack of awareness of how full of turmoil the entrepreneurial experience can be, contributed to the closing down of her fashion business and the loss of her confidence as illustrated earlier.

In summary, Dawn’s oral history narrative indicates that the entrepreneurial process cannot be captured by the neo-classical growth theory. Moreover, Dawn’s story confirms that the theory actually inhibits entrepreneurship.

#### **9.4 The relationship and inter-relationship of power as narrators assume multiple roles namely; the free agent, the oppressor and the oppressed**

Given the connection between the subthemes in Dawn’s story and in order not to interrupt the flow of her story, I will change the order of the subthemes to be as follows; the oppressed, the free agent and the oppressor.

## 9.4.1 Dawn the oppressed

### 9.4.1.1 Friction between the metanarrative of economic growth and Dawn's inner voice

Reading Dawn's story is like reading the story of two different persons. As illustrated earlier, Dawn's narrative has mainly associated entrepreneurship with growth and management. However, this meaning changed when I asked Dawn towards the end of the second interview to define the entrepreneur.

After struggling for a little while, Dawn defined the entrepreneur very much in line with Schumpeter's definition. She says:

*“ME: finally, how do you define entrepreneur?”*

*Dawn: Oh what a question! There're loads of them I don't know it's quite big really. Definitely finding a different unique way of either problem solving or delivering a service or product that people would like, is what entrepreneurship is for me. It's never about copying what other people have done. It's always about changing the goal posts and moving a concept on, whether it's a different system or a different process or a different approach, or something. It's very difficult to do something completely unique it's practically impossible but as long as some aspect is sufficiently different to what's already on offer out in the market place then that to me defines an entrepreneur.” (Dawn 2)*

Following the presentation of this definition, Dawn offered a different account of her entrepreneurial experience where creativity, and not growth or management, became its core. Subsequently a new story emerged as illustrated in the following section.

#### 9.4.1.1.1 A new story emerging

First instead of being proud of taking on the managerial role in the fashion business as illustrated earlier, Dawn stressed that she carried out this role against her will. Furthermore, she lamented assuming this role fully on behalf of David.

*“David and I were talking recently and he said you were the creative one and it was only because he wasn't prepared to do the business side that I was left with the business side, and I got pushed into the business side, so he said you were as creative as I was, if you remember and he gave me some examples and I was like oh yeah, I was, I was. It touched a bit of a nerve really for me because I thought gosh it's just because I'm so damn flexible I'll do anything*

*to make something work at the expense of my own talents, creativity.” (Dawn 2)*

Dawn also interpreted the ownership of her shops differently as she referred her lack of pride to the lack of creativity and not to her inability to open a chain of shops as discussed earlier.

*“I opened a few shops which was not very creative to me, not being unique, not being creative enough.” (Dawn 2)*

What is more, when reflecting on her entrepreneurial experience from the lens of creativity, Dawn defined her success differently. Instead of measuring it from the narrow perspective of wealth and fame and seeing it as a failure, she evaluated her experience holistically and appreciated its diversity and richness. She says:

*“It’s been an interesting journey so I suppose that’s success isn’t it? Having had an interesting journey through the interesting people and the things you’ve been forced to have to do and conversations you’ve had to have and the travel you’ve had to do. All added to a very rich environment and a rich experience. Then you bring that with you every day as a cumulative process into your everyday living.” (Dawn 2)*

The above analysis demonstrates the extent to which the metanarrative of economic growth has robbed Dawn of her voice. The conflict in Dawn’s narrative reflects the influence of the neo-classical growth theory which manifests itself in the metanarrative of economic growth. By rendering growth the only legitimate reason for entrepreneurship and associating the entrepreneur with a rational manager, the theory has made Dawn uncomfortable about expressing her voice.

In the next section, I explore another form of oppression that Dawn has been subject to.

#### **9.4.1.2 Stereotyping of property management business**

Dawn’s oral history narrative shows how entrepreneurs, regardless of their gender, can be subordinated when they operate in business sectors that have a negative connotation attached to them. Dawn was not proud of her property

business because being landlord/landlady is associated with the image of an exploiting elite.

*“I’m almost apologising for my new business endeavour because I’m a landlady. I buy properties, I do them up and I fill them with tenants, and I’m apologising because it’s very capitalistic it seems, but I’m a nice land lady. Other people too say well what do you do and I say, oh God I’m a landlady, because there’s a classic cliché of what landlords are the big bad wolf. They’re people that prey on the weakness of the poor, that’s sort of inequality. That’s why I sort of cringe a little bit, but I like to charge a very fair rent and make sure that everything is appropriate and if anything goes wrong a shower leaks or there’s an issue in the house you know I get people out there straight away because I want people to live in good conditions you know, so in fact that’s what I’m doing today I’ve just come from one of my properties.” (Dawn 2)*

In order to counterattack this negative connotation, Dawn emphasised her quality as a caring person who looks after her tenants. Thus the emphasis on this caring side of her identity has nothing to do with her being a female.

The lack of pride in her property venture pushed Dawn to emphasise that this business was only means to an end and that she was looking forward to launching a new business in the near future.

*“I’ll probably do a little bit more on my property maybe add another couple of properties to my portfolio but that still doesn’t feel like I’m treading water. I think it’s a transition. It will give me the means to do something more satisfying.” (Dawn 2)*

Dawn’s narrative indicates that not all forms of oppression are gender related and that men like women can also be subject to negative stereotyping.

When I reassured Dawn that I did not have any prejudice against landlords/landladies, Dawn attached a new meaning to her property venture as explored in the following section.

## **9.4.2 Dawn the free agent**

### **9.4.2.1 Entrepreneurship can be emancipatory**

After my reassurance, Dawn showed pride in her property business.

*“I’ve always been put into property, you know Englishman’s home is his castle that kind of thing.” (Dawn 2)*

Dawn then went on to explain how the property business held a strong emancipatory meaning for her as it enabled her to escape from the confinement of the corporate world and the oppressive organisational culture.

As discussed earlier, Dawn shifted to employment after she thought she failed as an entrepreneur and claimed that she was very happy with this move. Dawn’s narrative on her property business, however, indicates that her employment experience was not that perfect as she felt stifled by the corporate environment. She says:

*“When my mum died she left me a small semi-detached house. My motivation was I didn’t want to work for an employer for much longer. I was working for University X and doing a bit of associate work for another University but I’ve never felt comfortable working for a large organisation because I am ultimately an entrepreneur at heart, and it was always a bit of a tricky fit for me and I’m sure my line manager would agree, haha. So I never wanted to be beholden to another organisation or other people or the politics that are involved or the relationships you have to have or the language that you have to use and the formalities and the whole culture was always something that I struggled with. And very much wanted to have the freedom to make decisions, to rise and fall on my own decisions and do my own thing. So I thought well I don’t want to get to the age of 50 and have to be reliant on another organisation for my income, I need to be independent again. I thought I love property. I’ll use my mum’s small equity to leverage the borrowing requirement in order to grow a portfolio of properties.” (Dawn 2)*

The above quote shows that Dawn’s employment experience has led her to evaluate her entrepreneurial experience differently. Instead of seeing it as a failure, Dawn perceived her experience as success, including its downturns, because it emancipated her from the imprisonment of the corporate world.

*“I earn a living through my own endeavours and nobody is the boss of me, and I’m still in my 40s and I don’t have to look to anyone else and do it for myself so that is success isn’t? To be able to have the freedom and rely on my own resources and my own ideas, to create a lifestyle that suits me. So yes I’ve created a lifestyle and a sense of freedom that very few people in an employed world would ever taste. So I’m very successful in the sense I’m free.” (Dawn 2)*

This shift of meanings reflects the fluidity of the entrepreneurial experience and the meanings associated with it. It also brings to light the dynamic and complex relationship that an entrepreneur may have with the corporate world.

### **9.4.3 Dawn the oppressor**

#### **9.4.3.1 Dawn's reflection on other entrepreneurs**

As mentioned earlier, when Dawn's ex-partner, David started making jewellery out of ancient remains, Dawn put him in touch with her friend Sally to help him sell his products. Later on Dawn gained interest in this business and wanted to join in as a formal partner. Sally, however, resisted Dawn's involvement which led the latter to retreat temporarily.

It is clear that David and Sally were happy with the way the business was going. Dawn, however, had a different vision and sought to impose it on both partners. In order to do so, Dawn used the metanarrative of economic growth and its affiliated managerial discourse to prove the incompetency of both Sally and David.

