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The Older Entrepreneurial Self: Intersecting Identities of Older Women Entrepreneurs

Keywords: Enterprise, Entrepreneurship, Gender

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to contribute to the developing literature on entrepreneurship and identity by exploring the multidimensionality of older (50+) British women entrepreneurs' (WE) identity. By using *Positionality* as a lens, greater insight into the complexity of the lived multiple identities of older WEs is explored.

Methodology: 12 in-depth qualitative interviews took place throughout the UK seeking to capture the various experiences of how older women engage with intersecting discourses surrounding enterprise culture and ageing whilst constructing their identities. Empirical data was subject to thematic analysis.

Findings: Overall, findings evidence the outcomes of these intersecting dimensions are largely positive and demonstrate the life enhancing benefits of these overlaps. Whilst tension was evidenced between age and how these WE perceive their entrepreneurial identities, as well as some constraints between identity as 'mother' and 'entrepreneur', overall synergy was found between the intersection of older WEs' social identities and their entrepreneurial identity. It must be noted, however, that this synergy was heavily reliant on context and stage of life for these women.

Research Implications: This paper challenges the traditional discourse of entrepreneurship, which produces a homogenous view of entrepreneurs and omits key historical and social variables in the process of identity formation. The current paper adds to increasing calls to develop more sophisticated ways of measuring and understanding entrepreneurship and its impacts, moving away from an agency agenda and pursuing lines of enquiry that examine entrepreneurship as a process in contexts that are underpinned by both agency and external factors.

Introduction

Enterprise discourse prescribes an ideal universal identity, the 'enterprising self' and represents the entrepreneur as a fixed economic entity with premise given to agency and self-determination and a lack of consideration placed on structural and historical contextual influence (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008). Chasserio *et al.* (2014) argue that this 'disembodied' vision of what constitutes an entrepreneur cannot be applied to women entrepreneurs (WE) as easily, as previous research underlines the importance of socio-historical circumstances (the normative system) in the process of forming their identity (Diaz Garcia and Welter, 2013; Shaw *et al.*, 2009). In particular, within the WE literature there is a lack of critical investigation of how the context of age or life stage shapes the identity of WE and how these discourses intersect with other identity categories (Mallett and Wapshott, 2015).

Answering calls by authors such as Ahl (2006) and Brush *et al.* (2009), this paper seeks to improve understanding of the identity process of WEs, in particular older WEs, through the consideration of both social and historical components and how they influence or intersect with their other social identities. The study echoes calls throughout the most recent literature to move away from the agency agenda and pursue lines of enquiry that examine entrepreneurship as a process in contexts that are underpinned by both agency and external factors (Anderson, 2015; Berglund, 2007; Stirzaker and Galloway, 2017). By using *Positionality* as a lens, greater insight into the complexity of the lived multiple identities of older WEs is explored, further contesting the notion of giving agency primacy and placing importance on context and structural influence in the attempt to understand how older WEs construct their identities. This article therefore has two broad aims: to contribute to the developing literature on entrepreneurship and identity by exploring the multidimensionality of older (50+) British women entrepreneurs' (WE) identity and to explore the utility and value of Positionality in understanding entrepreneurial identity in context.

The next section provides a brief overview of the literature related to individual identity and multiple social identities. Women's entrepreneurial identity is then discussed, in particular in the context of the traditional male construct of entrepreneurial identity. Next, the framework of Intersectionality and Positionality is explored which allows us to view identity as a process and takes into consideration important spatial and contextual dimensions (Essers, 2009). From the literature review, a central research gap emerges, concerning a lack of evidence-based enquiry about the drivers, experiences of entrepreneurship and how the entrepreneurial identity amongst older women is formed. The section that follows thus describes the methodology employed to explore this subject empirically through the analysis of 12 in-depth qualitative interviews, focus is placed on the intersection of gender, age, and multiple social identities, in forming their 'entrepreneurial self' and the influence socio-historical context has on this process. The sections thereafter report outcomes of the research, including a discussion of the implications that emerge theoretically and practically. The paper concludes with a rationale for further research.

Literature Review

Self Identity

The concept of identity refers to both social and personal identity and together these form what is known as 'self identity' (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008; Chasserio *et al.*, 2014; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). 'Self identity' is a product of both the determination placed by others (social identity) and agential self determination (personal identity) (Diaz Garcia and Welter, 2013; Shaw *et al.*, 2009).

Social identity refers to the membership of social categories and group belonging an individual acquires in their lifetime (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Through social interaction with others, individuals learn what is culturally appropriate and acquire social identities based on values, norms and socially expected behaviours. Social identities are influenced by social contexts, structure and power distribution in society. For example, traditional social identities for women are situated around family: sister, mother, wife, daughter or grandmother and within these identities women are

expected to behave in certain manners associated with these roles (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Furthermore, gender roles have been shown to be deeply embedded in society and organisations, with women, in particular, expected to follow social norms and rules in their private and work life (Orser and Elliott, 2011).

