CONSTRUCTING ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF
ENTREPRENEURIAL DYADS.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the processes of identity construction and *identity work* in entrepreneurial dyads.

Entrepreneurial dyads are defined as two-person teams, in which members are bound both by a strong social tie and by a common commitment to start and manage a new business venture.

The thesis builds on the work of Watson (2008) and adopts his conceptual framework for understanding how discourse shapes social identities and how these are used to inform the production of a coherent self.

The business stories of three entrepreneurial dyads are used as case studies. Data were collected through both storytelling in interviews and direct observation. Entrepreneurs were asked to produce an individual account of their business story. In addition, the dyads' interactive dynamics were directly observed in their natural settings.

The business stories produced by the dyads were analysed using the narrative method. First, the narrative styles of the business stories were assessed looking at elements such as plot, structure, and characterisation. This analysis allowed an understanding of the socially available discourses which provided the entrepreneurs with a system of meanings that shaped their presentations.

Second, a process of narrative deconstruction allowed the identification of their locally meaningful discourse, uniquely created within each dyad by social interaction. What emerged shows that the entrepreneurs recounted not only traditional business stories, but enacted a unique discourse of 'being entrepreneurial'.

A meta-level cross-case comparison of the different experiences of each of the three dyads facilitated the identification of distinct patterns.

The tension between change and obligation is identified as the mechanism that governs the processes of *identity work* and the construction of social identities.

On the one hand, individuals actively engage in producing original discourses and in shaping the presentations of their selves. On the other hand, they deal with an established sense of obligation. The latter encompasses both the expectations that society associates with the social structure (e.g. marriage; company), and a unique system of meanings that each dyad constructs through social interaction.

The processes of identity construction and *identity work* are uniquely identified through the use of *linguistic portals*. These are theorised as cue words that populate the accounts of the entrepreneurs and signal some reflection on aspects of identity during the narration of a story.

Watson's (2008) framework has been expanded from undertaking this research and generating these insights. In doing *identity work*, individuals transfer features of their unique and locally meaningful discourses in their selves and also in other social identities (e.g. mother, daughter, boyfriend). This occurs because of an obligation both towards society and towards the community the dyads created. The ability to balance agency and this dual obligation represents the element of coherence across different presentations.

The thesis also expands Watson's five categories of social identity, through adding *communal* social identities in terms of those presentations of selves locally meaningful within a unique interaction.

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Chapter I

An introduction to the study of identity in entrepreneurial dyads

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this introductory chapter is to offer an overview of the key contents of the study. First, the research aims are presented. Second, the research background is discussed. This introduces the notion of entrepreneurial identity as the focus of the research and presents entrepreneurial dyads as the context of the investigation.

Third, the narrative method of inquiry is presented as the primary research approach for the study. Fourth, the main contributions to knowledge of this thesis are anticipated. Finally, an outline of the chapters that follow is offered to orient the reader.

1.1 The research aims

This study empirically investigates the processes of identity construction and *identity work* within entrepreneurial dyads in order to theoretically account for the development of the associated knowledge. From both theoretical and empirical perspectives, the study of identity has always attracted the interest of researchers in different fields (see Benwell and Stokoe 2006 for a review).

A number of publications have recently reignited this interest, in particular exploring the notions of 'organisational' (Dutton *et al.* 1994; Albert and Whetten 1985); 'managerial' (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001); 'professional' (Dent and Whitehead 2002; Cohen *et al.* 2004; McAuley *et al.* 2000); and 'entrepreneurial' identity (Cohen and Musson 2000; Lewis and Llewellyn 2004; Down and Reveley 2004; Down 2006).

By focusing on the notion of entrepreneurial identity, this study closely observes the dynamics of entrepreneurial dyads. This thesis defines entrepreneurial dyads as two-person teams, where members are bounded both by a strong social tie and by a common commitment to starting and managing a new business venture.

Three main aims are identified. First, the study investigates what allows individuals in entrepreneurial dyads to maintain coherent identities despite their

different presentations of their social self (e.g. mother, entrepreneur, wife, *breadwinner*).

Second, the study explores whether specific discourses of entrepreneurship might emerge within entrepreneurial dyads and how these might contribute to the generation of locally meaningful entrepreneurial identities. Third, the study looks at whether the tension between agency and structure can contribute to the development of localised understandings.

1.2 The research background

Although the importance of other streams of research in moving the debate forward is acknowledged, this study can be positioned within the body of literature that considers identity to be a social phenomenon (Jenkins 1996).

On this perspective, the processes that involve the definition, reinforcement, and presentation of a coherent self cannot be observed in isolation from elements such as societal dynamics, social interaction, discourse, social structures, and historical and cultural contexts.

The existing literature approaches the study of identity from different angles, focusing on specific processes and favouring the exploration of one perspective over another. It is possible, however, to observe how some elements of analysis recur across different studies. In particular, the relationship between agency and structure is central in the literature at different levels of explicitness. On the one hand, individuals might experience different levels of freedom in carving out a distinct and coherent self from their social and private life (Bauman 2004).

On the other hand, the encroachment of society, ideology, state, and power in the life of individuals might shape how the notion of self is constructed both at an individual and at a social level (Foucault 1972). The tension produced between these elements hence characterises virtually all of the existing research on identity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

This study empirically investigates the phenomenon through which individuals navigate different presentations of the self and achieve a coherent and consistent identity, while struggling with the tensions between personal desires and societal impositions.

Another element of analysis that often emerges in previous studies on identity is the role of discourse (Foucault 1972; Giddens 1991; Fairclough 1992; duGay 1996;

Fournier and Gray 1999; Gabriel 2000). As the composite structuration of different forms of talk, discourse is proposed as a suitable tool for observing the relation between language, agency, and structure (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

On this perspective, discourse can be seen, as in Foucault's early work, as the systematisation of language and knowledge in order to exert power (Foucault 1972). Alternatively, other positions favour the role of the individual as a social agent in purposefully using discourse in order to impose a specific version of self (Goffman 1959).

Other studies, instead, explore a dual role for discourse, trying "to accommodate concepts of both structure and agency" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 33). For example, Cohen and Musson (2000) suggest the "idea that language is not random or individual, but that institutions and social groups articulate their meanings and values *systematically*" (ibidem, p. 33; italics in original) and propose that "ideology (and discourses) 'frame' the way people see the world" (ibidem, p. 34). Individuals are informed by the power of discourse, but this does not prevent them from creatively contributing to it through linguistic practice (Butler 1997; Fairclough 1992; 2005).

This study therefore empirically observes how discourse is interrelated with structure and agency, and how individuals make sense of existing and emerging discourses.

In order to formalise the relationship between agency and structure in light of the above notion of discourse, the concept of *identity work* is discussed (Snow and MacAdam 2000; Kärreman and Alvesson 2001). In particular, Watson's (2008) framework of *identity work* is used as interpretative tool for conceptually approaching the study.

1.2.1 The research focus

The role that *identity work* plays in the process of identity construction has recently emerged in organisation studies (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Musson and Duberley 2007; Watson 2008). These investigations, however, focus on the observation of the phenomenon in an organisational context, looking in particular at how individuals experience the processes of imposition of a specific 'managerial identity' (Musson and Duberley 2007). This study, instead, focuses on entrepreneurial identity. Although the latter has been explored extensively, a shared view does not exist in the literature (Llewellyn and Lewis 2004).

In particular, the role of discourse in shaping entrepreneurial identity is the centre of fierce academic debates. On the one hand, some scholars propose the existence of a dominant discourse (duGay 1996). On the other hand, other views put forward alternative discourses and suggest them as being concurrent in shaping the notion of entrepreneurial identity (Fournier and Gray 1999).

This study adopts Watson's (2008) position in recognising how different notions of the concept of 'entrepreneur' might emerge from the available social discourses. This view is expanded here as this thesis suggests that studies on identity should not only take into consideration socially available discourses, but also local discourses that can be constituted in emerging organisations through dialogical interaction.

This consideration introduces the concept of entrepreneurial dyads as context of the research. In such relations, the dialogical interaction occurs at multiple levels, involving different social structures (e.g. marriage; friendship; business partnerships) and different discourses (e.g. discourses on family; discourses on gender and power; various discourses of entrepreneurship, including locally constructed ones).

Entrepreneurial dyads therefore represent a complex *milieu* of interaction where unique dynamics of *identity work* might be observed. Although some research explores identity in the context of family businesses, the main focus is often the institution (Fournier and Lightfoot 1997; Watson 2009). This study explores different typologies of entrepreneurial dyads, both family and non-family based, and aims to observe the complexities of the various levels of dialogical interaction.

1.2.2 The research context

The context of entrepreneurial dyads has also been chosen because of its increasing importance in the entrepreneurship field. For example, Francis and Sandberg (2000) and Timmons and Spinelli (2007) discuss how the relationship between two friends is often the determinant for the creation of a new venture.

In a family business context, Astrachan *et al.* (2002) found that 35% of family businesses have the form of a dyad and that this percentage will consolidate in the future. The study of dyads becomes critical, considering that family businesses can represent two-thirds of the total businesses in a sample (Westhead and Cowling 1997).

The growing importance of entrepreneurial dyads is confirmed by Marshack (1998), who notes that, according to the American Small Business Administration,

the number of businesses jointly owned by married couples in the US increases "steadily at about 5% a year" (p. 13).

Despite their importance, however, dyads are often overlooked in research reports and academic studies. This is due to the fact that dyads tend to be keener to maintain informal business relations (Nelton 1986). The decision to register a business run by a dyad as an individual venture has been linked to cultural traditions such as for example the 'hidden' role of women in traditional Indian (Dhaliwal 1998) or Italian families (Colli *et al.* 2003). But it also points to the benefits deriving from a different fiscal treatment (Barnett and Barnett 1988).

1.3 The research approach

This thesis aims at filling the identified gap in the literature both under a theoretical and an empirical point of view. Building on a three-step model suggested by Watson (2008), this study further develops the existing knowledge on the processes of identity construction and *identity work* and empirically investigates "the extent to which people embrace particular social identities or 'personas' as elements of their self-identity" (ibidem, p. 129). The study is framed within an interpretative paradigm and uses a social constructionist approach (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The choice reflects an understanding of the process of identity construction as essentially relational (Hosking 2004). In the case of the dyads, this dialogical interaction occurs at two levels. First, entrepreneurs interface with external interlocutors, such as in producing a story before a researcher in the context of an interview setting (Czarniawska 2002). Second, the individuals in question engage in a continuous dialogue between each other in the everyday unfolding of their entrepreneurial activities (Steyaert 1997).

Three entrepreneurial dyads are presented in the study as contexts for the investigation of *identity work*. The dyads were selected on the basis of three different social relationships: marriage; sisterhood; and friendship. The business experiences of the three entrepreneurial dyads contributed to the definition of four case studies. This is due to the fact that the two sisters had started two distinct and diverse businesses in the space of a few months.

The narrative inquiry method supported the empirical analysis in the study (Boje 1991; Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999; Hosking 2004). Moreover, the narrative

method was integrated with ethnographic elements collected through direct observation (Watson 1995).

In spite of the tendency of entrepreneurs to produce stories (McKenzie 2005), a structured use of the narrative method in entrepreneurship research has only emerged quite recently (Gartner 2007). However, very little research has been done using narrative methods for analysing and explaining team (Boutaiba 2004) and dyadic dynamics (Pitt 1998; Down 2006).

Different techniques of the narrative method have been used in order to achieve the aims of the present research. First, the stories produced by the entrepreneurs have been embedded into 'tales' of entrepreneurship (Verdujin 2007). Such tales are the narrations produced by the entrepreneurs as reported by the researcher. This approach facilitated the identification of the discourses that characterised this unique relation. The 'tales' have also been analysed in light of narrative elements such as plot, characterisation, and structure (Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999).

Second, the 'tales' have been re-approached through a process of narrative deconstruction that revealed alternative ways of reading the relationship between the characters (Boje 2001). Analysing this new version of the 'tales' in light of the notes collected during the ethnographic work has enabled the identification of local discourses, unique to the dialogical interactions within each dyad. Third, a thematic analysis has been run in order to observe the process of *identity work* and how this shapes the individuals as well the business.

Finally, the literature has been re-approached in order to discuss emerging concepts. As in every Ph.D. project, the journey has not been linear, but rather iterative and reflexive. This thesis is therefore the product of a recursive process of adjustment. Such process has been particularly relevant as the inductive approach adopted here prompted the need to interpret and analyse new conceptual elements *in divenire* (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000).

An example is the notion of obligation, which strongly emerged from the analysis of the data. This prompted an exploration of the literature on obligation in dyads, which has been traditionally linked to the definition of the social structure and therefore enacted as duty (Kondo 1990; Mulholland 1996b); respect (Hamilton 2006; Dhaliwal 1998); or commitment (Duck 1991).

The use of the narrative method unveiled how these dynamics of obligation do not only occur in the context of structures as products of society; but also in the context

of the unique relations that are created within each dyad by their sense of community (Tonnies 2001). This sense of community is produced by dialogical interaction and enacts a local discourse, in which meanings and understanding of entrepreneurship are embodied into unique configurations.

1.4 The contributions of the thesis

In addressing the research aims, specific contributions are made to the development of identity research. The thesis proposes both theoretical and empirical contributions.

From a theoretical point of view, this thesis suggests that a continuous tension between change and obligation permeates the processes of *identity work*, and in fact supports the development of a coherent identity. This continuous tension between change and obligation offers to the individuals studied consistency across different presentations of the self.

This theoretical contribution expands Watson's (2008) framework of *identity work*. In enacting a coherent self, each individual draws both from socially available discourses and from unique discourses that are locally constructed within the dyad. The former refer to discourses that are produced by society and that describe shared meaning in a specific cultural, historical, and societal context (Hosking and Hjorth 2004). An example might be the different discourses of management, of professionalism, of enterprise (Fournier and Gray 1998).

Locally constructed discourses, instead, refer to a system of language, images, and metaphors that is particularly significant in a given relationship and which unique meaning is negotiated through dialogical interaction (Fletcher and Watson 2007). This thesis proposes that unique discourses of entrepreneurship are constructed in dialogical contexts such as entrepreneurial dyads.

Another way through which this thesis expands Watson's (2008) framework is by suggesting three empirical contributions. These are linked to the identification of the locally constructed discourses and of the notion of obligation.

First, Watson (2008) proposes five categories of social identities that enact socially available discourse and on which individuals shape the social aspects of their selves. Building on Watson's (2008) assumptions, this study puts forward the definition of a sixth category: *communal* social identities. These are the enactment of

the sense of community on which entrepreneurial dyads create their locally meaningful discourses. The notion of obligation balances the way individuals draw from the six different categories.

Second, the thesis suggests an epistemological tool for detecting the construction of such social identities and the process of *identity work*. The empirical analysis identifies in the stories some specific cue words that signal moments, in the production of a story, where individuals reflect on the social and private aspects of their identity. The cue words constitute a common pattern across the cases and are theorised in chapter 11 as *linguistic portals*.

Finally, the tension between change and obligation in the process of *identity work* is linked to the different notions of 'doing business' and 'being entrepreneurial' enacted by the entrepreneurial dyads studied. This consideration shows that individuals uniquely shape, through their sense of obligation, their work and their organisations.

1.5 Outline of the chapters

Although the study has been recursive and inductive in nature, it is presented following the traditional structure for a Ph.D. thesis (Down 2002). Chapters 2 to 4 frame the study within the existing literature. Chapter 2 illustrates how the existing research on identity has explored the tension between agency and structure (Foucault 1972; Giddens 1986; Bauman 2004). Moreover, it discusses how the relationship between language, agency, and structure has been theorised (Giddens 1991; Fairclough 1992; Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

Finally, the concept of *identity work* is discussed as a process that allows a link between various discourses and the definition of a coherent understanding of what a person might be. Watson's (2008) framework on *identity work* is presented as an opportunity to make sense of the literature and to approach the empirical analysis.

Chapter 3 looks specifically at the concept of entrepreneurial identity. The literature is analysed in terms of the socially available discourses that inform entrepreneurship and that therefore contribute to shape social identities (Fournier and Gray 1999).

Chapter 4 illustrates entrepreneurial dyads. A definition of entrepreneurial dyads is offered and different typologies of dyads are presented, in the realm of both family

(Nelton 1986; Barnett and Barnett 1986; Marshack 1998; Dhaliwal 1998) and non-family businesses (Francis and Sandberg 2000; Down 2002; 2006).

Chapter 5 describes the methodology used in the empirical study and explains how the narrative method of inquiry was applied.

Chapters 6 to 9 present the four cases that represent the empirical part of the study. Within each chapter, Watson's (2008) framework is used to explore the dynamics that govern the processes of *identity work* in entrepreneurial dyads in each particular case.

First, the cases are presented in the form of 'tales', as they have been co-constructed between the entrepreneurs and the researcher (Verdujin 2007).

Second, an analysis of the tales is carried out from a narrative perspective (Czarniawska 1998). These two steps allow the identification of the socially available discourses to which individuals related in their production of business stories.

Third, the 'tales' are 'deconstructed' and integrated with notes from the ethnographic work to reveal local discourses of entrepreneurship (Boje 2001). Fourth, unique entrepreneurial identities are derived from the specific local discourses so uncovered. Fifth, the process of *identity work* in each case is observed and discussed.

Chapter 10 presents a meta-level analysis of the four cases. This highlights the similarities amongst the dyads in approaching the process of *identity work* and how this shapes the relationship between partners and the form of the business. Finally, chapter 11 discusses the key empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge that have emerged from the study, analyses the research challenges, and offers directions for further research.

1.6 Conclusions

This introductory chapter illustrated the research aims and the rationale for the empirical study. Moreover, in discussing the research background, it facilitated the contextualisation of the research. Finally, it offered an outline of the chapters in order to clarify the structure of the thesis. The next chapter turns to exploring the existing literature on identity in more detail.

Chapter II

Identity and *Identity Work*: a review of the literature

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to position this study within the broader literature on identity. In particular, while acknowledging the importance of other streams of research in moving the debate forward, this literature review focuses on the tradition that explores identity as a social product (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

This helps to ontologically define the notion of *identity* as being intertwined with social phenomena such as language, interaction, and social institutions (Giddens 1991; Cohen and Musson 2000; Watson 2009).

In spite of the different positions that emerge in understanding identity as a social product, some common threads of discussion are identified. The first one refers to the tension between structure and agency. For example, some studies suggest that individuals have complete freedom in choosing how to cast a coherent self (Weedon 1997); others postulate identities as impositions of ideological powers (Foucault 1980).

Furthermore, some studies could be positioned at different stages along an ideal continuum between the two extremes, whilst others overcome the dichotomy and suggest looking at the phenomenon as a duality (Giddens 1986).

The second common thread that emerges from the literature review is the notion of discourse. This chapter observes the relationship between discourse and identity, exploring the importance of societal dynamics in the processes of identity construction. Chapter 3 takes this discussion further by contextualising the review of the literature against the phenomenon of 'entrepreneurial identity' (Lewis 2004; Lewis and Llewellyn 2004).

The analysis of these elements of debate within the literature offers the opportunity to closely observe the concept of *identity work*. Section 2.3 discusses how this has emerged as a notion for formalising the debate on the relationship between discourse and the structure/agency dichotomy.

The last section of this chapter presents the work of Watson (2008), which summarises the existing debate on *identity work* and this concept is adopted for conceptually approaching the process of identity construction.

2.1 Agency and identity as social product

The traditional approach of the literature presents identity as projection of the self (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). Psychological approaches point at the individual as focus of research, observing in particular elements of self-image, self-esteem, and individuality. Cognitive psychologists also extend the focus of investigation to the notions of self-awareness and self-reflection (Leary and Tangney 2003).

Although acknowledging the importance that this stream of research has in defining theories and suggestions for psychotherapy and for identity management, this study can be framed within the wider and more established approaches that observe identity as a product of the discursive, linguistic, and narrative features that constitute the 'social world' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

Amongst the studies that observe identity as product of the social, a major area of debate involves the level of agency that individuals enjoy in shaping their notions of self. The possibility that a social agent (either an individual or a group) would be able to intervene along the different aspects that constitute what/who one might be, and to re-situate them within new dimensions is often implicitly discussed in identity literature (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

Several streams of research investigate the extent of individual agency in the process of defining and shaping one's identity. For example, Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory discusses the individual's enactment of social identities. The focus of the social identity theory is on the social-processes through which the membership to a specific social group is established (Tajfel 1982).

On this perspective, the social processes linking the construction of social categories with the development of a coherent identity leave specific spheres of autonomy to individuals. In particular, social identity theorists suggest that the process of categorisation is socially organised and reflects the labels that society imposes.

The process of identification, although it occurs at the level of the individual, is shaped by the psychological dimension of the desire for self-esteem. For social identity theorists, however, a level of agency exists to the extent to which individuals

within social groups compare different social groups and develop a sense of 'psychological distinctiveness'. The continuous reaffirmation of positive distinctiveness allows individuals to increase the distance between their in-group and other out-groups and to re-work their understandings of the self (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Although acknowledging the validity of social categories for facilitating the interaction between the self and society, Eckert (2000) criticises the contemplation of social groups as independent compartments. Without diminishing the importance that the labels that identify social groups (e.g. woman, black, gay, refugee) have for the political work on minorities, the author suggests that at times different social groups intersect.

This can happen either because an individual develops a sense of belonging to different social groups or because marginalised groups tend to converge into alliances or blend because of their social interactions. A society in which individuals would cover different roles in different contexts offers, therefore, the possibility for social identities to overlap. This allows individuals (and groups) to draw from different contexts and to creatively break free from social categories.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) present a comprehensive discussion of the challenges that recently emerged for the conceptualisation of identity in terms of its identification with a specific social group, and of the implications of these for *identity work*. These challenges emerge in particular from post-structuralist studies and they highlight the extent to which individuals can actively defy the dominant notions in society that traditionally contributed to the categorisation of society (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) suggest how this approach has contributed to the development of anti-essentialist frameworks such as *queer-theory* (Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1993) and *diaspora* (Hall 1993; 1995) from the peculiar experiences of marginalised groups (e.g. re-settled migrants) through a general revision of traditional norms and prejudices. For example, individuals can develop configurations of social identities that might challenge the social categories that the wider society defines.

While a dominant notion imposes norms on publicly living sexuality, individuals can temporarily resituate themselves into new personas that can contribute to challenging the *status quo*. Hall (1993) discusses how "diaspora identities are those

which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (ibidem, p. 402). This highlights, on the one hand, the continuous work that re-settlers do in temporary positioning their social identities into new *personae*, revisiting cultural identities from different perspectives. On the other hand, it underlines the *identity work* that these individuals engage in, as the author considers "every such position as 'strategic' and arbitrary" (Hall 1993, p. 397).

These forms of 'resistance' imply a distinct element of agency, particularly in relation to the open challenge to established social norms and discursive and linguistic practices. The latter is also highlighted in the experiences of *crossing* (Rampton 1995) and *hybridity* (Bhabha 1994) where individuals may re-invent existing linguistic norms with the result of subverting the homogeneity of discourses.

Hybridity in particular implies that individuals have the autonomy to draw from different discourses, not just as a way of fusing different cultural identities, but ultimately to create a local unique identity (Bhabha 1994). From a sociolinguistic perspective, crossing offers similar opportunities for agency.

Crossing "refers to the use of a language or variety that, in one way or another, feels anomalously 'other'" (Rampton 2001, p. 49). In terms of identity re-affirmation, it shows how individuals can decide to embark on voluntary actions of taking on board something that the norm assumes does belong to them for transform the cultural understanding of their identity.

In exploring how individuals interface with the 'other' as social group, Cerulo (1997) introduces the notion of collective identity. With this term, Cerulo (1997) indicates the notion of the "we-ness" of a group as represented by the system of "similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce" (ibidem, p. 386).

On this perspective, individuals continuously reinterpret their selves into collective identities through reflection and social interaction. Individuals have the freedom and the ability to participate in the construction of the shared meanings and understandings that constitute the collective identity.

This interpretation centres the notion of identity on the processes of co-creation of common values and beliefs, suggesting the need to explore the linguistic, interactive, and narrative dynamics that enact the self in groups, organisations, and society (Cerulo 1997; Downing 2005).

Adopting different perspectives (e.g. socio-psychological, interactionist), interpretativist approaches focus on the relations between the individual and the 'other' and on the processes through which interactive dynamics contribute to define a notion of self (Goffman 1959; Blumer 1969; Gergen 1987; Giddens 1991). These processes can be contextualised within the discussion of the role of the set of linguistic expressions, communications, values, and assumptions that constitute discourse (Fairclough 2005). The next section explores in more detail the role of discourse and how this contributes to shaping the understanding of identity and the level of agency that individuals have in relation to the 'other'.

2.2 Identity, agency and discourse

The debate on the role that individuals have in constructing their identities in relation to a system of relations and structures finds space in the studies on discourse. There is wide agreement that "'discourse' subsumes language as well as other forms of semiosis such as visual images and 'body language', and the discoursal element of a social event often combines different semiotic forms" (Fairclough 2005, p. 924).

Nevertheless, there are different understandings of the implications that discourse might have on identity. These derive from the different theoretical positions on how the system of language and communication that constitutes discourse should link structure and agency (Foucault 1972; Giddens 1991; duGay 1996; Fournier and Gray 1998).

The role of discourse in shaping identity is often seen to reside within the concept of power. Socio-political studies highlight how discourse may favour the internalisation of social norms and rules within the self (see Benwell and Stokoe 2006 for a discussion).

This attention on the power of discourse to shape identity also extends to other areas of human production, though, such as the role of media (duGay and Salaman 1992; Atkinson and Silverman 1997). For example, Foucault (1972) suggests that identities are discursively produced as reflection of a dominant discourse.

In Foucault's view (1972), such discourse is informed by the constraints of social structures and practices and dominates the definition of identities. Foucault's work reinforces the focus on the power of discourse, suggesting that the dominant discourse not only constitutes individual identity, but also defines the nature of the subject as well.

The dominant discourse hence finds its *raison d'etre* within ideology, where available versions of the self are constituted and ready for immediate consumption (Foucault 1972). Individuals identify themselves with these pre-defined identities that a dominant discourse has fabricated, and have limited energy for counter-shaping them or actively influencing the extant discourse.

On this perspective, "identity or identification thus becomes a colonising force, shaping and directing the individual" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 31). Individual agency is therefore constrained by ideology to a mere acceptance of the *status quo*, and identity becomes a mere description of the discourses and texts that permeate society (Derrida 1978). The focus on this perspective remains therefore the text as expression of the established structures that constitute society.

Understanding identity as being constituted through linguistic practices characterises the discussion on the nature of identity and on its relation with the 'other' in society (Butler 1990; Giddens 1991).

Some scholars criticise Foucault's approach, while trying to build links between a discourse-based approach to the definition of identity and the traditional psychoanalytic tradition (Butler 1990; Hall 2004).

These approaches principally aim at reinstating an active role for the individual, at least in terms of individuals being able to linguistically engage with the dominant discourse for managing its dynamics of control. In a feminist approach, Butler (1997) proposes that the individuals have a level of agency that may allow their identity to "exceed the power by which it is enabled" (p. 15).

On this perspective, individuals are not merely constituted by the dominant discourse; they can also decide the extent to which they own the discursive elements of their identity. This would happen through the use of specific performances based on socially available *personae* (Butler 1990; 1997).

This sense of 'play' that individuals enjoy in interfacing with the 'other' is at the base of another approach, which pays attention to the performative role of the individual (Goffman 1959; Butler 1990).

Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals may have a distinct and immediate impact on the definition of their identities within the limits of their performances before the other. On the one hand, individuals interact with others as like "reading from a script" (p. 10). This 'script' would be derived from socially available *clichés* that are produced in society (Down 2002).

On the other hand, individuals have a clear level of autonomy for effectively managing the different *personae* that these interactions require them to perform before the other. In the context of dramaturgical interactions, individuals are often invited to perform certain *personae*, but they can influence their projection of self by shaping the basis on which the interactions occur.

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) positions, Blumer's (1969) work on symbolic interactionism also discusses the role of agency within social relations. Individuals may re-work their selves but only within the boundaries of a set of values and symbols shared with the interlocutor.

This thesis draws upon these considerations in exploring how, in dramaturgical interactions (for example between the researcher and an entrepreneur), individuals continuously struggle between agency and structure.

On the one hand, they feel bounded to portray specific presentations of 'entrepreneur' according to images and themes derived from a clichéd understanding of entrepreneurship. On the other hand, a degree of agency emerges in proposing some re-working of self-presentations in the specific discourses that entrepreneurs share with the researcher (Blumer 1969).

This is visible in the cases where, for example, alongside the use of images from a 'dominant' discourse of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurs also impersonated characters from specific social discourses shared with the researcher. For example, Lorna draws from an 'academic' discourse of entrepreneurship, and Stella from a discourse of Catholicism.

The distinctive role that individuals might have in continuously shaping a coherent and consistent narrative of the self in relation to a system of shared knowledge and meanings contributes to a re-positioning of the study of identity in relation to structures of society.

For example, in his structuration theory, Giddens (1986) observes the emergence of identity linking the notions of agency and structure, where the agent is represented by human beings in social (inter)action and the structure is represented by a traditional set of organised norms, competences, and resources.

The main concept at the basis of Giddens' *structuration theory* is the duality of structure, through which the analysis of the agent (i.e. individual) is reunited with the one of the structures (e.g. family, marriage, state). Giddens (1986) suggests that the two can only exist as a duality.

Building on Goffman's (1983) considerations, Giddens (1986) proposes that the enactment of the self and the transformation of realities occur through the reflective analysis of the rules and resources of the known social order. In contrast to the classical structuralist approach, the concept of duality offers more space to agency for altering the rules of institutions through the change and reorganisation of the social order (Downing 2005).

The social structure on the one hand imposes codes of action, but on the other enables qualities and offers the possibility for change. Giddens (1986) observes that knowledgeable individuals can identify those linguistic structures, which he called modalities.

The modalities of a structural system are the means by which structures are translated into action. These would allow for the change of the social order using the relevant resources, the use of which is enforced by the shared rules. The duality of structure is therefore a system of interaction where language plays a critical role for both the enactment of relations and for the redefinition of the social order itself.

The thesis draws on these considerations in observing identity and structure in a comprehensive way. The empirical part of the study focuses on how the individuals consider the construction of the self in light of social structures; but also how language is used in order to reconfigure the understanding of such structures and their enactment.

An example is offered in chapter 8, where Anthony and Lorna introduce the notion of *"Christian couple"*. This linguistic feature characterises the definition of a new and particular social structure (i.e. the Christian marriage as opposed to marriage) that would strongly shape the discourse and the identity of the couple, and would in turn be shaped by the re-worked understanding of the self in a relational context.

In re-assessing the nature of identity in modernity, Giddens (1991) later suggests how socially shared linguistic practices contribute, when re-enacted in social interactions, to shaping identity as a definite entity encapsulated in the particular narrative that individuals use to make sense of the episodes in their lives.

On the one hand, Giddens acknowledges that the presence of divergent discourses fragments reality. On the other hand, he highlights how individuals can still find opportunities for defining coherent selves.

Giddens (1991) writes that "a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self." (Giddens 1991, p. 54).

The system of relations in which an individual engages pulls towards the creation of many local identities, but a coherent identity is maintained through a particular narrative and sustained through social interaction. Some criticisms of this approach imply that the agency of the individual is limited to a reflexive action of holding a coherent biography.

These positions proposed by Giddens (1991) are criticised by part of the literature for overlooking "issues of socialisation, context, and history (and the notion of being *subject* to available discourses)" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, p. 24 italics in original).

In other approaches that observe the role of interaction within the framework of discourse, identities are not necessarily coherent entities but they reflect the dynamics of local linguistic productions (Shotter and Gergen 1989).

Shotter (1993) reinforces this point of view underlying the importance of texts as local productions. Identities emerge from the texts produced in conversation and, as such, they can sometimes coherently develop in the form of a consistent narrative co-produced by the interlocutors, just as Giddens (1991) suggests. Identity can often also emerge as an extemporaneous set of episodic images that find their meaning in the context of social interaction.