*“Sally started selling David's jewellery in a very ad hoc way, table-top sales in historical houses and all sorts of things like that. He would send her on a sale or return basis his stock of goods, she would sell it and whatever she sold she would send a cheque to David, so very basic way of doing business. But there is a huge amount of trust between the two of them. Anyway, it was very much hit and miss as you can imagine these fairs.” (Dawn 2)*

She says the following about David:

*“Of course he has no market plan, he has no business plan, he has no strategy really. He understands it all, but he doesn't get involved in that. He is your classic artisan hands on and just likes nothing other than making items whereas I like nothing other than taking something that's good and taking it to market. So he was very open to me helping him.” (Dawn 2)*

While distancing Sally and David from growth and management to show their incompetency, Dawn identified herself strongly with these discourses as an indication that she is the “true” entrepreneur who has the right expertise, money and connections. She says:

*“So I got really frustrated because I could see as an outsider, except that I’m not an outsider, looking at my two dear friends doing business, that so much more could be done in terms of a really super interactive website, search engine optimising because of course now I have a lot of connections in digital media, social marketing media, expertise not necessarily that lies within my brain but lies within people I know who can help. And it seemed like a good idea to create a strategy, a marketing strategy, a business plan around the extremely good interactive website which would be supported by a fundamentally massive PR campaign. Because we saw that PR is a way of educating people about the product, because it’s not a me too product. Sally has been doing this on and off for four years these table top ad hoc sales, and there was me coming in in the summer with all my bright ideas and some investment money, not much you know a few, five thousand pounds say, with my contacts and this plan and a full time perspective on it going well.”*  
(Dawn 2)

In this sense, Dawn used oppressive discourses to subordinate both David and Sally. In order to accentuate further the incompetency of Sally, Dawn used the gendered discourse of womanhood. She emphasised the image of Sally as a mother of four young children. As discussed in chapter 2, the association of female entrepreneurs with motherhood holds a negative connotation as it means that the woman will underperform because her main priority is to achieve work-life balance (Shelton, 2006).

*“Sally was a mum, she’s a mumpreneur, is that the right phrase? And she’s got four children under the age of ten but she was desperate to do her own entrepreneurial.”* (Dawn 2)

Based on the above, Dawn played an important role in perpetuating the subordination of woman with dependent children by portraying them as unfit for entrepreneurship.

In the next section, I discuss the findings of this chapter.

## **9.5 Discussion**

Similar to Kate and Helen, Dawn’s experience is in line with Schumpeter’s theorising in terms of being dynamic, unpredictable and evolutionary. Dawn’s oral history narrative however pushes the boundaries of the messy entrepreneurial experience further as she has set up and closed down a number of businesses before ending up being a landlady. Dawn’s businesses were not

guided by well-defined plans and clear long-term objectives. The whole process was run in a spontaneous way including the expansion into overseas markets and the move to manufacturing. Dawn also acknowledges the importance of serendipity to her experience.

Similar to Helen and Kate, Dawn's oral history account indicates that judging businesses based on their growth is highly flawed. As illustrated earlier, behind the rosy picture that the metanarrative of economic growth would have painted of Dawn's first business, things were very gloomy. In this sense, the focus on growth can be very misleading for the entrepreneur as well as for the outside world.

Dawn's story defies female entrepreneurship studies which assume that female entrepreneurs are less likely to export and own production facilities compared to their male counterparts because women lack managerial experience and/or business/scientific degrees (Carter and Shaw, 2006). As illustrated earlier, neither Dawn nor David had business qualifications or managerial experience prior to setting up their first business. Despite this, the pair expanded their business overseas and owned manufacturing facilities in the North of England. Dawn's fashion business progressed tremendously not because of gaining business qualification but due to David receiving design related training.

Paradoxically, the notion that business education and managerial experience are paramount to the entrepreneurial experience had an adverse influence on Dawn's performance. Far from enhancing her entrepreneurial experience, the managerial discourse has inhibited the progress of her businesses. The strong association between the entrepreneur and the rational manager which has been reinforced by the neo-classical growth theory (Bygrave, 1989b) led Dawn to doubt her abilities. Dawn believed she was not running her businesses properly because she was short of business qualifications. This lack of confidence prevented Dawn from understanding her business and finding solutions to emerging problems. This is reflected in Dawn's decision to close down her card shop and seek refuge in an MBA programme with the hope that it would offer her answers on how

entrepreneurship should be. In this sense, the metanarrative of economic growth and its affiliated managerial discourse contributed to Dawn's failures.

What is really intriguing that once Dawn mastered the managerial discourse she used it to oppress other entrepreneurs notably her ex-partner and her best friend as illustrated earlier. Dawn used the business language to establish her superiority over David and Sally. This reflects the role played by female entrepreneurs in perpetuating oppressive discourses and metanarratives.

Dawn's narrative also shows how the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical growth theory which promotes linearity, predictability and universality has contributed to her failure. Influenced by the metanarrative of economic growth which presents linear growth as a natural and universal phenomenon (Schumpeter, 1947a), Dawn expected her business to constantly grow providing she worked hard. This lack of preparation for downturns has exasperated her panic and led her to close down her first business. The negative influence of the metanarrative of economic growth has not, however, been limited to her first venture. The closing down of her fashion business has left a deep scar on Dawn's entrepreneurial experience that went beyond this business to include all her retailing experience. In this sense, the metanarrative of economic growth has also led to the closure of her two subsequent shops. Dawn had to learn the hard way that failures and downturn are an integral part of the entrepreneurial process (Schumpeter, 1943). Moreover, constrained by the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical economic growth discourse, Dawn, unlike Helen and Kate, did not realise until late in her journey that being flexible and open to changes was part of the process. What is more, the metanarrative of economic growth has increased Dawn's vulnerability in the marketplace. Similar to Helen, the association between good and wealthy entrepreneurs distracted Dawn from taking the right precautions when dealing with her wealthy French client.

Dawn's motivation seems to be highly complex. As discussed earlier, the majority of her oral history narrative was tilted towards the emphasis of management, growth and hedonistic motivation. However, alongside this motivation, Dawn was also driven by a number of non-hedonistic motivations

including social mobility, emancipation from the corporate world, the need for achievement and creativity. Moreover, the analysis of each of her businesses indicates that her motivations were not static but fluid and contextual.

Dawn's oral history narrative offers a different representation of gender power relations as she was the leading and oppressive figure in the story and not her male partner, David. Moreover, the division of roles between Dawn and David shows the fluidity of gender roles and identities as Dawn assumed the managerial and rational role while David carried out design related functions. These different representations put into question the stability of the meanings assigned to masculinity and femininity. What is more, the assumption that men and women behave differently as entrepreneurs has distorted her ability to reflect deeply on her experience. This was reflected in her analysis of the reasons why her second business did not survive for long.

Similar to Helen's story, Dawn's accounts of her business relationship with Sally bring to light the diversity of female entrepreneurs as well as gender power relations within same sex group. New forms of power relations also emerge in Dawn's story including the asymmetrical power distribution between big and small players in the market. As illustrated earlier, the rule of the market established by big players had shaped Dawn's fashion business as it formed a strong barrier to their expansion and forced the pair to have their own factory. These different forms of power relations have not been explored in the literature.

By bringing the role of the macro environment upon Dawn's experience, her story challenges the metanarrative of economic growth which attributes women's underperformance to their traits. In fact, Dawn's narrative illustrates the complexity of business failure which cannot be attributed to personal characteristics as assumed by female entrepreneurship studies (Carter et al., 2007). As analysed earlier, the closing down of Dawn's businesses was due to a web of factors including false expectations, the institution's role, power relations in the marketplace, personal circumstances and human relationships.

Moreover, Dawn's failure in one business could not be theorised as a standalone event as preached by the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical theory. Instead her failure should be conceptualised, in line with Schumpeter (1943), as part of an evolutionary process. This is reflected clearly in the relationship between the first and the second business as illustrated earlier. It is also reflected in the way Dawn used her own pitfalls and failure to warn new entrepreneurs against these potential minefields. In this way her failure becomes an important component of the success of other entrepreneurs.

As illustrated in chapter 2, mainstream studies assumed that operating in the retailing sector is problematic (Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2013). While Kate's narrative challenges the assumption that all work experience gained in the retail industry has to be poor, Dawn's fashion business challenges the notion that owning a business in the retail industry means operating on a small scale in a low performing venture.

Mainstream female entrepreneurship studies focused on the subordination of female entrepreneurs due to gender related stereotyping (Marlow and Patton, 2005). Dawn's oral history narrative indicates however that woman can be oppressed by other forms of stereotyping that are not necessarily gender related. As discussed earlier, currently in England, landlords/landladies are perceived to be unkind. This negative association has silenced Dawn's voice and forced her to promote herself in the interview as a caring person. In order to gain a better understanding of the entrepreneurial experience and the meaning associated with it, it is vital that female entrepreneurship studies broaden their scope to explore different types of stereotyping.