Personal identity is formed through self-definition and has been referred to as a static form of identity that remains the same throughout one's lifetime (Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Recently though, there is assertion that personal identity is not a stable phenomenon, but in fact, changes throughout a life via on-going interactions between individual resources and contextual discourses (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014). Thus an individual will change and evolve throughout her/his life as a result of experiences, but also by way of interactions with social norms. Within this understanding, an individual's personal identity is negotiated through these interactions and the construction of self is dependent on social norms, institutional and political influences as well as the historical and cultural context (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008). Personal identity construction is interwoven within these narratives in which individuals are rooted. Individuals can adopt, resist and/or alter their personal identity within these narratives (Diaz Garcia and Welter, 2013).

Entrepreneurial Identity

According to Orser and Elliot (2011, p. 564) entrepreneurial identity is: '*created through interactions among an individual, the enterprise, and society.*' The 'entrepreneur' is the outcome of an individual's life path, experiences and social interactions (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014). It is a multifaceted concept where individuals attach and reject certain notions of self and behaviours to create better outcomes (Down and Warren, 2008). The 'ideal' entrepreneurial identity that is legitimised in enterprise discourse represents an agential individual who holds certain characteristics such as bravery, success and autonomy (Down and Warren, 2008). Traditional enterprise discourse celebrates entrepreneurship for its opportunistic individualism and democracy (Down, 2010; Essers, 2009). Within this understanding, entrepreneurship is an open and accessible pursuit where personal effort alone affords reward and status (Ahl and Marlow, 2012).

Researchers have argued, however, that entrepreneurship is not an identity everyone can assume for the principal reason that it is inherently marked by its masculine perspective (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The entrepreneur presented in classic enterprise literature is, more often than not, referred to as 'he' with emphasis placed on 'traditional' masculine qualities, such as high need for achievement, strong internal locus of control, risk taking, and autonomy (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014; Galloway, 2012). Throughout mainstream entrepreneurship literature, masculine narrative is taken as normative, with those outside of this norm represented as 'other'. This, according to Bruni *et al.* (2005), reiterates the conventional female stereotype of subordination, support and dependence, and has powerful implications over the understanding of what entrepreneurs are, how they behave, and who is deemed able to become an entrepreneur (Ahl, 2006; Brush *et al.*, 2009; Orser and Elliot, 2011; Wainwright *et al.*, 2011).

Gender and Entrepreneurial Identity

The social identities of traditional femininity and entrepreneurship rely on opposing expectations that women entrepreneurs must be authentic women (with associated feminine characteristics) *and* authentic entrepreneurs (with associated masculine characteristics) (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014). In a study of Spanish women business owners Diaz Garcia and Welter (2013) observed practices of WE 'doing gender' and 'redoing gender'. Results showed some of the entrepreneurs accepting and conforming to expected social norms whereas others distanced themselves from traditional norms and attempted to redefine new social norms. Along similar lines, Bjursell and Melin (2011) observed how the contextual interaction between family, business and gender influenced the construction of meaning and identity among women entrepreneurs. In their study of Swedish family businesses Bjursell and Melin underline gendered narratives created by entrepreneurs and call for a shift from the male-centred view of entrepreneurship to a more gender balanced understanding of the concept. Additionally, Chasserio *et al.*, (2014) examined how multiple identities of WEs are formed in the French cultural context. In their qualitative study, WEs used various daily strategies to manage interactions between different social and personal roles they play. Similar findings were demonstrated by Essers and Benschop (2007) in their exploration of identity formation of ethnic minority WE in the Netherlands. Focussing specifically on the care work sector, Nadin (2007) also emphasised the importance of context, such as family versus work, male-female orientated industries, the individual's background, professional experience and age, in the attempt to understand how women entrepreneurs construct their identities.

According to Essers and Benschop female entrepreneurs of Moroccan or Turkish origin utilise three main contextualised strategies to negotiate their personal and social identities: conforming to conventional images of femininity, situationally denouncing their femininity or ethnicity, and resisting masculine connotations of entrepreneurship. Other studies highlight the challenges WEs may face in managing their entrepreneurial identity and social identities and the coping strategies WEs use. For example, Lewis (2013) emphasises the process WEs must go through to gain an authentic entrepreneurial identity in contrast to masculine orientated discourse of traditional entrepreneurial identity. Verheul *et al.* (2005) underline the difficulty of WE finding a true 'entrepreneurial self' with findings from their research showing female business owners are less likely to apply the word 'entrepreneur' to themselves than males. Other research shows that in their search for an authentic entrepreneurial identity WE may draw upon a feminised discourse to their advantage or attempt to align themselves within the 'masculine' understanding of entrepreneurial identity (Lewis, 2011, 2013). Diaz Garcia and Welter (2013) argue that women business owners have a range of culturally embedded gendered practices through which they can 'do' and 'redo' in order to challenge gender differences in entrepreneurial identity formation.

Theory – Intersectionality/ Positionality

Marlow and Al-Dajani (2017) suggest an intersectional approach that recognises Positionality offers an interesting opportunity to advance understanding of the notion of context in entrepreneurial research.