Similarly, Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) stress how the presence of the individual in different conversations imposes a continuous editing of the linguistic structures used, and therefore a re-positioning of identity in different storied selves.

This view is shared by Kärreman and Alvesson (2001), who also challenge the notion of identity as a behavioural concept. They propose that the conceptualisation of an integrated individual is fallacious as "there is no such thing as a pure identity - no essence or substance that sums up what identity is about" (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001, p. 62).

Recuperating some of Giddens' (1991) insights, the authors ultimately suggest that attention should be focused on the processes through which individuals 'knit together' the different presentations of the self that are produced in conversations, stories, and

speeches. For Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) individuals not only engage with this process in a reflexive approach, but they also actively try to define the opportunities for creating such narratives.

In introducing this notion of reflexivity, the debate moves definitely away from understanding the individual as mere recipient of images drawn from the general discourse (duGay and Salaman 1992).

In Fairclough's (1992) perspective, for example, the relation between identity and discourse is not merely descriptive or reflective. Individuals may in fact actively contribute to defining the social realities that are constituted through discourse because "discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough 1992, p. 64).

Using language as a social process, individuals can not only represent the world, but also shape it, influencing their definitions of their selves and of others. Moreover, understanding discourse as an element of this social process facilitates reconciliation between social structure and social practice, with the two exerting a mutual influence on each other (Fairclough 1992).

Building on this approach, Cohen and Musson (2000) suggest that "discourse is based on the idea that language is not random or individual, but that institutions and social groups articulate their meanings and values *systematically*" (ibidem, p.33, italics in original).

On this perspective, individuals in social groups (and institutions) can contribute to co-create new realities through language and interaction within that specific system of values, assumptions, and beliefs that are collectively called an ideology.

For the authors, such ideologies frame the understanding that individuals have of the world (and of their position in it), guiding the use of images and linguistic resources. Therefore, "discourse, in this sense, can be seen as the embodiment and articulation of ideology" (Cohen and Musson 2000, p. 34).

Individuals thus would constitute their own understandings of the self, personalising the images that are derived from the shared discourse. Through this creative process, they would also be able to re-shape the discourses that constituted their systems of meanings within the boundaries of their particular ideologies.

The thesis draws upon this perspective in investigating how dyads engage with discourses in order to define and shape their identities. More importantly, following

this approach the thesis considers not only the socially available discourses that characterise society as a whole, but also how individuals contribute to the production of different discourses and relate them to ideological positions.

These considerations on the relation between the social dimensions and the actions of individuals are even more explicit on a social constructionist perspective, where meanings are locally constructed through language and interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

Building on this perspective, Fletcher (2007) suggests that social structures emerge through the interplay of societal images, general discourse, and local (social and linguistic) interactions.

Attention needs therefore to be drawn not only on the interaction between social structures and the individual (and to the related system of obligations and expectations), but also, and more importantly, to the characterising relation that individuals (i.e. plural agents) have in living the everyday realities of the structures (Downing 2005).

In conclusion, as social activity cannot be completely explained approaching it from the macro-perspective, it is necessary to focus as well on the dialogical interactions constituted in the relationships that emerge within structures (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004). This occurs as the construction of identity emerges through a continuous negotiation of competing narratives (Humphreys and Brown 2002).

These last considerations suggest focusing more on this creative work that individuals carry out in condensing the different aspects of identity that society (and discourse) suggest into a coherent selves.

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 highlight how, despite some differences, the literature exhibits some common elements. The tension that exists between agency and structure is particularly central to the analysis. Moreover, how these elements intertwine with the role that discourse plays in social relations has been widely debated.

Building on the work of Giddens (1986), this thesis suggests that the two elements need to be observed and analysed in a holistic way, taking into consideration the different structures and discourses in which the individual can be engaged at the same time (Giddens 1991). The thesis therefore empirically explores how individuals navigate between different situations and are able to maintain and support a coherent

identity. From this consideration, the importance of considering the role of discourse emerges as fundamental.

The thesis observes the interplay between discourse and identity construction at different levels. On the one hand, it focuses on the role of socially available discourses (Watson 2008). These are seen as a source of metaphors that inform the performance the individuals portrayed in front of others (Goffman 1959).

On the other hand, it also explores the locally constructed discourses building on Fletcher and Watson's (2007) considerations that "dialogic, emergent and relational thinking replaces the traditional and dominant notion of the entrepreneurial 'self' with a view of entrepreneurial identities as expressions of relationship" (ibidem, p. 13).

Relationships are hence observed as the *milieux* that shape unique meanings of things (Blumer 1969). However, as suggested by Fairclough (1992) and Cohen and Musson (2000), both such relations are not just explored in descriptive or reflective terms. The action of the individual in shaping discourse through practice and dialogue is also taken into consideration.

The review of the literature suggests that the debate on the continuous balance between agency and structure in light of existing (or emerging) discourses can be formalised by exploring the concept of *identity work*. The next section, therefore, looks in more detail at how the literature has approached this concept of *identity work* and how this has emerged as a key notion for understanding the dynamics of identity construction (Watson 2008).

2.3 Agency, discourse and *identity work*

The concept of *identity work* could be used for formalising the debate between agency, structure and discourse. *Identity work* was first described by Snow and Anderson (1987) as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (ibidem, p. 1348). Although the two authors observe the social web of relationships and meanings in which identity is constructed, the focus remains at the level of analysis of the individual. Social elements such relations, networks, and discourse represent, in this perspective, just the context in which the individual re-considers the personal understanding of the self.

The work of Snow and McAdam (2000) also analyses the notion of *identity work,* trying to synthesise different approaches in exploring the processes through which *identity work* takes place.

The authors identify two forms of *identity work*: the first one (i.e. *identity convergence*) "involves either identity seekership on behalf of individuals or the appropriation of solidary networks of shared identities by activists and entrepreneurs" (Snow and McAdam (2000), p. 53). This clearly highlights a distinct agency in deciding which aspects of shared discourses would be internalised by the individual.

The second form (i.e. *identity construction*) is more complex and it is constituted by different processes such as amplification, consolidation, and extension. Snow and McAdam (2000) envisage in the movements' dynamics the mechanisms that mediate the processes of identity construction.

For the authors, this approach would help to reconcile a social constructionist perspective on identity with the psychological tradition and, more specifically, with the structuralist stance. This could occur if the study of convergence between collective and self identities took into consideration the role of networks in shaping *identity work*, as chapter 4 discusses.

Although the work of Snow and McAdam (2000) considers different perspectives and highlights the role of the social context (and of the network) in shaping identity, it lacks a clear investigation of how the process of *identity work* takes place, and how this might allow individuals to maintain and sustain a coherent self in different contexts. Moreover, it only marginally takes into account the role of socially available images that the discourse can produce and that can, at different levels, contribute to the definition of identity.

Watson (2008) highlights how the focus on *identity work* has been increasing in the past few years, particularly in the field of organisation studies. The author specifically mentions how, on this perspective, *identity work* becomes an opportunity for the individual to mediate between socially available discourses (developed in cultural, linguistic, and interactive *milieux*) and the constitution of coherent identities.

These considerations are drawn from the previous work of Alvesson and his colleagues. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) propose that *identity work* occurs when individuals are "engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining,

strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (ibidem, p. 1165).

The unit of analysis remains the individual, with his/her decision to look for new configurations of the self; however, the study introduces the importance of local contexts such as organisations in shaping the identity dynamics. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) contextualise the processes of *identity work* within the specific discourses that constitute an organisation as a social *milieu*. The study also contributes to the development of an empirical approach to the study of *identity work*, observing the processes in action in the lives of managers.

In observing how individuals purposefully draw from specific discourses in order to shape their presentations, Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) also suggest that identities become "partly a temporary outcome of the powers and regulations that the subject encounters" (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001, p. 63).

For the authors, the relation between identity formation and power makes it difficult to shape identity into a specific form, but the latter is fluid and reconstituted when the power balance is shifted. While this considers, on the one hand, the encroachment of managerial discourses in the life of individuals; on the other hand, it offers a space for individuals to challenge the *status quo* by drawing from diverse (and at times divergent) discursive sources.

Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) ultimately propose focusing not on the identification of a coherent identity *per se*, but on the mechanisms through which the continuous configuration and reconfiguration of identity takes place.

The relationships between power, discourse, and identity are further analyses by Alvesson and Willmott (2002), who discuss the role of *identity work* in shaping the mechanisms of managerial control.

The authors argue that by making certain discourses available within the workplace, managers could contribute to shape the processes of identity construction. Individuals are exposed to a variety of available discourses, not necessarily constrained in the realm of their work lives within the organisation.

In shaping their identities, individuals balance the 'dominant' discourse available within the organisation with other discourses that emerge from their private lives and from other competing discourses within the organisation. There is therefore a continuous struggle between these competing discourses that is resolved by the process of individual identification (Knights and McCabe 2003).

In empirically exploring these mechanisms of control, Musson and Duberley (2007) observe how *identity work* is used "to produce a reflexively organised narrative" (ibidem, p.148). Individuals draw from diverse discourses and systems of relations in order to constitute a coherent and consistent identity.

The authors argue that *identity work* is "an active and critical process of making sense of and for our 'selves', but it is not limitless. Rather, we are constrained as well as enabled by material conditions, cultural traditions and relations of power, but nevertheless our role in the process of identity construction is active and ongoing" (Musson and Duberley 2007, p. 147).

Musson and Duberley (2007) suggest how, on the one hand, available discourses contribute to shape the roles that are welcomed by individuals. On the other hand, these are mediated by "the existence of competing and contradictory managerial discourses" from where individuals draw new elements for characterising identities (Musson and Duberley 2007, p. 157).

This study shows how the link between agency, identity and discourses is characterised by the fact that "discourses are not monolithic objects, but dialogical in nature, intermingling and vying for power and control across a range of actors, events and situations" (Musson and Duberley 2007, p. 157). This has relevance in exploring the relationship within entrepreneurial dyads that represents the context of this study, as chapter 4 will discuss.

These different positions are synthesised within a framework recently proposed by Watson (2008) for making sense of the notion of *identity work*. The next section presents this framework and highlights how this could be used for guiding the approach to the empirical study.

2.4 Adopting a framework for understanding *identity work*

Despite recognising the importance of discourse in shaping identity, Watson (2008) challenges a direct link between specific discourses and the constitution of clearly finite identities (e.g. managerial, professional, and entrepreneurial) that individuals can adopt. The author proposes a three-step approach for understanding how individuals internalise aspects drawn from discourse into their self identities.

While a traditional view on the relation between and discourses interprets individuals to be on the recipient side of the construction of roles and images,

Collinson (2003) anticipates how the role of individuals can be active in shaping and sometimes reversing the pressures imposed by 'dominant' discourses.

Watson (2008) takes this level of autonomy even further, suggesting that individuals can feed back in the discourse and eventually contribute to shaping it. On this perspective, the level of agency of individuals can be observed as being in a two-way relationship with the existing discourses.

On the one hand, individuals draw from socially available discourses, choosing what elements they consider opportune to making their own. On the other hand, the more that individuals find opportunities to interface with general discourse, the more likely they may be to propose new interpretations of social identities that can become available for others to re-enact.

The three-step model developed by Watson is used in the empirical analysis as an interpretative model for making sense of the data. As the arrows in figure 1 show, the first step of the model is to identify how different socially available discourses shape the definition of an 'entrepreneurial'/'professional'/'managerial' identity within an organisation.

The existence of multiple discourses of enterprise, of management, and of professionalism would therefore (in)form the definition of diverse understandings of such identities. The second and the third steps refer to the process of *identity work*.

The second step focuses on the extent to which individuals incorporate elements of a social identity into the self-identity. In doing so, individuals work inwardly, internalising elements of social identities intended as "*cultural, discursive, or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be*" (Watson 2008, p.131, italics in original).

Finally, in the third step, individuals have the opportunity to influence the notion of entrepreneurial identity that represents their social identity inputting elements of their self identity. This latter step is represented by the small arrow moving from the self identity to the social identities.

Figure 1. Watson's (2008) framework for the study of *identity work* (ibidem, p. 128)

| Socially Available Discourses (e.g. various entrepreneurial, managerial, professional discourses) | → | Social Identities (e.g. various notions of entrepreneur/ manager/ professional) | → | Self Identity |
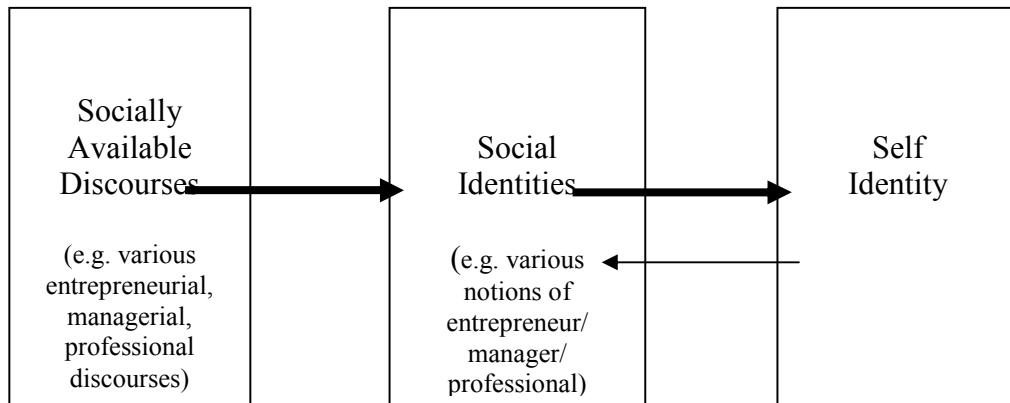
Watson's (2008) framework suggests that individuals use discursive elements such as social-identities in order to incorporate interpretations of socially available discourses into their self identities. For Watson (2008), *identity work* represents a system of "*mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieux in which they live their lives*" (p. 129, italics in original).

Individuals hence have a dual level of agency. One the one hand, they interpret what aspects of a discourse they want to internalise and in which form. On the other hand, they attempt to shape the discourse by re-designing the available social identities. These social identities are hence defined as "cultural, discursive, and institutional notions of who or what any individual might be" (Watson 2008, p. 131). As presented in Figure 2, Watson (2008) identifies five categories of social identity, although he states that they are not completely distinct as they tend to overlap.

Figure 2. A presentation of Watson's (2008) categories of social-identity.

```
┌──────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐
│  Social category │     │   Formal role    │     │     Cultural     │
│ (e.g. class, gender,│   │  (e.g. occupation,│    │    stereotype    │
│   nationality)   │─────│  rank, citizenship)│────│                  │
└──────────────────┘     └──────────────────┘     └──────────────────┘
            \                                        /
             \                                      /
       ┌──────────────────┐         ┌──────────────────────┐
       │  Local-personal  │         │                      │
       │ (characterisations made│   │  Local- Organisational│
       │ by others in the context│──│                      │
       │  of specific events)│       │                      │
       └──────────────────┘         └──────────────────────┘
```
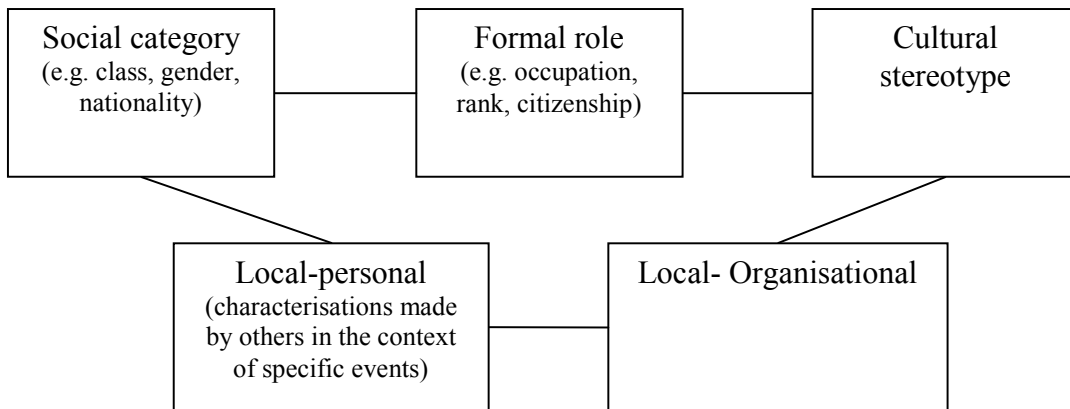
Watson (2008) suggests that the creative reworking that characterises *identity work* can be comprehended by "treating social-identities as elements of discourses, with these discursively located 'personas' being recognised as influences on individual self-identities, as opposed to the discourses themselves being treated as influences" (Watson 2008, p. 127). From Watson's analysis, a series of considerations emerge for understanding the positioning of this study.

2.4.1 Identities and multiple discourses

First, a multiplicity of socially available discourses exists. As individuals experience social interactions in different social *milieux* (e.g. family, work organisation) they are involved in various discourses, from which different social identities can be derived.

Social identities are therefore polysemic notions through which individuals therefore derive different notions of 'manager'; 'professional'; 'entrepreneur' etc., making sense of them in the ideological context within which their particular experiences are placed.

In adopting Watson's reasoning, different discourses on entrepreneurship will hence see the emergence of social-identities such as, for example, 'business owner'; 'workaholic entrepreneur'; 'serial entrepreneur'; 'self-employed'; 'one's own boss'.

Therefore, in observing the discourses from which entrepreneurs draw their images, it is important to identify the sources of these social identities. Chapter 3

therefore explores how individuals relate to some of the different discourses that contribute to shaping so-called 'entrepreneurial identities'.

Second, individuals maintain coherent self-identities in their lives. In spite of the multiple labels through which society identifies the showcase of particular characteristics, attitudes, and modes of expression, individuals live their selves as sole and whole entities (Jenkins 1996).

This observation offers the opportunity for two reflections that are fundamental for approaching empirical studies on identity. The first reflection is that social identities do not exist *per se*. Social identities, however labelled (e.g. managerial, professional), are not independent constructs that individuals can manage in autonomy. Notions such as 'managerial identity' are not objects 'out there' that can be adopted by individuals in order to become someone else.

This implication challenges the use of such labels, as for example in the case of 'professional identity' (see Dent and Whitehead 2002) and 'entrepreneurial identity' (Lewis and Llewellyn 2004), for identifying a set of pre-conceptualised attitudes, characteristics, and expectations that should guide the self-awareness of individuals such as professionals and entrepreneurs.

2.4.2 Identities as social phenomena

The second observation that derives from an analysis Watson's work is that identities are essentially social phenomena. This helps to situate this study within the social constructionist paradigm, inviting a reflection on the nature of self-identity.

On the one hand, this ontological stance is a key consideration for distinguishing this piece of research from the literature on Social Identity Theory. In the tradition of Social Identity Theory, a clear ontological distinction exists between self-identity and social-identit(ies). Aspects of self-identity refer to the individual's process of making sense of one's own characteristics, such as physical features, attitudes, and behaviours into roles for the person (Bandura 1977).

For Watson, these elements can be reconnected to what Ashford and Mael (1989) called 'personal identity' and contribute to clearly separating them from the social categories that instead facilitate the identification of social identity. In Social Identity Theory, these social categories are derived from the identification of socially recognised groups, but also from the identification of shared images in a community, and from the process of stereotyping (Cerulo 1997).

On the other hand, this ontological stance offers a conceptual basis for reflection on the process through which self-identities mature and unfold in circumstances such as the production of business stories.

Although it is possible to analytically distinguish between self-identity and social identit(ies), self-identities remain constructed through elements of social interaction. Social identities remain "in effect, 'inputs' into self-identities" (Watson 2008, p. 131). The recognition that self-identity cannot transcend dialectic interaction contributes to embedding the analytical distinction within a social constructionist perspective. Here, the social nature of the self-identity can be seen at multiple levels.

First, it can be observed in the individual's self-reflection over his or her own set of values and beliefs, and how they relate to the ones socially shared, as for example through the institutional and cultural pressures of social structures.

This can be seen as making reference to a system of power (Jenkins 1996); duty (Kondo 1990); and responsibility (Hamilton 2006) that derives from the typology of relationship(s) that exists within a social institution. These aspects are further discussed in Chapter 4, where the context of the study is presented through the unique 'institution' of entrepreneurial dyads.

Second, the relational nature of self-identity emerges from an individual's self-reflection upon his/her relation with the 'other', this being the interlocutor that contributes to shape and to allocate particular aspects of the self (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

Finally, the social nature of an individual's self-identity can be linked to the ongoing process of sense-making that individuals do with their own experiences and actions in relation to the social and organisational contexts they live in (Weick 1995). For example, in producing business stories in front of a given audience, individuals can do *identity work* relating with the interlocutor but also with a mirrored-reflection of the self, through the use of rhetorical questions, pauses, and loud reflections.

These real-time reflections (with the interlocutor and with a mirrored self) are explored in more detail in chapter 5, when the methodology of the study is discussed.

2.4.3 Identity as a coherent entity

The third reflection is that the notion of *identity work* should be distinguished by the traditional view of a process oriented at 'becoming'. There is no temporal distinction between an individual finishing making sense of himself/herself in the finite form of an identity and assuming another 'way of being'.

In the same context, such as for example the narration of a business story, different aspects of identity converge without interruption. Indeed, society utilises social identities and *clichés* as important interactive resources (Down 2002; Verdujin 2007).

Individuals are sensitive to the discourses that constitute the realities in which their selves are presented. Such discourses not only influence language, but also shape interactive dynamics and invite individuals to favour the emergence of precise elements of their own selves.

Business owners are exposed to the discourse on entrepreneurship and NHS dentists are well aware of the debate on professionalism and on the words used for making sense of relevant positions and concepts.

Individuals are also exposed to a multitude of discourses that correspond to the many aspects of their lives. The same person balances his/her existence through different systems of relations that are developed not only at work, but also in the different spheres of private life.

The process of *identity work*, on the one hand, facilitates the process of inputting specific notions of a social self into an individual's own notion of the self (i.e. self-identity). On the other hand, it allows individuals to keep their uniqueness, balancing amongst the different presentations of the self that discourse(s) may contribute to producing in different contexts and situations.

These considerations lead to the following research question:

> RQ1: in doing *identity work*, how are individuals able to maintain a coherent identity amongst the different presentations of their social identities?

2.5 Conclusions

This chapter offered a review of the literature on identity and focused on the studies that explore identity as a social product. The review highlighted some common elements of analysis across the different positions.

The first one refers to the dichotomy between agency and structure. The second considers the role of discourse as intertwined with the production of identities.

The chapter discussed how, by building on the work of thinkers such as Giddens (1986; 1991), Fairclough (1992; 2005), and Watson (2008) the thesis considers the notions of agency and structure as indissolubly connected; observes the multiplicity of discourses in which an individual engages at different levels of interaction; and explores how such discourses can be in turn shaped by the linguistic practices emerging in dialogical interactions.

Formalising the relation between discourse, structure, and agency, the chapter introduced the notion of *identity work*. The different positions discussed seem to converge towards the work of Watson (2008), which is adopted in order to systematise the existing literature. Watson's framework is also proposed as an interpretative tool for approaching the analysis during the empirical part of the study.

A three-step approach is proposed for this. The first is to observe how social identities are drawn from socially available discourses. The second refers to the extent to which aspects of a given social identity are internalised in a more private understanding of the self. The third suggests looking at the contribution that individuals can make to the refinement of such social identity by building on personal aspects (Watson 2008).

This model suggests several specific assumptions. First, identities are essentially social phenomena and the difference between 'social' and 'self' aspects of personal identity is merely analytical.

Second, different categories of social identity exist and they can be organised on the basis of the dynamics of social interaction. This is possible because of the existence of a multiplicity of discourses in which individuals might engage.

Third, in moving between different social identities, individuals need to develop a coherent understanding of the self that would allow them to be able to 'move forward' in an organic way, making sense of their lives systematically. These latter processes seem particularly in need of more empirical research that might investigate the mechanisms that facilitate the emergence of a coherent and consistent identity.

This suggests the emergence of the first research question that this study attempts to answer in empirically observing how individuals navigate amongst different presentations of their social selves, while being able to maintain a coherence understanding of these selves.

The considerations emerging from Watson's framework offer the possibility of anticipating the focus (i.e. entrepreneurial identity) and the context (i.e. entrepreneurial dyads) of this research. The following chapter turns to an analysis of the alternative discourses of entrepreneurship and how they are related to the development of different notions of entrepreneurial identity.

Chapter III

Entrepreneurial identity and discourse

3.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 described how the construction of identity ultimately occurs through language and discourse. The analysis of Watson's (2008) work has shifted the debate towards the discussion of particular forms of identity (i.e. managerial; professional; and entrepreneurial).

The present chapter discusses the research of entrepreneurial identity and how it relates to the present study. The next sections discuss the relationship between the figure of the 'entrepreneur' and society, and on how specific understandings of this relationship are continuously reinforced by the use of language and discourse.

The last section of the chapter introduces the role that dialogical interactions have in challenging the notion of entrepreneurial identity itself. These peculiar forms of social interaction are then explored in more detail in Chapter 4, where a contextualisation of the study in the case of entrepreneurial dyads is offered.

3.1 Discourse and entrepreneurship: the personification of the entrepreneur

The wide debate on the role of entrepreneurship in fostering economic development is traditionally centred on the role of the *entrepreneur* (Casson 1982; Gartner 1985; 1988).

Recent studies shift the attention to exploring how entrepreneurship shapes society (Hjorth 2004; Steyaert 2004) and on how entrepreneurial processes mould the lives of individuals in relation to others (Fletcher and Watson 2007).

This particular sensitivity to the relationship with society and to dialogical interactions moves research away from a discussion of the cognitive features that characterise entrepreneurs (Mitchell *et al.* 2002) and how they emerge as different from other social groups (e.g. managers Busenitz and Barney 1997).

The focus therefore moves towards the notion of entrepreneurial identity and on how this is continuously reinforced by the use of language and discourse.

Partially drawing upon the image(s) identified in the traditional psychological approaches to entrepreneurial traits, the mass-media have built a concept of entrepreneur as an iconic figure.

This mystification of a specific image of the entrepreneur, promulgated in the stories presented in magazines, televisions, and the internet, has supported the creation of iconic realities (Baudrillard 1998; O'Connor 2002).

The popularisation of icons and symbols in everyday life and their continuous reinforcement as examples to be followed have contributed to develop a specific ideology of the entrepreneur (Ogbor 2000). On the one hand, this has favoured the flourishing of small businesses and private enterprise; on the other hand, it has seen growing managerial attention to a culture of enterprise *tout court* (Lewis and Llewellyn 2004).

In a similar way, although often confusing enterprise and entrepreneurship, governments have promoted the emergence of an enterprising culture, hoping thereby to create a positive impact on the development of entrepreneurship (Pitt 2004). Attitudes, behaviours, and emotions considered typical prerogatives of a business owner are encouraged and promoted throughout policy interventions and education (Gray 1998).

In the United Kingdom, this attention to enterprise has affected not only the private sector, but also influenced the government's decisions in re-structuring public sector services. Government policies, education, and media nurture the discourse on entrepreneurship by fostering the presence of images related to wealth creation and distribution, financial success, innovation, growth, and risk taking (Morris *et al.* 1994).

Entrepreneurial behaviours have experienced a scientific process of personification, which has its roots in the behavioural and psychological approaches to the study of entrepreneurs as individuals (Bygrave 1989; Chell *et al.* 1991). The heavy promotion of such traits, attitudes, and behavioural characteristics has contributed to mounting expectations for business owners to align their actions and behaviours to the dominant image, particularly because the evaluation of success is strongly influenced by this shared understanding of the ideal of the *entrepreneur*.

The resulting dominant image essentially embodies personality and individual traits (McClelland 1965; Chell 1985) or cognitive characteristics (Busenitz *et al.* 1997) rooted in the traditional approach to entrepreneurship.

Psychological theorists describe entrepreneurial processes as a pure function of individuals' characteristics (Coulton and Udell 1976) and distinguish entrepreneurs from other economic actors (Bird 1988). This tradition favours the emergence of the image of the entrepreneur as an individual who should display characteristics such as preference for risk or uncertainty (Begley and Boyd 1987); tolerance for ambiguity (McGrath *et al.* 1992); optimism about future events (Brockhaus 1980); independence (Collins and Moore 1964); a sense of autonomy (Shrivastava and Grant 1985); or self-efficacy (McClelland 1961); and the *locus of control* (Brockhaus 1975).

Despite the lack of significant empirical results, the continuous disconfirmations, the partiality of the approaches, and the lack of a shared and codified set of 'entrepreneurial traits', such psychological traits remain often associated to the image of the entrepreneur (Gartner 1985).

This tradition contributes to maintaining a masculine connotation of the entrepreneur in media (Ogbor 2000; Cohen and Musson 2000) and to promoting and evaluating business enterprising in government policies as function of autonomy (duGay and Salaman 1992). The extension of common traits and characteristics to the definition of entrepreneurial identities has occurred in mechanistic manner as opposed to the production of identity as dialogical encounter (Down and Reveley 2004).

The focus on discursive, narrative, and linguistic features has shifted the attention in this area towards the production of identity as essentially a social phenomenon (Jenkins 1996; Watson 2008).

In the United Kingdom, the combined action of media and government policies has favoured the emergence of what has been labelled an 'enterprising culture' (duGay 1996). The effects of the emergence of an enterprise culture on the shaping of everyday realities have been widely discussed, and two main positions can be identified in regard (Lewis and Llewellyn 2004).

On the one hand, some authors claim independence for the so-called enterprise culture developed by governments and societies on the basis of economic and organisational scenario in Western countries (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson 2001).

On the other hand, others support the idea that the prominence of concepts like competition, dynamism, initiative, orientation to the market, and the culture of the

customer contributed to shape not only the concept of 'entrepreneurialism' but also the social and economic dynamics of organisations (Fournier and Grey 1999; duGay 2000).

These latter positions, identifiable within the 'discursive turn' that pervaded entrepreneurship research towards the end of the last century, nevertheless produce different positions in regard to how the notion of entrepreneurial identity is constructed.

In particular, duGay (1996) proposes that the notion of entrepreneurial identity is shaped by the dominant discourse on the notion of entrepreneurship. The author mentions how the enterprise culture promoted by the British government through the 1980s and the early 1990s contributed to shifting the attention to the dynamics of small businesses.

For duGay (1996), this dominant enterprise culture has contributed to define the features of an enterprising identity that individuals can identify with. On this perspective, there has been an active search for features that could have contributed to characterising individuals as 'entrepreneurially minded'.

The assumption of a definite dominant enterprising culture is famously disconfirmed by Fournier and Gray (1999). In their response to duGay's positions, the two scholars suggest how it is not possible to identify a single and unifying dominant discourse. A variety of discourses needs to be considered in approaching the study of a phenomenon as complex as the development of an entrepreneurial identity.

Although entrepreneurs are indeed part of a (more evident) discourse promulgated by government policies and the mass-media, they remain individuals who live different social occasions and are therefore exposed to different discourses that can shape their understanding of entrepreneurial identity.

As Watson (2008) also points out, there is not a single dominant discourse of entrepreneurship. The emergence of shared figures and images is an opportunity for individuals to introduce particular discourses on entrepreneurship in dialogical interaction. Particular words, expressions, and *clichés* become therefore discursive resources used for supporting a specific ongoing dialogue (Watson 1995).

The next section explores in more detail how specific linguistic practices are drawn from a variety of discourses on entrepreneurship and on how language contributes to shaping dialogical interactions. However, a note of caution is

mandatory. The list explored does not aim to be (and in essence it is not) exhaustive of the multiplicity of discourses that facilitate the emergence of specific notions of 'entrepreneur'.

3.2 Discourse(s) as source of expectations: language, *clichés*, and identity

Schiffrin (1996) highlights how specific words contribute to build a platform of shared meanings and to convey reciprocal understanding. Individuals hence develop a sense of obligation in using specific linguistic choices drawn from a particular discourse (Gabriel 2000).

These can be shaped from the body of metaphors and images derived from tradition and religion (Berger and Berger 1972; Sewell 1992); from the productions of media, arts, and humanities in society (Atkinson and Silverman 1997; duGay and Salaman 1992); from the shared language within groups and organisations (Tietze *et al.* 2003); and, ultimately, from constructing a dialogical interaction with the use of forms of talk specific to a relationship (Goffman 1981; Giddens 1987).