Dawn's experience has also been shaped by different emotions. Similar to Kate, Dawn felt that her first business was her 'baby'. Consequently she became overly protective and did not allow anyone to interfere with it even if it was in the interest of the business. While the negative consequences of this feeling have not been manifested in Kate's narrative, they are very elaborate in Dawn's story. As discussed earlier, this feeling was one of the reasons behind the closing down of the fashion business as it prevented Dawn from benefiting from the input of

potential investors. Moreover, by refusing to delegate her responsibilities, Dawn became so weary that she could not make sound decisions. Not knowing that it is very common amongst entrepreneurs, regardless of their gender, to express similar emotion towards their businesses (Cardon et al., 2005), Dawn attributed her behaviour to arrogance and immaturity. Given the prevalence of this feeling amongst entrepreneurs and its potential danger, it is important that female entrepreneurship studies explore this emotion in great depth and make entrepreneurs more aware of its presence.

An additional type of emotion emerging strongly in Dawn's narrative was her fear emanating from pregnancy. Although work-life balance features strongly in female entrepreneurship studies as illustrated in chapter 2 (Morris et al., 2006), the literature does not explore pregnancy and its effect on female entrepreneurs' experience. The neglect of this important stage in woman's life, whether by academics or by the media, has rendered Dawn's pregnancy a very scary experience. By silencing any discussions around pregnancy within entrepreneurial discourses, Dawn felt that pregnancy was totally alien to entrepreneurship and did not know how the two experiences could be reconciled. The tension resulting from this dilemma was one of the reasons leading Dawn to close down her business one week before her child was born. It is therefore important for the survival of women's businesses that both academics as well as policy makers integrate pregnancy into the entrepreneurial experience and start building a positive dialogue around this stage of woman's life.

While pregnancy has led Dawn to close her business, the birth of her child drove her to open a new business. The positive implication on the entrepreneurial experience of having children has not been addressed in female entrepreneurship studies. Indeed, as illustrated in chapter 2, the assumption underlying the literature is that having children as a female entrepreneur must be problematic (Shelton, 2006). The contrasting impact of Dawn's motherhood upon her entrepreneurial experience shows the fluidity and complexity of female entrepreneurs' emotions and motivations.

Dawn's narrative brings to the surface the importance of having fun during the entrepreneurial experience as it boosts the energy of the entrepreneurs and enhances their ability to cope with stress. Under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth which dismissed anything emotional as being feminine and thus irrelevant to entrepreneurship, the positive relation between having fun and business performance has not been explored in the literature.

Finally, in the same way that Kate and Helen found the move to self-employment to be intimidating, so did Dawn when she initially wanted to move from self-employment to employment. Dawn's anxiety emanated from her belief that her entrepreneurial experience would not be considered by potential employers. Dawn saw it therefore necessary to have the MBA badge on her CV. After being employed, Dawn found it hard to again become full time self-employed because she enjoyed having a regular income. At the same time, Dawn did not want to remain a full time employee and so she set up her property business to escape from an oppressive corporate world. While female entrepreneurship studies focused only on the move from the corporate world to self-employment (Carter and Shaw, 2006) Dawn's narrative illustrates the complexity and multifaceted relation that can link these two worlds together. It is therefore time for entrepreneurship studies to widen their horizons to explore this dynamic relation and its impact upon the entrepreneurial experience.

In summary, similar to Helen and Kate, Dawn's oral history narrative indicates that female entrepreneurs assumed multiple roles in relation to oppressive discourses. Moreover, her experience is line with the findings of the previous empirical chapters. The analysis of Dawn's narrative confirms the inability of the neo-classical growth theory to capture her messy experience and illustrates the relevance of Schumpeter's theorising with this regard.

By highlighting the misfit between the metanarrative of economic growth and the entrepreneurial experience and at the same time confirming Schumpeter's theorising as a lawful alternative, this chapter contributes to the destabilisation of this metanarrative.

## **10 Discussion**

### **10.1 Introduction**

As illustrated in chapter 1, the main objective of the thesis is to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth. This objective is achieved by destabilising the metanarrative of economic growth as the only true representation of female entrepreneurs' experience. In order to achieve the thesis's objective and aim, a number of questions have been addressed throughout the thesis (as figure 1 refers).

Chapters 7, 8 and 9, which offer the empirical contribution of this thesis focused on answering the following questions;

- What are the narratives of female entrepreneurs in relation to their entrepreneurial experience?
- Is there an alternative conceptualisation of the entrepreneurial experience?

These three previous chapters offered an in-depth critical analysis of three oral history narratives collected from three female entrepreneurs in the North of England over a period of almost two years. The analysis of the narratives was organised around two main themes:

1. The messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life.
2. The relationship and inter-relationship of power.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the theoretical findings which were summarised in chapter 5 (tables 2,3 and 4) together with the empirical findings of chapters 7 (Helen), 8 (Kate) and 9 (Dawn). Before I start the discussion of these findings, I would like to offer in the next section a brief summary of the research problem and how the adoption of oral history method and the detailed analysis of the narratives addressed a number of methodological flaws in female entrepreneurship studies.

## 10.2 Brief summary

After undertaking a critical analysis of mainstream literature on female entrepreneurs in chapter 2, it appears that the female entrepreneur has mainly been conceptualised in terms of her function in the economy as an economic agent who contributes to economic growth. Closely related to this definition is the assumption that female entrepreneurs underperform relative to their male counterparts (Holmquist and Carter, 2009). Despite the lack of empirical research supporting the underperformance hypothesis, it remains largely unchallenged in female entrepreneurship studies. The persistence of this hypothesis is explained by its close tie with official statistics which portray female entrepreneurs' performance as problematic (for example see BERR, 2008).

The findings of chapter 2 illustrate that under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth, the underperformance hypothesis became the departure point for the different research areas on female entrepreneurs (see figure 2). Consequently, the literature is constantly searching for those feminine attributes and "woman's issues" where her underperformance is believed to be grounded. In order to rectify her inferiority, female entrepreneurs are advised to acquire all the qualities and characteristics that successful men are assumed to possess. In short woman had to go through a process of masculinisation in order to be able to grow her business and be awarded the label of successful entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000).

The "problematic female behaviour" and the "successful male behaviour" are both perceived to be stable and universal. This is due to the scarcity of studies that analyse the process and contextual factors, and to the absence of longitudinal studies and the continuing supremacy of quantitative methods. As a result, the complexity of female entrepreneurs' experience has not been captured and the heterogeneity and diversity of women's experience have been silenced in the literature. Women are portrayed as one homogenous group whose entrepreneurial experience is mainly gender related (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

The adoption of an oral history research method which advocates the focus on a very small sample and the collection of more than one narrative over a period of time (Thompson, 2000) enabled this project to overcome these limitations. The method captured the diversity of female entrepreneurs' experience outside the hegemonic entrepreneurial discourse that promotes a masculine form of practice within entrepreneurship theory. As illustrated earlier, despite the emergence of common themes in the analysis, the way participants related to these themes varied substantially from one another. Another indication of the diversity of female entrepreneurs was reflected in the detailed analysis of Helen's account of her relationship with Mia. Helen emphasised how she and Mia took a dissimilar stance on their entrepreneurial endeavour and sought different outcomes from this journey. The same observation was noted in Dawn's narrative where she juxtaposed her vision of David's jewellery business against Sally's.

The detailed analysis of the narrative has also succeeded in shifting the research away from the focus on the individual. The study captures the complexity of the entrepreneurial process which is one of the main challenges facing researchers in entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2013). In line with the call of critical studies (see chapter 3), the analysis also brings to light the role of contextual factors and institutions in shaping the entrepreneurial experience and meanings. These points are elaborated further in the next section where I carry out a detailed discussion of the thesis's main findings.

### **10.3 Discussion**

As discussed in chapter 4, the metanarrative of economic growth is embedded in neo-classical economic growth theory. The theory, which is based on Newtonian mechanics, is biased towards stability, rationality and uniformity. The neo-classical growth theory, therefore, conceptualises growth as linear, progressive and predictable and the entrepreneur as a rational economic manager whose main motivation is profit maximisation (Bygrave, 1989a). This conceptualisation has reinforced the supremacy of the managerial discourse over entrepreneurship studies (Baumol 1968). The neo-classical theoretical foundation, including its theorising of both the entrepreneur and growth, has been critiqued by

Schumpeter. Schumpeter distinguishes the entrepreneur, whose main function is new combination, from the manager. He argues that the entrepreneurial process is messy, complex and non-linear. He stresses that failure and success are part of the process and that setbacks are usually beneficial in the long-term. Schumpeter adds that the entrepreneur does not operate in isolation from others and that his/her experience is shaped by the institutions. The review of economic studies also shows that the neo-classical growth theory dominates not only entrepreneurship studies, but also macro-economic policies. The supremacy of the neo-classical economic growth theory over these two fields has led Wennekers and Thurik (1999) to warn against the surge of anti-entrepreneurial culture that inhibits entrepreneurs.