The term 'Intersectionality' was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1990, 2018) and was initially used by Black feminists to capture simultaneous and context-specific discrimination of Black women, based on their gender and ethnicity (Nash, 2008). The recognition that social identities need to be examined simultaneously rather than in an additive manner quickly gained popularity and Intersectionality soon became one of the leading theoretical frameworks in feminist research and other social studies concerned with inequality (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). Although a contested construct (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013) Intersectionality highlights how individuals' identities are simultaneously formed by various categories of differentiation, as well as drawing our attention to people's experiences shaped through interlocking identities.

Positionality is based upon the original construct of Intersectionality (Anthias, 2013), moving beyond original concepts of intersecting identities and highlighting social locations and processes (Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2017). Positionality is 'more than identification; it is also about the lived practices in which identification is practised/performed as well as the intersubjective, organisational and representational conditions for their existence' (Athias, 1998 as cited by Martinez Dy, 2015, p. 52). Conceptually, it is located within the intersecting space of structure and agency, combining the outcome of social position with the process of practice, actions and meanings of social positioning. In other words, Positionality encompasses both the present outcome of Intersectionality – i.e., the being – as well as the process of development continually occurring – i.e., the becoming (Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2017).

Positionality highlights the importance Intersectionality places on multiple identities (Martinez *et al.*, 2014) and places focus on the contextual processes of meaning and time (Anthias, 2008). By focussing on the spatial and contextual dimensions, identity can be viewed as a process rather than a set of properties and individual possesses (Essers, 2009). From a positional perspective, entrepreneurship is embedded within complex social hierarchies which influence the unequal accumulation of resources (Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, those in a marginal position may have a limited opportunity to accumulate human, social and economic capital and are likely to face structural barriers to entrepreneurial activity (Anthias, 2013).

Previous research in the entrepreneurship literature has tended to equate gender with women, where women are identified either as different from or the same as men, and does not place marginality within a structural context (Martinez, 2015). Positionality offers the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial research, particularly around WEs, as it allows for the exploration of structural conditions as well as enabling researchers to move on from the 'same or different discussion (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2017). In terms of the research on women entrepreneurs, applying an intersectional approach that considers Positionality might provide a platform to explore the diversity between women entrepreneurs who are distinctly positioned through particular privileges and constraints related to, for example, the context of class, disability, ethnicity, and of course, age (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017).

Age, Gender and Entrepreneurship – A Research Agenda

McKay (2001) states it is not sufficient to research women entrepreneurs as a homogenous group and further argues that it is essential to acknowledge the different subgroups of women entrepreneurs as well as the structural and contextual influences they encounter in forming their identities. For example, age related generational perceptions might differ in what is deemed an acceptable career path for women. Thus, older women who reject normative generational perceptions, breaking away from age and gender stereotypes, to engage in entrepreneurial activity may have to overcome sexism and ageism in response to their socially non-conforming behaviour.

The construction of ageing, similar to the construction of other social identities like ethnicity and class, can also be considered gendered (Ainsworth, 2002). Moulton and Anderson (2005) argue that at a later stage in life WE and their business activity are still affected by social and personal gendered expectations. WEs in the 35-54 age group have to face gender and age related issues such as balancing family and business responsibilities and limited support from partners (Moulton and Anderson, 2005). At the same time Smith (2014) argues that in family business older WEs can use the narrative of matriarchy to challenge the hegemony of male centric entrepreneur stories. Smith (2014) in a conceptual paper examines the idea of matriarchy, highlighting this concept's potential to override commonly assumed patriarchal norms in family enterprises.

Existing literature explores the potential for and barriers to older enterprise (Kautonen *et al.*, 2008), as perceived by older entrepreneurs engaging in entrepreneurial activity (Perenyi *et al.*, 2018) as well as how these entrepreneurs articulate their goals (Clarke and Holt, 2009). However, gender in the subject of older enterprise is underexplored and requires further research. Ginn and Arber (1993) argue that older women tend to be socially invisible or are often portrayed in popular culture in a demeaning way. The lack of inspection of gender in research on older workers, particularly older women entrepreneurs, perhaps illustrates this notion of invisibility. Older women entrepreneurs do not traditionally represent or conform to traditional enterprise discourse and/or normative cultural perceptions of 'old age' (Wainwright *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, older entrepreneurs, particularly women, may be viewed negatively and their behaviour in enterprise may be understood as atypical in the context of prevailing social norms (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008). Empirically, this notion is supported by McKay (2001), with findings highlighting women of an older generation may perceive their career options 'limited' through perceptions of what is acceptable for their generation and age group. Yet, as research such as Kelley *et al.* (2016) illustrate, there are older female entrepreneurs, and the evidence in studies such as Kautonen *et al.* (2012) and Stirzaker and Galloway (2017) is that their number seems to be increasing. This reflects a general increase of older age entrepreneurship, but one likely to increase as a consequence of better health and wellbeing in later life and an associated increase in the desire to maintain an income to supplement or augment pension (Wainwright and Kibler, 2013). Yet within the literature there are few empirical investigation on older WEs (exceptions include Moulton and Anderson, 2005) and so we know very little about their motivations, experiences or outcomes of entrepreneurship, nor how they negotiate and establish their identities as older women and as entrepreneurs.