In the context of dialogical interaction, the expectation of presenting identity by using particular words contributes to the emergence of *clichés* and clichéd narratives (Down 2002). *Clichés* are often used for portraying a narrated identity in the production of stories, where the storyteller assumes an obligation to characterise the story along established images (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

The Oxford dictionary defines a *cliché* as "a hackneyed or overused phrase or opinion" and as "a very predictable or unoriginal thing or person" (Oxford English Dictionary 2010).

Clichés are often referred to in a pejorative sense, highlighting lack of originality and overuse (Verdujin 2007). These two aspects seem to be the main characteristics of *clichés* and contribute to the transformation of common images and expressions in trite presentations of reality and in stereotypes.

However, Down (2002; 2006) notes how no agreement exists in the literature on the negativity of the use of *clichés*. The use of *clichés* is traditionally seen to constitute poor linguistic practice, although some authors discuss their important role for facilitating communication and interaction (Verdujin 2007). As vehicles of social interaction, *clichés* are a common presence in the production of stories (Gartner 2007). Their role often produces diverse modalities for the interaction to unfold.

On the one hand, because of their excessive use of common images, *clichés* simplify the complexity of (business) stories and invite a process of ex-post 'normalisation' of the entrepreneurial experience in a process of sense-making, as Weick (1995) describes. Diverse situations and unique behaviours are often overlooked given the desire of the storyteller to present images and representations that the audience could be more familiar with and which would be easier to define.

On the other hand, the use of *clichés* helps to sustain a continuous symbolic interaction in dialogical relations (Blumer 1962). Zijderveld (1979) suggests that *clichés* "enable us to interact mechanically […], without reflection. By means of *clichés* we are able to interact and communicate smoothly, routinely and in a facile manner. […] *clichés* are indispensable to social life" (ibidem, p. 58).

Storytellers ultimately tend to use *clichés* as these facilitate the creation of a shared set of meanings with the audience (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Similarly, Down (2002) discusses how clichéd narratives are a fundamental rhetorical resource for entrepreneurs as they help the storyteller to keep the *fluency* of the account going during the production of business stories.

From a slightly different perspective, Watson's (1995) analysis of discursive practices highlights how individuals often feel a sense of obligation in using specific words or rhetorical devices for introducing specific topic of discussion.

The use of narrated *clichés* favours an immediate representation of the storyteller's identity (Down and Warren 2008). On this perspective, in the dialogical interaction occurring during the production of (business) stories, *clichés* provide a powerful resource for depicting the one's representation of the self.

The emergence of *clichés* is strongly associated with the production of common images and symbols in society. *Clichés* themselves as societal productions are often derived from the dominant discourse on a subject (duGay 1996; 2004). In everyday activities, such societal images are associated with specific presentation of the self, such as in the cases of 'entrepreneurial' (Cohen and Musson 2000); 'professional' (Dent and Whitehead 2002); and 'managerial' identities (Musson and Duberley 2007; Watson 2008).

The sources of the words and expressions that contribute to define and strengthen *clichés* and stereotypes can be found in those societal productions that embody a shared knowledge on the subject such as media, literature and arts (Giddens 1991).

For example, O'Connor (2002) discusses how the specialised press has contributed to placing before the eyes of wider audiences the image of the successful entrepreneur. In management magazines, entrepreneurs are hence expected to embody peculiar characteristics and present themselves with specific linguistic constructions. Noudashani and Noudashani (2000) note how the dissemination of academic studies to a wider public has strengthened the stereotype of the successful entrepreneur.

Similarly, Down (2002) explores how entrepreneurship textbooks have facilitated the emergence of a glossary that entrepreneurs tend to share with their interlocutors. In a content analysis of broadsheet newspapers in England, Nicholson and Anderson (2005) find that the figurative language adopted not only contributes to making sense of the current reality through a process of sense-making, but it also informs and, in turn, is shaped by the ideology dominating discourse and policy.

Finally, for Kärreman and Alvesson (2001), *clichés* are often constructed around schemata (e.g. words, gestures) that are relevant in the industry-sector where the entrepreneur-manager operates.

Clichés are therefore built around metaphors and ways of representing reality through narratives. In regard to metaphors, Koiranen (1995) and Hyrsky (1998) find that despite some cultural differences in considering a specific metaphor as a positive rather than a negative feature of an entrepreneurial effort, different cultures tend to use common images for representing entrepreneurs.

These metaphors often depict a solitary individual and reinforce a social construction of the entrepreneur as a human being living a continuous battle (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson 2001).

On this perspective, we have examples such as the "gladiators" portrayed by Pitt (1998, p. 387) and the "warriors" imagined by Hornaday (1990, p. 248). Entrepreneurs invoke images of iconoclasts and racers in Drakopoulou-Dodd's findings (2002) and solitary Western men in Ogbor's work (2000).

Interestingly, not all the metaphors used have such mythological auras; a less dynamic image used often used by entrepreneurs in media for depicting their relationship with their ventures is the parenting metaphor, in which the entrepreneur envisages the business as a child to be taken care of (Drakopoulou-Dodd 2002; Cardon *et al.* 2005).

With regard to the way that the realities lived by entrepreneurs are narrated, Down (2002) suggests that the emergence of *cliché* is not just related to the production of images and metaphors for (re)presenting the figure of the entrepreneur. The way that these figures are embodied in coherent stories also contributes in creating clichéd narratives that entrepreneurs effectively use for engaging their audiences. The style of the narrative adopted becomes, therefore, an opportunity for the entrepreneur to convey an entrepreneurial image during a dialogical interaction.

Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) observe how the adoption of specific narrative styles and linguistic choices ensures coherence in projecting one's identity. In their own words, the clichéd identity represents "a sense/impression of continuity over time and situations" (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001, p. 63).

Fletcher (2007) highlights how, in the production of business stories, entrepreneurs feel an obligation to adopt a peculiar presentational style that reflects familiar structures. This eases the interaction between the storyteller and the audience and offers consistency to the identity presented in the story.

Words and narrative structures are not the only ways through which clichéd stories are produced in order to offer consolidated identities to an audience. A storyteller not only tells us the words of a story, but supports the presentation with gesture, emphasis, and tone (Johnstone 2007).

This contributes to making the story come alive before the eyes of the audience. As narrations are not only words, identity is built using not purely discursive elements. Who we are and how we project ourselves to others is also achieved with a "style of movement" (Taylor 1989, p. 15). The analysis of the projection of the self should also include the observation of gestures and other non-verbal communication as "the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object" (Giddens 1991, p. 77).

3.3 Gendered discourse and implications for female entrepreneurship

A common element to the pool of *clichés*, metaphors, and images that different discourses of entrepreneurship produce is the masculine connotation of the 'entrepreneur' notion (Cohen and Musson 2000; Ogbor 2000; O'Connor 2002; Petterson 2004).

Chapter 4 explores how this observation becomes particularly relevant in the study of entrepreneurial dyads such as entrepreneurial couples or co-preneurs (i.e. married couples starting and managing a business together – Nelton 1986; Marshack 1994). The role of the woman in entrepreneurial couples is of particular interest as the wife often represents the 'hidden' partner (Barnett and Barnett 1988; Dhaliwal 1998).

Hamilton (2006) attributes such a lack of visibility to the marginalisation of research on women and entrepreneurship. This is also underlined by Ahl (2002), who highlights how research methods, methodologies and measurement models, despite being nominally a-gendered, are crafted on the male figure, neglecting the contribution of women. O'Connor (2002) notices that this can be related to a general marginalisation of the female role in the images used in the entrepreneurship discourse.

The general discourse on entrepreneurship is in fact traditionally pervaded by an ideology designed around a masculine characterisation of the entrepreneur. Ogbor (2000) invites us to reflect on how a dominant masculine ideology contributes to portrayals in the media of the entrepreneur as a Western, lonely, white male. And this, in turn, reinforces the clichéd and trite image of the entrepreneur as an individualistic man.

deKoning and Drakopoulou-Dodd (2002) observe how the predominant use of these masculine images is a common element across different national cultures. Similarly, Koiranen (1995) highlights how masculine metaphors remain predominant even in Scandinavian nations, which are traditionally more culturally orientation towards feminine values (Hofstede 2001).

The implications of acknowledging the presence of such a (dominant) entrepreneurial ideology are relevant. Cohen and Musson (2000) demonstrate that women entrepreneurs generally feel that they ought to use masculine metaphors and images in order to present their entrepreneurial identities. Petterson (2004) claims that this sense of obligation is so rooted in the general discourse that women

entrepreneurs remain constantly aware of a polarised general discourse, even when they try to highlight their independence in decision-making.

For example, Hamilton (2006) finds that the stories produced by family businesses for an external audience are moulded in order to fit with the expectations at the basis of such an ideology and do not really reflect the ongoing dynamics within the partnership.

An interesting reflection of this aspect is the use of the metaphor of the *breadwinner*, which has been found to be common in the exploration of the intersection between marital relations and family businesses.

3.3.1 The metaphor of the breadwinner

The role of the male worker in couples has been of particular interest in the industrial and feminist history of Britain (Crompton 1989).

The notion of a predominant male partner with an (expected) role to work and to provide subsistence for the entire family is often linguistically embodied in the *cliché* of the *breadwinner* (Barrett and MacIntosh 1990). The *breadwinner* as metaphor is commonly used, particularly in discussing marital relations and the balance of power and relationships within a household (Kondo 1990; Creighton 1999).

The word *breadwinner* has traditionally a masculine connotation; likewise the feminine term *housewife* is used to specifically indicate female activities and responsibilities in the household (Oakley 1990).

Despite a few national differences emerging in recent years, the notion of the *breadwinner* seems to be embedded in the discourse on family in most Westernised societies (Warren 2000). Specifically, Cockburn (1990) acknowledges how the role of the male partner as primary *breadwinner* is still widely considered one of the basic institutions in modern societies. Warren (2007), in a cross-national study on the breadwinning figure, explains national differences by finding that the concept is built on the following dimensions.

The *breadwinner* is seen as main financial provider; as main labour market participant; as ideology and policy prescription; and as underlying masculine identity. Although Creighton (1999) shows that the role of the (male) *breadwinner* family in Britain is fading out, other authors suggest that the role of the wife in providing a wage for the family is solely revised when critical situations such a family financial crisis or an economic recession occur (Cockburn 1990).

The notion of the *breadwinner* is taken for granted as the expected role of husband, and it is often not seen as oppressive (Crompton 1989). However, Barrett (1980) opines that women surely consider the role of the *breadwinner* to be beneficial for men in the struggle for power between the genders.

Speakman and Marchington (1999) propose that men have an ambivalent feeling towards the *cliché* of the *breadwinner*. They swing between ideology and the practical implications of a dual-earner household.

On the one hand, men remain fascinated by the responsibilities that the notion bears in terms of expectations of society and of their fellow men. On other hand, the realisation that a single wage could not be possibly enough for maintaining a certain lifestyle moves them to revisit the key role of the *breadwinner* (Creighton 1999).

Rose (1992) suggests that the battle over the cultural conception of masculinity has been reignited by the perceived threats by the male partner(s) in the *breadwinner* role. The revision of the notion of *breadwinner* is of primary importance for the balance of power between the couple, particularly when co-preneurs are running a business as a way for integrating life at work and in marriage (Nelton 1986).

The metaphor of the *breadwinner* is also often used as a discursive resource for exploring the upgrading and downgrading of identities and roles for married couples (Warren 2000). As noted earlier on, Hamilton (2006) proposes that *clichés* such as the *breadwinner* can represent an indicator for identifying the conflicted obligation wives feel to present a business story that would remain consistent with this dominant view.

A final consideration about the implications of the existence of a gendered discourse on female entrepreneurship is a reflection on the process of the male personification of the entrepreneur.

Bruni *et al.* (2004) notice how the creation of a masculine understanding of entrepreneurship is not simply related to the figure of the male (image) *tout court*. The authors observe instead how the process of transformation of entrepreneurship into a field dominated by the male figure can be linked also to the presentation, by women entrepreneurs, of masculine characteristics in management -- such as an aggressive approach to leadership and management and opportunistic behaviours (Cohen and Musson 2000).

These considerations are particularly relevant for understanding the blunt communication style that the Gruber sisters enacted with their business interlocutors, as shown in chapter 7.

3.4 Religion and discourses of entrepreneurship

These latter considerations suggest how overlapping discourses of entrepreneurship not only shape linguistic practices, but also have an influence on symbols and meanings. The symbolism and the metaphors used for conveying mutual understandings contribute to generating a system of communication often enacted through language.

This also endorses a more complex system of sharing beliefs and values (Fletcher 2007). In social settings, a critical resource for generating symbols that can shape the interactions among individuals and between them and social structures (e.g. organisations) is represented by religion.

With regard to the influence that religion can have in nurturing a sense of obligation in dialogical relations, it is interesting to mention the recent studies of Drakopoulou-Dodd and Gotsis (2007). In discussing the links between religion and entrepreneurship, the authors observe how the religious values respected by the members of the organisation can have an influence on their interactions and on the development of their businesses.

Religious values and beliefs can be used as sources of shared social meanings and actions that can be repositioned in the continuous flux of symbolic negotiation in dialogical relations (Blumer 1969). On a social constructionist perspective, religion offers guidance for the interaction between individuals and social structures: "providing norms for social action […] religion explains and justifies social institutions and social roles" (Berger and Berger 1972, p. 382).

More importantly, religion also informs language and the production of narratives in social groups (Sewell 1992). The stories produced during their social interactions bring to life such meanings and symbols and contextualise them in the social relation linking the interlocutors (Bourdieu 1977). Particular words and meanings are used in order to comply with the reality lived during the interaction with such symbols (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

The religious element contributes to favouring the use of specific metaphors in different cultural settings and invites the storyteller to shape his/her account around

the models and the images promoted by the narrative tradition of his/her religious credo.

This can contribute to the emergence of different metaphors used for presenting entrepreneurial activities and images across the world (Drakopoulou-Dodd and deKoning 2003). For example, Anderson *et al.* (2000) propose that religion offers a decisive contribution, not least in terms of rhetoric and creation of symbols, for the development of what has been called 'enterprise culture' in Britain during the 1980s.

Similarly, Bruni *et al.* (2004) suggest that, in Catholic societies, the masculine interpretation of entrepreneurship finds an explanation in the image of the (male) conquistadores and Catholic missionaries rather than in the image of the Schumpeterian innovator.

The implications in terms of identity construction are relevant. Cerulo (1997) observes that fulfilling the obligations suggested by religious values also contributes to creating some visible anchors used by individuals for developing a sense of belonging to a defined and identifiable social group. This can occur within structured social settings or within locally constructed systems of understanding.

As Drakopoulou-Dodd and Gotsis (2007) note: "religious practices are frequently enacted outside the framework of strict organisational forms in such a way that religion can be properly conceptualised not as a distinct institution, but rather as a cultural form or resource generating social capital or enhancing social bonds of reciprocity" (ibidem, p. 94)

Despite some isolated attempts to analyse the interrelations between work (i.e., in this context, entrepreneurship) and other religions (or religious beliefs and practices), research traditionally focuses on the role of Christianity (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Gotsis 2007). For instance, Christian values are often identified as sources of obligation in workplace relations (Sewell 1992).

More specifically, Drakopoulou-Dodd and Gotsis (2007) note how such values and belief orient and inform the decision-making processes that permeate entrepreneurial activities. Drakopoulou-Dodd and Seaman (1998) suggest that Christian values and entrepreneurship intertwine as religion is a source of symbols and obligations for social structures.

The authors claimed that "religion both shapes and is shaped by society. It supports power structures, gives meaning and shape to a society's ethical structures, rewards and punishes certain kinds of behaviour" (ibidem, p. 71). These analyses

contribute to re-positioning the emergence of a notion of entrepreneurial identity at the crossroads of different and diverse discourses, where diverse societal elements need to be taken into consideration.

Exploring entrepreneurial identities cannot transcend a wider interpretation of the osmotic relation between general discourses and locally produced ones. The following section explores in greater detail the construction of localised discourses and in particular of organisational discourses. This should facilitate further analysis of dialogical interactions as the focus of the production of entrepreneurial identities.

3.5 Discourse of entrepreneurship in emerging organisations

Language is not only responsible for the production of a sense of obligation towards images in societal discourse, but it also encourages attention to images and expressions throughout social contexts such as groups and organisations (Gray 1998).

Language, both verbal and non-verbal, is a key element for constituting groups and organisations (Grant *et al.* 1998). Tietze *et al.* (2003) propose that individuals develop a sense of obligation to act in an organisation because of their involvement in the co-creation of language. Individuals contribute to the creation of the realities by sharing a common linguistic web and expect to participate in its development.

At the same time, the sense of belonging to an organisation is enforced by expectations about the use of specific words and of a shared language (Gabriel 2000). This contributes to the development of a set of statements that enact socially shared meanings and constitute a specific discourse within organisations (Parker 1992).

Grant and Hardy (2004) refer to organisational discourse as "the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artefacts) that bring organisationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed" (Grant and Hardy 2004, p. 6).

Discourse is thus often considered the basis for the processes of identification within an organisation (Albert *et al.* 2000). The language used within organisational contexts can offer critical insights in regard to the relationship that individuals enact with the organisation. As Fiol (2002) poses it, "language can reflect the strength of

relationship between individuals and their social group, not simply attitudes about the group" (ibidem, p. 663).

Although the analysis of his work often focuses on causality in retrospective sense-making, it is interesting to observe how Weick's (1995) contribution also stresses the implications that the individual's performance of a storyline has in his/her future enactment of realities.

This view suggests that individuals develop an obligation to perform specific actions that comply with the expectations that 'others' have because of their past experiences of interaction. Language, actions and reflections are not the only determinants of the sense of obligation that individuals can develop towards others and organisations.

In studying entrepreneurial identity within organisations, it is therefore of fundamental importance to understand the mechanisms through which local meanings are constructed. In particular, in emerging organisations these can be linked to how the dialogical interaction between partners unfolds (Fletcher and Watson 2007). This consideration leads to the following research question:

> RQ2: How are specific discourses of entrepreneurship constructed within emerging organisations, and how do they contribute to the generation of a locally meaningful entrepreneurial identity?

This research question assumes a particular relevance in the context of businesses started and managed by small entrepreneurial teams. The analysis of *identity work* by individual entrepreneurs would have to observe how social identities are drawn from general socially available discourses into constructions of self-identity. In entrepreneurial teams this process should also take into consideration any local discourse that forms the basis of the dialogical interaction and of the team as such.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter systematised the literature on the relationship between the concept of discourse and the notion of entrepreneurial identity. In particular, it identified several different positions on this relationship.

For some authors, the definition of entrepreneurial identities is a process independent of existing discourses (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson 2001). Others, instead, theorise a direct link between discourse(s) and concept of entrepreneurial identity.

Among the latter, some authors propose the existence of a 'dominant' discourse that imposes the characteristics an idea of entrepreneurial identity must embody (duGay 1996). Others suggest that multiple discourses can concur in (in)forming the identity of entrepreneurs (Fournier and Gray 1999).

Building on this latter position, the concept of 'entrepreneur' might emerge from the different socially available discourses (Watson 2008). This implies, however, that different understandings of the notion 'entrepreneur' might emerge depending on the relationship that each individual develops with a particular discourse (Gabriel 2000).

The empirical part of this study takes these reflections into account and attempts to identify the different discourses that shape the entrepreneurial identities of the individuals studied. In doing this, particular attention is paid to the role of specific 'discursive resources' that might suggest a reference to a wider discourse (Watson 1995). For example, as Down (2002) proposes, the analysis considered the *clichés* that often populate business stories, as these are expressions of a discourse which the individual might utilise.

Finally, while the discourses explored in this chapter are the ones more commonly highlighted in the literature, it has been anticipated that the list is not exhaustive. Other discourses might contribute to (in)form different notions of entrepreneurial identity.

In particular, the chapter highlighted the importance of understanding how unique discourses of entrepreneurship might be constituted through language and social interaction within emerging organisations. Such organisational discourses might be considered 'local' to the dialogical interaction between partners in micro-organisations, such as entrepreneurial dyads.

The next chapter, then, presents the particular case of entrepreneurial dyads and contextualises the aims of the study within their unique social dynamics. Chapter 4

specifically discusses how the latter are influenced by the system of obligations that social structures and institutions such as 'marriage' or 'friendship' impose on individuals.

Chapter IV

Discourse and structure: the case of entrepreneurial dyads

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the context of this study, focusing on the notion of entrepreneurial dyads. In particular, the chapter discusses the rationale for taking into consideration the role of this structure and of its web of obligations. Section 4.3 explores in detail how the typology of social structure that binds an entrepreneurial dyad shapes the relationship between the members and their discourses.

4.1 Defining entrepreneurial dyads

An entrepreneurial dyad can be defined as a two-person team bounded by a strong social tie, and by the common dedication of the partners to starting and managing a new business venture.

Entrepreneurship research often adopts the context of entrepreneurial teams as the relevant level of analysis (Kamm *et al.* 1990; Ucbasaran *et al.* 2003; Chowdhury 2005). Even though two-person based relationships often dominate the general discourse on entrepreneurship,[1] they are generally not approached in a systemic way (Fletcher 2006).

Although scholars seem to agree two-person teams represent an important configuration of entrepreneurial teams, few empirical studies, in fact, include them in their analyses (Francis and Sandberg 2000). Research is centred, rather, on large entrepreneurial teams composed of three or more members (Lechler 2001).

On the one hand, large entrepreneurial teams are linked with negative situations such as an increase in coordination costs (West and Anderson 1996); social loafing (Lechler 2001); inefficient communication (Ancona and Caldwell 1992); complex long lasting decision processes (Knight *et al.* 1999); personal conflict (Ensley *et al.*

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1   A search conducted amongst the articles published about entrepreneurial teams on *Fortune*, *Forbes*, and *European Business* in the period 1998-2008 suggests that 87% of these were, in fact, dyads.

2002); risk-shifting (Houghton *et al.* 2000); misleading communication (Smith *et al.* 1994); and over-heading (Cooper and Bruno 1977).

On the other hand, though, large entrepreneurial teams appear to present some specific advantages such as greater access to information (Simon *et al.* 2000); deeper analytical capabilities (Cooper and Daily 1997); reduced risk of *groupthink* (Janis 1972); and a higher variety and availability of resources and competences (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

A higher level of formalisation in larger teams also makes their identification easier. These considerations can, thus, justify why larger teams seem to receive better external evaluations by stakeholders and attract higher research interest (Foo *et al.* 2005).

Where specific studies on two-person teams exist, they are mainly focused on dyadic relations within the field of family business (Barnett and Barnett 1988; Marshack 1998). An interesting stream of family business research has been the one focusing on experiences of *co-preneurship* (Marshack 1993; Ponthieu and Caudill 1993). *Co-preneurs* are defined as "married couples who jointly operate business organisations or who otherwise share risk, ownership, responsibility and management by working together in any phase of the business venturing" (Ponthieu and Caudill 1993, p. 3).

These studies seem to focus more on the emotive, affective, and irrational elements that influence the management of the work/life balance (Nelton 1986). In spite of their relevance in the field of family business research, relatively few studies exist on siblings' relations in starting and running a new venture (Astrachan *et al.* 2002; Fletcher 2006).

Existing studies predominantly focus on dynamics between siblings in the context of family firm succession (Handler 1991; Grote 2003). Very little is said on two-person teams governed by relationships based on non-family strong ties such as friendship (Francis and Sandberg 2000). Compared to large teams' dynamics, friendship-based small teams appear to show different relational dynamics (Duck 1991). This could be justified by the different social approaches that people adopt in these dyadic relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

One of the aims of this research is to fill this gap and to explore the dynamics that develop between two partners while constructing local discourses of

entrepreneurship. This is done both in a family and in a non-family context, offering at the same time some scope for comparison.

Entrepreneurial dyads are considered to be unique with regard to many aspects, particularly as different discourses converge on the very same relational milieu. For example, in entrepreneurial couples, the husband and the wife would be interfacing with discourses on social institutions such as marriage (both from a religious and a secular point of view); family; and enterprise (Marshack 1994).

Due to the dialogical nature of the relationship, entrepreneurial dyads have the possibility to develop unique discursive interactions and meaning sharing mechanisms (Fournier and Lightfoot 1997).

Ferdinand Tonnies first considered how dyads represent peculiar cases of social interaction, as their social links characterise what essentially is a "community of spirit" (Tonnies 2001, p. 22). Tonnies (2001) suggests that dyads are a peculiar pattern of *Gemeinschaft* (i.e. community). In this social configuration, individuals devote themselves to the dyad as much (or more) than to their own interest and their behaviours are not regulated by formal structures and controls.

Tonnies (2001) proposes that friendship and family relationships (e.g. maternal; brotherly; or marital relations) can be considered as archetypal forms of *Gemeinschaft*. These are essentially non reciprocal, in the sense that individuals show their commitment while disregarding the potential advantages that could be gained from an active engagement in the relationship.

The philosopher also identifies the notion of *Gesellschaft* (i.e. society)*,* in which relations are, instead, formal and based on a mutually convenient commitment. The classic example is the one of a company where individual commitment (and hence the survival of the company itself) counteracts the potential benefits that could be achieved (e.g. salary; return on investment).

Notwithstanding the clear distinction between the two notions, Tonnies' categories assume a unique complication in the case of entrepreneurial dyads. Entrepreneurial dyads share two levels of interaction: a personal as well as a business one.

As the cases of Stella and Irina (chapters 7-8) and Anthony and Lorna (chapter 9) show, the two levels are often difficult to distinguish despite precise attempts from these individuals to separate their business dynamics from their private ones.

When the discussion of the notions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is contextualised in the study of identity, some precise implications emerge for the debate between agency and structure that were presented in chapter 2.

Giddens (1987) suggests that society constitutes a specific set of 'dos' and 'don'ts' to which individuals are expected to adhere in defining their selves and their interactions with others. Chapter 3 has shown how specific discourses such as the family or religion ones contribute to define these structures that influence the relations between individuals.

It could be argued that dyads such as married couples are not only bounded by elements of *Gemeinschaft* (e.g. marital love), but they also inform their relationship on elements of *Gesellschaft* (e.g. marital contract; marital duty). Similarly, at a business level, the relation can be shaped by elements designed by society (e.g. the government discourse of entrepreneurship - duGay and Salaman 1992) as well as elements designed by the dialogical community of the dyad (e.g. 'local' discourses of entrepreneurship).

Chapter 11 reflects on how the empirical investigation carried out in this study can be used to make sense of this argument, as well as of the diffuse sense of obligation that emerges from these complex relations. With regard to the latter, the next sections highlight how existing studies have only superficially explored the phenomenon.

In particular, the review of the literature shows how a sense of obligation deriving from elements of 'community' is to a certain extent mentioned in the study of loosely coupled relations. Even without addressing the phenomenon directly, the literature on networks considers the role of obligation based on shared beliefs.

However, in strong ties such as dyadic relations, however, obligation is principally explored as a product of society. Moreover, existing studies overlook the community aspects of obligation and only reflected on the societal ones in the forms of duty, respect, and commitment, while focusing on other dynamics such as power relations (Mulholland 1996b).

4.2 Obligation and the definition of social relations

Obligation is often suggested as a critical element in shaping the dynamics of human relations within teams and organisations, but its constituent dimensions and its implications for identity construction have never really been object of a clear academic debate.

In spite of some attention to religious, cultural, and ethical hierarchies, the notion of obligation is in fact overlooked in human relations studies in general. Sometimes authors take it for granted, as in the case of family business (Sharma 2004). In contexts like marital relations in a business context, for instance, despite being partially acknowledged, obligation has been marginalised by the desire to focus on other elements such as the balance of private and public life (Barnett and Barnett 1986) or the power struggle between genders (Mulholland 1996b). It is hence critical to better explore the nature of obligation and to evaluate how this has been studied in the literature.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2008) defines obligation as "something one is bound to do" and cites amongst its synonyms duty, responsibility, and commitment. This definition clearly indicates obligation as a phenomenon deeply affecting the sphere of the individual in evaluating and performing his/her actions. This definition finds its ontological roots in a psychological perspective trying to explain the attitude of individuals towards performing specific behavioural patterns.

The Oxford Dictionary (2010), on the other hand, refers to obligation as "the condition of being morally or legally bound to do something". In introducing the ethical and judicial aspects, this definition presents the notion of obligation as embedded in a societal dimension. Moreover, in this case, a corollary definition of obligation is also offered as "the commitment to honour expectations", suggesting reciprocity.

This implies that obligation requires specific interactions between two or more individuals, marking it clearly as a social phenomenon. This observation can offer an indication of the different approaches that have been taken in the past for investigating and clearly defining the notion of obligation. The literature has explored the sense of obligation as a binding factor in social relations, focusing on particular manifestations of the phenomenon such as duty and commitment (Kondo 1990; Hamilton 2006).

However, it could be argued that duty, responsibility, and commitment not only represent human agency, but they also presume an evaluation of it in light of societal rules. As human behaviours and actions are essentially social, any study of obligation has to take into consideration the role that social dimensions have in shaping its enactment in everyday relations.

The review of the literature shows how these enactments of a broader sense of obligation are studied both loosely coupled networks and more structured relationships (e.g. teams, organisations). The following sections explore how the sense of obligation binds social relations in different social structures. The last two sections in particular focus on dyadic relations characterised by a strong social tie (e.g. marriage).

4.2.1 Obligation in social networks

A diffuse sense of obligation is traditionally considered to be the social glue binding individuals and organisations within social networks that are not characterised by contractual agreements (Burt 1992).

At a corporate level, this phenomenon is widely explored as mechanism of intra-firm cooperation (Johannisson 1986; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1988; Lorenzoni and Ornati 1988; Larson 1992; Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven 1990; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998; Gulati 1998).

As a production of individuals, obligation is discussed both as societal phenomenon (Coleman 1988, 1990; Putnam 1993) and as a psychological one (Renzulli *et al.* 2000). The linkages between feelings of obligation and social relations generally focus on the network dynamics themselves (Granovetter 1973; Johannisson 1986; Starr and MacMillan 1990; Burt 1992; Larson and Starr 1993; Hansen 1995; Hitt *et al.* 2001; Hoang and Antoncic 2003).

The research on social networks is built on the suggestions offered first by human capital theory (Becker 1964) and subsequently by the structural approach to social networks (Granovetter 1973). These theories make the assumption that individuals share a strong sense of obligation despite their relations being loosely coupled (Burt 1992).

Social networks are rarely structured and formalised in social structures and their identification is generally difficult. Starr and MacMillan (1990) propose the notion of

social capital as an entrepreneurial activity and study its key role in the emergence of new businesses (Gartner 1995).

This view suggests that social networks are bounded by social transactions "that engender feelings of unspecified, diffuse, future personal obligations, trust, and gratitude" (Starr and MacMillan 1990, p. 80). The authors stress how these transactions and obligations are rarely explicit and the binding element is offered by the individual's commitment to the network.

Larson and Starr (1993) take these considerations further, proposing that expectations and sanctions reinforce mutual obligations. They suggest that reciprocity is a critical element for ensuring the endurance of social relations.

The formation of the system of obligations proper of a social network has been related to a sense of geographical community (Putnam 1993), to tradition (Luo 2000), to family (Coleman 1988), to kinship (Marsden 1987; Marsden 1990; Blau 1994), and to religion (Coleman 1990).

In discussing the role of *guanxi* in sustaining the emergence and development of Chinese businesses, Luo (2000) argues that the systems of obligations characterising a network are strongly influenced by national culture and by tradition.

Coleman (1988; 1990) links instead the emerging sense of obligation to the element of religion as the key driver for the formation of basic social structures such as families and local communities. Similarly, Putnam (1993) proves that social networks in southern Italy are strongly influenced by a peculiar system of reciprocal obligations and expectations shaped by local customs and traditions.

In contrast, Greve and Salaff (2003) find no differences in how social networks are built in different countries. Birley *et al.* (1990) offer discordant results, showing great similarities in relation to the formation of the network but more differences in how the obligations are maintained over time.