The empirical findings are consistent with these theoretical findings. Similar to Schumpeter's theorising, the narratives indicate clearly that the entrepreneurial process is not linear and that downturns and failures are inseparable from the entrepreneurial experience. Helen summarises her experience as follows "*it changes all the time*" and Dawn describes the process as "*up and down and sideways*". Kate has, therefore, considered the ability to handle failure as one of the most important aspects of entrepreneurship. In fact, the narratives display a wide range of downturns, struggles, setbacks and failures. Helen, for instance, talks about how choosing Mia as a business partner has stifled her. Moreover, Helen does not think that Mia has contributed much to the development of the business in return for her 20% share in the business. Kate also mentions how things went wrong with the first business when she focused all her energy and time on establishing a new joint venture with two other partners. Dawn's experience involves a number of serious setbacks which led her to close down three businesses.

The participants' mistakes and failures are not however standalone events as claimed by the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical economic growth theory. Instead they are part of long-term business development as stressed by Schumpeter (1934). Kate and Helen confirm that these downturns have enhanced their learning and business performance. Dawn also points to how the

closing down of her fashion business has not been experienced as a complete waste. As illustrated in chapter 10, Dawn had a wealth of contacts and knowledge from her first business which enabled her to set up her second business. Moreover, by communicating her pitfalls to potential entrepreneurs, Dawn's failures played an important part in the potential success of other business owners.

Furthermore, the empirical findings expose the role of institutions in inhibiting participants' performance. Kate, for instance, lost most of her revenue as a result of the Coalition government cutting their funds to the North of England. The performance of Kate's business ventures has also been adversely affected by the time and energy she wasted on trying to comply with government's regulations and legislation. Helen's narrative brought to the fore the negative impact of employment law upon performance as the complexity of these laws had deterred business owners from hiring new employees. This is in line with Chittenden et al. (2003) who argued that tax regulations can have an adverse impact on business performance. At the same time, Dawn's story exposed the negative impact of industry stereotyping upon the experience of entrepreneurs operating in these industries. As discussed earlier, mainstream female entrepreneurship studies have silenced the role of institutions in shaping the entrepreneurial experience (Calás et al., 2009). Consequently, failures have been attributed to personal attributes which are believed to diverge from those of the successful male entrepreneur. The demystification of the oppressive role of institutions in shaping female entrepreneurs' experience is therefore paramount in addressing her subordination within the theory of entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2004b; Ahl and Nelson, 2010).

The narratives also laid bare the negative influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the entrepreneurial experience. The misleading promotion of wealthy entrepreneurs as good entrepreneurs has threatened Helen's business and impeded the survival of Dawn's fashion business. Judging businesses based on linear growth proved also to be misleading not only for the outside world but also for the entrepreneur himself/herself. As discussed earlier,

Dawn's fashion business was growing and expanding into manufacturing and selling overseas while it was suffering from serious weaknesses. This growth gave Dawn false indications that she was on the right track and thus hindered her ability to evaluate her business properly. The narratives also signal that on-going growth can have an adverse impact on the long-term survival of the business. As illustrated earlier, following Mia's departure, Helen shifted her focus from growing the business, to protecting it. This shift was vital for the long-term survival of her firm as it prevented Mia from poaching Helen's existing clients. In contrast, Dawn who did not halt her expansion and growth could not survive in the long-term. The fashion business could well have benefited massively if Dawn had taken the time to evaluate the business and rectify its weaknesses.

The promotion of linear progress as a universal phenomenon by the metanarrative of economic growth has also hindered the female entrepreneurs' performance. Blinkered by this myth, Dawn was certain her fashion business would continue to grow and progress as long as she worked hard. This misperception left her totally unprepared for any downturns. It was not until Dawn closed down three businesses and lost her confidence that she realised that failures and downturns were part of the entrepreneurial process. This was reflected in the advantages she noted about working with David twenty five years after their business separation; *“so basically we bring into the present moment what we'd learned from our mistakes in the past and our successes and failures in the past and bring the whole thing to a point where we could really understand the bigger picture and make it work.”*

The metanarrative of economic growth and its adjacent managerial discourse have also robbed the participants of their voices. Helen could not identify herself with the “wealthy male” entrepreneur who managed according to the axioms of the rational economic man. She, therefore, relied on the testimonies of others to prove that she belonged to the “entrepreneur species”. In order to qualify for the title, Kate, however, decided to wait for her second business to grow while Dawn narrated her story mainly from the perspectives of economic growth and managerial discourse. These perspectives were not necessarily a true reflection

of her inner voice, as towards the end of the second interview, a different story emerged with creativity at its core. The divergence of the participants' experience from these normative metanarratives and discourses has led them to believe they were at odds with other entrepreneurs and, therefore, they decided to suppress their own stories. Kate, for instance, did not share her experience with other entrepreneurs. Instead she continued to promote, through her training workshops, the managerial discourse and the metanarratives of economic growth. Dawn, on the other hand, thought that through studying for an MBA her experience would match the one promoted by the metanarrative of economic growth.

The analysis of the first theme; the messy and irregular experience of entrepreneurial life, brings into question the positive value that business education and managerial experience can bring to the entrepreneurial experience. First of all, far from being a purposeful act the three participants established their businesses in a very spontaneous way that was nicely summarised in Kate's quote "*I sort of fell into my business*". Moreover, none of them talked about writing up a business plan prior to the launch. In contrast, the take-off was very informal. Helen for instance made some phone calls and talked to some people to help her decide what to do while Dawn took her home-made garments to the market to see if she could sell them to her friends. In the same vein, Kate visited the tourist attraction centres that she knew previously to introduce her company and gain some feedback. As explained in the analysis of the narratives, spontaneity and informality were not limited to the launch of the business as it guided their whole entrepreneurial experience. Participants were also against long-term planning as it hindered their ability to respond swiftly to changes in their environment. In line with Schumpeter's (1934) writings, Helen also highlighted the difficulty of predicting the performance of new combinations in the market which added to the futility of long-term planning. The participants' narratives did not therefore allude to rationality, control, prediction and planning. Instead, they emphasised flexibility, being open, serendipity and intuition. Unfortunately, under the mechanistic and rational ideology reinforced by the neo-classical economic growth theory (Bygrave, 1989a) these notions and traits

which are important to practitioners' experience are silenced in mainstream literature as well as in entrepreneurship discourse. This is reflected in Dawn's below quote.

*“Dawn: Because I used to and still do to a large extent less so now make decisions on impulse, make decisions based on how I am feeling and you know we are told that you should think about things*

*Me: You are told?*

*Dawn: Yes business plans and you should like assess the market and take time.”*

This finding puts into question the literature which promotes business qualification and managerial experience as main contributory factors to the growth of women owned companies. As discussed in chapter 2 and 3, with the exception of Terjesen (2005) and Constantinidis et al. (2006), no studies have contested the positive relation between the managerial experience (and business education) and the performance of female entrepreneurs. The narratives of Helen and Kate, similar to Terjessen's (2005) findings, indicated that not all human capital gained in the corporate world was relevant in the context of self-employment. Kate's story also alerts us to experience from the university of life that informs her early businesses decisions, rather than a formal business education, as she obtained her degree three years after setting up her business. Her narrative was therefore consistent with Constantinidis et al. (2006) who found that gaining business qualification prior to establishing a company was not always necessary.

The empirical findings of this study, however, extend this research area further as they highlight the influence of the culture of the previous employer upon the entrepreneurial experience. As illustrated in chapter 7, this dimension, which has not been explored in female entrepreneurship studies, has strongly shaped Kate's experience. Kate's previous employer placed a high value on customer service. Furthermore, Kate's employer relocated staff frequently across various departments. This culture of customer service and extensive relocation shaped Kate's entrepreneurial experience. As an entrepreneur, Kate adopted the same value as her employer when dealing with her customers. At the same time, her

far-reaching role movement within the organisation turned her into a flexible entrepreneur. This quality was highly valuable to her business as it enabled her to engage swiftly with changes in her environment and to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Moreover, the findings of this study challenge the assumption that part time jobs are an impediment for the growth of women-owned businesses (Marlow and Patton, 2005). As illustrated earlier, the part time job that Kate occupied after leaving her corporate career was the main driver for her entrepreneurial endeavour. It is, therefore, important for mainstream literature to explore the influence of different forms of employment, other than full time senior positions. The study also challenges female entrepreneurship studies which dismiss retailing as a sector teeming with unskilled women and label any experience within this sector as poor (Carter and Shaw, 2006). In contrast, Kate's and Dawn's narratives bring to light the richness and the diversity of this sector.