In exploring entrepreneurial identity in the context of older WEs two broad themes emerge from the literature: the inherent masculine narrative of traditional enterprise discourse around entrepreneurial identity and the opposing social identities of traditional femininity, particularly those related to age, and entrepreneurship. As mentioned above, older female entrepreneurs are an interesting case through which to explore the processes of identity formation as traditional enterprise discourse is deeply marked by the masculine point of view as well as ageing being largely portrayed as a form of decline and thus inherently anti-enterprise. The traditional roles and social expectations of women, particularly those of an older age, may act as barriers towards the construction of an entrepreneurial identity, thus older WEs may have to draw upon particular coping strategies to negotiate deeply embedded social norms. To address these issues, the following research questions are identified:

RQ1: How do older WEs construct their entrepreneurial identity in relation to traditional enterprise discourse?

RQ2: How do social identities of older WEs intersect with their entrepreneurial identity?

To address this research gap the following sections report a qualitative study of 12 older female entrepreneurs with a view to contributing some data. In particular, the empirical work explores the multidimensionality of older women entrepreneurs' identity, with a particular focus on the intersection of their entrepreneurial identity, age and gender. Figure 1, depicts the adopted Positional and Intersectional theoretical lens used to explain the collected data.

[Figure 1 An Intersectional and Positional lens framing examined WEs' identities]

As Figure 1 illustrates the paper uses Positionality as a wider context-sensitive lens, allowing to draw attention to processes of meaning, place and time in identity formation. At the same time at the centre of the study resides exploration of how older WEs combine their different intersecting identities (e.g. age, gender and entrepreneurship). Intersectional investigations should not be stripped of accounts of dynamic contextual processes affecting identity construction (Anthias, 2013). Thus, the theoretical framework used in this study combines the Positional and Intersectional approaches. It is recognised that as the study focuses on qualitative exploration of WE's experiences, it is beyond the scope of this research, and the above model, to attempt to identify causality between the examined concepts.

Methodology

In order to explore the multidimensionality of older women entrepreneurs' identity a qualitative method was applied (Stake, 1994). Furthermore, as acknowledged by Ahl (2006) and Brush *et al.* (2009), a qualitative design is appropriate in the examination of social processes such as the process of constructing identity and, in concert with Gartner and Birley (2002), we subscribe to the idea that

diversity and complexity of entrepreneurship experiences are most appropriately explored via qualitative enquiry. The idea was to gather data that were otherwise unquantifiable and would allow for a depth of exploration of older entrepreneurs stories and identity formation.

The sample of 12 older WEs was sourced from a larger qualitative study of 20 British older entrepreneurship. Respondents were sourced through business support organizations and groups such as The Experts in Age and Employment Network. These organizations advertised the project to prospective (self-selecting) participants. Snowballing was also used, both through traditional word of mouth and by the use of social media. The UK's Office for National statistics (ONS 2017) report internet use rates amongst people aged 55-64 at 90 per cent, 65-74 at 78 per cent, and 75+ at 41 per cent. Consequently, confidence was given to the online sampling method's capability of capturing experiences of older women's' entrepreneurship. It is acknowledged that while self-selection has the potential to bias the study in favour of those who were keen to take part, since the study was exploratory the experiences of self-selectors were entirely valid.

Interviews sought data about how participants came to be in business and their experiences and, as per Salkind (2009), these are best understood by investigating the perspectives of the people involved. Interviews were semi structured and conversational, in order to afford conversation and rapport and facilitate the relation of participants' stories in their own words. This also allowed for matters to emerge that may not have been anticipated in the research design or suggested in the literature (Bryman, 1988; Stake, 1995). Semi structured interviews is also a research method which is firmly established in studies of gendered entrepreneurship (Diaz-Garcia and Brush, 2012; Kirkwood, 2007) and intersectional studies (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Forson 2013). Table 1 shows summary profiles of the 12 participants who elected to participate. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following Miles *et al.* (2014), analysis was conducted by each researcher individually studying the transcripts and consensus of interpretation was achieved by consultation between researchers ultimately arriving at consensus. Themes were guided by the extant literature and emerged also in the narratives of participants.

[Table 1 Interview Respondents]

Findings

Overall, the women in this sample did not conform to the traditional entrepreneurial identity. Accepting the gendered assumptions of traditional enterprise discourse, the older WEs in this sample struggled in finding authenticity within entrepreneurship and had difficulty representing themselves as entrepreneurs in defined stereotypical terms, as well as experiencing some difficulty in achieving legitimacy as an entrepreneur by others. As illustrates Table 2, from analysis of the interviews three themes emerged in relation to research question 1 based on how the older WEs in this study constructed their entrepreneurial identity in relation to traditional enterprise discourse: *Influence of Social/ Cultural Norms*, *Entrepreneurial Outcomes*, and *Age and Life Stage*. Two themes were identified in relation to

research question 2: *Conflicting Interplay Between Identities and Synergy between Identities*. The following section presents a discussion of these identified findings.

[Table 2 Cross Case Analysis of Themes]

Influence of Social/ Cultural Norms

Using their understanding of what an entrepreneur is from societal/ cultural norms and common enterprise discourse, the older WEs used the conventional entrepreneurial model as a reference in determining their entrepreneurial identity (or lack of it). They understood the traditional norms of what 'makes' an entrepreneur and accepted these ideals. The majority accepted entrepreneurial conventional norms and social expectations without question or doubt, even if these norms were sometimes male gendered. For them, being an entrepreneur meant to conform to this model and its requirements. Consequently, most of the older WEs in this sample struggled to form a legitimate entrepreneurial self identity.