Focusing on family and friendship, these debates move the attention from the loosely coupled liaisons to more structured and deep relations built upon the creation of common meanings and understandings. Granovetter (2000) puts forward the notion of entrepreneurship as embedded. He suggests that social interaction contributes to create specific meanings that are the basis for trust and mutual support within the network. Such meanings crystallise in the particular structure of the network, setting the rules for its management.

In Granovetter's (2000) analysis, kinship is central in developing a shared culture within which to position the meanings that characterise the network. As anticipated in chapter 2, Snow and McAdam (2000), highlight how networks are powerful in shaping behaviour and *identity work*, and how in order to "understand how network ties encourage activism, we have to know more about the shared meanings that are encoded in those network connections" (ibidem, p.63). They stress the importance of the definition of shared meanings and advice that these are more likely to emerge when groups engage in common activities.

4.2.2 Obligation in organisations and teams

In regard to relationships characterised by more structured ties, the issue of obligation is (vaguely) explored in the literature on teams and organisations.

In organisation studies, the phenomenon of individuals feeling obliged to commit to common decisions and actions is generally coupled with the senses of affiliation (Albert *et al.* 2000) and of participation (Tosi *et al.* 2000).

Studies of identity study these dynamics either from a macro level (e.g. Albert and Whetten 1985; Czarniawska-Joerges 1994; Christensen 1995) or from the perspective of the individual, looking at issues of identification (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000).

Recent studies attempt to link the two levels by trying to focus on issues such as identity regulation and identity management and their links to organisational control (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Musson and Duberley 2007). On this perspective, elements such as participation, affiliation, and identification are explored as alternatives to contractual requirements and formal control for effectively managing the involvement of employees.

While some research exploring commitment within established organisations exists, the sense of obligation is often neglected in researching entrepreneurial teams. These peculiar relationships can be considered as different from the ones within organisations because team members are often not bounded by contractual obligations, but rather by high levels of commitment and dedication (Lechler 2001).

Although it is often assumed that members of entrepreneurial teams are bounded by mutual obligations, the focus of the research remains on more immediately measurable aspects, such as socio-demographic heterogeneity (Chowdury 2005). Where studies make explicit the need to consider the factors that bind members

together, they prefer to vaguely refer to commitment (Vyakarnam and Handelberg 2005).

In entrepreneurial teams, individuals often enact behaviours, roles, and identities that they feel reflect the social dynamics underpinning the dedicated relationship (Lechler 2001). This presumes a "sense of we" that motivates people to act together in the name of, or for the sake of, the interests of the social group, thus suggesting collective agency (Brewer and Gardner 1996, p. 76).

The nature of this kind of commitment is not fully explored in the literature. Despite being often used interchangeably (see for instance Roure 1986), the notions of 'team' and 'group' are considered essentially different (Francis and Sandberg 2000). Teams are defined as groups characterised by trust, identity, affiliation, and teamwork aimed at achieving a specific goal (Tosi *et al.* 2000).

Members of a team therefore consider themselves as part of a unique system, commit their actions on team decisions, and rely on mutual trust and support in accomplishing a given task (Houghton *et al.* 2000). Obligation as trust and commitment often shapes the formation of the team and the development of its early-stage dynamics (Talaulicar *et al.* 2005).

Individuals would thus select partners on the basis of their personal commitment to the shared idea that would act as the binding element for the team. The incorporation of the sense of obligation into the decision of one's self-committing to a nascent organisation is critical for studying the processes of identity re-configuration.

4.3 Obligation in strong ties

The role of obligation as binding force is then observed in the context of relations characterised by strong social ties. When the literature looks at these relations in more direct detail, it understands obligation as enacted in forms that include *marital duty* (Kondo 1990); *familiar respect* (Sharma 2004); and *commitment to friendship* (Francis and Sandberg 2000).

These issues are often studied from the perspective of power and control with implicit attention to the actual processes of *identity work* that may take place (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

The exploration of obligation as marital duty can help us to discern how a widespread sense of being bound to act in a specific way can unfold in the everyday actions and activities of a married couple sharing a business.

The literature traditionally frames this phenomenon within the contexts of respect to social institutions (Hamilton 2006), of religious reverence (Creighton 1999; Gallagher and Smith 1999), and of cultural distinctiveness (Colli *et al.* 2003).

The tie characterising the relationship between husband and wife is generally considered to be substantially different from other familiar relations because of the distinctive role played by the sentiment of love (Barnett and Barnett 1988).

Similar dynamics are discussed in other familiar dyadic relationships, such as for instance the duty binding fathers and sons in carrying out a common business activity (Sharma and Irving 2005).

Moreover, duty and commitment are seen as critical elements in defining the reasons that bind friends together in the pursuit of a common goal and/or economic activity (Francis and Sandberg 2000). Despite being less structured and socially formalised than familiar ties, dyadic relationships based on friendship can present liaisons as strong as the family ones (Duck 1991; Giddens 1991).

The exploration of how the sense of obligation manifests in non-socially formalised relationships can help in explaining the role played by social institutions in defining the dimensions of duty and commitment where neither legal nor family boundaries are evidently enforced.

4.3.1 Obligation as duty in dyadic relations

The notion of obligation is often implicitly considered in studying the notion of duty in business partnerships. Duty is studied in particular as the binding element of collaborative efforts in the context of family businesses and friendship-based partnerships. Duty represents an enactment of the sense of obligation towards the social structure dominating the relationship between two or more partners.

The forms through which a diffuse sense of obligation is enacted in everyday actions and activities include marital duty (Kondo 1990). In entrepreneurial couples, defined as those partners that share ownership, commitment, and responsibility for a business, the concept of marital duty is often considered as the prominent factor binding the partners in the pursuit of the business success (Marshack 1998).

Barnett and Barnett (1988) suggest marital duty as the main reason for an entrepreneurial couple to share the direction of the business. Marshack (1998) and Reed (1996) claim that marital duty has a direct influence on the decision of one of the partners to join the other in the venture. Marital duty is traditionally framed within the notions of respect (Hamilton 2006); cultural distinctiveness (Colli *et al.* 2003); and religious reverence (Creighton 1999; Gallagher and Smith 1999).

With regard to the first aspect, Kondo (1990) explores marital duty as a source for continuously re-balancing the power struggle between the couple and in its interaction with the business. Nelton (1986) notes how marital duty is relevant for work allocation between partners.

The focus on marital duty highlights how the role of mother and educator of young children can often shape the way that women approach entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). The assumption is obviously that the mother is traditionally responsible for fostering and caring for the family (Oakley 1990). Women's space in the workplace is therefore strongly influenced by the sense of obligation present in the role of mother and the expectations that this bears before society (Speakman and Marchington 1999; Karambaya and Reilly 1992).

The limitations imposed by the role of 'mother' often introduce an opportunity for skewing the involvement in business activity in favour of the male partner. Hamilton (2006), for example, suggests that the traditional patriarchal role of the husband within the marital sphere implies for the wife a marginalised entrepreneurial identity. Similarly, Mulholland (1996a) discusses how some specific dynamics of co-managing a business offer the opportunity to male partners to simply extend their sphere of patriarchal influence from the domestic walls to the workplace (see also Reed 1996).

The relevance of marital duty in family businesses is also debated and evaluated in light of the cross-cultural context. Colli *et al.* (2003) and Dhaliwal (1998) argue that the 'invisibility' of wives is related to the structure of the family in different national cultures. Asian wives would hence consider it a marital duty to remain 'invisible' whenever the business activity of the couple is presented to external interlocutors (Dhaliwal 1998; Sharma 2004).

Warren (2000) and Creighton (1999), on the other hand, note how class system and governmental policies aimed at stimulating the role of women in the workplace influence the emergence of different work patterns. Speakman and Marchington

(1999) not only highlight how male cultural and political factors are critical in shaping the male perspective, but they also describe how these arrangements are acknowledged by women as well, on the basis of cultural reminiscences (Coltrane 2000).

Marital duty in an entrepreneurship context can be shaped by religious reverence. Drakopoulou-Dodd and Seaman (1998) suggest that religion and entrepreneurship intertwine as religion is a source of symbols and obligations for social structures. The authors claim that "religion both shapes and is shaped by society. It supports power structures, gives meaning and shape to a society's ethical structures, rewards and punishes certain kinds of behaviour" (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Seaman 1998, p. 71).

For instance, the dominant Christian values in which Western culture is rooted traditionally assign to the male figure the role of resource-gatherer and income-provider for the couple (Creighton 1999). This notion gains particular relevance in religion-conscious families, where the concept is used as an "ideological tool" for creating the distinctiveness of men within a society (Gallagher and Smith 1999, p. 221).

Broadening the analysis of obligation as duty from the marital relation to other relational dynamics within family businesses, Dhaliwal (1998) linked the hidden role of women within the context of family businesses to the social dynamics of the family structure.

The author discussed how the peculiar social structure of Asian families would favour the marginalisation of the female role in running the business. Particularly in patriarchal families, women are expected to construe their involvement in the business as 'duty' and 'respect' (Mulholland 1996b).

Studies discussing the relations between obligation and family business dynamics focus on succession dynamics (Handler 1994; Sharma 2004). Entrepreneurial behaviours in second generation entrepreneurs are justified as underpinned by a sense of duty in joining the family activity (Zahra 2005).

Sharma and Irving (2005) refer to these dynamics as "an individual's feeling of obligation to pursue a course of action of relevance to one or more targets" (ibidem, p. 17). The authors imply that individuals often join the family business with the sole purpose of not disappointing the expectations of other members of the family.

These expectations are related to antecedents such as the institutionalisation of norms and/or family traditions and are generally characterised by a gendered

contraposition between the male and the female participants in the business (Mulholland 1996a; Hamilton 2006). This suggests that "when there is widespread familial acceptance of the expected role of family members in a family business based on their gender and birth-order, such practices come to be accepted as 'right' or 'acceptable' way of doing things" (Sharma and Irving 2005, p. 21).

There is therefore no surprise in the findings of Constantinidis and Cornet (2008) that highlight how daughters leave the oldest male the opportunity to decide first whether or not to join or the family venture.

4.3.2 Obligation as commitment and trust in dyadic relations

While obligation in the form of duty often proceeds from a sense of belonging to a specific collective identity, obligation as commitment and trust derives from an autonomous choice of the individual in joining a specific social web of relations (Cerulo 1997).

Giddens (1991) talks of trust and commitment as critical elements of strong dyadic relationships, particularly when these occur within less formalised relations. The author points out how "a friend is *ipso facto* a committed person" (ibidem, p. 92 italics in original) and recall how trust between partners is key for sharing decisions and plans.

Commitment and trust not only favour the decision of the individual to participate in a social relation, but they also influence his or her actions, behaviours, and identity. Commitment and trust are rarely discussed in the context of family business (see Sharma 2004), where the sense of obligation is generally enacted in the form of duty as the previous section discussed.

The role of commitment and trust is, instead, often analysed both in the context of friendship-based entrepreneurial ventures (Francis and Sandberg 2000) and in more traditional entrepreneurial teams (Lechler 2001). It can be argued that commitment and trust in family businesses are intrinsically embedded in the sense of belonging and affiliation deriving from the social institution, and the sense of obligation that they embed is immediately recognisable.

By contrast, in 'teams' not bounded by familiar ties, these elements are more difficult to detect despite their being the predominant modes of obligation (Giddens 1991). Entrepreneurial teams not based on familiar ties are often expressions of a pre-existing relationship based on friendship (Timmons and Spinelli 2007).

Similarly, friendship-based dyads represent an interesting case because they embed strong relational ties, despite a lack of predefined social structure. Therefore, a closer analysis of the friendship phenomenon in entrepreneurial teams and dyads is necessary. Chapter 6 presents an empirical analysis of the case of Tony and Jazz, two friends who started an innovative business in the courier industry.

Giddens (1991) suggests that friendship relations can present social ties as strong as family ones. Differently from family relations, friendship-based relations do not have a formal structure and can be encapsulated in infinite configurations (see also Tonnies 2001). In friendship-based relations, the sense of obligation can reflect a commitment to societal rules (based on cultural and religious aspects and to moral principles) or to locally constructed meanings (based on emotions or on symbolic and dialogic interaction).

Mutual alignment and shared priorities require commitment and trust to be reciprocal. The interaction occurs on the exchange of meanings rather than on the juxtaposition of the selves: hence, such "pure relationships cannot exist without substantial elements of reciprocity" (Giddens 1991, p. 93).

Commitment in friendship is also widely discussed in cross cultural studies. Trompenaar and Hampden-Turner (1998) argue that the notion of friendship is culturally embedded and the dimensions suggested by Universalists (e.g. truth) cannot be observed in every national context. The case of the *guanxi* in Chinese society is emblematic in showing how friendship and business are intertwined in a system of specific mutual obligations over time (Luo 2000).

Individuals are bound to specific actions and behaviours because they have committed to being part of a specific 'we-ness' (as in Cerulo 1997). Similarly, in Christian cultures, commitment to friendship is enforced by the shared values of religion (Carmichael 2004).

Shipton (2007) observed how obligation in friendship can also be linked to a commitment to a magical and mystical reciprocity. The author also highlights how "entrustment and obligation are not just practical matters but moral and sometimes aesthetic ones as well" (Shipton 2007, p. 12). For example, in enacting the notion of friendship, Brazilians commit to a series of responsibilities that include similarity in terms of judgement of tastes (Novinger 2003).

Commitment to a social structure such as friendship can be shaped around more general principles that might dictate how individuals develop a set of expectations

based on moral concepts. Despite being culturally influenced, notions of ethics, trust, and self-disclosure represent the universal principles at the basis of societal rules (Morton and Douglas 1991).

Drawing on these considerations, Duck (1991) also includes respect, suggesting that individuals feel an intimate obligation to follow the other whenever more trustworthiness, more recognised wisdom, and overall more charisma are acknowledged.

Friendship can also be considered a social construct that transcends cultural and societal dimensions. As such, commitment to friendship can be generated by emotions (Francis and Sandberg 2000) or can be negotiated between the partners through language, dialogue, and ultimately interaction (Argyle and Henderson 1985). Francis and Sandberg (2000) identify as antecedents of friendship elements such as propinquity, interaction, psychological characteristics and suggest that individuals commit to these elements because of emotive ties.

The focus on emotions is relevant as it presents a new dimension for understanding the sense of obligation between two individuals with no family or business ties. Emotions reinforce their commitment to the relationship by offering the basis for shared meanings and understandings even in such less formalised social structures (Francis and Sandberg 2000). However, chapter 10 discusses how these dynamics are not fully explored in this study in order to maintain a precise scope on the construction of meanings and identities. Chapter 11 proposes some directions for further researching these aspects in future studies.

Commitment to a relationship can be generated by the reciprocal obligation towards common understandings that are locally constructed. Social rules between two friends are self-imposed and occur through symbolic negotiation (Blumer 1962) and through the sharing of experiences and backgrounds (Argyle and Henderson 1985).

These elements favour the emergence of unique configurations of friendship, with non-replicable rules, ones that are based on a common symbolic language (Bliezner and Adams 1992). On this perspective, "an intimate friendship or partnership is a choice between any two people who live a commitment to each other to share a meaningful lifestyle" (Wegscheider-Cruse as cited in Giddens 1991, p. 95).

Tonnies (2001) suggests that these forms of *Gemeinschaft* develop mutual bonds similar to siblinghood and proposed that such configurations of friendship bind the

partners in a unity of will that shapes the definition of appropriate behaviours and ways of being. In dyadic relations, therefore, the dialogical interaction contributes to the development of localised understandings of duty and commitment.

These are surely informed by the social structure, but they also, in turn, influence the relation contributing to shaping it in its unique form. As Penuel and Wertsch (1995) indicate, a key point of interest in identity research thus becomes "how individuals select, choose, and commit to different people and idea systems in the course of their activities" (1995, p. 91).

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the context of entrepreneurial dyads, offering a definition of the concept and analysing its unique features. In particular, it highlighted the different levels of interaction and the complex relations that these have if considered in light of the agency/structure debate.

The notion of obligation is analysed in the existing literature. This illustrates that, in loosely coupled relationships, some references to a sense of community exist; whereas, in more structured relations, obligation has been seen particularly related to societal dynamics. In particular, obligation has been studied in the forms of duty, respect, and commitment.

These are linked to dynamics such as affiliation and identification and to the construction of a notion of 'team'. These considerations, supported by the argument that entrepreneurial dyads are complex *milieux* of interaction where elements of society and community converge, lead to the following research question:

> RQ3: Taking into consideration the role of both societal dynamics and local discourses, how does the tension between agency and structure contribute to the development of localised understandings in entrepreneurial dyads?

The answer to this question is particularly relevant for considering how individual identities reside within the presentation of the dyad as a unified structure (i.e. 'team') and for comprehending the understanding that each member will have of it.

Addressing this question is also relevant for understanding how entrepreneurial dyads develop the meanings of 'doing business' and 'being entrepreneurial'. This

allows for a richer interpretation of entrepreneurial dyads as they construct an identity for their organisation as it is presented to external interlocutors.

The next chapter presents the methodological stance adopted for approaching the collection, analysis, and interpretation of empirical evidence. In particular, the chapter argues how the narrative method of inquiry represents the most appropriate research method for investigating a complex phenomenon like the construction of identity within entrepreneurial dyads.

Chapter V

Research Methodology and Research Design

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach adopted for investigating the phenomenon of identity construction in entrepreneurial dyads.

In particular, the inductive nature of this study, situated within an interpretative paradigm, is stressed. According to the social constructionist stance adopted, the role of the researcher in co-producing the data is acknowledged and discussed.

The narrative method is introduced with an analysis of the roles of validity, reliability, and ethics in treating such unique qualitative data. A rationale for the choice of the method employed is offered, and contextualised with respect to the existing literature on identity and on entrepreneurship. The cases analysed are then briefly introduced, and the rationales for their selection are discussed.

Furthermore, a definition of the research design is offered, and information on the data collection and analysis are provided. With regard to the former, section 5.4.3 describes how storytelling was used to access data, and direct observation was used for accessing ethnographic data.

With regard to the latter, the chapter highlights in section 5.4.4, the innovative approach used for investigating the unique discourses that characterised different social interactions. First, the construction of 'tales' and their narrative analysis explain the discourse constructed in the interaction between researcher and storytellers. Second, narrative deconstruction and direct observation unveil the unique discourses constructed within each dyad. Third, a thematic analysis identifies the entrepreneurial identities and the dynamics of *identity work*. Finally, a meta-level analysis enables the observation of similarities across the dyads.

5.1 Research Methodology

Understanding *identity work* as the continuous reconfiguration of personal and social aspects of identity demands particular attention to the selection of the most appropriate research approach.

The methodological stance adopted in this thesis reflects social constructionist views, framed within the interpretative paradigm (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Burr 1995). This choice is based on the consideration that the process of identity construction is essentially relational and not confined to the cognitive sphere of the individual (Hosking and Hjorth 2004; Watson 2008).

A distinctive feature of this approach is its distance from using the scientific method as an epistemological process (see Popper 1950). In contrast to a positivistic approach, no hypotheses to be tested or verified using the scientific method have been developed *ex-ante*. More importantly, conceptualisations have been directly shaped by the observation of particular phenomena, which are not necessarily representative of a given population (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The decision to focus on social relations was based on the assumption that discourses could be configured as a system of symbolic elements with meanings locally constructed between the interlocutors (Fletcher and Watson 2007). In particular, relational elements such as dialogue and language were considered to be the bases for the creation of shared meanings and common understandings (Parker 1998; Hosking and Hjorth 2004).

Moreover, knowledge was created through the interpretation of such empirical phenomena in light of several background factors: personal experiences and background; the existing literature; theoretical conceptualisations; and contextual developments (Bryman and Bell 2008).

The analysis of local cultures and discourses as shaping the resources of such dialogical realities also framed the study. This is in line with Burr's (1998) assertions that "since we cannot ever step outside our own culturally and historically located value systems, perhaps we must (and can only) make such judgements from within this system and defend them regardless of their inevitable relativism" (ibidem, p. 16).

Finally, another element that distinguishes this approach from the positivistic paradigm is the acknowledgement of the role of the researcher as a constitutive element of the epistemological process through her or his interpretative activity.

Knowledge is shaped by the observation of the phenomenon, allowing new conceptualisations to emerge from the interaction of the researcher with the process of construction (Fletcher 2007; Ahl 2007).

5.2 The narrative method

The research method(s) used for exploring the continuous process of identity construction refer to that body of research techniques comprehensively known as 'narrative inquiry' (Sarbin 1986; Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004; Gartner 2007).

The assumption underlying this decision is that people create their self-identities by making sense of their activities through the stories they tell (Gergen 1999). It is therefore not possible to study the processes of identity construction without considering the stories that entrepreneurs tell us (Polkinghorne 1988).

At the same time, the narrative method pays attention to polyphonies or "use of multiple and competing discourses" for enforcing the presence of different directions from which the actors converge into a unique discourse (Gergen 1998, p. 155). This allows for the exploration of different stories emerging in organisations and in entrepreneurial dyads (Boje 2001).

Narrative inquiry has been used as an interpretative method both within the realist approach and the social constructionist one. In the former, the account obtained by a teller/presenter does not necessarily include all of the 'truth'. A teller/presenter only offers his/her own point of view, presenting facts in a way that is affected by personal interpretation and by the kind of self he/she is constructing during the presentation (Riesman 1993).

The realist approach, therefore, looks for a more objective interpretation of the data in order to identify the reality within which the events of the story have taken place. This implies verifying their accounts with the points of view of other informants, who can have their own perspective on the events/actions.

Instead, the social constructionist approach used here highlights the value of ambiguity (Cary 1999). Stories are taken as the 'reality' and, in these, identities, meanings, and understandings are assumed to be constructed and manifested (Tierney 1999). It is not important, hence, that the stories do not reflect perfectly the events as they happened. As life stories concern our past experiences they are coupled to our present actions (Polkinghorne 1988).

Personal identity could be seen as the fabrication of an emerging story. Individuals are in the middle of their stories and do not yet know what the end will be. Therefore, they continually revise the plot as they live new experiences during their interactions with their interlocutor(s). Life stories are then a way of articulating and explaining who we are, not only to others but also to ourselves (Johansson 2004).

5.2.1 Issues of Validity and Reliability

Using a narrative method of inquiry framed in a social constructionist perspective presents some questions in terms of validity and reliability. These notions refer to the need to ensure an adequate level of 'objectivity' and 'generalisability' in measuring and analysing a given social phenomenon.

Reliability has been defined as "the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out" (Kirk and Miller 1986, p. 19). On the other hand, the notion of validity refers to the extent to which "[a measurement procedure] gives the correct answer" (ibidem, p. 19).

Because of their link with the scientific method, both notions have traditionally been associated with quantitative research (Gubrium and Holstein 2003). However, they are discussed also in qualitative studies for ensuring authority and for reducing the temptations of subjectivity (Kirk and Miller 1986).

The methodological stance adopted here openly conflicts with the criterion of objectivity. The role of the researcher has been, in fact, fully acknowledged at different levels. First, the researcher has contributed to socially constructing the relational phenomena explored through social interaction (Fletcher 2007).

Second, in approaching the text, the researcher developed some interpretative keys that allowed him (and the reader) to make sense of specific linguistic and social elements (Wolcott 1990).

Third, the researcher (re)shaped the constructed reality while (re)presenting the text to the reader (Ahl 2007). This lack of 'objectivity' does not mean that narrative research is not rigorous. On the contrary, it contributes to contextualising the researcher's interaction with the social phenomenon explored.

The social constructionist stance focuses, epistemologically and ontologically, on the unique contextual and relational discourses co-created through social interaction (Burr 1995; 1998). This has profound implications in terms of the potential to generalise the research findings.

These dynamics are locally constructed and embedded in a unique combination of relational and dialogical relationships (Hosking and Hjorth 2004). Each and every situation is unique and it is not possible to simply extend the findings to a number of (similar) cases.

The stories selected were therefore not representative of a specific population and the sampling procedure did not have any claim of reflecting a wider range of business experiences. The stories were selected because of their strength in exemplifying the social and dialogical mechanisms behind the construction of meanings in entrepreneurial dyads.

Any new knowledge generated by the study can be linked to the social mechanisms underpinning such relations in entrepreneurial dyads, and used to interpret and understand other (similar) situations. Ultimately, the findings are far from being normative or prescriptive of what should or should not be done.

5.3 Rationale for the narrative method

The following sections debate the epistemological and ontological considerations that have offered a rationale for the choice of narrative inquiry as the research method for this study. First, the choice of the narrative method contributes to positioning the study within the current debate on entrepreneurship research (Gartner 2007).

Second, this narrative approach offered an open structure of investigation, requested by the 'fluid' and dynamic nature of the topics of identity and venture management (Hosking and Hjorth 2004).

Third, the narrative method facilitated the illustration of the process of construction of shared meanings among the dyad's members and between the dyad and the external world based on a 'business story'. This embodied the living representation of a business experience in light of the relative socio-cultural framework (Bakhtin 1986; Boje 2001).

Fourth, focusing on narratives allowed the researcher to analyse and present verbal data in a more complex and rich way, highlighting the importance of plot and structure in reflecting the process of identity construction (Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999).

Finally, the narrative method allowed the researcher to be under the spotlight, as his role in the creation of the discourses emerging from the story has been fully acknowledged (Ahl 2007).

5.3.1 Positioning the study within the field

The positioning of this study within the current methodological debate in the field of entrepreneurship research has been a primary reason for choosing the narrative method.

Narrative was classically a prerogative of psychological research (Sarbin 1986). Its use as an alternative way of generating knowledge to the dominant logical-scientific mode has recently increased in other fields (Murray 1989; Bruner 1990; Czarniawska 1997; Boje 1995; Steyaert and Bouwen 1997; Gartner 2007; Fletcher 2007).

After some interesting pioneering studies (Steyaert 1997; Pitt 1998), the use of narrative in entrepreneurship research emerged in earnest thanks to the contribution of the book series *Movements of Entrepreneurship*[2] and to the *Journal of Business Venturing* (2007 special issue on the *Toy Story*)[3].

Moreover, Bill Gartner and his colleagues, in promoting the international research project of the *Republic of Tea*, suggested how narratives represent key data for investigating recursive and not-linear processes that are strongly contextual and differ in relation to the audiences convened.

More generally, the use of qualitative analysis in the field of entrepreneurship has been recently re-evaluated (see for instance the 2002 Special Issue of the *Journal of Business Venturing*).

This is due not only to a re-consideration of their value within the realm of positivist paradigms, but also to the increasing visibility of alternative methodological approaches for investigating entrepreneurial dynamics (see for example the 2005 Special Issue on Social Constructionist Approaches of the *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*).

Despite the fact that entrepreneurship research has been historically characterised by a spectrum of methodological and conceptual approaches, drawing from economics, strategic management, sociology, and psychology, the dominant view has always promoted the researcher's objectivity and exhibited a consequent preference for quantitative methods.

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2   Particularly the second book of the series: "Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship" (2004) Edited by C. Steyaert and D. Hjorth.
3   Journal of Business Venturing (2007) Special Issue Editors: W.J. Gartner, C. Steyaert, D. Hjorth.

The preference of quantitative methods over qualitative ones reflects the predominance of positivist paradigms. This tendency has been inherited from economics research, which extensively focused on entrepreneurship and often questioned its relevance as an autonomous field of research (Hayek 1948, Casson 1982).

However, new venture management is essentially a human phenomenon. A more holistic approach that would have taken elements such as social interaction into consideration was therefore required.

5.3.2 Studying identity as a continuously changing phenomenon

The use of the narrative method offered the opportunity to observe identities *in divenire* during their flow of continuous presentation and re-presentation (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). More importantly, in line with the narrative turn in management studies (Gabriel 1995), narrative also represents a way to conceptualise the role of obligation in the constructions of entrepreneurial identities.

Social psychological approaches favoured the theorisation of identity in terms of fragmentary images or concepts (e.g. Tajfel 1982; Banaji and Prentice 1994). This tradition transpired in the studies of identity that focused on discourses, metaphors, and stereotypes. On the other hand, locating identity in individuals' self-narratives offered analytic advantages as well as an opportunity to holistically observe the transformation of an individual's identity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

In studying identities, narratives can be therefore used to make sense of experiences and meanings (Gergen 1987; Riesman 1993) and to present constructions of the meaning of the self and relationships with others (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004; Hytti 2005); with entrepreneurial and managerial dynamics (Boutaiba 2004); and with the socio-cultural and institutional environment (Hosking and Hjorth 2004).

Moreover, narratives are authored impositions in which people's self-conceptions and experiences are 'emplotted' in a story-like fashion, taking into account the need to enthuse an audience. This facilitates self-understanding, the achievement of a mature identity, and individuation (Humphreys and Brown 2002). At the same time, the social context renders the story and its characters acceptable as legitimate by the teller's interlocutors (Riesman 1993).

On the one hand, self-identity is constructed as actors attempt to construct a coherent, continuous biography where their life story is the result of a series of related events or cohesive themes (Gergen 1999).

These stories and characters favour the emergence of presentations that embody identities shaped around the images suggested by the general discourse and shared by the interlocutors (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001). This can lead, for example, to the emergence of entrepreneurial identities encapsulated in *entrepreneurially*-crafted stories (Cohen and Musson 2000).

The narrative method makes the collection of such stories and the understanding of the use of particular metaphors and images easier. On the other hand, the stories are an opportunity for a continuous (re)production of the self (Hytti 2005). Hence, some linguistic practices become specific constituents of the continuous process of presentation and re-presentation of the narrated identity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

As individuals share personal stories with others, fantasise future scenarios, and identify with or partake in the stories of others, they constitute and reconstitute narrated identities within shared physical, cultural, and historical contexts (Hosking 2004). The roots of narrative and identity thus merge, becoming inextricably embedded and nurtured in the soil of human (inter)action. Because such narratives are not 'in-the-heads' (of individuals) but 'of-the-world' (of relations), the entire system of relational storytelling has to be taken into consideration (Hosking 2004).

Identity emerges in its narrated presentations only as one entity, which actively moves between private and public, personal and cultural, past and present (Watson 2008).

This study focuses on the stories of the entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs become their stories (McKenzie 2005) and these stories become a negotiated opportunity for the teller and his/her interlocutor(s) to talk of entrepreneurship (Fletcher and Watson 2007). Therefore, the use of the narrative method of inquiry facilitated the investigation of such fluid dynamics (Tracy and Trethewey 2005).

Narratives are not 'knowledge' confined in the minds of the tellers only waiting to be collected by a researcher; they became the essence of the research (Hosking 2004). Therefore, the narrative method has been a method for collecting stories and for understanding their meaning, their structure, and the interactional context of storied narratives (Elliott 2005), ultimately uncovering "the idiosyncratic nature of nature" (Verdujin 2007, p. 22).

As section 5.3.5 highlights, the versatility of the narrative method allowed the researcher to explore the discourses characterising the interaction between each dyad and the researcher. It also helped to uncover the unique discourses produced between the members of each dyad.

The former was carried out through an analysis of the text focusing on the elements of plot, characterisation, and structure (Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999). The latter, on the other hand, was achieved through the combined use of narrative deconstruction (Boje 2001) and direct observation (Watson 2008).

Even though the researcher was not always present during the interactions between the partners, he was able to make sense of it through the narratives they produced with him and through the direct observations he carried out. These narrative techniques, used within the narrative method, are presented and discussed in section 5.4.4.

5.3.3 The importance of the socio-cultural framework

Narratives and the discursive resources of entrepreneurs need to be carefully explored in order to follow the construction of meanings within the relations that dominate the life of a business venture (Downing 2005).

For this reason, research on entrepreneurial identity has recently moved from an individual, person-based understanding towards a broader understanding in which aspects such as history, language, and culture have equal explanatory power (Hosking and Hjorth 2004).

Differently than other approaches also adopted in the interpretive paradigm for studying narrated texts (i.e. conversational analysis), narrative inquiry pays attention to the text presented and also fosters the exploration and the understanding of the relational interaction between individuals, and between such relationships and the outside world (Hosking and Hjorth 2004).