The narratives also bring to light the negative impact of business education and managerial experience upon the entrepreneur's performance. This was illustrated in the scared feelings which dominated Helen's and Kate's transition into self-employment as they did not know how to bridge the gap between the structured corporate world and the unstructured one of entrepreneurship. Helen also noticed that entrepreneurs who occupied managerial roles prior to setting up their companies were not necessarily innovative or open to change as the corporate culture turned them into bureaucrats.

The adverse impact of the metanarrative of economic growth and the managerial discourse upon participants' performance raises questions regarding the soundness of the debate on female entrepreneurs' management style. Restrained by the underperformance hypothesis, mainstream studies focus narrowly on whether women adopt a feminine management style or follow a more masculine/entrepreneurial management style. As illustrated in chapter 2, a female management style is believed to hinder growth because it is informal and unstructured, while the masculine management style follows a more formal and structured approach and therefore enables business growth (Chaganti, 1986). The theoretical and empirical findings show how this debate is not only fruitless

but also misleading. As mentioned above, the participants' narratives contested the value of structure, formality and planning to the entrepreneurial experience. Moreover, the narratives illustrate the potentially negative impact that this discourse had upon performance.

The narrow focus on this debate has hindered the progress of this area of study tremendously. This is reflected in the myriad of topics and problems that have emerged in the narratives and have not yet been addressed in the literature. Helen for instance pointed to the entrepreneurs' struggles regarding the hiring of new employees. Helen said; *"it's the dilemma of any small business. It's the chicken and egg thing, what do you do, get the staff in first and hope that your ideas are right or do you do the idea and test it and then get the staff."* Helen also emphasised the conflict she faced between assuming the managerial and the innovator roles. Similar to Schumpeter's ideology, Helen believed that the latter was the main force driving her business forward so therefore she tried to delegate the management function to another person. This decision, however, had its own challenges and for years Helen could not find a concrete solution to this problem. Consequently, Helen ended up assuming the two roles. This led her to be seriously ill and forced her to change her working patterns. It is worth reiterating that (as discussed in chapter 2) female entrepreneurs are believed to adopt a management style that accords with their nurturing and caring nature. This includes motivating their employees through delegation. Helen's attitude towards delegation indicated how this interpretation could be misleading as her behaviour was mainly driven by her own interest. Moreover, Helen's reflection on her clients' surprise visits to her office for socialisation implies that nurturing relationship within an entrepreneurial context is not necessarily a universal women's practice.

As the neo-classical economic growth theory associates the entrepreneur with a hegemonic masculinity based on economic rationality and the non-articulation of feeling (Nelson and Winter, 1974), it comes as no surprise that the exploration of emotions has not received much attention in female entrepreneurship studies. In contrast with the literature, emotions have strongly shaped the entrepreneurial

experience of the participants. Dawn emphasised how fun was important to her and David as it fuelled their energy and helped them to overcome work related stress. In sharp contrast, Dawn's fear of pregnancy and motherhood, however, had a negative impact on her experience. The conflict between the discourse on womanhood and entrepreneurship (García and Welter, 2013) has silenced any discussion around pregnancy. Unable to reconcile both experiences, Dawn felt alienated by her pregnancy and ended up closing down her most beloved endeavour; the fashion business.

As discussed earlier, the scared feelings associated with setting up a business, forced Helen to look for a business partner who she did not need. This apprehensive feeling was not restricted to female entrepreneurs as Kate mentioned how Steve (who used to be her mentee before becoming her business partner) was also anxious about setting up his business. Helen's important decision to move offices was also triggered by emotions as she wanted to overcome the gloomy mood that governed her life following Mia's departure. Finally, Dawn's and Kate's narratives shed light on how much business owners could become attached to their ventures. As illustrated earlier, Kate decided not to grow her business so she remained the only person associated with this business. In contrast, Dawn grew her business but as she refused to get anyone involved, she failed to sustain it and eventually had to close it down.

Based on the above, it is clear that emotions form an integral part of the entrepreneurial experience regardless of the gender of the entrepreneur. The omission of this topic from the literature is, therefore, a major gap in the literature and one that needs addressing. It is also important for researchers as well as policy makers to acknowledge the importance of emotions and raise the awareness of entrepreneurs about these various feelings and their implications upon the long-term survival of the business.

Informed by postmodern feminist epistemology, the analysis brings to the surface a new level of complexity as it captures the fluidity of the entrepreneurial experience and its contradictory meanings. Kate's narrative for instance presented two distinctive entrepreneurial experiences. The first one was the story

of an entrepreneur who loved her company so much and wanted to keep it small so she could maintain full control over it without having to go through the pain of sharing it with another person. The second story was of a detached entrepreneur who sought to run a high growth company with various business partners. Helen also allocated different meanings to her business relationship with Mia. Helen portrayed Mia as a dear friend, a hard worker business partner and a companion in the scary journey of entrepreneurship. This relationship took a different meaning after Mia's departure when Helen portrayed her as a sneaky enemy, a great barrier and a waste of resources. The same observation was noted in the meanings Dawn attributed to her relationship with David. In some parts of her story, Dawn presented David as a talented person whose creativity added lots of value to their entrepreneurial experience. On other occasions, he was presented as a low skilled person and a burden.

The narratives also highlight the fluidity of traits. As illustrated in chapter 10, risk taking had different meanings in Dawn's story depending on which perspective she was talking from. In her account on the property business, Dawn considered this business not to be risky because of her access to good quality tenants. However, when she evaluated the property company in terms of the required finance and expertise, the business became highly risky. The reason was that Dawn had to invest a huge amount of money in a sector that she did not know much about. Helen's reflection on how she was becoming more of a risk taker while Mia was getting more risk-averse was another indication of the fluidity of traits.

The analysis also points to the fluidity and the complexity of entrepreneurs' motivations. Female entrepreneurship studies associated female entrepreneurs mainly with two motives; flexibility and the escape from job constraints (Carter and Shaw, 2006; Shelton, 2006). Under the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth, these two motives have been presented as an explanation for women's alleged underperformance (Morris et al., 2006). The oral history narratives contested the importance of flexibility to the entrepreneurial experience as Helen and Kate occupied very senior positions in their corporations before turning into self-employment. Moreover, the findings challenged the

assumption that female entrepreneurs gave up their career to escape the constraints of the job market. Helen's narrative indicated that some women instead of giving up they fought the system using their agencies.

In this study all three participants were driven by different inner forces such as the need to: be creative and develop new things; add value to the customers; have a sense of achievement; fill in a void in life; escape from corporate culture; be independent; and achieve social mobility. Although, hedonistic motivation was emphasised in Dawn's narrative, its weight was played down towards the end of her interview in favour of creativity. These motives exhibited by the narrators were referred to in the literature as the pull factors. These factors (discussed in chapter 2) - which are believed to be the main driver for growth - have rarely been explored in female entrepreneurship studies (see for example Orhan and Scott, 2001). The reason behind this limited exploration is that woman's performance is perceived to be problematic and therefore they can only be pushed into entrepreneurship by factors such as flexibility and job constraints.

Furthermore, in line with Mallon and Cohen (2001), the participants' motives have been associated with a sense of emancipation. Helen's entrepreneurial experience, in contrast with her corporate career, offered her the freedom to innovate while Dawn through her property business gained her independence from the oppressive organisational culture. Kate's first venture also empowered her as it offered her an escape route from the void resulting from the growing up of her children. The celebration of different emancipatory meanings is in line with the critical, feminist and postmodern lens governing this study (Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) – discussed in chapter 6). Furthermore, in line with Mallon and Cohen (2001) who noted that participants emancipating the oppression of the corporate world had a sense of pride and heroism, Dawn celebrated her property business as it gave her; *“the freedom to make decisions, to rise and fall on my own decisions and do my own things.”*

Finally, and as explored through these empirical chapters, the findings regarding the participants' motivation are consistent with Schumpeter's theorising (see table 6 below).