Participant 2, for example, accepted traditional norms in forming her entrepreneurial identity and until joining a professional group, where she received social recognition; she did not perceive herself a legitimate entrepreneur. Her testimony is illustrative:

'It was all just sort of you know I'll top up the pension a bit and pay for holidays and that sort of thing. But then I got involved in this society for editors and proof readers, you know all these people out there doing this sort of thing very professionally. And then, you know you read all the stuff like that you are a business owner so you go set yourself up as a business, get your website and this sort of thing' - Participant 2.

Participant 7 followed a similar process in forming her entrepreneurial identity, even as a business owner she was unable or did not want to consider herself as a professional artist until others perceived her in this role. Her testimony is illustrative:

'I'd been invited to go into a school to talk to the children about natural sculpture as an artist. I said "I'm not an artist, I've just got pieces of driftwood", but they invited me into the school and I couldn't believe it when they paid me. They said oh yeah we'll pay you and then people started asking me to do craft fairs so I started to do those. Since then the business has taken off and I'm already seeing a profit' - Participant 7.

It is interesting to note that even though she carried out the same tasks and roles prior to joining the professional group, it was not until she received the recognition and acceptance of her peers in the

industry that she considered herself 'an entrepreneur'. Her entrepreneurial identity is reliant on the acceptance of others in society and its associated norms. Thus, it was evident that to be recognised by others, by peers, was also a way for the older WEs to recognise themselves as entrepreneurs, to build their own self identity and professional legitimacy.

Situations, such as above, demonstrate the older WEs recognised and accepted dominant norms on entrepreneurship and how an entrepreneur has to behave. Norms are widespread by institutional and academic discourses. They assess themselves with these expected standards. If they consider that they do not fulfil these standards, then they estimate that they are not real or legitimate entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Outcomes

After assessing themselves against normative standards of entrepreneurship in terms of high need for achievement, risk taking, growth and profit maximisation etc, there was evidence that some older WEs rejected the professional identity of entrepreneur, particularly based on the outcomes of their business. For the majority of the sample, there was rejection of male orientated norms related to how success is defined in terms of pecuniary business outcomes. For them, success was valued in relation to non-financial outcomes such as increased flexibility and more time to enjoy activities outside of work. Thus, this misalignment between their business outcomes and traditional male orientated understanding around business success led the WEs in this sample to devalue achievements related to business outcomes, particularly non pecuniary outcomes, as well as their professional standing. For example, participant 6 struggled to consider herself as an entrepreneur in stereotypical terms due to the small size of her business and its low profitability.

'It's very very tiny so... I'm not an entrepreneur. I just run this little business that brings in a little bit of pocket money and more than anything it's such a delight to do.'

Participant 9 also rejected the identity of 'entrepreneur' and strongly emphasised a lack of desire to maximise profit or grow her dog walking business, claiming:

'I love being my own boss but there is a problem I will have to address because I think I might have to charge a bit more... But I'm not in it to be greedy.'

This situation reveals that some women refuse a specific social category as a central marker for themselves because they do not perceive themselves to be authentic members of the group of entrepreneurs. Based on traditional understanding of success that focuses on business outcomes of profit maximisation and growth, the older WEs did not recognise themselves in the stereotypical figure of entrepreneur. Emphasis was placed on lack of drive towards profit maximisation throughout the sample, for example participant 9 even considered charging her customers more as 'greedy'. Thus the

majority of older WEs in the sample rejected the masculine orientated traditional entrepreneurial identity and attempted to develop their own understanding of their professional identity.

Age and Life Stage

Age and entrepreneurial identity conflicted, for some participants, when attempting to create a legitimate professional identity. Those who mentioned their age worried that they would lack legitimacy in business ownership after a certain age. They accepted the western cultural notion of 'old age', and were concerned they would be viewed negatively through their participation in enterprise. For example, participant 4, was concerned about customers perceiving her as an '*old lady*' once she reached age 60, which she believed would hinder her legitimacy in her profession:

'I'm in my 50s at the moment, I'm quite fit and healthy and everything, you know. But I just feel like for me personally I feel like I'd be too old...I don't want them to look at me as being an old lady... I don't know... it's not a vanity thing it's a thing about age and finding it hard to come to terms with being 60' - Participant 4.

There was an acceptance amongst the sample that older age was inherently anti-enterprise and there was concern as they got older they would become 'irrelevant' or lack respect from others. Following the normative cultural perceptions of 'old age', participant 2 looked upon her younger peers as entrepreneurs due to their age and also because they had business growth aspirations:

'As I say I don't look upon myself as an entrepreneur. I've got friends who actually set up their businesses at the same time as me ... and they are now taking on extra staff and running so many classes a week in schools and things. It's just not the way I wanted to go. They're still in their 30s and they've still got a long way to go yet. Whereas I'm coming towards the end now so I want to be able to enjoy my life and just earn a little bit of extra cash on top. I look on them as being entrepreneurs and me as just being a plodder and enjoying life' - Participant 2.