This approach hence takes into consideration the different levels on which socio-cultural influences affect the production of identity in relation to multiple local-cultural-historical acts/texts (Hosking 2004).

On the one hand, the productions of identity need to be contextualised within the extant societal dynamics and images, social institutions, and general discourse. On the other hand, the productions of identity need to consider the social dynamics dominating the interactions within relationships and organisations (Fletcher 2006).

However, social constructionist studies on identity have often focused on the products (the stories) rather than on the processes (Hacking 1999). Boutaiba (2004) contributes to focusing researchers' attention on the process, claiming that, particularly in teams and/or organisations, narratives should be analysed *in divenire* considering the different socio-cultural influences, internal and external to the relationships involved.

Understanding the institutional framework is critical, as identities are not portable but become intelligible only within those contexts which provide the resources for their construction (Gover 2000).

Individual and collective identities in narrations are therefore not solely private concerns, but are governed by, for example, social conventions, community scrutiny, legal norms, familial obligations and religious injunctions (Rose 1987). This socio-cultural view suggests that stories are always and forever a part of, and themselves contain, other stories (Gover 2000). Thus, their origins are not assignable to a single time or place but should take into consideration an array of different influences (Hytti 2005). Narrative inquiry also focuses on the 'voices' of the entrepreneurs and of the other characters in their stories (McKenzie 2002).

Contextualising the analysis of narrated identities in organisations and groups, Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) suggest that the construction of individual and organisational identities is an interrelated process and identities in organisations emerge in a fictional way. As they point out, "[narrative] represents a potential resource in identity construction, but one that has to be negotiated among and accepted by other actors" (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004, p. 163).

People author narratives "to enact versions of themselves and their relationships to other social categories" (Humphreys and Brown 2002, p.439). The assumption is that unique narratives are used for specific purposes and, in this, not all narratives are equally powerful in influencing ongoing social relationships in a particular context.

As narrative constitutes a purposeful form of social action, actors may attempt to increase the power of their narrative. Narratives in groups and organizations will therefore be used to inform, harmonise, or break the relationship (Humphrey and Brown 2002).

According to Cobb (1993), the power of narrative is generated by closure and resonance. The former can be achieved through narrative structures that reduce the range of possible interpretations at points where the narrative could be contested. The

latter can be achieved through the use of familiar metaphors that allow actors to assess the power of dominant cultural stories whose meanings have already been stabilised (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004).

These considerations have some implications for the analysis carried out in this thesis. First, narratives and their language were analysed in light of the socio-cultural contexts they were produced in. This included taking into account the socially available discourses that could have informed the development of individual interpretations of entrepreneurial identity (Watson 2008).

Amongst these, the thesis takes into consideration industry-related images (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001); societal images (duGay and Salaman 1992; Down 2006); and social institutions (Fletcher 2006).

Second, narratives produced by different actors in a single story were linked to one another by considering the social dynamics occurring between the individuals in the dyad studied. In doing so, the analysis was not just confined to the final products (i.e. the narratives), but used them in order to trace back the processes that led to their enactment.

5.3.4 Identifying narrated identities within stories

The production of stories favours the emergence of narrated identities. Individuals use plots, structures, and characterisations for generating representations of the self before their audience (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). Analysing narrative productions facilitates the understanding of how identities are constructed.

Generally, the constituent elements of a narrative are plot, story-teller and audience (Czarniawska 1998; 2004). Other critical elements are characters and structure (Gergen 1999). This section discusses the importance of plot, characters, and structure; the next section analyses the relationship between the story-teller and his/her audience.

Plot

The presence of a plot allows the storyteller to link actions and events into an "understandable composite" (Polkinghorne 1988, p.18) and to generate a comprehensive way to make sense of the reality of the story (Boje 2001).

Czarniawska (1998) suggests that organisational narratives can be drawn from four archetypal genres: tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire. Similarly, Gergen

(1999) depicted four main plots for organisational stories: the happily ever after; the heroic saga; the tragedy; and the comedy romance.

In analysing business stories, O'Connor (2002) links each particular narrative style to the entrepreneurial style adopted. She identified six basic narrative types (founding, visionary, marketing, strategy, historical, and conventional) in three main categories (personal, generic, and situational) that are essential in founding and governing a new company.

Following this approach, the choice of a particular way of narrating a business story offers to the audience an initial understanding of how the venture and the related experience are conceptualised.

Characterisation

The definition of the plot is strongly linked to the characterisation of the story's protagonists. Czarniawska (2004) suggests that individuals organise their own experiences through schemes drawn from the dominant discourse (Silverman 2001). This recalls Ogbor's (2000) masculine ideology of entrepreneurship.

Similarly, Fletcher (2007) proposes that business stories are constructed around meanings and images borrowed from the dominant images of the field. Fletcher (2007) notes how entrepreneurial stories often see the figure of a lonely and resilient individual who struggles before eventually triumphing over adversities.

These observations are consistent with the conclusions of Drakopoulou-Dodd and deKoning (2007) that put forward how entrepreneurs construct their identities on the basis of metaphors and storylines unique to their national cultures. Observing the characterisation used in business stories uncovers the system of socio-institutional references that shape the identity (re)presentation.

Structure

Particularly debated in the literature is the issue of the structure that a narrated text should have. A narrative structure reflects the decisions of the storyteller in terms of the chosen themes and the linearity of the account.

The existing literature refers to the *theme* as the concept that pervades an account and helps both the teller and the reader/listener to integrate new events in the plot and to relate them to the context within which the account is taking place (Czarniawska 2004).

The presence of a theme is therefore critical even in rudimentary storylines as the theme sets the tone of the narrative and guides the interpretation of the events (Gergen 1999). An element of debate is offered by the possibility of multiple themes.

Generally narratives are considered to embed a single theme (Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999); however, some authors explain that more open narrative constructions can be characterised by the emergence of several distinct themes (Riesman 1993).

The linearity of the account refers to the extent to which the storyteller would present the events in a coherent sequence, generally temporally or causally organised (Gergen 1999).

The sequential presentation of events is often seen as a feature that distinguishes narrative from other approaches treating verbal accounts such as unstructured interviews, monologues or essays (Gergen 1999). Some authors take this forward and infer that narrative accounts should show predictable patterns (Polkinghorne 1998).

In the alternative, postmodernist approaches claim that, for mirroring a world in continuous mutation, fragmented and extemporaneous structures have specific value for investigating fluid phenomena (Hosking 2002; Warren 2004). In this, the unexpected becomes a critical interpretative element (Cary 1999).

For other authors, the presence of a theme and the chronological exposition of events are strongly related. Riesman (1993), for example, suggests that a "thematic sequencing of narratives" would transcend the need for a linear narrative (ibidem, p. 121). Episodic narratives can be independent from chronological concerns as long as they are clearly patched together by the presence of one or more themes.

Boje (2001) discusses theme and linearity identifying different levels of narrative: ante-narrative, story, and (proper) narrative. In particular, he argues that ante-narrative is narrative at an embryonic stage, no more than a fragmented and "unplotted account" (ibidem, p. 60). And, while stories are the accounts of the incidents as they happened, a proper (sequential and plotted) narrative is constructed around specific theme(s).

The suggestion here is that the sequential exposition of events assumes a different relevance depending on the purpose that narrative research is used for. When narrative is used to collect verbal data, the structure of narrative tends to be generally linear. Events are recalled and exposed in a sequential way and often positioned on a temporal continuum. This is due to both the reference to societal (and literary) images and to the desire of the storyteller to remain in a comfort zone. The

perception of time is often crucial and leads the storyteller to produce relations between events and actions.

However, the storyteller can be 'invited' to make digressions and reflections that fragment the timeline. This requires attention, as memories leave space for *ex-post* evaluation (e.g. counterfactual thinking) and present sensemaking and sensegiving (Weick 1995). The relevance of the sequential exposition of events fades when narrative is used to analyse the phenomenon.

In the analysis, time is often marginalised by the focus on meanings and linguistic elements, both in the plots and in the relationship between the storyteller and the listener/reader. Therefore, despite the attention paid to the structure of the story and to its coherence, accounts are continuously re-interpreted and possibly re-positioned overlooking the importance of time.

Finally, the sequential exposition of events assumes a critical relevance when narrative is used as an approach for presenting data. The presence of a sequence is favoured by the storytelling tradition so as to allow both the teller and the reader to categorise the contents of the story. Similarly, different themes emerge depending on the importance that the interpreter gives to particular events.

In situating the story in the narrative arena that the storyteller and audience share, events are continuously re-framed in light of social interactions and reciprocal expectations. These considerations introduce the need to discuss the role of the researcher in the research project and how the narrative method facilitates its exploration.

5.3.5 Exploring the researcher's role

The way a story is conceived and delivered has to take into consideration other contextual elements such as, for instance, the presence of a listener/reader (Boje 2001; Czarniawska 2004). Despite claims of objectivity in qualitative studies (Kirk and Miller 1986), the role of the researcher cannot remain invisible and distant from 'contaminating' what he is observing. According to what Goffman (1981) refer to as "participation framework", the simple presence of someone receiving a story can shape the way stories are constructed and words are chosen (ibidem, p. 10).

In proposing the notion of *double hermeneutics*, Giddens (1991) implies that storytellers tend to shape their stories by anticipating some of the elements that they assume the listeners would be interested in and incorporating them into the story

itself. The narrative inquiry method facilitates the exploration of the relationship that the storyteller puts into place with the person that eventually will re-tell his/her story.

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher emerges in the process of writing up, particularly in sorting and organizing data (Wolcott 1990). Therefore, in re-crafting the story through analysis and re-presentation, the researcher subjectively influences the process of identity presentation (Baker 2007). The narrative method highlights this process by informing the reader of this 're-positioning'.

As Czarniawska (1998) points out, adopting the narrative method helps to explore the self of the researcher. The identity of the researcher is questioned through an introspective analysis of the storyteller's role. The researcher ultimately repositions himself/herself before the object of the study, and this aspect cannot be left outside the evaluation of a research project.

5.4 Research design

Three entrepreneurial dyads that own and manage a business have been approached for this study. This section illustrates how those cases have been chosen and how data have been collected, analysed, and reported. Table 1 summarises the relevant information regarding the three dyads studied.

Table 1. A summary of the cases explored

Relationship	Friendship	Marriage	Siblinghood
Company	Courier	Integral Relations	a) Studentshopping.co.uk b)[4] Shopping Antiques
Industry	Courier	Public Relations	a) e-Commerce b) Retail
Size	Large company (>50 employees)	Small Company (<10 employees)	a) Micro-Company (no employees) b) Micro-Company (no employees)
Strategic orientation	Growth. IPO	Growth Potential Stay small	a) Growth Potential b) Stay Small
Tale	"Being like Bill Gates"	"Integrating a business"	a) "Growing a business" b) "Confessing a business"
Member A	Jazz	Anthony	Irina
Member B	Tony	Lorna	Stella

5.4.1 Sampling and selection of the cases

The entrepreneurial dyads studied here have been chosen on the basis of the type of the social relation binding them. Three relationships have been explored: friendship; siblinghood; marriage (Giddens 1991; Tonnies 2001). The choice was driven by the acknowledgement that the entrepreneurial experiences of the three dyads might be different in terms of construction of meanings (Ponthieu and Caudill 1993).

The opportunity of studying different configurations introduces an element of cross-comparison, facilitating the observation of any existing differences with regard to the presentation of the self. Far from claiming a generalisation of results, this analysis offers a meta-interpretation of the meanings emerging in such social settings.

The cases have been identified using a snowball sampling method (Bryman and Bell 2008). This process has been chosen because of the difficulty in accessing entrepreneurial dyads. Greene and Greene (1994) notice how, despite the fact that 'co-preneurs' (Marshack 1994) are an important and critical aspect of the economy in several Western countries, it is indeed very difficult to access them as well as to locate them within dedicated databases.

This has been confirmed by accessing the Companies House database.[5] Using this source, it was only possible to identify teams composed of three or more members. This is due to different reasons. First, the fiscal conditions often suggest registering a business as a solo venture despite the fact of a shared and common effort (Barnett and Barnett 1988). Second, the existence of dyads is often encapsulated within family businesses. The legal configuration of these businesses does not necessarily reflect the input of all the family members participating in the venture (Sharma 2004). This is common in ventures managed by couples, where the role of the female partner is often 'hidden' (Dhaliwal 1998; Bruni *et al.* 2004; Ahl 2007).

Moreover, in family businesses, the financial interest is not always formalised as it is often difficult to distinguish it from the personal endowments involved. In line with these considerations, the dyads eligible for the study did not have to be formally responsible for financing and managing their ventures.

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4   Two stories are produced for the siblings, as the Gruber sisters have started different businesses eighteen months apart.
5   www.companieshouse.co.uk

The selection process revealed trustworthiness and reputation as key elements for approaching dyads. Because of the strong personal link characterising the business relationship, dyads proved to be generally more sceptical than larger teams. This was consistent with existing studies that suggest how a personal relation is critical in order to access co-preneurial ventures (see Marshack 1994).

Information gatekeepers have been used as initial points of contact. This increased the trustworthiness and reputation of the research with the entrepreneurs. Gatekeepers have been identified in institutions supporting entrepreneurship both at a local and at a national level.[6] The guidance received from such institutions facilitated the identification of, and contact with, the three dyads. The entrepreneurs were initially contacted by the researcher directly via email.

In conclusion, it is important to point out how the three business experiences do not represent traditional 'case studies' (Yin 1994). First, the events (and the stories) have been observed in an a-systematic perspective in order to reduce any possible bias emerging from the imposition of rigid limitations typical of case study research (Stake 2003).

Second, the study has an explorative and inductive nature, whereas some authors suggest that hypothesis generation and test should be the primary objective of a case study approach (see for instance Flyvbjerg 2006). Third, cases were not selected on the basis of a pattern identified through a specific theoretical perspective (see for instance Yin 2002).

Finally, rather than identifying a clear level of analysis that would represent the 'case', the narrative method facilitates a continuous shift of focus (Hosking 2004). Although the stories collected could lead one to think of classical 'cases', they are in fact unique representations of how social realities are created. The focus moves, throughout the stories, between the lives of the individuals involved, the companies that they run, the relations that they have with other people and with the researcher, and the teams they are part of.

5.4.2 Ethical Issues

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6   The institutions contacted for creating contacts with the businesses were Business Link; the Hive at the Nottingham Trent University; UNIEI at the University of Nottingham; Bio-City; EMIN incubator network; EMDA; Start-up; NESTA, CONNECT.

As with most qualitative studies, narrative research implies the need for the social researcher to deal with complex ethical concerns (Fisher 2005). Research can in fact harm the participants of the study (Boje 2001).

In producing narratives, individuals open their worlds to the researcher and this requires not only academic rigour, but also sensitivity about delicate and private aspects. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring ethical rigour in the entire process of collecting, analysing, and presenting narrative data.

During data collection, participants were informed of the dynamics and the purposes of the research and a confidential agreement was negotiated and signed by both parties. A copy of the Research Ethics Framework, published by the ESRC[7] was provided. During interviews, meetings, and company visits, explicit permission to use a digital recorder was always sought and participants were informed when the device was switched on.

In analysing the data, stories were transcribed *verbatim* and utterances and other non-textual elements of the story were included without altering the original purpose of the accounts. In presenting the data, the privacy of people and companies involved has been protected with anonymity. On more than one occasion, the stories on record contained private information or data that the entrepreneurs did not want to publicly disclose. Therefore, personal and financial data were disguised and pseudonyms were used.

5.4.3 Research instruments and data collection

Techniques such as ethnography, life history, interviews, and storytelling can be traditionally used for producing stories in the narrative method (Labov 2001). The field data used to produce the stories presented in this thesis have been obtained by combining storytelling and direct observation (Lemke 1998).

The field material was enriched with secondary data such as press bytes and advertising brochures that also depicted the story of the businesses. This facilitated a better observation of the presentations of self: how it was shaped by the general discourse, the media, and the language used within the industry.

Such an approach is consistent with Gregory's (1994) suggestion that discourse is not just a linguistic practice, but it also includes the means and the actions in which it

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7   http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf
(last accessed 12/01/2008)

is carried out (see also Foucault 1972; Burr 1995). This fostered the re-contextualization of the process of identity construction within the specific social, economic, and institutional framework characterizing the lives of these individuals (Hatch and Wisnieski 1995).

The narrations

Narrations are the most direct way to obtain data in the form of a text (McKenzie 2005). Such narrative productions can be written, oral (McKenzie 2002), filmed (Linde 2001), and, for some, even musical (McDonald 2003). Storytelling has been used for collecting narrative data. This allowed the voices of the entrepreneurs to emerge and facilitated the engagement of the researcher in the production of the story (McKenzie 2002).

Each participant was individually met by the researcher and asked to produce a narration of the life of the business they had started with their partner. Individuals were prompted with the following question: "*tell me the story of your business*".

As shown in table 2, the freedom enjoyed by the participants emerges from the different lengths of the stories. The two sisters (Irina and Stella) have been asked to produce two accounts each. The rationale for this choice was the emerging awareness, eighteen months following the first interview, that their first business had failed and that they had started a new venture.

Table 2. A summary of the stories collected

Relationship	Friendship		Marriage		Siblinghood	
Company	Courier		Integral Relations		a) Studentshopping.co.uk b) Shopping Antiques	
Partner	Jazz	Tony	Anthony	Lorna	Irina	Stella
	97 mins	168 mins	133 mins	157 mins	a) 95 mins b) 125 mins	a) 92 mins b) 146 mins

Meetings were arranged at the respective business premises, and the setting where the stories were told could formally recall the structure of open-ended interviews (Czarniawska 2004). However, interviews are traditionally considered by the participants as interrogations, which often frustrate the narrative flow and favour the emergence of pre-packaged 'realities' (Fletcher 2006).

On the other hand, the storytelling approach transformed the setting in an interactive arena where the teller enjoyed extensive narrative freedom (Johansson 2004). Moreover, the storytelling setting contributed to turning the researcher not necessarily into a silent receiver, as for example in the tradition of the *testimonio.*

Acting as the listener of a story, the researcher intervened every time that the tellers invited him, either with direct questions or with long interrogative pauses, to reflect on their narrations (Beverley 2003).

Accounts of other informants have also been collected in order to obtain a richer understanding of the context where each dyadic interaction was taking place (Lemke 2001). In the narrative method, the narration represents the way in which a storyteller uses the representation of a fact in constructing an interaction with the listener/reader. Therefore, there is no distinction between a fact and its interpretation by the storyteller. The 'true' version of the facts is ultimately the one residing between the teller and the listener/reader (Hosking 2004). Nevertheless, in order to enrich the understanding of the context, narrations have been integrated with observational elements aiming at uncovering relational dynamics.

The observations

Watson (2008) suggests the ethnographic approach as the most effective method for investigating the continuous reconfiguration of identity. Moreover, in the narrative method, the observation of everyday practices contributes to contextualising the words of the entrepreneur in specific social dynamics (Czarniawska 2004).

The use of observations also helps in linking different events, making sense of them within a narrative plot (Hytti 2003). Narrative is in fact situational and a clearer understanding of its unfolding embraces the definition of the settings in which the text is carried out (Deuten and Rip 2000). The account is framed in the situation where the story is told, and in the particular kind of interaction that the researcher creates with the story-teller (Hosking 2001).

Direct observation complemented the narrative because of its two main characteristics: time and focus. In the production of narrations, the former is constrained by memory and *ex-post* interpretation (Hosking 2004). The time of the event is the past, but the (re)action takes place in the present.

On the one hand, this discordance represents valuable data in itself. Events fade not only because of the liability of memories but also because of the wills of the tellers to make sense of specific situations from their present situations. An account with one or more "memory bugs" is not necessarily bad material to be discarded from the interview (Boutaiba 2004, p. 216).

On the contrary, it can offer insights on how some concepts driving the actual identity of the participant emerged (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). On the other hand, observation contributed to 'expanding' time in its ongoing flow, with actions and interpretations taking place almost simultaneously: "in ethnography the tense of the action is ultimately the present" (Watson 1976, p. 26). This favoured the understanding of specific actions and behaviours in the context of a coherent presentation of the self. For example, direct observation allowed the researcher to make sense of some of the relationships between the teller and some key characters of his/her account.

With regard to focus, pure ethnography investigates the event *per se* and its observation represents the core for both the collection of the data and their analysis. This generally transcends any interpretation of the actions that the actor can produce (Becker 1996).

Embedding observational elements within the narrative method instead allowed the accounts and the reflections on particular events to be contextualised within the relational actions between the partners (Hamilton 2006). For example, it was possible to consider the different use of particular linguistic expressions in a social context different from the one of the storytelling setting.

The observations of the dyads took place in different social contexts. First, the researcher spent a day with each of the dyads observing their everyday activities and shadowing them wherever possible. This facilitated the observation of the three dyads in their natural settings and allowed the researcher to contextualise some of the references that had emerged from the stories produced. Extensive notes were taken during these observations.

Second, the dyads were observed in contexts other than their workplaces. This was particularly important for the two dyads linked by familiar engagements, as their business and their personal lives were overtly overlapping during the day.

For example, Lorna and Anthony, the married couple, were met not only at the business premises, but also at a conference on small business; at a local pub; and at

dinner. Similarly, Irina and Stella, the two sisters, have been met at a conference on small business and at a networking event for their university's *alumni*. During these meetings, extensive notes were taken, sketches drawn, and conversations scribbled as the use of the recorder was prevented by the social nature of the meetings.

5.4.4 The analysis of the stories

The data collected have been analysed in different stages, using different techniques proper to the narrative method.

As presented in the literature review in chapter 2, particular dialogical interactions contribute to define unique discourses, meanings, and identities (Fletcher and Watson 2007). Therefore, the interaction between the researcher and the storytellers might have produced a discourse in which the entrepreneurs defined a specific *persona*-entrepreneur to perform.

However, the dialogical interaction between the members of the dyads might have produced a different discourse, in which different *personae*-entrepreneurs could have found their *raison d'être*. In order to stabilise the different dialogical interactions and the emerging discourses, a multistep analysis has been carried out. Figure 3 offers a summary of the complete research design process.

The first stage focused on the interpretation of the interactions between each dyad and the researcher. The narrations produced by each of the entrepreneurs have been re-situated into 'tales' produced by the researcher. The production of such 'tales' was in essence an analysis itself, as it was exploring the dialogical interaction between the researcher and the cases studied. Through their plots, their characterisations, and their structures, the 'tales' highlighted the discourses that were constructed in the researcher-storyteller interactions and that were, in turn, shaping such interactions.

The narrative analysis of plot, characterisation, and structure fostered the observation of *clichés* and stereotyped societal images. This helped to identify the discourses the entrepreneurs were using in constructing a coherent presentation of 'entrepreneur' (Down 2006; Benwell and Stokoe 2006). This stage is highlighted by point 1 in figure 3.

The second stage of analysis, then, aimed at exploring the discourses that had emerged in the dialogical interactions between the members of each dyad. As observed earlier in this chapter, such interactions proved difficult to access directly as the researcher was not always been active part of them (Boutaiba 2004).

This phenomenon has been investigated using narrative deconstruction, which facilitated the identification of stories behind a story (Bakhtin 1986). This has also been combined with the ethnographic work. The text has been thus re-approached and reinterpreted in light of the notes taken during the direct observations. This stage is highlighted by point 2 in figure 3.

A third stage of analysis included a thematic analysis aimed at observing how specific understandings of entrepreneurial identities were emerging from both socially available and local discourses. In addition, this facilitated the identification of the dynamics that characterised the process of *identity work*. This stage is highlighted by point 3 in figure 3.

Finally, a meta-level analysis of the cases observed was carried out. This allowed the study to explore how the process of *identity work* is shaped by a diffuse sense of obligation across the three dyads. This analysis permitted the observation of how notions such as 'growth' and 'team' were enacted by the dyads. This stage is highlighted by point 4 in figure 3.

Figure 3. The research design process
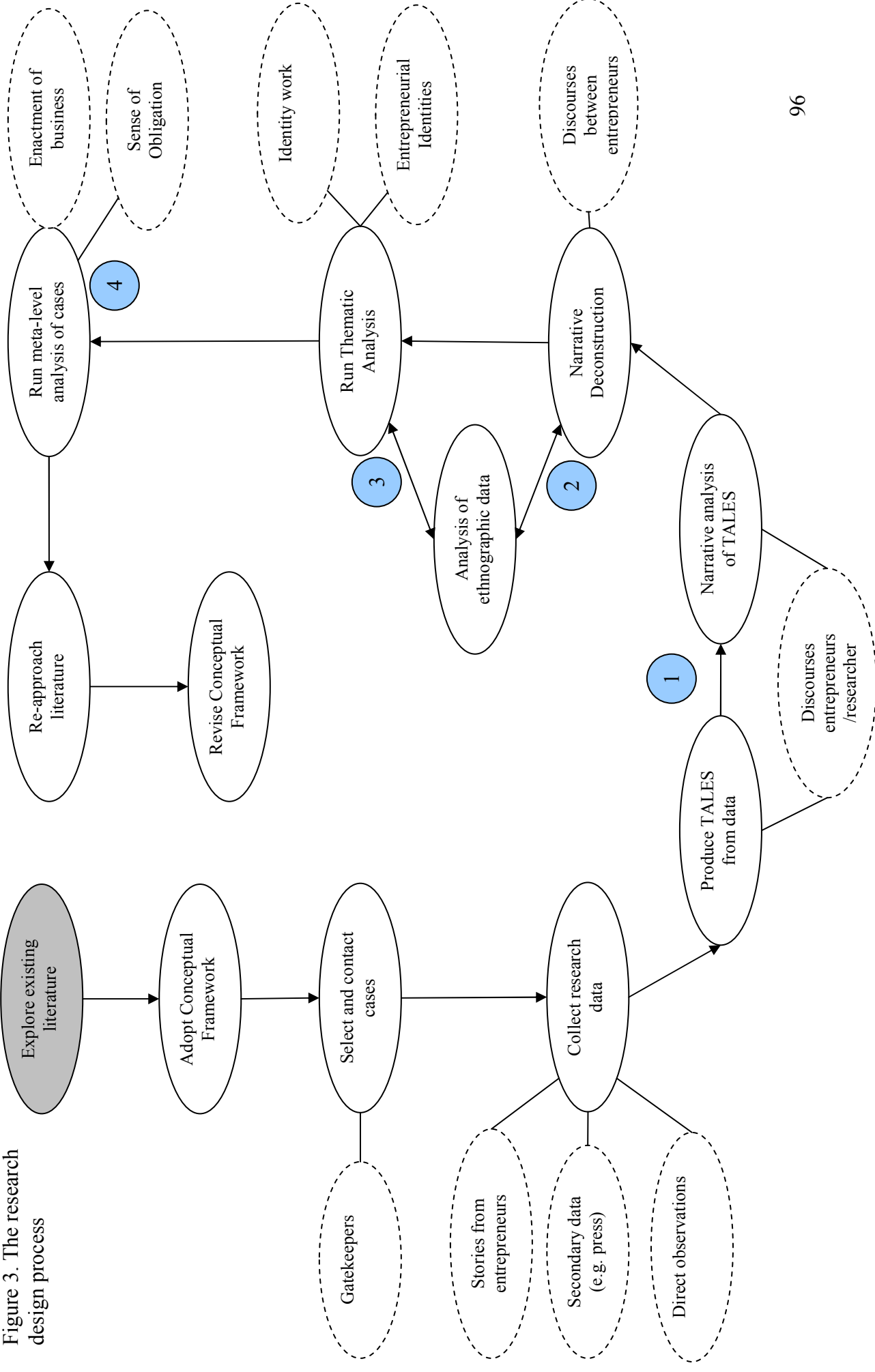
Telling tales

The first stage of analysis is represented by the creation of tales of entrepreneurship (Verdujin 2007). As a research method, narrative enables the collection, the analysis and the presentation of data (Czarniawska 2004). A comprehensive use of the narrative method hence includes the creation of stories to be (re)told (Fletcher 2007). In doing so, the presentation of a narrative becomes a way of making sense of and interpreting the research material.

The tales are story-like presentations of the cases produced from the point of view of the researcher using the research material. This facilitates the inclusion of the "perspective of participant(s) other than those whose perspective the original story is told" (Baker 2007, p.694). These tales emerge from the integration of the entrepreneurs' narrations with the researcher's observations and with other story-framing data (e.g. press bytes).

Traditionally, in narrative research, the "main actor is of course the researcher, even if the somewhat peculiar rules of this genre recommend that she remains invisible" (Ahl 2007, p. 676). This thesis, on the contrary, not only acknowledges the role of the researcher in crafting the reality with his/her role as audience (Burr 1995), but it also recognises the academic perspective in (re)telling or (re)writing the stories for other audiences (Hosking 2004).

Each tale is based on the story directly collected from the voice of the relevant entrepreneur. The style of each tale reflects the narrative elements (i.e. plot, characterisation, structure) adopted by the entrepreneurs in telling their original story.

Some narrative styles reflected the ones previously identified in the literature (for example the plot of the heroic narration - Boje 1995; Gergen 1999; Czarniawska 2004). However, some narratives produced original plots that were specific to the relationship existing between the entrepreneur and the interviewer (Verdujin 2007).

Finally, the 'tales' have themselves also been analysed, interpreting them in light of their plot, structure, and characterisation (Czarniawska 1998; Gergen 1999).

The production of the tales helped to explain how a particular discourse emerged between the storytellers and the researcher. The reflections on the *clichés* and on the narrative styles adopted facilitated the explanations of how the entrepreneurs were enacting their role as *raconteurs*. This process was shaped by presentations of the self aimed at encountering the expectations of the researcher in a process of *double hermeneutics* (Giddens 1991).

This consideration highlighted the importance of the 'tales' in exploring the relationship between the storytellers and the researcher. The stories narrated by the entrepreneurs suggested plots, characterisations, and structures that were shaped by themes and images generated by discourses that each storyteller assumed the researcher was sharing.

An example of these socially available discourses was the academic understanding of entrepreneurship as involving the identification and exploitation of opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). The entrepreneurs therefore enacted an obligation in re-presenting these discourses with the researcher.

Revisiting the tales

The sense of obligation towards prevalent societal images and the obligation to fill a particular role of *raconteur* expected by the researcher contributed to shape the discourse of entrepreneurship and, hence, the presentations of the entrepreneurs. However, Bakhtin (1986) suggests that it is possible to uncover the dynamics of the relationship that two actors share behind the scenes by comparing their respective behaviours with an audience and observing the particular meanings created between the lines by the dualities of the narrations.

Therefore, other techniques proper to the narrative method have been adopted to uncover the specific entrepreneurial discourse that members of each pairing were sharing (Verdujin 2007). Drawing on Boje (2001), the field material (i.e. accounts, observation notes, meeting notes, press bytes) used to produce the stories has been revisited using narrative deconstruction. The prosaic nature of the stories has been re-read in a new perspective, moving beyond the scripted presentations and focusing on the relationships between the two tellers in each case (Bakhtin 1986; Steyaert 2004). This process facilitated the identification of the unique entrepreneurial discourses shared within each dyad.

Boje (2001) proposes a set of indicative guidelines for deconstructing a narrated text. In chapter 7, the process starts with a *duality search*, which is aimed at highlighting key words producing antithetical meanings in different parts of the story. The identification of such words subsequently offers the opportunity to *reinterpret the hierarchy*.

Re-assessing the evident hierarchical relations and *listening to rebel voices* facilitates the observation of the *other side of story* within the relevant organisational

(or the relational) settings (Boje 2001, p. 44). Silent voices within the story become central and create the space for reading the story from another perspective. This helps to shift the focus from the relationship between each individual and the researcher to the relationship between the business partners.

The story then begins its transformation; the researcher has been able to *deny the plot* and to re-read it under a new structure clarifying the *exceptions* and the *traces between the lines*. The latter emerge while observing other elements contextual to the narration and taking into consideration non-verbal data produced at the margins of the main story.