**Table 6: Schumpeter's theorising and participants' motivations**

Schumpeter's conceptualisation of the entrepreneur's motives	The narrators' motivations
The dream to found a private kingdom which is associated with a strong sensation of power and independence such as social distinction.	<p><i>Dawn</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social mobility (the fashion business)</li> <li>- freedom from the corporate culture and being independent (the property business).</li> </ul> <p><i>Kate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the need to fill in a void in her life (her first venture).</li> </ul>
The second motive is the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others and to succeed for the sake of it.	<p><i>Dawn</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prove to her mum that she can succeed on her own terms (fashion business).</li> </ul> <p><i>Helen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- this is evident in her narrative notably when she contrasts her experience against Mia.</li> </ul>
The motive of getting things done, exercising one's energy and the joy of creating as the entrepreneur likes to venture and to seek out difficulties.	<p>Dawn, Kate, Helen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- this motive was manifested in the narratives of the three participants.</li> </ul>

Critical theorists accused Schumpeter of gendering entrepreneurship by reinforcing the image of the entrepreneur as a heroic male. His conceptualisation of the entrepreneur's motivation was one of the main reasons behind this critique. After re-visiting Schumpeter's theories in chapter 4, I illustrated that the interpretation of his work was taken out of context. Given the participants' motivations are in line with his theorising, the empirical findings provide further indication that Schumpeter's conceptualisation is relevant to the entrepreneur regardless of gender.

The analytical lens adopted in this study has also captured the fluidity of gender identity which is an important step when addressing women's subordination within the theory of entrepreneurship (discussed in chapter 3). In line with the studies reviewed in chapter 3 including; Bruni et al. (2004b), Lewis (2006), Nadin (2007), Welch et al. (2008) and García and Welter (2013), the oral history

narratives indicated the dynamic nature of gender identity. The participants for instance associated and disassociated themselves with the discourse of womanhood depending on the context. Dawn emphasised her image as a caring person when she talked about the property business as she sought to detach herself from the negative stereotyping of landlords/ladies. On other occasions, she distanced herself from the womanhood discourse to prove that, unlike Sally who is a “*mumentrepreneur*”, she is a “true” entrepreneur who can put the jewellery business on the right track for growth.

Kate, on the other hand, associated herself with the womanhood discourse to stress that it was her husband and not herself the main breadwinner. This association freed her from any financial obligations and gave her the ability to pick her customers and to launch a second company. However, in order to establish herself as the expert and the knower entrepreneur who can guide the others, Kate in line with Dawn, associated herself with the gendered image of the rational economic entrepreneur. Helen followed the same path in terms of using these gendered discourses to exclude Mia from entrepreneurship and to establish her superiority over the rest of women because unlike them she was not emotional and thus fit for work.

In summary, this critical inquiry has not been limited to the celebration of the diversity and fluidity of female entrepreneurs’ experience and the inclusion of their voices. The study pointed to how the entrepreneurial experience as well as gender identity are shaped by power and social relations. The study has also explored participants’ agency and how female entrepreneurs reproduce and at the same time resist existing power and social relations (Bourne, 2010).

Before moving to the final chapter of the thesis, I conclude this discussion with a brief summary.

#### **10.4 Conclusion**

The theoretical and the empirical findings of this study are both consistent and complementary with each other. Both findings contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs by destabilising the metanarrative of economic growth.

Similar to the theoretical findings, the oral history narratives indicate the inability of the neo-classical growth theory to represent and evaluate the entrepreneurial experience. The participants' entrepreneurial experience is messy and their performance is non-linear as they have all faced setbacks and downturns. In contrast with the metanarrative of economic growth which does not celebrate failure, Schumpeter acknowledges the importance of failure to the entrepreneurial experience and to the long-term development of the business. The narratives are therefore better represented by Schumpeter theorising of the entrepreneur.

Furthermore, the narratives of female entrepreneurs contribute to the destabilisation of the metanarrative of economic growth. The participants' stories challenge a large number of the "woman's issues" that were highlighted in the literature and used as an explanation for her underperformance (see figure 2). In this way, the adoption of oral history narratives has offered a better understanding of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2007).

In addition to adding new insights into the experience of the entrepreneur, the analytic process has diverted the focus of the study away from the individual. By establishing a link between the personal experience and the macro environment, oral history narratives show how female entrepreneur's experience is shaped by a web of factors and is context dependent. Far from the psychological reductionism that governs female entrepreneurship studies, the analysis exposes the role of the institution in shaping the entrepreneur's experience including his/her poor performance. The narratives point in particular to the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth in inhibiting the entrepreneur's performance. The neo-classical growth theory has reinforced a number of assumptions, including the linearity of growth, that on-going growth is always positive and that wealthy entrepreneurs are necessarily good entrepreneurs. As mentioned earlier, these assumptions have misled the research participants.

The managerial discourse, reinforced by the neo-classical growth theory, does not also reflect the participants' experience as none of them use business plans or rely on long-term planning. On the contrary, planning is seen as an impediment

that hinders the ability to respond swiftly to environmental changes. The entrepreneurial process is guided more by serendipity and spontaneity. The analysis also illustrates that the more the entrepreneurial experience is governed by the neo-classical economic growth theory and its rational ideology, the less likely he/she will succeed.

Despite the irrelevance of economic growth and managerial discourses to the narrators' experience, they are nevertheless perceived to be the "truth" or the norm. The gap, between the participants' narratives and these metanarratives, has negatively influenced their confidence and performance, and led them to silence their stories. This is in line with Wennekers and Thurik (1999) who warn that the association of the entrepreneur with the neo-classical economic growth theory disseminates an anti-entrepreneurial culture. Within this culture, mechanistic and rational behaviour becomes the norm and anything that goes against it is considered to be problematic.

The analytic process and the oral history narratives also bring to light the negative impact of the neo-classical economic growth theory upon the conceptualisation of female entrepreneur's experience. By diverting the attention of researchers towards business growth and the underperformance hypothesis, the neo-classical theory has foreclosed this area of study to vital research questions. This is a major shortfall in female entrepreneurship studies as academics can be of great support to entrepreneurs who are currently left on their own to try to figure out how best to deal with the upheaval of the entrepreneurial process.

The oral history method has also enabled this study to incorporate female entrepreneurs' voices which have largely been silenced in the literature by the metanarrative of economic growth. According to the postmodern feminist epistemology guiding this study, this inclusion is crucial for addressing imbalanced power relations (Anderson, 2011). Furthermore, by acknowledging the multiplicity of stories while highlighting the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth in shaping these stories, the analysis process destabilises this oppressive narrative (Saukko, 2000)

Finally, as this study holds a critical stance, the analysis has allocated a special attention to female entrepreneur's agency to assess whether she is free to tell her story or she is mainly drawing on a "*limited repertoire of available metanarratives*" (Steyaert, 2007, p.743). Consequently, the analysis went beyond the consciously articulated events, descriptions and explanations to explore the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience as well as the contradictions and the hidden (Steyaert, 2007). In this sense, the oral history narratives have been "*both scholarly and activist enterprise that can advance knowledge but also empower people and contribute to social change*" (Armitage and Gluck, 1998, p.3). The narratives formed an important part of the political process as each story became "*central to the understanding of the working of...politics*" (Plummer, 1995, p.145).

The next chapter presents the final conclusion of this thesis. However, in line with Plummer (1995), I will call the following chapter "no conclusion". This is to emphasise that this study is an exploratory study and an introductory inquiry that does not make any claim of being complete.

## **11 No conclusion**

### **11.1 Introduction**

I start this chapter by discussing how the thesis's objective has been achieved. This is followed by a presentation of the study's main contributions to knowledge. I will then consider the implications of the thesis's findings for both policy makers and practitioners. The chapter concludes by assessing the limitations of the study, presenting an account on self-reflexivity and offering recommendations for future research.

### **11.2 Returning to the research objectives**

The objective of this exploratory study is to emancipate female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth. In order to achieve this objective the thesis's main aim was to destabilise the metanarrative of economic growth theoretically and empirically. However, in order to avoid making grandiose claims that are not founded, the objective and aim of this critical inquiry have been addressed using a multidisciplinary approach (Scott, 2007).

In the first part of the thesis (chapters 1 to 5), I explored mainstream female entrepreneurship studies, critical studies on female entrepreneurs and economic studies including the re-visiting of Schumpeter's theorising. In these chapters, I destabilised the metanarrative of economic growth by showing how its theoretical foundation is inconsistent with the experience of the entrepreneur. This was achieved by exposing first the oppressive role of the metanarrative of economic growth. The critical analysis of female entrepreneurship studies (chapter 2) elaborated how the metanarrative has subordinated female entrepreneurs by establishing in the literature a dichotomy of successful male entrepreneur versus an unsuccessful female entrepreneur.