Participant 12 was also aware of her age impacting upon her role as entrepreneur, the older she got the less she felt a sense of authenticity within her professional identity. She claimed that after a certain age she would no longer be 'useful' or 'current'. Her testimony is illustrative:

'I'm 3 years older so you know it's the same effect with my colleagues of a similar age you probably have three years after retirement where you're sort of useful and current.'

Testimony such as this illustrates the tension between older age and enterprise has on the formation of the older WEs' entrepreneurial identities. Ironically though, for several of them, age was also the pivotal factor that drove the entrepreneurial behaviour. Either it was facilitated by role changes as a consequence of older age, having acquired a lifetime of experience and skills, or it was a consequence

of a lack of legitimacy and opportunity in the employment context. Both testimonies of participants 12 and 10 are illustrative of these important historical paths into entrepreneurship:

'When I retired I have had 30 odd years in the third sector and I considered that I wanted to be able to have some of the expertise that I'd got. People within the industry seemed to think I would still be valuable as a resource so setting up a business is perhaps a grand term for offering some consultancy work and freelancing' - Participant 12 again downplaying their identity as an entrepreneur.

'I was past my sell by date basically. I chose several years ago to let my hair go grey. I think that was a mistake. I think if I'd still dyed my hair I could have got away with looking younger but yeah you are what you are... as far as I'm concerned I'm still a clever articulate woman who could have done the jobs that I was going for standing on my head but they just wouldn't give me a chance' - Participant 10.

The older WEs in this study were marked by their historical paths and these are important factors to consider in the formation of these older WEs' entrepreneurial identity. These personal and professional paths influence who they are as entrepreneurs. Previous experiences in and around the employment market inherently influenced their current context as entrepreneurs.

To fully understand the identity work of these older WEs it is necessary to take into account their personal and family contexts, the points where they are in their lives. All these dimensions of their lives interact to influence the on-going processes of their entrepreneurial identity, and it is to this the focus turns.

Intersection between Social Identities of Older WEs and Entrepreneurship

To illustrate the dynamics among identities of WE, focus will be placed on specific interplay between the social identities of the sample and their entrepreneurial identity. Thus, answering research question 2 'How do social identities of older WEs intersect with their entrepreneurial identity' both conflicts and synergies among the different identities of the older WEs are demonstrated.

The older WEs in the sample discussed the interplay of different social identities and owning a business. Overall, family life and familial roles and their constraints and/ or synergies with enterprise was a recurring theme throughout the data. The balance between familial roles and enterprise was heavily reliant on context and stage of life for these women, with some evidence of difficulties in combining the identity of 'mother' with 'entrepreneur' mentioned. However, overall the intersection of traditional social identities of grandmother, wife and daughter had positive overlaps with entrepreneurship for these older WEs.

Conflicting Interplay Between Identities

Women remain deeply associated with the identity of mother. The intersection of mother and entrepreneur was found to be more incompatible than the other familial related social identities held by participants. This was apparent for the seven participants in their 50s and who still had children in full

time education. Being available both physically and financially for their children combined with the time and risk involved in business ownership was stressful and difficult. For example, Participant 2 experienced conflict between being a mother and entrepreneur during business start-up. She felt she would find it difficult to manage both roles simultaneously and worried her role of mother would suffer as a consequence. As she notes:

'[I was] thinking I can't really do this when my son is at university as he's still dependent on me but I'll look at it and see.'

This particular situation reveals the conflicting experience that some older WEs may incur between traditional social expectations linked with their private social identities and being an entrepreneur, particularly as they are built on opposing norms.

Synergy between Identities

By contrast, in the context of older WE who have older children, there was less conflict observed between the intersection of mother and entrepreneur. Contextually, stage of life was an important factor for the synergy creation between the two identities. In fact, many of the participants outlined synergies between their professional and private roles and discussed the enriching influence these identities had on one another. Having reached a particular age, many of the older WEs now had grown children and less financial responsibility than previously, thus felt they were able to take the risk of business ownership. The testimonies of participant 1 and 4 are illustrative:

'I think it's easier when you are older ... well in my circumstances it was easier because ... you are sort of more settled. You've not got a huge mortgage and you don't have dependent children and things like that' - Participant 1.

'When I first got married and when the children were younger, I'd not really thought about it [starting a business] seriously if that makes sense. I think it was just a pipe dream but I never did anything about it or thought about it seriously'- Participant 4.

Consequently, it is understood that the balance between identities varies according to the context and the moment in the lives of the WE. Both testimonies of participant 1 and 4 reveal that the intersection between two social identities is not a static event but rather a dynamic process and can change over time. These intersections may evolve through changes in context and structure as well as through the agential choices made by the older WEs.

Additionally, synergy was found between the traditional identity of wife and entrepreneur, where the flexibility and autonomy of entrepreneurship allowed WEs to participate in family life more often compared with their time in salaried employment. Having reached a certain age and financial stability, the participants discussed a desire to spend more time with family members, in particular their spouse.