The integration of the verbal material with observations and field notes supports a complete *resituation* of the story in a new light. The new story does not have centres and allows the researcher to access meanings and understandings otherwise hidden (Bakhtin 1986). This process of narrative deconstruction then allows the researcher to understand the entrepreneurial discourses that each dyad shares and that are unique to each relationship. Therefore, the narrative deconstruction is not a negative process, as it allows the powers of the story to emerge (Derrida 1996). This is demonstrated in each case in chapter 7.

Exploring *identity work*

The production of the 'tales' and their analysis allowed the identification of the socially available discourses that the entrepreneurs used to orient their discussions with the researcher. The process of narrative deconstruction fostered the identification of the unique discourses of entrepreneurship that characterised the interaction within each dyad. A thematic analysis has also been used in order to investigate the process of *identity work* as suggested by Watson (2008).

The use of this thematic analysis enabled the ontological definition of the specific presentations of the self as they emerged. The thematic analysis involved coding, which highlighted how specific verbal data could be seen as expressions of more general categories (Bryman 2004). Coding has been carried out as follows. First, a template with two columns was created. In the left column there was the interview transcript, while on the right the codes for each excerpt of the story were reported.

Drawing on Harvey (1990) and Fielding (2001), data were cut up and re-ordered in ways that reflected the key themes. Once the data were re-ordered in this way, illustrative quotations from the transcripts became available for each theme. The

process of re-ordering was also useful for looking over each code and for evaluating how it could have explained the participants' accounts. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explain "some codes do not work; others decay. No field material fits them, or the way they slice up the phenomenon is not the way the phenomenon appears empirically. This issue called for doing away with the code or changing its level" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 61).

Meanings were subsequently drawn from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994). The variety of categories and the overall quantity of data contributed to complicate this analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that "from the beginning of data collection, the qualitative analyst is beginning to draw conclusions, to decide what things mean, and to note regularities, patterns, explanations, and possible configurations" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 26).

Because of the systematic extraction of excerpts, the risks of losing both the context and the flow of the narrative were elevated (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Bryman 2004). For these reasons, the links of the emergent themes with the stories were continuously re-observed and discussed. Finally, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) explain, a continuous and reiterative comparison between the field data and the interpretative framework that emerged from the analysis helped in refining the key dimensions identified.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the methodological approach used to carry out the study. The research design was described and a rationale for the choice of the cases was offered. The narrative techniques used not only contributed to the analysis the cases, but also to their presentation in a story-like form. The next chapters illustrate the empirical analysis of the cases. Each chapter is dedicated to a case, structured following Watson's (2008) framework as base for the interpretation of the data.

Chapter VI

Friendship and entrepreneurial identity: Tony and Jazz

6.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the first of the cases explored in the empirical study. The case presents the story of Tony and Jazz, an entrepreneurial dyad based on a friendship relation.

Sections 6.1 and 6.2 identify the discourses from which the entrepreneurs drew their understanding of 'entrepreneurship' and of 'entrepreneur'. As described in chapter 5, this analysis was carried out taking into consideration the role that the researcher has not only in influencing the narrations of the entrepreneur, but also in re-telling the story (Ahl 2007).

Section 6.1, in particular, presents the stories produced by Tony and Jazz re-told in the form of a 'tale'. The 'tale' also includes the perspective of the researcher and his contextualisation of the accounts within the observation of the dyad that he had carried out. The 'tale' replicates the format that the entrepreneurs have adopted in the initial stories they presented to the researcher. An analysis of its narrative style describes the socially available discourses that characterised the conversations between entrepreneurs and researcher.

Section 6.2 then re-approaches the 'tale' using narrative deconstruction. This analysis is integrated with notes from the ethnographic work carried out by the researcher in order to highlight the relational dynamics within the dyad. These processes facilitate the comprehension of a unique discourse of entrepreneurship that is 'locally' meaningful in the relation between Tony and Jazz.

Section 6.3 illustrates the 'entrepreneurial identity' embodied by the two friends. The analysis highlights not only the *persona* of 'entrepreneur' Tony and Jazz portrayed in their interactions with an external interlocutor such as the researcher, but also the *persona* of 'entrepreneur' they shared in their own dialogical interactions.

Finally, section 6.4 focuses on the processes of *identity work*. This term is used as in Watson's (2008) framework, which is presented in chapter 2. As explained in figure 4 below, the analysis therefore looks at two steps. The first step explores how individuals 'internalised' aspects of the *persona* 'entrepreneur' into the more private

aspects of the self. The second step, indicated by the small arrow, investigates how individuals were able to input elements of their selves into the social identity they portrayed to external interlocutors.

Figure 4. Watson's framework of identity work (Adapted from Watson 2008, p. 128).

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┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│   Socially   │        │    Social    │        │     Self     │
│  Available   │───────▶│  Identities  │───────▶│   Identity   │
│  Discourses  │        │              │        │              │
│              │        │(various notions        │              │
│  (various    │        │of entrepreneur)◀───────│              │
│entrepreneurial        │              │        │              │
│ discourses)  │        │              │        │              │
└──────────────┘        └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
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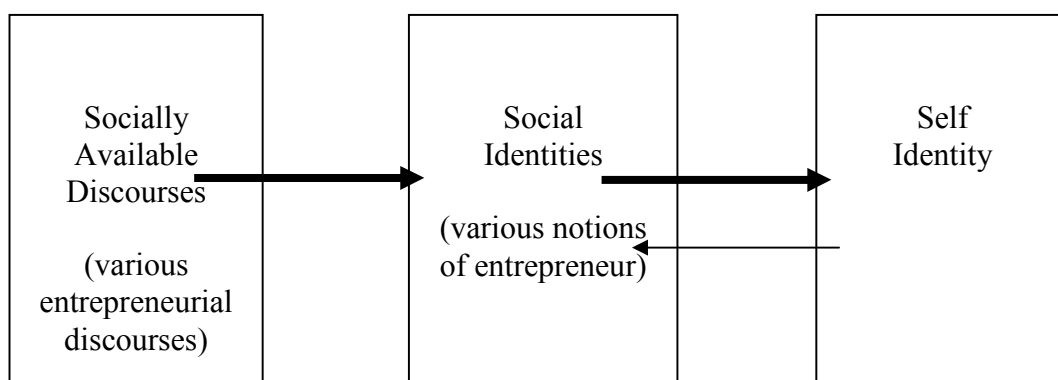
6.1 Tony and Jazz's 'tale': "Being like Bill Gates"

Tony and Jazz were two students at Durham University in the USA. Jazz came from a family of doctors, but he did not want to go for a "*traditional career*". Tony had always been "*quite entrepreneurial*" and at college he had found a way to "*be proactive*" and to make money.

Different reasons led them to London. Tony had left the USA after 9/11 because the 'entrepreneurial' activity[8] he was carrying out "*wasn't very sensible... [...][9]*". Jazz had moved instead for "*a bit of a change*" and wanted to start develop his skills in communication and broadcasting.

After moving to the United Kingdom, Tony worked as partner in a ship brokering company. Although he had neither participated in coining the idea nor in seeding up the business and this "*was more sort of a learning experience than anything else*"; he ultimately contributed in starting it up as he was "*the third person*" in the team. The project had been "*quite successful*", but Tony realized that this was not in line with his long term goals.

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8   The activity was not reported in order to protect the interviewee. It is an ethical responsibility of the narrative researcher to select sensible elements within the story (Czarniawska 2005). This is framed in the context of the wider ethical responsibility of the social science researcher to prevent possible harm to the people who allowed the researcher to enter their lives (Fisher 2005).

For Tony the ship brokering company *"had been good business school"*, but *"things are made to be moved forward"*. Money, success, and free tickets to major events were not everything. Tony wanted to work in a place with *"a lot of scope, to you know, do your own thing and have ideas and be able to put them into action…Which is something, you know, we really like"*.

He was ready for new challenges. In the mean time, Jazz had graduated in philosophy and he had moved to the UK to get a Master's Degree. Before starting his programme, Jazz decided to try *"something new"* and to sign up for a summer school class in entrepreneurship and he learnt *"all the basics of entrepreneurship; how to write a business plan etc, etc, etc. […] it was fun"*.

During that summer, the two old friends met again. Tony presented the problems that he was experiencing with couriers at the ship brokering company and suggested to Jazz that they start a courier company that *"would make a revolution in how people use couriers"*. At the beginning, Jazz was not really excited at the idea because he *"hadn't ever used a same-day courier in my life"*.

Jazz was eventually convinced by Tony and together they decided to formalise the idea. While Tony was developing contacts, Jazz spent the summer *"sitting in my old flat, during the day, just trying to write as much as was possible in the first draft [of the business plan]"*.

At the time, the duo was in fact a trio. Along with Jazz and Tony, another friend was talking with them about the possibility of starting the business: Christian. The team researched the market size, the key players, the structure of the industry as they *"wanted to understand and quantify what the opportunity we had in mind was"*.

 Eventually, they had the opportunity to pitch the idea to one of the professors of entrepreneurship at LSE who reassured them that *"there was actually an opportunity in the market"*[10]. The summer ended with a trip to a Greek island where the three of them ended up writing a sort of business plan on the beach because *"at that point it was, you know, exciting, it was a bit of fun but it was also something you had to do in order to get to the next stage"*.

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9   Long excerpts are sometimes edited without altering the sense of the narration. Missing parts are signalled by […].

10   The introduction of a (mainstream) academic figure in the story invited Tom to use a stereotyped academic expression. This could be an indicator of the process that Giddens (1986) calls *double-hermeneutics*. Tom interpreted and anticipated the expectations of the academic researcher with the use of a particular language.

Back in England troubles materialised when they approached a supplier asking for a quote for the technology they needed "*in order to consolidate the courier market*". The quote for a beta version of the technology exceeded their entire budget for the venture. The disappointment, however, did not last long as *"you've got to be an optimist. If you weren't an optimist there would be no point going down that route because there's always going to be disappointment"*.

It is at this point that they decided to explore the academic route. An academic approach to process-solving was more appropriate for solving the problems software developers faced. While Tony was coordinating access to financial resources, Jazz transformed himself into a *"library rat"* researching studies on the subject.

He found out who were the most respectable academics working on the subject and then sent them a "*sort of research proposal*" to see who was interested (and able) in solving the problem. All of them but one replied with possible research solutions and quotes. The academic route proved to be more feasible than relying on commercially driven technology consultants.

However, another issue soon arose as they did not know how to read and evaluate the proposals. They hence decided to submit the research proposals to the only one who had not responded in the first place. The team soon discovered, however, that this professor was closely working at the time with one of the major players in the industry and the conflict of interest prevented her from being able to help.

Tony and Jazz did not give up and started "*harassing her*" during the holiday she was spending in Hawaii, having gifts and fruit baskets delivered to her hotel room. She was eventually moved by their resilience and offered them an "*editorial judgement*" on the proposals received.

Once the technological aspects of the project were solved, they had to face the financial difficulties. After presenting the project to several investors, Tony was able to secure the support of a venture capitalist. With this other problem solved, they could eventually start the business.

The first months of the company saw the emergence of several other problems. First among these was the departure of Christian from the team. Christian was already marginal in the process of the start up. He had not found a clear role to enjoy and his contribution faded away. In starting the actual business he had only participated with a minority stake, reinforcing the fact that his commitment had vanished.

Moreover, Tony and Jazz came to understand their lack of knowledge of the courier industry. Although they had read every report on the sector and carefully analysed the documents of every competitor, they were still lacking the experience necessary to assess specific industry dynamics. And, *"obtaining this was necessary if Courier wanted to revolutionise the industry"*. The team was joined by new managers bearing the necessary experience and the success of Courier unfolded rapidly.

6.1.1 An analysis of the narrative of Jazz and Tony's 'tale'

This section offers a reflection on the 'narrated reality' that was co-produced by the interaction between the storytellers and the researcher. The analysis is carried out by focusing on plot, characterisation, and structure (Czarniawska 1998, Gergen 1999).

In terms of *characterisation*, the story of Jazz and Tony is dominated by the image of the entrepreneur *a la* Bill Gates, who disrupts the market with innovation and personifies success (O'Connor 2002).

They both explicitly acknowledged that their desire to become entrepreneurs had been favoured by them being exposed to the American culture and to the mass media phenomenon of successful hi-tech entrepreneurs (Ogbor 2000).

In terms of *plot*, the two friends narrated a story constructed on the archetype of the heroic entrepreneur (Czarniawska 2004). Thus, they presented a series of obstacles that arose during their path to success and highlighted how they overcame such difficulties thanks to their unique dedication to their cause (Nodoushani and Nodoushani 2000). For example, the problems in accessing the adequate technology or in raising the needed seed capital were faced with courage and eventually solved.

The *structure* is purely chronological, reflecting the *modus narrandi* that business magazines typically use for presenting success stories.

The emergence of the themes of visionary innovativeness and resilience that traditionally pervade such stories reinforce this perspective. With regard to the former, Tony and Jazz often remarked how only few individuals around them could see the potential of their intuitions.

With regard to the latter, Tony and Jazz highlighted their tenacious approach to the American professor as example of their willingness to never give up. These considerations facilitated the identification of a discourse of 'being entrepreneurial' as constructed around specific characteristics such as tenacity, autonomy, and vision

that are traditionally associated with the notion of entrepreneur dominating Western media (Ogbor 2000; Down 2006).

The implications of this discourse for the development of their entrepreneurial identity emerge when considering their answer to an observation the researcher made during the meeting. He mentioned that he knew that their business story had appeared on the media such as the Daily Mail; The Times; and Start-up.com. To this comment, Tony replied that

> (1) "you know, in the end we grew up in the USA and over there is all about successful entrepreneurs […] and everybody wants to be like Bill Gates" (Tony)

Their behaviours during the interviews also mirrored the cover-page entrepreneur. All participants in the study were asked *"where would you prefer to stay for the interview?"* To this, Tony replied *"we always stay in the office with the others [journalists?]"* and Jazz suggested that staying in the office would have helped to face some potential work issues suddenly arising (*"you know…we have to be always ready"*).

As Taylor (1989) suggests, their presentation was supported by non-discursive elements such as non-verbal communication. Tony and Jazz first offered a tour of the facilities and asked whether the researcher was "*going to write about it*" and they often pointed at prizes and awards around the room.

These elements can be connected to the images of celebration of the individual that the 'interview society' perpetrates in its social productions (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). In conclusion, the discourse characterising the interaction between each member of the dyad and the researcher was strongly influenced by Western stereotypes of 'being entrepreneurial'.

Table 3. A summary of the narrative analysis of Tony and Jazz's story

Plot	Characterisation	Structure
Heroic tale	Cover-page entrepreneur	Chronological Themes of success, resiliency and visionary innovativeness

6.2 A narrative deconstruction of Tony and Jazz's 'tale'

As anticipated in chapter 5 on the presentation of the research design and the discussion of the methodology and techniques used, the stories are re-approached through a process of narrative deconstruction. Boje (2001) identifies several steps through which this process can be carried out.

The first of these analyses is the *duality search*. In this, it is important to identify the different dichotomies that populate the story. In the first tale co-produced with Tony and Jazz, specific dichotomies emerge such as the 'dirty/boring industry' on the one hand, and 'fun/creative organisation' on the other.

> (2) "you see, if it's not sort of UPS and FedEx whatever, it's, you know, quite a **dirty** industry […] there are not so may **entrepreneurial** companies […] they are quite **plain**, I'd say. You know. We think that something new can always be done" (Tony)

> (3) "And when I saw what that is, I sort of engineered my Master's thesis to be able to use the courier industry as a case study. And as part of that I got to go around to all of these large courier companies and see top people there. And I discovered that it **was not such an exciting** industry. These people were not really **entrepreneurial** at all". (Jazz)

In their accounts, Tony and Jazz often referred to their company as a *"fun organization"*; *"entrepreneurial venture"*; and *"exciting business"*. The definitions they offered of their company compared with the industry highlight a *hierarchical* relation. They consider their business to be superior to an otherwise dull industry, and Tony assumed the researcher shared this view.

In Tony's account, the discursive marker *"you know"* shows the importance of context as the entrepreneur refers to the possible common knowledge he had with the researcher (Schiffrin 1987). Tony invited the researcher to recognise that their 'being entrepreneurial' is different from anyone else the industry.

The presence of the discourse marker also highlights the use of the words *"dirty"* and *"plain"*, giving them an even more negative aspect. Similarly, Jazz dismissed the level of 'excitement' that the industry could offer. In excerpt 3, the use of *"and"* at the beginning of each sentence contributes to build up towards the blunt conclusion that the industry is not entrepreneurial.

The narrative deconstruction includes the analysis of other *voices*, such as other members of the organisation. Tony and Jazz often referred to managers and

employees. These events are part of those movements through which the entrepreneur supports his storied interview (Taylor 1989).

For example, during a tour of the premises, Tony introduced one of the bike couriers who had just joined them from a competitor. He asked him to describe how *"un-challenging"* working in the other place was and to depict the disorganised conditions characterising the industry in general.

The employee's statement was pervaded by a constant reference to the difference of approaches to *"live the business"* between Tony and Jazz and the entrepreneurs he had previously worked for. He stated that *"they always talk with you about new things that can be done, always inquire [...] they are entrepreneurs at 360 degrees"*.

Another voice that discussed the sense of 'being entrepreneurial' shared by the two entrepreneurs was Simon, a manager who had recently joined the team leading Courier.

(4) "they love to show how **entrepreneurial** they are in **everything they do.** […] Yesterday Tony bought a sandwich from a cob-shop. Instead of just eating it, he popped here in the office while Jazz and I were having a meeting. We spent 20 minutes discussing how that bloody sandwich could be improved and better delivered to clients […] their curiosity is in continuous motion" (Simon)

Simon was overwhelmed by the enthusiastic approach to business of the two friends and by their attention to being *"entrepreneurial"* in every aspect of their lives. In particular, he hinted how what was characterising their approach was a continuous curiosity, and this mirrored the bike-courier statement.

Finally, a 'voice' that highlighted this peculiar approach to living a business was re-presented by the silent contribution of Christian. As presented in the 'tale', he had been briefly involved in the start-up of the company before parting ways with Tony and Jazz because of different views on how to 'live the business'. As next sections and chapter 10 discuss in more detail, Christian was *"not being entrepreneurial"* as *"he was doing the same thing over and over"*.

The comparison with Christian underlined even more how Tony and Jazz shared a unique understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' that was characterised by an element of curiosity and of doing things always in diverse ways.

These observations indicated to consider next step of Boje's (2001) narrative deconstruction: the unveiling of the *other side of the story*. This step makes emerge

how the business experience for Tony and Jazz is not only an opportunity to make money and be successful (as described by the clichéd version presented in the tales), but also an opportunity to play with one's curiosity and do alternative things.

This becomes clearer if the plot of a cover-page success *story is denied*, and the events are read as a transformation story. The plot in such narrative is centred on the activities that transform the protagonist(s). In this perspective, the transformation story has a breakthrough plot in which the protagonist not only changes himself/herself, but also changes others.

This consideration is confirmed by the continuous references that both Tony and Jazz made to other anecdotes in which they and other characters were transformed (e.g. Christian; Jazz's father; Tony's girlfriend; the industry) and that are often *traced* by the continuous reference to words such as *"entrepreneurial"* and *"revolution"*. Table 4 shows a summary of the entire narrative deconstruction process, highlighting the different steps suggested by Boje (2001).

The final step of the narrative deconstruction is to *resituate the story*. This implied re-presenting the story so that the centre of the story is subverted and other meanings beyond the text can be identified.

The story of Courier can be *re-situated* as a story of change, where change is observed at the level of the entrepreneur(s), of their clients, and of their interlocutors. In this story, people continuously transform their lives pushing, boundaries and re-thinking the *status quo*.

This was ultimately the discourse of entrepreneurship that the two friends shared in their dialogical interactions and in which they developed an understanding of 'being entrepreneurial'. In the next chapter it becomes possible to observe how a social identity of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' was drawn from this discourse.

Table 4. A summary of the narrative deconstruction process for Tony and Jazz

	Tony and Jazz
Duality search	- Challenging /Unchallenging situations - Dirty (boring; antiquated) industry / fun creative
Hierarchy	Challenging, fun, and creative activities take priority in approaching different aspects of life
Rebel voices	- Christian

	- Tony's girlfriend - Jazz's father
Other side of the story	The story is not just business centred, but it also explores the role of curiosity in the lives of Tony and Jazz
Deny the plot	The story can be observed not just as a heroic story, but also as transformation story that discusses breakthroughs
Traces	- Entrepreneurial - Revolution - Responsibility
Resituated discourse	The story is no longer the one of heroic heroes that overcome difficulties, but becomes one of people who transform their lives continuously pushing boundaries

6.3 A unique entrepreneurial identity: the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur'

The process of narrative deconstruction unveiled the discourse that characterised the dialogical interaction between Tony and Jazz. Both considered 'entrepreneurial' those projects that would be considered exciting and that would create a change in the different aspects of their lives and in the existences of their external interlocutors.

This section shows how, drawing from the elements that characterised that specific discourse of entrepreneurship, Tony and Jazz enacted a unique understanding of the notion of entrepreneurial identity. In particular, the two friends envisaged the *persona* 'entrepreneur' as a 'boundaries-breaking individual'. That is, someone who is able to break existing boundaries and re-assess the *status quo* and the equilibria in the lives of other individuals.

This notion of breaking the boundaries was introduced by both Tony and Jazz several times using words such *"entrepreneurial"* and *"revolution"* (in its different forms).

The comparison of the two narrations and the notes taken during the ethnographic work highlighted how often the two friends used these particular words in their accounts. Interestingly, every time they used one of these words the account's flow was altered.

This happened in different ways. At times, the words introduced moments where the narration was stopped to make considerations with regard to their attitudes to the business or to the one of others (e.g. the reflections on their ex-business partner Christian).

On other occasions, the words characterised a micro-story nested within the grand narrative of the business story (Boje 2001). Examples are the micro-story in excerpt 5 below about a previous activity carried out by Tony while at university; the micro-story about Tony's breakup with his girlfriend; and the micro-story produced by Jazz telling of the business and professional activities of his parents.

The flow of the narrations was also altered because the story often changed tone. For example, in excerpt 5, the confident narration of Tony became tentative and insecure. These considerations with regard to the alteration of the narrative flow are confirmed by other observations carried out by the researcher.

Whenever these words were used, both entrepreneurs often suspended their stories, looking for words, and almost reflecting on their experiences while presenting them. As chapter 10 discusses, these behaviours in the presence of specific words characterised all the entrepreneurs studied.

A thematic analysis highlights these linguistic features through the text and suggests that they were signalling the presence of a moment of reflection on the self and on what characterised their 'being entrepreneurial'. Next, some of these situations are closely analysed.

> (5) "Erm, I wasn't ...Erm...very well behaved at university…and I guess I was... Erm... kind of, you know quite **entrepreneurial** at an early age. And I started…you know with a friend of mine, we ended up starting,...Erm...we started making xxxxxx [11]…and, erm, started getting people sort of asking me…it started ...erm...getting bigger and bigger…and, it ended up, you know, being sort of quite big business…And I guess that was how I sort of first got the, you know, sort of **entrepreneurial** bug. I stopped; I stopped doing that straight after 9/11. Erm...It was obviously the sort of thing you didn't, wasn't very sensible…" (Tony)

Of particular interest is the use of the word *"entrepreneurial"* for describing an activity that was not only 'not very sensible', but also illegal. The sensitivity of the

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11   This datum needed to be deleted from the excerpts in order to prevent an identification of the illegal activity carried out.

topic is highlighted by the utterances that populate the text and suggest how Tony was tiptoeing around the subject.

The excerpt shows how, in Tony's perspective, the concept is not just related to starting a new business or managing a successful venture, but in general to activities that would push or break the boundaries of existing situations and assumptions.

In discussing such an activity, Tony stressed some features that are fundamental for this understanding of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur'. The first one is the presence of a fast pace in changing and growing the activity, with their entrepreneurial venture that became bigger and bigger and changed quickly from a personal interest to a big 'business'.

The second element is the attention to learning. The 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' needs to be able to identify when change is needed and to be able to learn how to do it quickly. A third element is the creation of changes in the lives of others. Tony noted how others were contacting him and how his 'product/service' was changing the way people were using other specific 'products/services'.

Another example of how the local notion of entrepreneurial identity was enacted between Tony and Jazz is the relationship they had with their friend Christian. As mentioned, Christian had been involved in the early stages of the start-up as a full member of the entrepreneurial team. He had helped in refining the idea; had contributed to the development of the business financing equity; and had covered a managerial role in looking after sales.

After few months of operations, while Tony and Jazz secured the attention of their main competitors and attracted new capital, Christian left the team. In their stories, both Tony and Jazz reflect on the reasons the two of them considered Christian's departure.

> (6) "He was not **entrepreneurial** enough. He obviously did not enjoy it and he was doing the same thing over and over […]. He did not put any effort in learning new things or in changing the way he was trying it. (Tony)

> (7) "[Christian] did not find his way in. […] He was not being **entrepreneurial** and his commitment had gone. [long pause] In the end, it was just down to us to lead the breakthrough" (Jazz)

The process of narrative deconstruction highlights how the discourse that characterises Tony and Jazz's interactions refers to continuous change. They built their interactions on and around thoughts, expressions, and considerations of how lives could be continuously transformed; how existing boundaries could be pushed; and how the *status quo* could be altered.

The above excerpts show the role of the word *"entrepreneurial"* in signalling to an external reader their common understanding of what 'being entrepreneurial' represents for the dyad.

By introducing the word *"entrepreneurial"*, Tony exemplifies what are the distinctive elements that an individual needs to have in order to be able to understand and to be part of their entrepreneurial discourse. From his perspective, continuous learning and the introduction of new practices are two key elements for enacting the *persona* of the entrepreneur in the context of Courier and in his relation with others.

Similarly, Jazz clearly recognised that in order to be part of the specific local discourse, Christian should have been more determined in sharing the meanings and the symbols that the dyad had been developing in the months soon before and soon after the start-up. He referred in particular to *"lead the breakthrough"*, without any further explanation of what this might be.

On the one hand, this could be linked to a desire to change the structure of the industry through innovation. On the other hand, this could be representative of those wider changes in their lives and in the lives of others to which both Tony and Jazz often made reference to during their story. Chapter 10 shows how the definition of such specific understandings of the 'entrepreneur' contributed to shaping the business to reflect Tony and Jazz's dialogical constructions of what the notions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur meant.

A final consideration relates to the reference that Jazz made to commitment. As the review of the literature in chapter 4 explores, the sense of commitment strongly shapes social relations and particularly strong ties such as friendship. In their stories, several times both Tony and Jazz referred to Christian as their friend (e.g. *"and we are still friends"*).

However, it seems here that the commitment which Jazz refers to in excerpt 7 derived not just from an obligation to the social structure 'friendship'. The commitment was generated also by an obligation to fulfilling the expectations carried by the image of 'entrepreneur' they had constructed.

Chapter 11, in reflecting on this empirical analysis, highlights how this could represent an important finding in the development of the study of entrepreneurial identity.

The development of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' is not only signalled by the word *"entrepreneurial"*, but also by the use of the word *"revolution"*. In particular, this word has been used in other different forms such as *"revolutionaries"*; *"to revolutionise"*; *"complete change"*.

> (8) "we would like to think of us as a courier company that would **revolutionise** the industry […] we want Courier to transform everything, from sending a parcels to calling a cab […] this will change people's lives". (Jazz)

> (9) "We are making a **revolution** here. The possibilities for the application of the technology to other industries are endless. […] You know, we could change the way people think and access services" (Tony)

Contextualising the analysis of these accounts within the discourse of change/transformation that dominated the interactions within the dyad, the unique identity of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' emerged again.

Their understanding of an entrepreneurial identity was not shaped around the notion of 'business owner' or 'new venture launcher'. Jazz highlighted how, for him, the value of his venture resides more in the possibility of creating a breakthrough in how people used and accessed things. The real value of being an entrepreneur is not just the financial success but more importantly the possibility of implementing a revolution in the lives of others.

Similarly, this is observable in Tony's account, with his references to *"revolution"*. The use of the discursive marker *"you know"* introduced the effects that his approach to entrepreneurship would have on the lives of others and invited the researcher to recognise these aspects of as core elements of the social identity of 'entrepreneur' different from the one he had been portraying in his story.

The construction of their entrepreneurial identity is hence strongly linked with the construction of value, not just conceived as the monetary reward for an innovation. Rather, value is constructed as a reward for what the individuals believe to be transformative for each other and for the world they interact with.

Jazz confirmed this when he recognised that: *"we both definitely have the same concept of the quality of life we want to achieve"*. Moreover, the direct observation of the entrepreneurs in their workplace contributed to reinforcing this view, as Tony also stressed this when he talked about Courier's clients during a meeting with Jay (*"we are changing the lives of all these people"*).

In conclusion, what characterises their understanding of the *persona* 'entrepreneur' is a continuous tension in observing new opportunities for challenging the *status quo* and its general assumptions. In the particular examples above, both Jazz and Tony envision their roles as of those who not only would re-shape the boundaries of the industry, but would break those boundaries altogether, changing the way people accessed services and lived their customer experiences.

6.4 An analysis of the processes of *identity work*

Tony and Jazz carried out *identity work* making sense of a widespread sense of obligation towards the values and beliefs that characterised the social identity of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' and upon which their relation is based. The following examples show how Tony and Jazz had internalised their understanding of entrepreneurial identity in their self-images.

As Watson (2008) suggests, this process not only occurs 'inwardly', but it also influences how some projections of the social identity that individuals live in their social interactions are shaped by this understanding of the self.

An example of this 'outward *identity work*' is the way Tony used some the aspects of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' that he had made part of his self to (in)form his projection of the 'boyfriend'.

Aspects deriving from the social identity Tony shared with Jazz were transferred to the way he lived his love life. During the company visit, Tony showed the researcher how Courier's technology worked. He suggested simulating a delivery to the researcher's girlfriend, after asking if he had one. When prompted with the same question, Tony admitted that he had broken up with his girlfriend during the start-up phase of the company.

> (10) "Yeah, a paradox, really [laughs] it simply stopped going. […] I was not enough **entrepreneurial** with her. I was putting all my efforts in making the company take off and I was drained in energy [...] I didn't have the energy to **move things forward** [long pause] I was doing mad

hours, I was working probably about nineteen, twenty [hours a day] and had no time even for a phone call […] but **the company needed it** and managing directors are here for a reason." (Tony)

Tony constructed an understanding of how he might be embedding aspects of 'entrepreneurialism' in his notion of self. His relationship collapsed because he was *"being not enough entrepreneurial with her"*. In saying what he *"was not"* he attempted to carve out the dimensions of what instead he really associated with the self (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001).

This element of reflection is also highlighted by the long pause after which Tony supported the statement that the relationship had been jeopardised by his incapability to *"move things forward"*.

As Weick (1995) suggests "when people punctuate their own living into stories, they impose a formal coherence to what is otherwise a flowing soup" (ibidem, p. 128). Tony implied how he was not proud of being just a 'boyfriend' and of how his self had now changed.

The absurdity of being in a situation where he was not himself (i.e. *"entrepreneurial"*) is supported by the use of the word *"paradox"* and by the relaxed style (e.g. *"yeah"* and the laughter) that was strident compared with the professional presentation that Tony had delivered in his 'storied' interview. Ultimately, in his reflections, Tony claimed how the relationship had collapsed as he was not living his self, the one that transferred the 'being entrepreneurial' to all personal aspects of his life.

Another example of how Tony internalised the social identity of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' in his self identity concerns the reflection on the 'managing director'. In the excerpt above, Tony moved away from the use of the *"I"* to the use of a more general *"managing directors"*.

On the one hand, as Cerulo (1997) suggests, this could be interpreted as the identification with a collective identity (i.e. CEOs; MDs). As Brewer and Gardner (1996) point out, when individuals make clear their self-identifications with a collective self, they are likely to associate elements of the latter in their presentational identities. On the other hand, this highlights how for Tony 'being entrepreneurial' went from being an aspect characterising the social identity he and Jazz shared to being an intimate element of the self in different life situations.

Identity work not only facilitated the internalisation of some characteristics of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur', it also contributed to the transfer of these internalised aspects into the 'managing director'. This process of *identity work* emerges in another reflection on how the self is related to the social identity 'managing director'.