At the same time, the exploration of economic studies contested the assumption that the metanarrative of economic growth is universal. The review of these studies revealed the embeddedness of the metanarrative in neo-classical economic growth theory. What is more, far from being a true reflection of the

entrepreneurial experience, the theory is accused of inhibiting entrepreneurship (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). The theoretical foundation of the neo-classical growth theory, which is based on a mechanistic and rational ideology, cannot incorporate the complex and dynamic experience of the entrepreneur (Bygrave, 1993). Consequently, the theory conceptualises the entrepreneur as a rational economic manager which explains the supremacy of the managerial discourse over entrepreneurship studies including the literature on female entrepreneurs (Baumol, 1968).

Schumpeter's theories are presented in economic studies as a substitute to the neo-classical economic growth theory (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). Schumpeter conceptualises the entrepreneur as an innovator whose experience is dynamic, unpredictable and non-linear. He rejects the stability of the entrepreneur's environment advocated by the neo-classical theory and acknowledges the importance of the context in shaping the entrepreneurial experience. In order to explore the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience, Schumpeter calls for the use of historical analysis including longitudinal studies. He blames the neo-classical theory for encouraging the adoption of causal research. According to Schumpeter, this research method, which still dominates entrepreneurship studies (Gartner, 2013), leads researchers astray as it cannot encapsulate the turmoil of the entrepreneurial experience and process.

Furthermore, contrary to feminist led critiques which attack Schumpeter for gendering the theory of entrepreneurship, the re-visiting of his work indicates that his theorising addresses many of the concerns raised by critical studies. Schumpeter for instance, in line with critical theorists, attacks the narrow focus of the analysis on the individual entrepreneur, the overlooking of the institutional and environmental influence upon the entrepreneurial experience and the adoption of causal research method. All these points, as elaborated in chapters 3 and 4, have been blamed by critical theorists for maintaining the subordination of female entrepreneurs and for hindering the progress of entrepreneurship studies. Given the above, I argued in this study that Schumpeter's theorising can

contribute to the emancipation of female entrepreneurs from the metanarrative of economic growth; the latter is embedded in the neo-classical growth theory.

In the second part of the thesis; chapters 6 to 9, I destabilised the metanarrative of economic growth by firstly including the voices of female entrepreneurs which have largely been excluded from the literature. This was achieved by collecting oral history narratives. Secondly, the narratives captured the diversity of female entrepreneurs' experience which challenged the oppressive homogeneity imposed by the metanarrative of economic growth. Thirdly, the findings questioned existing knowledge about female entrepreneurs notably the justifications regarding her alleged underperformance. Fourthly, the study challenged the psychological reductionism governing female entrepreneurship studies as the participants highlighted the role of the institutions in shaping their experience. Finally the narratives illustrated the negative influence of the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical growth theory upon the entrepreneurial experience.

In the next section, I present the thesis's main contribution to knowledge.

### **11.3 Research contributions**

The thesis has contributed to the existing body of knowledge in four ways.

#### **11.3.1 Contribution to theory**

The study has made a number of theoretical contributions to female entrepreneurship studies. First of all the thesis offers an epistemological contribution to female entrepreneurship studies which remain largely dominated by positivism. Furthermore the adoption of a critical feminist and postmodern analytical lens constitutes a major contribution to entrepreneurship studies as the adoption of these three perspectives remains at its infancy (Calás et al., 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The embracing of this epistemological stance and analytical framework has enabled this study to question accepted knowledge about female entrepreneurs and opened the literature to new research questions. The review of critical studies on female entrepreneurs, presented in chapter 3 also adds to the

thesis's theoretical contribution as this body of literature has not been analysed in such depth beforehand.

Furthermore, the study explored in great depth the influence of the metanarrative of economic growth upon the subordination of female entrepreneurs. This exploration, which has not been carried out beforehand (Ahl, 2006), indicates how the metanarrative has reinforced the image of the female entrepreneur as problematic and inferior to her male counterpart. In chapter 2, the thesis for instance contested the claim that the theme of business performance, which is equated to growth, is a standalone and neutral theme as presented in previous literature reviews. The study argued that due to the metanarrative of economic growth, this theme dominates all research areas on female entrepreneurs and that the underperformance hypothesis is the departure point for all female entrepreneurship studies (see figure 2). The thesis has also illustrated how by referring the underperformance to the presence of "women's issues", the literature has silenced the negative influence of the metanarrative of economic growth. The supremacy of both positivism and causal research has maintained the authority of the metanarrative of economic growth.

The theoretical contribution of the thesis has not been limited to the demystification of the role of the metanarrative of economic growth in subordinating female entrepreneurs. The thesis went further as it challenged the metanarrative's claim for being the only true representation of the entrepreneurial experience. This has been achieved by showing that the roots of the metanarrative lie in the neo-classical economic growth theory. The exploration of economic studies highlighted how the theoretical foundation of the neo-classical theory excluded the entrepreneur from its models and turned him/her into a rational economic manager. In this sense, the thesis exposed the lack of theoretical synergy between the neo-classical economic theory and the conceptualisation of the entrepreneur.

This revelation clarified why the entrepreneur has been associated with a hegemonic rational masculinity that excludes both men and women (Nelson and Winter, 1974). It has also deciphered the role played by the neo-classical growth

theory in reinforcing the managerial discourse, objectivism and quantitative methods in entrepreneurship studies. The exploration of economic studies also brought to light the supremacy of the neo-classical theory not only over entrepreneurship studies but over macroeconomic policies as well (Kirchhoff, 1991; Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). This disclosure explained the observation noted in chapter 2 regarding the close link between female entrepreneurship studies and official statistics as well as the lack of empirical studies that challenged the underperformance hypothesis.

At the same time, the re-visiting of Schumpeter's work challenged the current wisdom regarding his role in subordinating female entrepreneurs. The study brings to the fore a new interpretation of Schumpeter's theories that differs from the one offered by critical studies on female entrepreneurs. The analysis of Schumpeter's work indicates that he has strongly attacked the influence of the neo-classical economic growth theory upon entrepreneurship studies. Therefore, instead of critiquing Schumpeter for gendering the theory of entrepreneurship (Ogbor, 2000; Bruni et al., 2004b; Ahl, 2006), this thesis argues that his theorising can emancipate female entrepreneurs from the gendered metanarrative of (neo-classical) economic growth. Furthermore, Schumpeter's theorising addresses many of the concerns raised by critical entrepreneurship studies. As discussed in chapter 4, his theories for instance pave the way for entrepreneurship studies, including female entrepreneurship studies, to shift their focus away from the individual entrepreneur to explore the context and the turmoil of the entrepreneurial experience. The adoption of his theories can, therefore, open the horizon for new conceptualisation of the entrepreneur and his/her experience regardless of his/her gender. This study, therefore, offers a theoretical contribution to entrepreneurship studies in general.

Furthermore, the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach with view to liberate female entrepreneurs is in line with recent calls made by critical theorists who consider this approach to be paramount for the progress of entrepreneurship studies. The reason is that this move not only brings the voices of those who

have been marginalised by mainstream studies but also opens the door for new research methodologies that break away from positivism (Gartner, 2013).

In summary, the thesis pushes the boundaries of theory development. The study does not only question the theoretical foundation of the dominant neo- classical economic growth theory and destabilises its relation with the entrepreneurial experience but also presents Schumpeter's theorising as an alternative theoretical position (Whetten, 1989).

### **11.3.2 Contribution to research methodology**

The adoption of narrative inquiry and an oral history method constitute an important contribution to entrepreneurship studies in general. This gap is reflected in Gartner's (2007) call for researchers to adopt narrative approach by stressing that; *an understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship begs for the narrative mode*" (p.622).

Furthermore, the adoption of an oral history method opens the door for more critical studies to challenge the authority of dominant discourses and ideologies within entrepreneurship. In this study, the collection of oral history narratives proved successful in breaking the silence around female entrepreneurs as a marginalised group. Furthermore, by enabling stories to be told from below, the marginalised level, and not from above; the institutional and elite level, the mainstream story of a problematic female entrepreneur has been challenged (Plummer, 1995).

The way the analysis of the oral history narratives has been carried out in this study offered an innovative way to overcome the limitation of narrative inquiry in terms of maintaining the focus on the individual (Steyaert, 2007). This concern was raised again in the conference held in Leeds 2013 by European Tradition in Entrepreneurship. As discussed in chapters 6 to 10, the analysis carried out in this study managed to capture the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience and process as well as the fluidity of gender. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted the multiple roles played by the participants in relation to oppressive discourses and narratives.