For example, after decades working full time in an office environment, participant 10 retired and decided to start her own company, which allowed her more time at home with her husband:

'Well I was 62 which I think is sort of approaching retirement age and my husband was already retired and you know we were just beginning to think that this time in our lives we were wanting to do something a bit more together.'

Other participants also discussed how entrepreneurship allowed them to participate further in their private family orientated roles. As business owners they believed they had more control and autonomy over working hours and time spent outside of work. This allowed them to manage their business around other aspects of their life. Again it could be perceived that life stage is an important factor in allowing these WE to find a balance between the intersection of their entrepreneurial identity and multiple social identities now children are older and mortgages paid off etc. Participant 1 is a good example of this synergy of intersecting multiple identities, in her case as mother, wife and entrepreneur. Having started a business at home she is now able to spend more time with her older daughter and husband as well as performing traditional gender roles within the household:

'It [business ownership] does suit my family as well. My daughter is ... studying at home with an Open University degree...It suits her and I think it sort of suits my husband me being at home as well. So I can do more housework through the week and spend weekends at home with them' - Participant 1.

Synergy was also found between the identity of enterprise and grandmother, as engaging in entrepreneurship allowed them more time with grandchildren and caring duties. With both parents in full time employment and the increasing costs of childcare, some of the older WEs took on a primary caregiving role for grandchildren. For one participant (P7), being a grandmother and caring for her grandson was the primary incentive to engage in entrepreneurship:

'I have my grandson for my daughter and they [previous employer] wouldn't allow me to... the hours I needed to do in order to support my daughter so I just said, "oh well I'll just take the redundancy". The year before that I had trained as a baby yoga teacher and I was teaching baby yoga classes in the children's centre so I thought, "right I'm just going to set up my own business teaching baby yoga" - Participant 7.

Caring for other family members, such as older parents, was also enhanced through enterprise as well as generally spending more time with loved ones. The following are illustrative:

'My mum has had a bad back and I know I can take her for appointments and she doesn't have to worry about it. She knows I can do it and I really like that' - Participant 4.

'My mum likes to come and help me once a week. She's a genuine help and in winter it gets her out of the house and I think it gives her a sense of worth. You know she had to retire early because my dad

was terminally ill and she retired early to look after him. ...It's just meant that... it's just nice for her to be able to tell her friends yeah I can't come Tuesday because I'm busy you know. I think she really likes that... So that's an advantage to me that I know I'm helping my mum even though she's helping me' - Participant 1.

As discussed above, the intersection of the older WEs identities is not a static event and from the data it emerged that these change over time. Thus, contextually, age and time of life for some of the WEs formed a displacement where they chose to reject or reinterpret social norms related to traditional gender roles, particularly related to the social identities of wife and mother. Where in the past these women conformed to traditional understandings of their social identities, in older age they now attempted to reform these identities through their own agency. For example, when participant 1 was younger she conformed to traditional social expectation of the time, accepting her main identities as wife and mother. However, after reaching older age, she has rejected or attempted to transform these norms through starting her own business. Her testimony is illustrative:

'I'm now 72 years old and when I got married in my 20s my husband said, "you will not work" and I said, "yes dear". The hours that I wasn't actually out of the house doing voluntary work I was in the house doing a lot of things that kept my hands busy and my mind free, you know the usual sort of washing up and things like that and I always used to imagine businesses and think of businesses and come up with the ideas' - Participant 8.

This example illustrates how a woman may evolve her identity through certain life stage. It can also be seen that context and changing social norms may also influence older WEs, where they may attempt to take advantage of changing social norms around women's social and professional identities.

Discussion

Empirical Implications

Where we are bound to notional conceptualisations of 'the entrepreneur', alternative interpretations are not clearly visible, being relegated to the eclectic position of 'other'. This research has revealed a rich data of nuanced experiences of entrepreneurship as practiced by women as opposed to men, and as older people as opposed to younger. These characteristics have influenced the shape and orientation of their entrepreneurship and exposed it as different, but of considerable value to the lives of these entrepreneurs and their identity as older women.

Process of identity formation is evidenced in this investigation where WE adopt a large scope of attitudes towards norms surrounding enterprise, particularly in regards to the formation of their entrepreneurial identity. Following findings of Verheul *et al.* (2005) some of the participants struggled to find their entrepreneurial identity and preferred not to refer to themselves as 'entrepreneur'. For others, legitimacy of their entrepreneurial identity was not formed until they perceived others accepted them into this group. This follows the findings of Chasserio *et al.* (2014) who show the ways in which

the norms and social expectations that are linked to entrepreneurial identities can be a challenge for WE. Additionally, tension was evidenced between age and how older WE perceive their entrepreneurial identities, with some older WE consuming normative cultural perceptions of 'old age' and concerned how others would perceived their entrepreneurial legitimacy. Wainwright (2011) evidences similar findings citing older entrepreneurs may be viewed negatively as they do not traditionally conform or represent traditional enterprise discourse.