This occurred when Tony was reflecting during his interview about his previous experience as part of an entrepreneurial team in a ship-brokering start-up. Again, Tony was reflecting his understanding of the self by describing what he 'was not' (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001).

> (11) "[…] Yeah, I was the, I was **the third person**. Yeah, I had a tiny equity stake but, yeah, erm, it was more sort of a **learning experience** than anything else. But it started to grow very, very quickly…and, erm, by our second year you know, we'd you know, built 35 ships, you know, which was you know, pretty amazing within you know, within the market. But that was how I sort of, I, you know I'd never wanted to work in **sort of** you know, a big company with, sort of rules, I mean, I don't really do very well with that… but somewhere where there is a lot of scope, where you have the **responsibility**, you know, to do your own thing and have ideas and be able to put them into action …erm Which is something, you know, we really like. And I thought, you know, **these two guys** had done an absolutely, you know, phenomenal job with … [long pause] their idea and I was basically, you know, **a hanger-on**." (Tony)

Tony evaluated this experience to be discordant with what he considered 'being entrepreneurial'. Hence, in the story, he tries to create distance between it and himself. In his presentation, Tony looked uncomfortable and in need of justifying the reasons why he instead considers himself a *"hanger-on"* or *"the third person"*.

Diverse discursive elements contribute to highlighting a sort of embarrassment for Tony in talking about this experience. First, the utterances and the change of tone signal discomfort (Goffman 1981). Second, the discomfort in talking about this experience is also suggested by the frequent use of the *"you know"*. Differently than in the main story characterising the interview, this expression lost its characteristic of being a discursive marker and a discursive tool for introducing the listener/reader to a shared platform of meanings (Schiffrin 2001). The *"you know"* is here repeated in a convulsive fashion and becomes more of a stock phrase, indicating that the narrator was nervous and not keen to disclose aspects so conflicting with the idea (and the image) of 'being entrepreneurial' which he was portraying at the moment.

Third, Tony often tried to rescale the importance of the ship-brokering business. Although he acknowledged that the business had grown fast, he used the expression *"sort of"* to distinguish between what Courier was and what the involvement in the other company represented in his life.

Tony considered starting, owning, managing, and growing a successful business more as a "*sort of a learning experience than anything else*" as he was preparing himself to explore the 'real' facet of entrepreneurship. He referred to his previous team as *"these two guys"* and the use of such a personal adjective underlined a sense of distance between his activity and what the guys were doing.

In his account, Tony suddenly changed from the use of the subject "*I*" to the use of the "*we*" in stating that putting ideas into action is what "*we really like*". The plural "*we*" emerged as a clear contrast to the other plural category labelled as "*these two guys*", suggesting a sort of identification of Tony with a common identity that he shared with his business partner (Brewer and Gardner 1996).

This is an expression of the platform of shared understanding of what 'being entrepreneurial' meant for Tony and Jazz, and showed how Tony had made it part of his own self. As his self was characterised by being a driving force in every aspect of his life, he could not be a "*hanger-on*". Being part of a successful entrepreneurial team should have satisfied the image of the self-made, cover-page, and creative entrepreneur that traditionally dominates the public discourse on the subject and that he had been portraying all along.

Nevertheless, Tony defined himself as a *"hanger-on"* because the image of being a *"third person"* in a successful business did not reflect the understanding of 'entrepreneur' he shared with Jazz.

Jazz also engaged in *identity work*, embedding aspects of the social identity he shared with Tony (i.e. the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur') into the more private aspects of the self. In particular, Jazz internalised the aspect of continuously changing some elements of his life. This emerges from the quote in which Jazz compared his understanding of the self with what is not, in particular his father's experience.

> (12) "My family was **entrepreneurial** to some extent […] But, but never anything else, never anything to do with this; all my family's pretty much medicine. But, but my dad he was very **entrepreneurial** in his way […] he never started a business and kept his old life" (Jazz)

Jazz's stumbling, and the indecision highlighted by the repetition of *"but, but"* at the beginning of these sentences, are not consistent with the storytelling style he was otherwise producing in his heroic narrative (Czarniawska 2004). In linking and opposing the two clauses, the *"but, but"* enforce the observation of an ongoing reflection from Jazz.

His family and his dad had always been involved in the same field (*"pretty much medicine"*); hence, they are different not only because they have never started a business, but also because they kept their roles static through their lives. This understanding of the self as someone who engages in different activities is exemplified by the following excerpts in which Jazz highlights some of the different roles he assumed in his work life. For example, Jazz reflected on how he had become a 'scholar' or a 'technician'.

> (13) "At this point the business consisted of a Power Point presentation with a general overview of Tony's ideas and clearly in order to actually raise money for it we'd need a business plan and some more thorough thought. […] I was using material that I had to put a business plan together. I remember sitting in my old flat, during the day, just trying to write as much as was possible in the first draft. […] I never liked reading and researching but I had to transform myself into a **library rat**. It was my **responsibility** to find out articles that had discussed our problem and that could offer a solution."(Jazz)

> (14) "We had no deep computer experience and we **needed** to change something. So Jazz started **studying** the technology in every aspect. He **read** books and spent hours at the pc trying to understand. Now, he kind of enjoys it". (Tony)

> (15) "**It needed** more control […] After a while I had to **learn** to grasp the main aspects of the technology, […] now I really like the project aspect of this, I like the technology aspect of it, I like the building something aspect of it […] I don't know if he [Tony] really likes the accounting stuff but he **learnt** it anyway. So what it needs for this relationship is, we don't get in each other's way very often because there are lots of things that senior executives **need** to do in a company like this (Jazz)"

Excerpt 15 is well integrated by field notes. Jazz's desk showcased four computer screens and several items of discarded equipment in a corner and in his office he mainly talked using hi-tech jargon. He was casually dressed, but in his office there

was a tie and an extra shirt. During the interview he broke off several times to go and fix *"computer problems that I'd better to solve myself"* and apologised for not being much talkative and ensured me that *"it wasn't always like this, I was a very organised person before it [Courier]"*. This last statement exemplifies how Jazz embedded the continuous changing aspect of the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' into his own self.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter presented the first of the four cases studied, showing the processes of identity construction and *identity work* of Tony and Jazz. The production of the 'tale' and its narrative analysis favoured the identification of the discourses of entrepreneurship the two friends engaged in through their interaction with an external interlocutor in the form of the researcher.

The discourse of entrepreneurship as the development of innovative ventures reflects the one that is promoted by media and remains the expression of the dominant ideology in Western societies (Ogbor 2000; Cohen and Musson 2000; Down 2006). This informed the personification of the entrepreneur as the one portrayed by specialised magazines as success stories (O'Connor 2002).

The narrative style also confirmed this conclusion. For example, the plot was built as a heroic saga, which is the archetypal style for these stories (Czarniawska 2004). The narrative structure also embodied these features, reflecting the chronological approach of 'success' case studies and highlighting themes such as resiliency and visionary innovativeness (Verdujin 2007).

The narrative deconstruction and its contextualisation in the ethnographic work highlight how the discourse that characterised the dialogical interaction between Tony and Jazz is unique. Their understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' emerges as continuous attention to moving forward and to fostering breakthroughs and learning.

Their notion of entrepreneur might be personified in the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' *persona*, for whom aspects such as continuous learning, role reconfiguration and attention to always challenge of the *status quo* are fundamental.

Finally, the analysis of the process of *identity work* shows how Tony and Jazz internalised aspects of this shared understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' in the consideration they had of their selves. More importantly, they then transferred these aspects to their other social identities. This led, for example, to Tony seeing that his

persona of boyfriend was in need of being *"entrepreneurial"*, influencing his relationships with his significant others.

The following chapter presents the same analysis in the case of Stella and Irina, two sisters. This dyadic relation produced, however, two distinct cases. The rationale is twofold. First, the two young women had started different businesses few months apart. Second, the presentations of the two business stories were substantially different, leading us to consider their uniqueness in separate analyses.

Chapter VII

Siblinghood and entrepreneurial identity: the first case of Stella and Irina

7.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the case of Stella and Irina Gruber and the story of their first business: *Studentshopping.co.uk*.

As for the previous case, the chapter is articulated using the following structure. First, the 'tale' "Growing a business" is presented and analysed using narrative analysis. The 'tale' was produced in the interactions that the two entrepreneurs had with the researcher, and therefore presents the social identities of 'entrepreneur' that Stella and Irina performed, highlighting the socially available discourses from which these were derived.

Second, the 'tale' is re-approached using narrative deconstruction and the notes from the associated ethnographic work. This process unveils the unique discourse of entrepreneurship enacted from the dialogical interactions between Stella and Irina. The analysis of the emerging themes allowed the identification of the social identities constructed within the dyad. These two processes are then discussed in order to carry out the first step of analysis following Watson's framework, as presented in figure 4 on page 100.

Finally, section 7.4 focuses on the processes of *identity work* undertaken by Stella and Irina. The first process (i.e. inward *identity work*) relates to how the Gruber sisters made sense of their 'entrepreneur' *personae* in shaping their understandings of the self. The second process (i.e. outward *identity work*) debates the contribution that they made to their social roles.

7.1 Stella and Irina's first 'tale': "Growing a business"

By the time Irina, the younger sister, had graduated from Nottingham Trent University, Stella was working for a local big pharmaceutical group. Irina was deciding what career path to pursue when Stella was made redundant by her employer. In evaluating her possible career choices, Irina had presented her boyfriend with the idea of a business involving selling ink cartridges to students.

However, she did not want to embark in the venture on her own and she was struggling to find partners.

When Stella lost her job, the two sisters decided to start a business together, always focusing on students as "*[we] knew that they buy all sort of stuff; especially freshmen*" but expanding the range of products offered as "*there was a real opportunity, there, isn't it?*".

Problems arose pretty quickly: money, for instance, emerged immediately as a challenge for starting the business. The two entrepreneurs overcame the initial difficulty and, through the Prince's Trust scheme, found the necessary financial support.

At the same time, the two entrepreneurs had to face the reactions of the family. If on the one hand the family supported the principle "*that we were doing something together*", on the other hand both the parents did not believe that starting a business was a good idea overall.

In particular, the father had experienced launching an unsuccessful business in the past and did not want the two daughters to face the same disillusionment he had. Moreover, the Gruber sisters noticed that other interlocutors, such as potential business partners, other entrepreneurs, and bank managers "*were not taking us seriously*".

Irina and Stella concluded that this prejudice was because they were young entrepreneurs and, especially, because they were young women. This convinced them to invest in their image in order to appear very professional. For example, they invested in high quality business cards and stationary for contacting the suppliers and spent money and energy "*dressing like two real businesswomen*" for their meetings.

They also developed a deep relation with a business mentor they had previously met through the Prince's Trust scheme. As a woman-entrepreneur herself, the mentor supported them not only in organising the business activity, but also in building up their confidence and in providing a successful example to imitate. The Gruber sisters eventually overcame all these problems, developed their business, and were happy with their success.

7.1.1 An analysis of the narrative of Stella and Irina's first 'tale'

The presentation style Irina and Stella adopted in the first meeting was very similar to Tony's and Jazz's presentations. Both sisters were sitting back on their chairs; they were supporting the key moments of their accounts with large, inclusive gestures; and they had chosen to sit next to the researcher in the 45-degrees angle typical of TV interviews. The *structure* of the interview was linear and based on the exposition of the relevant events in a chronological order. The main events were presented sequentially and in the form of problems that need to be overcome in order to achieve success. As in Tony and Jazz's story, success and resiliency ultimately represent the dominant themes that recur in the story. For example, the young women had to face the scepticism (male) business interlocutors had towards their activity on their way to success.

> (16) "**you know**, they look at us and they think "why these girls want to **play the entrepreneurs**?"". Then they realize that we have good ideas and good contacts and that [the mentor] supports us" (Irina I)

In terms of *plot*, the story was crafted, as in the Courier tale, as a heroic tale of epic entrepreneurs fighting against the odds and eventually succeeding. Czarniawska (2004) remarks how this approach is a quite masculine one to narrative as it embraces the traditional male figure of the hero.

While Cohen and Musson (2000) find that women prefer to move away from depicting their identities according to such male dominating images, Petterson (2004) notices that even from a feminist perspective, women tend to use masculine images.

The projection of an entrepreneurial identity by Stella and Irina used images widely drawn from the general discourse on entrepreneurship. For example, Irina used a clichéd metaphor typical of the cover-page entrepreneur, which sees the business as a baby to grow (Cardon *et al.* 2005).

Their *characterisations* also reiterate some of the traditional aspects embedded in an entrepreneurial identity as promoted by media, such as the desire for independence, motivation, individualism, self-confidence (e.g. *"Yes!"*). This highlights how the discourse of entrepreneurship that characterises the media influenced the life of the Gruber sisters. The excerpt below presents a list of characteristics that the entrepreneur image promoted in media discourse should have.

(17) "**Yes!** It was definitely a desire for independence. And very motivated by targets, so I knew if I could do something for myself, then it would just bring a lot of satisfaction **Yes!** (Irina I)

Table 5. A summary of the narrative analysis of Stella and Irina's first story

Plot	Characterisation	Structure
Heroic tale	Cover page entrepreneur	Chronological Themes of success, resiliency and visionary innovativeness

Finally, the two sisters highlighted how entrepreneurs should engage in networking, how they should be alert to opportunities, and how they should always aim at growing the business (Gray 1998). The last two aspects are particularly interesting, as they also reflect the academic discourse on entrepreneurship (Shane and Venkataraman 2000).

(18) "We saw a demand there and we decided to give it a go […] we really wanted to see the business grow" (Stella I)

(19) "And, you know, such opportunities are there to be taken! […] Although we have a passion for it and we love our business and see it as a baby that we want it to grow, our weakness is that we don't push it enough to people" (Irina I)

Stella and Irina seemed aware of the role of 'opportunity' in the academic discourse on entrepreneurship. Before the meeting Stella mentioned how she had seen, on the researcher's on-line profile, how the study of entrepreneurial opportunities was one of his research interests. Moreover, Irina mentioned she had attended an entrepreneurship class at University and she therefore knew how important it was *"to be always alert"*. Chapter 10 discusses how the academic discourse was brought into the stories presented by all the dyads analysed, and discusses some of the implications of this specific choice.

7.2 A narrative deconstruction of Stella and Irina's first 'tale'

Applying the process of narrative deconstruction also to Stella and Irina's story allowed the analysis to discern the basis on which the entrepreneurial discourse within the dyad was constructed. In terms of its *duality search*, both Stella's and Irina's accounts present a dichotomy between the notions of *"positive/negative"* and *"young women/ old men"*. The following two excerpts show how these dichotomies punctuate the stories.

> (20) "But when it comes to looking for people, I now prefer to speak to people of our age, who've been there and done that because, just because of the **negativity** we've had from **… older people… usually men…**it's just quite **negative**, so…So in terms of advice, we aren't really looking for advice anymore because we thought we knew everything they had to say." (Stella I)

> (21) "So when you come across people that are so **negative**…**men** who have been in the business-world for a very long time…and yes, … they do have experience and knowledge, I'm not denying that,… but I don't think that they appreciate this sort of generation of business and they are, sort of, over-critical and **negative**. They feel they can talk down to us and they never take us seriously as **businesswomen**. We are very **positive** instead and that's what I find really frustrating because they try and challenge us as if our business is good for nothing and that's what I don't like." (Irina I)

The second step in the process of narrative deconstruction is to *reinterpret the hierarchy*. Stella and Irina presented their story in the form of the heroic saga typical of the cover-page entrepreneur. In spite of the adversities they faced, and in spite of people not believing in them, they were able to achieve their small success of starting a potentially successful business. In doing so, however, they were able to reverse the exertion of power that older men were subjecting them to. Without having power, they became *in* power through their activities and their behaviours.

The third step of narrative deconstruction is represented by the identification of *rebel voices*. These are expressions of other centres in the story, often marginalised in the narrative. The process of narrative deconstruction could offer these the possibility of representation. They might emerge as an opportunity for making sense of the dualities and of the hierarchical relations within the narrative. In the case of the first story, for Stella and Irina two 'voices' seemed to be clearly identifiable.

Two silent voices may be identified: the one of all *"businesswomen"* and the one of the sisters' father. The former emerges from the continuous reference the sisters made to the word *"businesswomen"*. In describing the continuous dichotomy between the plural businesswomen and the plural men, the two sisters were not talking just on their behalf, but they seemed to present the view of all businesswomen in the gender struggle in entrepreneurship. They often commented on how it would have been important to be able to encounter more women in their networking meetings and in their supply chain.

> (22) "I think another thing is that we've met only a very small proportion of women and not even one or two, excluding our mentors who are in business that we've spoken to. It's mainly if you go to networking events, it is mainly businessmen and maybe that is perhaps why we have got that **you know…You know [lack of confidence]**, that it's men that do this whereas it's maybe if they were women, we'd have a different perception, but at the moment, it's just men." (Stella I)

The discursive marker *"you know"* and the brief pause substitute for the use of the expression *"lack of confidence"* that Stella did not even want to mention. The use of this discursive marker is of critical importance, as it implies an expectation, from Stella, that the researcher was already conscious of the 'suited men' as a source of negativity.

The introduction of the notion of confidence in the reflections of the *rebel voices* of the businesswomen could be an expression of a generalisation of this condition to the collective identity of businesswomen.

The second voice that emerged was the one of their father. He had started his own business years ago, but it had not had the expected success. Chatting before a meeting, the two sisters recalled how he often had tried to dissuade them, despite being supportive once they had made their choices. The way that Irina crafted the narrative allowed the voice of the father to appear clearly

> (23) "And then, the reaction of our family was in reality quite **negative**. Although my dad was supporting us to start a business, he was all about <it is time to go out there and to get a real job> [...] they, my, both parents were very…**negative** about it because, because of the financial issues…They…Once we'd graduated, they thought that we should go and they thought we should go and get a job with the degree we'd just obtained and all of a sudden we were, it was almost like we were

rebelling against that and saying <No. We're going to go and do something else instead.> **[laughter]** So, you know, they had it planned that we went to university and we got a job, we got a fantastic wage, which of course it doesn't always work like that anyway **[laughter]**. So, it was, it was just a worry because no business makes money straight away, does it? So it's a worry for them, really". (Irina I)

Interestingly, the laughter breaks the 'voice' of the father, introducing an element of rebellion and reinstating the desire of the sisters to be *in* power in the relationship with 'others' (whether their father or an old-suited-businessman).

These considerations facilitate the identification of *the other side of the story*. Stella and Irina's tale is no longer just a business story, but an opportunity to talk about how the sisters live their relationships with others. This approach contributed to *denying the plot*. The tale could be re-read as a coming of age story in which the heroines come to terms with their own maturity and their need to become more confident. This is exemplified by excerpt 23, where Irina highlights how the development of more confidence is fundamental to adequately living the relationships with others.

The use of the word *"confidence"* enables one to *trace what is behind the lines* and to observe the story within the context of personal struggle. As the next chapter shows in more detail, this personal struggle was highlighted by a continuous link between the word *"confidence"* and the verbs *"to show"* and *"to demonstrate"*. The development of their confidence and of their motivation, hence, took place in a context of continuous personal struggle.

The business activity was carried out by devoting considerable energy and resources to demonstrate to others that they were worthy of being treated as businesswomen in spite of *"being so young and being females"*.

(24) "And this was mainly down to a lack of **confidence**. We were so down. […] [old businessmen] pushed us down, but it's always made us think <Well, let's **show** them!> Never <Oh we'd better leave it because they think it's never going to work…> We just have the approach <Well, what do they know? We'll **show** them.> And that **motivates** us. Both of us – I mean me and my sister will always get together afterwards and say <Oh my gosh, I can't believe he said that!> We are biased about our business but we just think we developed it and…we'll **show** them. We'll **demonstrate** what it's all about. You know, we don't like to be criticised…But some criticism is useful, isn't it?" (Stella I)

Reading Stella and Irina's accounts as a coming-of-age experience within the context of their personal development in approaching life, allowed the analysis to *resituate* their story. Table 6 shows a summary of the entire narrative deconstruction process.

Stella and Irina's experience is no longer a cover-page business story where heroic entrepreneurs overcome difficulties to successfully start their own venture. It becomes a story of how two sisters wanted to show to others (i.e. older businessmen; their father) how they had grown up and how their confidence could motivate them to rebel to a business world dominated by men. The entrepreneurial discourse permeating the relationship within the dyad was, therefore, shaped by words, concepts, and notions aimed at fulfilling this specific understanding of the entrepreneurial activity.

Table 6. A summary of the narrative deconstruction process for Stella and Irina's first story

	Stella and Irina's First Story
Duality search	- Negative / Positive - Business Women/ Older suited men
Hierarchy	Women become *in* power
Rebel voices	- Businesswomen - Older suited businessman - Father
Other side of the story	The story is not just business centred, but it also explores how the sisters live their relationships with others
Deny the plot	The story can be observed not just as a heroic story, but also as a coming-of-age story
Traces	- Pride - Confidence - To show/to demonstrate - Responsibility
Resituated discourse	The story is no longer one of heroic people who overcome difficulties, but becomes one of people who would like to show to others how they have grown up

7.3 A unique entrepreneurial identity: the 'rebellious entrepreneur'

The narrative deconstruction of the 'tale' *"Studentshopping.co.uk"* shows how the permeating discourse of the business relationship between the two Gruber sisters was characterised by a desire to show to 'others' how they had matured. This was substantially different from the 'tale' of entrepreneurship that Stella and Irina had constructed with the researcher.

In that 'tale', they had built their image of entrepreneur on the *cliché* of the cover page entrepreneur (O'Connor 2002) and had structured their account as a heroic saga (Czarniawska 1998). Such images were enacting a discourse of entrepreneurship that both Stella and Irina shared with the researcher.

The identification of the local discourse the sisters shared in their own interactions invited the researcher to re-approach the stories produced by the Gruber sisters through their accounts and their observed behaviours. It is then possible to observe 'glimpses' of the image of entrepreneur that was characterising the relationship between the two women.

As in the case of Tony and Jazz, the presence of some specific words altered the narrations. This occurred whenever Stella and Irina used expressions such as *"confidence"*, *"pride"*, or to *"show/demonstrate"*. These words introduce micro-stories, as for example the business card anecdote in excerpt 26 below; reported conversations; or changes in the tone of the story pinpointed by pauses and moments of reflection.

> (25) "They look down at us that **we're female**. They look down at us that we're so young, well, not so young, but young and it's usually, like, **suited men** that think they know everything. They look down and talk at us and they think we have no **confidence** […] And the women – it's very rarely we meet women that are in business for a start, unless it's at an event organised [for them] and there can be general conversation instead of <How much money are you making?> So men are always very quick to look down on us and that's, **you know,** what **we've had enough of.**"
> (Irina I)

> (26) "And they were always trying to attack our **confidence** […] We have lots of personal **negative** experiences as businesswomen. Even in networking events, men will be very quick to judge and you know, <You're in business?!? I bet you haven't even got a business card.> And because, you know, they are surprised when we say <Actually, we have got business cards.> So, so that's been all where we've been to – trade

fairs, networking events...So...**you know**, always **demonstrating** that we can do it" (Stella I)

As for Tony and Jazz, a recurrent word in both stories (i.e. *"confidence"*) signals the presence of a reflection on their own identity. The two excerpts presented above offer an example of how this reflection emerged throughout the data, showing a construction of 'entrepreneur' that is unique to the dyad. The figure of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' that emerges from the reflection enacts the locally constructed discourse of what 'being entrepreneurial' might be.

This colourfully named image has as its main characteristic a challenge to a *status quo*. Stella and Irina live their 'being entrepreneurial' as an opportunity for showing to the 'other' their maturity, revaluing the role of *"young"* and *"female"* entrepreneurs in the contexts of business networking. In this reflection, both Stella and Irina introduce their social selves of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' in comparison with the 'other' (*"suited man"*). Reporting the actual dialogue in the story reinforces this image.

They present the voices of businessmen before adding sharp sentences such as *"we've had enough of"* or even blunt responses such as *"actually, we got business cards"*. The latter example shows some main aspects of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. Stella stressed how important it was for her that the 'suited businessmen' remained *"surprised"* by her statement, particularly considering how their comments had been a recurring practice in her networking experience.

After some indecision signalled by the long pause that contains the *"so"*, Stella introduces the aspect of *"demonstrating"* their entrepreneurial ability as a precondition for altering the *status quo*. Without this aspect of rebellion, they would have remained subordinated because of their being *"female"* and *"young businesswomen"*. The presence of the discursive marker *"you know"* presents the relevant clause to the researcher, as he would have been aware of such gender discriminatory practices within the field.

Irina's account unfolds in a similar fashion. The woman presents her reflection as recalling an interaction with the 'other' (i.e. *"suited men"*), where the Gruber sisters were experiencing gender discrimination. On the one hand, the continuous use of the phrase *"look down at/on us"* recreates the different positions and the hierarchical relations they embodied. On the other hand, in reflecting on her entrepreneurial

identity, the businesswoman considers the attack on her confidence as the trigger that pushed a rebellious reaction.

The sharp sentence that concluded the excerpt highlights another key characteristic of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. The aggressiveness that pervades the excerpt (and other similar reflections) did not find any space in the rest of the story and in other presentations that either Irina or Stella produced in their encounters with the researcher, or that were recorded during the ethnographic observation of their day-to-day activities. This supports the characterisation of entrepreneur as a subject always in search of opportunities in which he/she will *"show/demonstrate"* the abilities of a businesswoman.

Finally, another characteristic of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' is the ability at self-promoting her success. This was carried out proactively by attending business networking events and trade fairs; offering speeches in schools; and even by participating in the present academic research as a *"successful case study"*.

7.4 An analysis of the processes of *identity work*

The last step of the analysis focuses on the *identity work* carried out by Stella and Irina. As discussed in chapter 2, this study adopts the concept of *identity work* suggested by Watson (2008).

Two distinct processes are therefore analytically identified. The first process refers to the extent to which individuals such as Stella and Irina adopt aspects of their social identity in the consideration they have of their self. The second process considers the 'outward' effort that individuals might carry out in order to shape their social identity with aspects typical of their internal self.

As in Tony and Jazz's case in chapter 6, and as in the case of Stella and Irina's construction of a shared entrepreneurial identity, these processes are identified in the accounts by tracing some specific cue words. The process of narrative deconstruction helps in identifying these 'traces'. The analysis of the text, combined with the associated ethnographic data, allows the researcher to notice how words such as *"confidence"* and *"pride"* introduce sudden changes in the narrative styles of both Stella and Irina.

As seen with Tony and Jazz, these changes seem to offer 'moments' within the story where Stella and Irina stepped back from their roles as storytellers and reflected on their identities. The following two excerpts from the two sisters' stories show these changes.

> (27) "Actually, I think the negativity that we have is because we've still got to build up our **confidence** about our business. [...] We are perfectionists and we want people to see it when it is at a perfect stage in the development, rather than seeing it as it is now. We are like this. Even at Uni, I was always spending a lot of time revising and sorting things until the very last minute [...]" (Irina I)

> (28) It's that we also have some **pride**, you know? [...] We hate being challenged like that because we've had so many issues with people talking to us in a way that we know nothing of business because of our age and being **female**. [...] After XXX [a networking event where men were looking down on them from on high] we were very down and we went to talk to our business mentor [...]. (Stella I)

The narrative analysis in section 7.1.1 highlights the chronological structure of their stories. In the examples above, the continuity of the narrative is interrupted as each sister presents an anecdote that drifts away from the main plot.

In excerpt 27, Irina stops recalling the first experiences of the dyad with *Studentshopping.co.uk*'s suppliers and introduces her past experience as a student. The excerpt continues with an anecdote about an exam. In excerpt 28, Irina also interrupts the fluency of her story in order to introduce an anecdote about their mentor.

The attention, however, has to be placed not on the anecdotes as such, but on how those represent an opportunity to 'step back' from the real-time storytelling and reflect upon some aspects of the self. As seen in the previous section, these 'moments' are introduced by the cue words *"confidence"* and *"pride"* that are presented in bold within the text.

These words make an ideal bridge between the social identities of the 'rebellious entrepreneurs' that the two sisters have been projecting so far in discussing their shared approach to do business and the comments on how they see aspects of their identities. For example, Irina reflects on how she considered herself to be a *"perfectionist"*, while Stella suggests how they both *"hate being challenged"*.

These links show how, in their presentations, the two sisters have carried out a process of *identity work* connecting the social aspects of their selves (i.e. the characteristics of the 'rebellious entrepreneur') with the understandings of self that they have.

Identity work does not just link the social identity of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' with the internal aspects of the self. The two sisters also show these characteristics of aversion to challenges, perfectionism, and the continuous showcasing of their abilities in other social identities. For example, this outward process is also highlighted when they discuss of their relationship with their parents.

As presented also in other excerpts (see for example section 7.2), Stella and Irina often introduced the voice of their parents. Both their mother and their father did not initially encourage their decision to start the venture, although they eventually came to terms with this. Both sisters often introduced little anecdotes about their family and the Polish culture that characterised it into their stories.

> (29) "you know, we are a **Polish family**. We talk a lot to our parents and everyone gives you advice […] we share everything and that keeps our **confidence** high [...] but, **you know**, they always say <go and get real jobs> and it [starting *Studentshopping.co.uk*] was almost like we were

rebelling against that and saying <No. We're going to go and do something else instead.> [laughter]" (Stella I)

Interestingly, Stella points out how the nature of the familial relation (*"Polish"*) induced the sisters to share their decisions with the other members of the family. In particular, the figure of the father played a major role as he appeared to be eventually supportive despite the fact that he would have preferred the young daughters to look for *"real jobs"*.

> (30) "His advice and financial support were very important for our **confidence**. [...] it is ... a good thing ... to confront with your parents on such issues [long pause]... although they are worried for us and would like us to have good jobs [...] so we always show them our progress" (Irina I)

The analysis of these excerpts highlights again how the word *"confidence"* is linked to an anecdote, or to a reported conversation, or to a moment of difficulty in finding the right words to keep the narrative going. The role of the 'daughter' is here characterised by aspects similar to that of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'.

Stella bluntly rebels against the advice she receives, just seconds after having reiterated the values of the Polish family. This paradox is solved by the nervous laughter with which Stella concludes her statement. Stella is obviously caught between the expectations that being part of a Polish family implies (e.g. be respectful of parental advice) and the new understanding of her self as being independent and rebellious.

Similarly, Irina seems to reflect on the internal aspects of her self, almost as if the researcher was not present. The reflection highlights how she transfers the characteristics of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' to her being a 'daughter'. She acknowledges the support of her parents and also confronts them. The latter is done by showing their progress in the hope of demonstrating their competences and ability to look after themselves.

The transfer of these aspects also occurred against other social identities. In one of the conversations during the observations, Irina mentioned how her boyfriend helped her in *"maintaining the confidence high"* during the start-up. However, he was so successful in motivating her that *"now I don't let anything go"*. Stella also discussed

her love relationship, describing herself as a *"proud girlfriend"* who now often challenges her boyfriend.

7.5 Conclusions

This chapter analysed the business story of *Studentshopping.co.uk*. This was the first venture started by Stella and Irina Gruber, and consisted of an innovative website selling products and services for the 'student life'.

At first glance, their business story resembled Tony and Jazz's tale. They were both constructed by drawing on the format of business stories available in the media discourse on entrepreneurship (Fletcher 2006). Their common system of reference influenced how the two 'tales' also presented similarities in terms of their narrative styles.

They both presented a version of the entrepreneur as a cover-page entrepreneur, characterised by aspects such as visionary innovativeness and resiliency in turning back unfavourable situations. These aspects were also reflected in the *plot* of the epic hero that commonly describes business stories in Western media (Czarniawska 2004; Down 2006). Therefore, the development of such business stories and of the relevant figure of 'entrepreneur' were both derived from socially available discourses that the two sisters thought they shared with their interlocutor (i.e. the researcher).

The process of narrative deconstruction and the direct observation of the sisters in their own environment by the researcher highlight the presence of an original discourse constructed through the dialogical interactions within the entrepreneurial dyad. This discourse is characterised by locally meaningful images and beliefs that reflected a 'sense of we' within the dyad.