By adopting the oral history method in a business context, the study's contribution extends to include oral history studies where projects on entrepreneurship, management and organisation remain a scarcity (Perks, 2010; Keulen and Kroeze, 2012). Thus, by collecting oral history narratives from female entrepreneurs in the UK, the current study addresses an important gap in oral history literature as well as in entrepreneurship studies.

### **11.3.3 Empirical contribution**

The study incorporates female entrepreneurs' voices, which have largely been silenced in the literature due to the metanarrative of economic growth. This is an important step when addressing imbalanced power relations (Ogbor, 2000). As illustrated in chapter 6, the findings have shed new light into the experience and practices of female entrepreneurs. This new knowledge challenges the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs as reinforced by the "neo-classical" economic growth theory. Furthermore the study succeeded in shifting the analysis from the individual level to the business and macro levels and drew attention to the complexity of the entrepreneurial experience. The findings have also captured the diversity of female entrepreneurs outside the hegemonic entrepreneurial discourse that promotes a masculine form of practice within entrepreneurship theory. These nuanced accounts of female entrepreneurs' experience destroy the false dichotomy of successful male entrepreneur versus an unsuccessful female entrepreneur.

Guided by a critical, feminist and postmodern lens, the analysis adds to critical entrepreneurship studies on female entrepreneurs as it showed that the latter are not necessarily subordinated by oppressive institutions. On numerous occasions, the participants used their agencies to resist oppressive institutional arrangements and discourses.

In this sense, the thesis's findings shift the rhetoric on female entrepreneurs. The story is no longer of a problematic woman who is struggling to grow her business due to her divergence from male entrepreneurs but a story of power, gender and an oppressive metanarrative that inhibits the entrepreneurial experience

(Plummer, 1995). In this sense, the findings change our understanding of entrepreneurs and of entrepreneurship.

In the next section I will discuss the research implications.

## **11.4 Research implications**

### **11.4.1 Implication for practitioners**

The research empowers entrepreneurs in different ways. The destabilisation of the metanarrative of economic growth will open up the space for entrepreneurs to evaluate their experience through approaches that are based on their own storied accounts. The celebration of the diversity of the entrepreneurs and the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of entrepreneurial stories will make entrepreneurs more confident as they will develop a better appreciation of their experience. Furthermore, entrepreneurs' vulnerability in the marketplace will be reduced when they become aware of the negative influence that the metanarrative of economic growth and the managerial discourse hold upon their performance.

In the next section, I discuss the research implications for policy makers.

### **11.4.2 Research implications for policy makers, official bodies and funding agencies**

The research is of value to policy makers as it generates new knowledge and insights that aim to incorporate the current social and economic changes in the context of female entrepreneurs. These changes can no longer be sustained by the neo-classical economic growth theory especially in the current economic climate. This is evident in the increasing number of calls and movements against the neo-classical theory which governments can no longer ignore. For instance, this year a large number of students of economics in Manchester have risen against the teaching of the neo-classical economic theory because it failed to predict or deal with the current economic crash. Similar movements took place in the University of Cambridge over the last few years (Guardian, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that the strong link promoted by the government between the successful entrepreneur on one hand and linear growth has inhibited entrepreneurs whose experience did not match this image. It is important therefore for governments to change the mainstream discourse to incorporate the experience of the majority of the entrepreneurs.

The study offers also guidance for governmental bodies and any agencies offering support and guidance for female entrepreneurs. Based on the findings of this study, these agencies should incorporate the diversity of female entrepreneurs' aspiration and experience as opposed to continuing to force upon them ready-made programmes and toolkits that inhibit them as opposed to empowering or guiding them.

In the next section, I discuss the limitations of this study.

### **11.5 Limitations of the study**

As discussed in chapter 3, postmodern feminist epistemology has been attacked for its inability to mobilise any political change because it destabilises the concept of woman. This limitation is not however without debate as it has been rejected by writers such as Gibson-Graham (1994) who stressed that power is manifested everywhere, including the production of knowledge, whether or not there is a unified identity. Furthermore, by bringing to the surface the presence of multiple positions and exposing the conflict between them, postmodernism threatens dominant ideologies and discourses by enabling the emergence of new liberatory discourses. This is true of this study. As illustrated earlier, the participants in this study hold contradictory positions in relation to the metanarrative of economic growth and the allied managerial discourse. By raising awareness of the presence of these different stances, a tension will be created amongst the community of female entrepreneurs. This tension is empowering as it will eventually lead to the development of new forms of resistance against these dominant discourses. Furthermore, postmodern epistemology in this study enabled the exploration of the diversity of female entrepreneurs. This exploration has empowered women politically by liberating

them from the oppression of a homogeneity that has been imposed on them by the gendered growth discourse (Stewart, 1994).

On the other hand, the empirical findings of this study have their own limitations. Oral history narratives collected in the thesis are only the outcome of a certain context and interactions. The narratives have been shaped by the current social, material and ideological context of the UK. The findings of this thesis cannot therefore be generalised to the wider community of female entrepreneurs.

Despite these limitations, the oral history narratives collected in this study offered invaluable contribution as they provided an entry point to the larger social and economic environment of female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, by moving female entrepreneurs out of silence, the collected stories open the door for more voices to be heard. These stories can eventually lead to a political change by facilitating the development of a public language that incorporates all those who have been excluded by the metanarrative of economic growth (Plummer, 1995). Furthermore, the collected narratives offered new insights into the experience of female entrepreneurs which practitioners, researchers and policy makers can use (Armitage and Gluck, 1998).

Another potential limitation of the study is the interpretation of the findings as well as my influence as a researcher. These two points are however discussed further in the next section on self-reflexivity.

## **11.6 Self-reflexivity**

Self-reflexivity is an integral part of this thesis given the fact that it is governed by a postmodern feminist epistemology. This is because within this epistemology, I am not a detached researcher who, as claimed by the positivistic perspective, is looking to discover meanings. On the contrary, as a postmodern social researcher, I acknowledge my participation in the construction of meanings (Crotty, 2009; Creswell, 2007). My social and political location has, therefore, influenced the whole research process (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). For instance, my political stance in terms of liberating female entrepreneurs from the oppression of the metanarrative of economic growth has influenced the research

process as illustrated in figure 1 (Gibson-Graham, 1994). My objective in terms of delegitimising the metanarrative's claim for "truth" and opening up the space for alternative discourses on female entrepreneurs' experience has also influenced the choice of research questions (Anderson, 2011).

My influence on the research was not, however, without limitations. As discussed in chapter 6, in order to achieve the study's liberatory objective, it was important for the participants' voices to be included. Therefore, I have approached this research as a bricoleur (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This means that I undertook the research with an open spirit which enabled me to capture emerging meanings (Crotty, 2009). Furthermore, I analysed the data by trying to the best of my abilities to reinterpret the meanings of female entrepreneurs' experience away from the conventional interpretation that dominates the literature. Consequently, the analysis was guided by emerging themes and ideas (Gilgun, 2005).

It is, however, important to mention that in line with the postmodern feminist epistemology followed in this study, the interpretation offered in this study is not part of an oppressive discourse that forecloses all other possibilities. Instead, it is a liberatory one that acknowledges its limitations, its partiality and its contextuality (Creswell, 2007). Thus the interpretation of the findings is not perceived to be the only right story. It does not enjoy any privileged status; it is just one possible narration from many other representations (Czarniawska, 2004).

### **11.7 Future research**

The outcome of this research addresses the marginalisation of female entrepreneurs from the theory of entrepreneurship and offers new insight on the meanings of their entrepreneurial experience. In this sense, the research, as envisaged by Lather (1991) (cited in Creswell, 2007), addresses the invisibility and the misrepresentation of female entrepreneurs' experience in the literature and opens the door for more research projects that better reflect the diversity of their experience. This study has also presented Schumpeter's theorising as an emancipatory alternative for the conceptualisation of female entrepreneurs. The

theoretical and empirical findings with this study offer opportunities for researchers to replicate them in different contexts including that of male entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 10, by getting closer to the participants, the thesis bridges the gap between practice and theory. The discussion chapter has therefore raised a large number of research questions that need to be addressed in the future. This includes further exploration of the dilemmas facing entrepreneurs, the influence of emotions upon the entrepreneurial experience and the importance of serendipity and intuition. Most importantly however, the thesis opens a dialogue around the negative influence of the myth of linear economic growth and the managerial discourse upon entrepreneurs' performance. The thesis also brings to the surface the phenomenon of an anti-entrepreneurial cultural and the role of the neo-classical growth theory in reinforcing it. These findings should be further explored. Further studies can also be enriched by collecting more stories that include those who did not survive as this will offer more insights into the factors inhibiting entrepreneurs.

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