Older WEs demonstrated how they must manage numerous and various social identities. Their daily strategies to accommodate different roles reveal the ways in which their entrepreneurial activities are intertwined with their personal and social lives. Several studies have highlighted the conflicting intersections amongst social identities, particularly between WE identity and social identities of women (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014; Garcia and Welter, 2011). Where evidence from this study does support these findings, particularly in relation to 'mother' and 'entrepreneur' for WEs in their early 50s, overall synergies between intersecting traditional social identities and enterprise were found. In fact, many of the participants outlined the enriching influence these identities had on one another.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, by using *Positionality* as a lens, greater insight into the complexity of the lived multiple identities of older WEs is explored, further contesting the notion of giving agency primacy and placing importance on context and structural influence in the attempt to understand how older WEs construct their identities. Through the lens of Positionality, the diversity of women entrepreneurs, who are distinctly positioned through particular privileges and constraints, in the construction of their entrepreneurial identities can be explored. In terms of entrepreneurial identity, it can be seen from the sample that some of the older WEs used the conventional entrepreneurial model as a reference in determining their entrepreneurial identity, whereas others rejected the notion of entrepreneur and did not consider themselves legitimate. This came in the form of basing their entrepreneurial identity on discourse surrounding age and enterprise, where age was placed as a constraint in forming a legitimate professional identity. Additional societal constraints were placed on their identity construction in the form of social norms around women, and in particular older women, and entrepreneurship. Evidence such as this demonstrates the tension between traditional social identities, professional identities and the influence age and gender has on these. This effected how these older WEs perceived their entrepreneurial identities. Ironically though, for several of them, age was the pivotal factor that drove entrepreneurship.

Timing and life stage were important factors for the older WEs engagement with entrepreneurship and how their professional identities were formed, this also coincided or intersected with traditional gender roles associated with older women. The balance between familial roles and enterprise was heavily reliant on context and stage of life, with some evidence of difficulties in combining the identity of 'mother' with 'entrepreneur' mentioned. However, overall the intersection of traditional social identities of grandmother, wife and daughter had positive overlaps with entrepreneurship for these older women, with life stage playing an important factor in this synergy. Furthermore, age and

time of life for some of the WEs formed a contextual displacement where they chose to reject or reinterpret social norms related to the social category of wife and mother. Where in the past these women conformed to traditional understandings of their social identities in older age they now attempted to reform these identities through their own agency.

Given the importance of time and context on the intersection of their entrepreneurial and multiple social identities of the older WEs in this research, the study asserts therefore that Positionality might have good explanatory power of the construction of entrepreneurial identity if entrepreneurial identity is conceptualised as a reflexive process, contingent on both agency and structure at a certain point in time within the unique context of the entrepreneur. These findings extend entrepreneurship theory by revealing the heterogeneity of experiences amongst older WEs and how Positionality might develop understanding of entrepreneurial identity through the exploration of how contextual factors (such as space and time) and structural conditions influence entrepreneurial identity. Furthermore, this paper contributes to existing knowledge by challenging the traditional discourse of entrepreneurship, which produces a homogenous view of entrepreneurs and omits key historical and social variables in the process of identity formation.

Conclusion

The article presented data on a group of older women entrepreneurs to explore the multidimensionality of older women entrepreneurs' identity, with a particular focus on the intersection of their entrepreneurial identity, age and multiple social identities. Overall, in the study the outcomes of these intersecting dimensions are largely positive and demonstrate the life enhancing benefits of these overlaps. Whilst tension was evidenced between age and how these WE perceive their entrepreneurial identities, as well as some constraints between identity as 'mother' and 'entrepreneur', overall synergy was found between the intersection of older WEs' social identities and their entrepreneurial identity. It must be noted, however, that this synergy was heavily reliant on context and stage of life for these women.

Using Positionality as a lens, the notion of giving agency primacy is contested and allows for importance to be given to both context and time (such as age/ stage of life). Thus, Positionality provides a useful lens which some of the process of entrepreneurial identity formation in this sample of WEs has been revealed. The paper echoes calls by Berglund (2007) and Anderson (2015) to move away from the agency agenda and pursue lines of enquiry that examine entrepreneurship as a process in contexts that are underpinned by both agency and external factors.

From a practical perspective, evidence suggests that policy makers need to understand that older entrepreneurship is not homogenous and tailor programmes accordingly that provide support to the multifaceted needs of older entrepreneurs. In particular, findings of this study highlight the heterogeneity of older WEs experiences and intersections of their social identities with their entrepreneurial identity. It would, therefore, be beneficial for policy to take into account these particular nuances. If the policy aim is to increase older entrepreneurship, measures to enhance older individuals' motivations towards business creation should be of high importance on the policy agenda. Increasing

older women's awareness of the possible positive outcomes of engaging in entrepreneurship should be taken into account in entrepreneurship development as well as the business outcomes and support from social networks that may be achieved through overlaps between their social identities and entrepreneurship.

Limitations

Given that this study was qualitative and cross sectional in design, it is acknowledged the findings presented may lack generalisability across older WEs. In addition, the authors acknowledge that a sample of mainly white British WE does not allow for simultaneous analysis of intersections between gender, race and class orientations. However, it is suggested that the theoretical framework and contributions of this research may be applied to facilitate future research into how older WE is experienced by members of these and other populations. Nevertheless this research has afforded a depth of analysis that has exposed some nuanced and thematic issues associated with older women's entrepreneurship that appear worthy of further research.

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