Stella and Irina both saw in the entrepreneurial activity an opportunity to display to 'others' (e.g. businessmen; their father) how they had grown up. Their 'tale' could have been read hence as a coming-of-age story dominated by the figure of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. This image of the entrepreneur was characterised by aggressiveness in enacting social interactions with 'suited men' and by the continuous search for opportunities to show and demonstrate their abilities as businesswomen.

Words such "*confidence*" and "*pride*" introduced some changes in the narrative of the business story. These changes were characterised by sudden and temporary alterations in the plot, by reported conversations and anecdotes, by a general

difficulty in keeping the fluency of the story going. These 'moments' were considered as live reflections on identity that Stella and Irina carried out during their live storytelling.

Chapter 10 and 11 discuss in more detail this process and present the significance of this finding providing new insights to the understanding of the topic. In this analysis, these cue words allowed the researcher to detect the processes of identity construction and *identity work*. With regard to the former, the analysis presented the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. With regard to the latter, it highlighted how Stella and Irina transferred aspects of this social identity to other social identities (e.g. daughter) and into the consideration they have of their selves.

The next chapter confirms the assumption of this study that social identities are fluid and malleable. In producing the business story of their antique shop, Stella and Irina crafted another presentation of 'entrepreneur' for the researcher.

The cover-page entrepreneur left space to a projection of a more self-focused entrepreneur, more in line with the enterprising discourse predominant in small and medium businesses. Moreover, their social interactions and their experiences also shifted the construction of their locally meaningful discourse, convincing them to give up their earlier portrayals of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'.

Chapter VIII

Siblinghood and entrepreneurial identity: the second case of Stella and Irina

8.0 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 5, the analysis of the entrepreneurial dyad of Stella and Irina was carried out through two different cases.

After their initial success, *Studentshopping.co.uk* ceased trading operations and after few months the Gruber sisters started an antiques shop: *Shopping Antique*. In between the two experiences, they had briefly attempted to start-up a recruitment agency for foreign workers and had applied for part-time jobs. While the first case focused on the business story of a trading website, the second case focuses on the period that leads from *Studentshopping.co.uk* to the start up of the antiques shop.

As in the other cases, the chapter first presents the 'tale' of entrepreneurship and its narrative analysis. This is subsequently re-approached through narrative deconstruction in section 8.2. Section 8.3 introduces the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur', which is the unique construction of their *communal* social identity as entrepreneurs. Finally, the processes of *identity work* are explored in section 8.4.

8.1 Stella and Irina's second 'tale': "Confessing a business"

By January, *Studentshopping.co.uk* was not producing the cash flow the sisters expected and they *"were becoming very desperate in a way, to hold onto it and to try and make it work, when, really we didn't have the motivation anymore to keep going"*. At this stage Stella and Irina *"decided to find part-time jobs to finance it"*. Surprisingly, neither of them wanted to talk about their part-time jobs during their narrations. They simply digressed to keep talking of their business and of their personal lives.

They did not decide *"to shut it [Studentshopping.co.uk] down"*, they simply put it *"on hold"* as their level of attention, commitment, and enthusiasm for it had dropped. They sold all the remaining stock and kept the business idle. Thanks to the contacts they had made during their part-time jobs, they decided to start another business and opened a recruitment agency specializing in foreign labourers, because **"***there were a lot of Polish people coming into the country"*.

The recruitment agency seemed the appropriate choice for revitalizing their entrepreneurial careers, not only *"because we can both speak Polish"*, but also because they had the chance *"to do some good [...] we could really help lots of families"*. Their parents were also less sceptical about this activity as they now *"had a proper office"* and *"it was no longer working from home in pyjamas and a jumper [...] simply walking from the bedroom to the study without even dressing up properly"*.

However, they did not really like the recruitment agency as *"it was something was not really reflecting what [we] like"*. The recruitment agency was also not paying well; cash flow issues emerged when they realized that many of the people approaching them neither had the prospect of a regular salary nor could bear any expense. They eventually decided to close it down after only few months because of their (lack of) cash flow.

They were no longer enjoying going out with their friends. This was negatively affecting Irina in particular, as *"she had always been the soul of the party"*. It was difficult for her even to *"stay at the same table with them, [who are people] earning 30k with their brilliant careers"*. With the failure of the second business, the two sisters took a break and enrolled in a course for creative design. They loved to finally be able to use their creativity, choosing and matching colours, preparing assortments, and trying new combinations of different materials. This activity was productive particularly for organizing Stella's wedding. Irina took the responsibility of being her sister's wedding coordinator and both of them worked to make the event a success in terms of style.

During the preparation for the wedding, Irina suggested the possibility of opening an antique shop where customers could find items for decorating their own houses or for special events. Although this was an activity that she really liked, Stella was quite reluctant to share the enthusiasm of her sister because of the bad experiences they already had in their two past ventures. She asked her sister to think about the project while on her honeymoon.

With the newlywed Stella back from Australia, Stella and Irina started acquiring stocks and found a location for the shop. However, they decided to act in secret, keeping it from their family and their friends, deciding to let everyone know only few days before the grand opening.

8.1.1 An analysis of the narrative of Stella and Irina's second 'tale'

The story produced by the second encounter with the two sisters is substantially different compared to the one of eighteen months before. The differences are not only in the contents, but also in their presentational styles. The tone of the story changes to one more 'hushed' when compared to the enthusiastic and self-driven accounts of few months earlier. The confident voices stressing their first accounts have given way to low volumes and murmured tones.

The non-verbal communication adopted during the production of the story was different. On this second occasion, they kept for almost the entire session their hands conjoined as in a long Catholic prayer; their knees tightly together; and they were sitting right before the researcher, keeping the heads slightly forward. Proxemics was oriented to minimise the distance with the researcher and the interviews were characterised by a tendency to search for empathy with the interviewer with a high focus on emotions.

The *plot* of the 'tale' is the underdog story. The premise of the underdog story is the existence of two rivals, the strengths of which are not equally matched. In the story, "the protagonist is at disadvantage and is faced with overwhelming odds" (Tobias 2003, p. 131), but eventually is able to succeed, rewriting the moral behind the story.

For Stella and Irina, the rivals, although silent, are their friends and university colleagues who now have safe jobs, life stability, and confidence. Their parents often point at them as examples, inviting the two sisters to venture into traditional careers. In the 'battle of life', the two sisters have been losing for months, as they only *"collected blows"*.

The plot reverted, however, when the two sisters decided to do something they loved and this brought them happiness despite their lack of financial success. This introduces a moral of the story and sees them winning over their better equipped antagonists.

In the terms of *structure*, the story is organised as a Catholic confession. This sensation has been enhanced by the setting in which the 'confession' took place. As the shop had just been officially inaugurated, the back room was still *"in a mess"* and interviewer and interviewee had to sit on boxes. As the researcher was sitting on a taller box, the figures of the young women were coming across even more humbled.

They hence resembled a faithful Catholic believer sitting in front of a priest during a confession. In Catholic confessions, the believer's account follows a hilly path alternating between good moments, reflections, and sins. The researcher joked with the two sisters on his Catholic education and all observed how it was funny that only three Catholics could have ended up transforming an interview into a confession.

The structure of the narrative is therefore constructed by presenting the highs of their experiences, immediately followed by the lows. In between, there are reflections on the actions that clash with the expectations that the story should have otherwise fulfilled. In this 'confession', events are not presented in a chronological or sequential way, but they are offered in the form of a reflection.

Such reflection is particularly present in analysing the role of entrepreneurship in their lives. The themes of success and growth that were presented in the first story disappeared. The recurrent themes are now the concept of being self-employed and their enduring *"enterprising spirit"*, which is still there despite the difficulties. These themes are intertwined with the theme of humility, where actions should be carefully considered before being disclosed to others.

The discourse that permeates the stories ultimately reflects the enterprising culture that the British government has promoted in the past few years (Gray 1998; duGay 1996). Stella and Irina have been trying to improve their lives through enterprise, focusing on this could have enhanced their confidence and their freedom.

> (31) "And I think we'd lost all our motivation and **confidence** because we'd taken so many knock-backs over the past three years. So we thought if we tried to start another business it might not work or…we just didn't have the confidence to try anything – but knowing that we always wanted to be **self-employed**" (Irina II)

> (32) "Oh, really. It was not important what we were going to do. As long as we could be working for ourselves" (Stella II)

In terms of *characterisation*, the entrepreneurs represented by the Gruber sisters are now more reflexive and less confrontational with the outside world. This is underlined by a use of recurring phrases such as *"it was not important what"* that serve to introduce their relationship with the outside world in the form of *"what they thought", "what we were going to do", "how people were treating us"*.

This discourse on their enduring enterprising spirit characterised the relation between the dyad and the researcher as well, and therefore (in)formed an entrepreneurial identity more in line with the image of individuals who want to become 'his/her own boss'.

In the accounts, this is also stressed by the complete absence of any reference to growth. The Gruber sisters do not describe any more their business in terms of a baby to raise; but in terms of an opportunity to *"not just get wages from an employer"*.

Table 7. A summary of the narrative analysis of Stella and Irina's second story

Plot	Characterisation	Structure
Underdog tale	Enterprising entrepreneur (Self-employment business)	Catholic confession. Organised alternating highs and lows. Themes of self-employment, self-satisfaction, humility.

8.2 A narrative deconstruction of Stella and Irina's second 'tale'

Stella and Irina's second set of accounts considerably differs from the first encounter the researcher had with the two sisters. In telling the story of their antiques shop business, Stella and Irina could not prevent some elements of reference to the earlier experience of *Studentshopping.co.uk*. This was mainly due to an anticipation of the curiosity of the researcher. The two sisters assumed they would receive questions about what had happened to the website (Giddens 1987).

The comparison between the ways in which each sister references the two business ventures offers a chance for identifying clear elements of *duality*. In particular, just in the storied interview, Irina refers to the 'entrepreneurial processes' of *Studentshopping.co.uk* and of the recruitment agency as *"these experiences"* (3 times); *"these activities"* (4 times); or *"these projects"* (4 times). Stella, similarly, uses mainly the word *"experience"* for describing *Studentshopping.co.uk*.

On the other hand, the antique shop venture is generally addressed as *"business"*. Another distinction emerges in the verbs used by Stella and Irina for describing their

actions within the 'entrepreneurial activity'. While the student website had been *"launched"*, *"realized"*, and *"started"*, the antique shop is introduced by expressions such as "*doing something with my sister*", "*working with my sister*", and "*collaborating with her*".

A final duality refers to the use of the word *"opportunity"*. In this second story both sisters still mention expressions such as "*we had found that opportunity*" and *"we discovered an opportunity"* whenever making any reference to *Studentshopping.co.uk* or to the recruitment agency. On the other hand, whenever they focus on the antique shop, they used expressions such as "*we took our personal decision*", "*we created it through our coordinated effort*", and "*it was generated mainly by our thoughtful enthusiasm*".

The identification of these dualities favours the comprehension of a *hierarchical relation* between the antique shop and their past entrepreneurial experiences. The different terminologies used for the website and the shop could be interpreted as an opportunity for the young women to bury their past (failing) experiences and to present them in a subordinate grade compared to the exciting new entrepreneurial activity.

What can be now considered a "*business*" is a success in its own terms, whilst the experience of *Studentshopping.co.uk* was considered a definite failure to the extent that Irina clearly states how she does not want to talk about *"that thing"*. Interestingly, however, the two sisters use to refer to their past experiences using the pronoun *"these"* rather than *"those"*. Syntactically, it would have been more appropriate to use *"those"*, considering the temporal sequence of events. Shrader *et al.* (2004) suggest that serial entrepreneurs generally distance themselves from past failures and tend to focus on actual events.

On the one hand, Stella and Irina limit the references to *Studentshopping.co.uk*, foregrounding their reflections on the new business. They also explicitly state that they would rather avoid talking about the website, even though the researcher had not even asked them to. The use of *"these"* rather than *"those"* suggests a sense of vicinity that disconfirms the existing literature. On the other hand, though, they did not ignore the old venture altogether as they address it in the story as a 'project/activity/experience'. In contrast, while this confirms subordination against what it really represents a business, the linguistic change allows the storytellers to

revaluate past experiences as learning opportunities that contributed to their professional development.

Using expressions such as *"creating something together with my sister"* rather than *"we discovered an opportunity"*, contributes to shifting the focus from the processes of searching, discovering, and evaluating new opportunities to the analysis of how the antique shop represents a vehicle for allowing the sisters to do something together.

The opportunity is no longer something waiting 'out-there', but is constructed through interaction (Fletcher and Watson 2007). The importance of the product of the entrepreneurial process (e.g. an e-commerce website, a recruitment agency, an antique shop) fades away, foregrounding instead the processes of re-confirmation of the relationship.

From this perspective, the story presents *another interesting side*. It is no longer just an opportunity to present a business experience, but it also offers the chance to talk and reflect on the relationship between the two sisters.

This could be also observed if *the plot is denied*. Rather than an underdog story (told in the fashion of a Catholic confession), the story becomes an emotional rollercoaster (Johnson 1964), in which the focus is always on how the changes of scenario (e.g. new business, new interlocutors) influence the interaction between the characters. The recurrent words remained always *"confidence"* and *"pride"*, but they are no longer in association with verbs such as to *"show/demonstrate"*.

Between the lines, the story becomes an ongoing reflection on their relationship. This is exemplified by the following excerpt.

(33) "this is all much better than **these experiences**. This is ours, we really don't care if other people like it or not … we know that we love doing this." (Irina II)

The importance of a shared understanding is reinforced by the use of the possessive pronoun *"our"* that highlighted both a sense of re-appropriation of their lives and a sense of community in sharing the responsibility of doing something together. The antique shop was not successful yet, as it had just started, but Irina was already considering it a critical step in their lives as it allowed them to work together and to do something they liked. From this perspective, the story could be *resituated*

as an opportunity for the sisters to demonstrate to themselves their newly retrieved confidence.

Table 8. A summary of the narrative deconstruction process for Stella and Irina's second story

	Stella and Irina's Second Story
Duality search	- Business / That thing - Launching (realising; starting) / Doing (working; collaborating)
Hierarchy	Having created the current business has more importance than having discovered opportunities in the past
Rebel voices	A Polish family
Other side of the story	The story is not just business centred, but it also explores how the sisters live the relationship between them
Deny the plot	The story can be observed not just as an underdog story, but an emotional roller-coaster
Traces	- Pride - Confidence - Responsibility
Resituated discourse	The story is no longer a business story in the form of a Catholic confession, but becomes one of people who would like to show to themselves how they have grown up

The comparison between the two business stories lived by Stella and Irina offers some important elements of analysis. On the surface they are two similar business stories, with similar characters and distinguished by the use of two different plots.

However, as the process of narrative deconstruction shows, the local discourse of entrepreneurship, which is shaped by the dialogical interactions between the two sisters, takes two different forms in these cases. The first interaction is centred around a discourse of rebellion (in)formed by words and concepts aimed at showing to others (i.e. older businessmen; father) how their confidence and motivation had grown up. The second one, however, is characterised by a discourse of self-satisfaction, where the sisters aim at proving to themselves how they had grown up.

8.3 A unique entrepreneurial identity: the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur'

The second story reveals how the Gruber sisters had developed a different approach to business. On the one hand, this is testified by visible elements. The new business they started is of a complete different type from *Studentshopping.co.uk*: it has different technological implications, a different industry, different target market, and different working hours. The production of the 'tale' also highlights how their presentation as 'entrepreneurs' to the researcher was different.

On the other hand, the process of narrative deconstruction shows how non-visible aspects had changed as well. The local discourse that characterised the dialogical construction of entrepreneurship is now different. The interaction between the sisters is no longer characterised by a desire to show to 'others' how they had been able to succeed in spite of the negativity they received for being young businesswomen. The discourse between the sisters in the second story is centred around a reflection on the self-satisfaction generated by their entrepreneurial activity.

As in the previous scenario, the words *"confidence"* and *"pride"* signal an alteration in the flow of the story. For example, excerpts 34 and 35 below introduce two micro-stories. Irina interrupts the business story to narrate an anecdote about going out with some friends and discovering that they were earning much more doing *"normal jobs"*. Stella also uses the word *"confidence"* to recall how, between the businesses, she had applied without success for her old part-time job.

(34) "So we realised once again that this really wasn't something that we were enjoying doing. We weren't passionate about it. We just did it because we saw an opportunity and it got to a point where both Stella and I were very sort of depressed, literally depressed in our sort of situation, with zero **confidence**. Not only were we not making a lot of money, but we were holding onto something that we didn't even enjoy doing. So we were trying to develop something that we both enjoyed and we always knew that we wanted to do something creative, but we just couldn't figure out what it was that we wanted to do. And I think we'd lost all our motivation and **confidence**" (Irina II)

(35) "Our **confidence** was so low for both of us, myself and Irina, just because of these sort of knocks we'd had over three years. You know, just like the transition to self-employment and things that I went for a job interview, doing a job that I'd been doing four years ago and I didn't get the job because they said I had a lack of **confidence**. […] I didn't get it…you know, and even though I had, sort of like, experience, they said I had a lack of **confidence**. I knew I had a lack of **confidence** anyway

because after sort three years being knocked and knocked and knocked we were both really low…and for somebody else to say <You've got no **confidence**>… you know […] because then **confidence** has now grown because we're doing something that we're happy with and I think we're proud [of it]. And I think that's what it is. I think we're just, I think we just **show to ourselves** we're more **confident** in selling it, just because we love what we're doing." (Stella II)

Excerpts 34 and 35 exemplify how the new discourse of self-satisfaction, that characterises their relationship and that is based on showing to themselves how they had grown up, is enacted in a unique interpretation of 'entrepreneur'. The *persona* of the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' emerges as an individual who has the courage to do what he/she loves.

Irina's account shows how identifying and exploiting opportunities does not reflect the idea of entrepreneur that the sisters share any longer. In spite of this being considered a key feature of the entrepreneur in both the academic (Shane and Venkataraman 2000) and policy discourse (duGay 2004), the two sisters neglected it and defined their own understanding.

Both accounts highlight how 'being entrepreneurs' meant keeping their confidence high doing something they loved. In Stella's account, it is interesting to notice how the change of subject from *"I"* to the *"we"* underlines two precise implications.

First, it presents how this notion of entrepreneur was collectively developed by the sisters. Second, it underlines how another key feature of the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' is the importance of doing things together. These observations are important for possible interlocutors of the business.

For the Gruber sisters, elements such commercial viability; growth potential; and market opportunities are no longer important in defining the typology of their business. The key aspects to consider in a shaping and evaluating an entrepreneurial venture are represented by the presence of the other sister and by the definition of an activity in line with their own personal preferences.

Finally, comparing the enactment of this social identity with the previous *Studentshopping.co.uk* experience, some other unique features emerge in terms of their 'entrepreneur' *persona*. One of the key 'skills' that characterised the 'rebellious entrepreneur' was the desire to show to others the activities of the dyad. However, the new presentation of the social identity of 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' required the

two women to be able to find opportunities for demonstrating their achievements to themselves. This consideration is also supported by ethnographic observations.

Stella prepared a portfolio of all press news, achievements, and contracts that the two sisters had produced in the past 24 months, and she had organised these into a booklet. During a pause in her day, Stella was refining the package. Without asking the researcher to see the booklet, she mentioned how what she had been preparing was something she would not have circulated: *"that's for us, so we can always remind each other how much we put into it"*.

8.4 An analysis of the processes of *identity work*

As observed in the other cases, the process of *identity work* also emerges in the analysis of the second story of Irina and Stella. In this case as well, the use of particular words introduces changes in the story.

The excerpts presented in this section for example show how, through these words, Stella introduce the discussion about her marriage, while Irina interrupts her account with laughter and long pauses. These alterations of the story are interpreted as moments of reflection on their identity. The words *pride/proud* represent examples of words that recur in both stories and introduce such reflections.

On some occasions, the precise words *pride/proud* are not explicitly used. However, the accounts paraphrase the concept with more complex expressions. For example, in excerpt 36 Stella uses the phrase *"so they can tell all their friends and family"* which signifies how her parents enacted the notion of pride with regard to the activities of their two daughters.

> (36) "I think as you get to a certain age there's a **pressure**…for being more **responsible**. After university you're expected to go [away from the family] and, you know, and you need to show your parents that university was worthwhile and you're getting paid a nice salary and you're doing a good job. **Just so they can tell all their friends and family** and in reality, after being made redundant it was just like plodding along, you know, **sort of** doing the *Studentshopping* project, but like I say, taking part-time jobs and just surviving…" […] we are more mature now, you know, [**laughter**] I do something I love, with my sister […] and I got married [**laughter**] (Stella II)

In the excerpt, Stella's *identity work* emerges both inwardly and outwardly. On the one hand, Stella shows how some aspects of her social identity as a 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' became embedded in the idea of self she had. It is possible to observe this in the link between how she considers herself to be more 'mature' now and the realisation that this had happened because of her dedication to doing something she loved, rather than something that would have directly affected her relation with 'others'.

This projection of her social identity co-exists in the first part of her account with the one of the 'daughter'. The latter seems to be shaped by the dialogical interaction that Stella had with her parents and by the understanding that she had of the traditional family. This form of respect towards the existing social structures is often

observed by the literature in how social roles are enacted in family business contexts (Dhaliwal 1998).

Stella acknowledges that becoming more mature means moving away from something like their first entrepreneurial experience. The family had never particularly been keen on *Studentshopping.co.uk* and Stella is well aware of this. However, she also mentions how part-time jobs and a 'surviving' approach to life do not reflect her true self.

This introduces some elements of *identity work* that allows her to make "a connection 'outwards' to social others" (Watson 2008, p. 140). The process of outwardly *identity work* is pinpointed by how Stella enacts her self as mature, yet in a unique and joyful way.

Specifically, she introduces a projection of her social identity as the 'wife' with laughter. She extends the new understanding of 'being mature' that characterises the self into other social aspects of her life. This was also confirmed by direct observation. When Stella introduced her husband to the researcher, she played along with him, mocking a serious wife standing next to him before she started laughing again.

In the story, introducing the notion of 'wife' and the concept of 'being mature' she often moves from the use of the *"I"* as subject to the use of the plural form, highlighting again how this social identity emerges from the discourse that the dialogical interaction with her sister had locally constructed.

(37) "I should be serious, now, I am **married** […] I cannot really put that face up so easily, I am so happy now after all **we** have been through." (Stella II)

Similarly, Irina reflects on the implications that the choices of the dyad had had in terms of their relationships with the family. The following two excerpts are, again, both introduced by the word *pride/proud* and therefore signal some elements of reflection on the social identity the two sisters share in their dialogical interactions.

The comparison between the two excerpts highlights considerable differences in terms of identity construction. In the first, Irina briefly recalls the times when they started a recruitment agency for Polish workers in the few months between *Studentshopping.co.uk* and the antiques shop. Although the researcher manifested his interest, both sisters did not want to discuss the recruitment agency. In this, it is

possible to observe agency in the foregrounding of specific events and considerations (Riesman 1993). The experience of the recruitment agency is not in line with their account and they want clearly to neglect it. Irina introduces such a brief reflection just before excerpt 39, comparing the two contexts.

(38) "[our parents were] Shocked. We didn't tell them. I think with *Studentshopping*, you know, I don't [know] what my parents did think about *Studentshopping*. I think because we worked from home and we just didn't feel **grown-up**, in a way, you know, with **responsibilities**…[…] I think they were quite, **sort of** like, **proud** in a sense in that it was a physical thing rather than *Studentshopping*. I know that they were a bit more relaxed now. We were in an office, we were working nine to five, you know, this is what we were doing. […] there was a **sort of** social element in what we were doing as we were helping Polish people […] and our family was **sort of proud** about it". (Irina II)

(39) "We felt we had to do it. We're **grown-ups** and we decided to take on our **responsibilities** together. […] And then when we got this place, we actually knew about this place at Christmas time, January but we didn't tell them until April, when we actually had the keys **[laughter]**. […] So I think they're just really pleased now. **[laughter] Proud** and pleased **[laughter]**. I think they're just worried because it's more of a financial risk than any of the other businesses, that initially they were just so worried and asking us questions, how were we going to do this? "Have you thought about that?" And you know, **I think they still think we're babies [laughter]**. (Irina II)

In Irina's reflection, two aspects of the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' are internalised in a clear understanding of the self (i.e. inwardly *identity work*) as 'being mature'. The first is the realisation of doing things together and is highlighted by the continuous use of the plural *"we"* whenever she reflected on aspects of her own identity.

The second aspect internalised is the realisation of doing things she liked. This is underlined by the continuous laughter that accompanies her reflections on the self. Her sense of guilt because of the parents' worries and expectations that clearly characterised the self in previous activities fades away and leaves space to a new self that is confident enough to laugh when rhetorical questions about her future are asked. This reflects the unique discourse of 'being mature' that the two sisters share in their dialogical interactions about starting and managing a new venture.

At the same time, this aspect of the internal self informs the construction of the social identity of 'daughter' (i.e. outwardly *identity work*). Even if she is now not mature in the sense that her family are expecting, she is still able to make them proud. The laughter highlights how the notion of 'being mature', constructed in the relationship with her sister, is shaped into the consideration that Irina has of her self, and again in the *persona* she presents in front of her parents as 'daughter'.

In her account, Irina constructs her presentation of 'daughter' on what was expected by her parents. She introduces in her reflection the elements of the entrepreneurial activity that could have supported a notion of 'being mature' in the family context. She hence highlights the social role of the recruitment agency in supporting the Polish community and the traditional structure of the business (e.g. 9-5 working hours).

However, she seems to distance herself from this understanding of 'being mature', stressing how they *"didn't feel grown-up"* as this construction does not reflect the self she is trying to shape. Such a consideration is supported by the vagueness and the judgemental dimension that the expression "*sort of*" suggests (Schiffrin 1987).

On the one hand, in this accounts, Irina avoids a clear definition of what the parents' expectations were and this is exacerbated by the continuous use of the *"sort of"* and by the presentation of their ideas in the form of *"I think"*.

On the other hand, the use of *"sort of"* implies a negative judgement about the result achieved (Schiffrin 1987). In the first excerpt, although she mentions that her parents were proud, this does not reflect the understanding she has of her self. In the second excerpt, Irina presents their parents' ideas of proud introducing them with *"I think"*, but there is no indecision in affirming that they were definitely proud.

The only doubt emerges with regard to the financial worries, which was to be expected in a business activity and it did not have any social implication, as it was instead given in the first excerpt.

8.5 Conclusions

This chapter showed how in starting a new businesses, Stella and Irina Gruber had not just developed a new understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' with others. They had also developed a new unique discourse of entrepreneurship that was locally meaningful within their relationship.

In discussing the processes of *identity work,* section 8.4 pinpointed how the two sisters were feeding back on their image of the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur. Moreover, they also transferred some of the aspects of this social identity into their other social identities.

The presentation of the 'daughter' was hence shaped by aspects of the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur. In relating to their parents, they still felt the obligation towards the social structure 'Polish family' to make them proud. They also felt the obligation of doing it through something they loved and disregarding what other people thought.

The following chapter also explores this dual relation with the structure of family as it presents the case of Anthony and Lorna, a married couple.

Chapter IX

Marriage and entrepreneurial identities: the case of Anthony and Lorna

9.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the last case of the empirical part of the study. The case refers to the entrepreneurial dyad consisting of Anthony and Lorna, a married couple.

The 'tale' called "integrating a business", and the subsequent narrative analysis, highlight the discourses that the couple related to in projecting the social aspects of their selves to the researcher.

Sections 9.2 and 9.3 discuss the unique discourse of entrepreneurship that was produced between Anthony and Lorna and that (in)formed the definition of a shared understanding of 'being entrepreneurial'. Finally, section 9.4 discusses the processes of *identity work* involved.

9.1 Anthony and Lorna's 'tale': "Integrating a Business"

Both Anthony's and Lorna's stories were presented in the format of a television talk-show interview. Each section of their stories was presented as if they were answering specific questions. However, the researcher had never posed those questions in the first place. Anthony and Lorna were on a stage almost interviewing themselves. The following section reports the story using this specific structure.

[How did it all start?] Lorna had been working as freelance PR consultant and small business advisor for several years and she had built up a considerable reputation amongst her clients and research centres. However, *"this activity was not much more than a hobby at the time"* and she was running it from home in the pauses of her life as a housewife.

[How did they start Integral Relations?] Something happened between Anthony and his job career and this strongly affected the couple's life and the business's history. Two parallel stories emerge from the accounts.

The importance of the events in the story does not rely on what actually happened, but in the 'realities' the two spouses were constructing with the researcher. Both events are 'true' as they were in the negotiated realities constructed between the researcher and each of them (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

[What did happen in Lorna's perspective?] One day, Lorna arrived home to find out with *"horror and shock"* that Anthony had been made redundant. With Anthony losing his job, the family faced some difficult choices. Lorna was very concerned as the *"eldest daughter had just accepted a place at Nottingham Girls High School. So [...] life would be getting expensive, long-term"*. They needed to decide what to do next.

Anthony could have looked for another job, but the coal industry he had built his skills in *"was dying"* and in his *"[...] early forties [...] he'd just decided that he would not be able to find a similar job at a similar level on a similar salary"*. Although they had never considered working together, in less than 24 hours the decision was made. They were going to start a company together.

[What did happen in Anthony's perspective?] Anthony had worked for years for a leading coal company. In the period before leaving the company, he had recognised that he could not get any further in management without being actually owner of a company. He thus started looking around for other career choices.

In the meantime, he started getting interested in what Lorna was carrying out and noticed that, although *"she had been running it like a hobby"* she had achieved quite a respectable position in the industry. Different to any other player in the PR industry *"she was having national journalists ringing her up and asking for advice and contacts"*. *"Over a period of two years"*, Anthony and Lorna had discussed whether it would have been possible for her to better exploit, in the market, the competitive advantage she had against other firms.

Anthony started doing some work for a couple of clients of Lorna and enjoyed it. The couple discussed the possibility of starting a business together over a period of time *"And then the opportunity came for me to leave the coal industry…with a nice redundancy package. So we decided we'd take that and start a business together"*.

[What was their approach to the business?] For sure they would have needed to spend a lot of more time at each other's elbow. They had to learn to *"formalise Lorna's contacts"*, to re-balance the financial dimensions of the business for the family, and to ultimately integrate family and work issues. Before taking the final decision of starting the business in July, Anthony and Lorna decided to go away for a weekend. Hidden in a rented cottage in the countryside and *"over a few bottles of wine"*, they formalised the business idea, chose the name of the business, defined the way to approach clients, and decided an initial attribution of roles.

[What were the main problems?] Starting the business, Anthony and Lorna wanted to produce a change in the way Public Relations services are created for small businesses. They had discovered an opportunity that others had not seen before, and they wanted to exploit it.

As a typical family business, there were some issues related to the integration between work and family life. In particular, they soon decided to move out from the offices that they had *"carved"* out in the two top storeys of their Edwardian house. Working at home was making difficult to manage their privacy and they *"thought that it was necessary to create some sort of distance between us and the company"*.

Like other small businesses, money was an issue. Although they had no problems at the start-up because of Anthony's *"generous redundancy package"*, they eventually realized that they were taking out to much money from the business for *"sustaining our family life-style"* and that they were not reinvesting enough in the company for ensuring its steady growth over time.

[Where are they now?] The company was successful but contingencies did not allow it to grow. They had thought about hiring staff, but they were *"concerned we could have altered the balance between us"*. Moreover, they were also reluctant as *"we don't wanna hire someone and then telling her to go when we have no more projects coming in"*. Moreover, the general expenses of the household (i.e. mortgage, the daughters' education) meant that Integral Relations remains *"a lifestyle business"*.

9.1.1 An analysis of the narrative of Anthony and Lorna's 'tale'

Anthony and Lorna drew the images they used for producing their business story from many different discourses. First, the stories compared them in terms of small business entrepreneurs against the big companies the Public Relations (PR) industry.

Both partners mentioned how they were able to overcome this comparative disadvantage in approaching newspapers and magazines by developing personal ties with key journalists.

This finding is consistent with studies that have explored cultural differences in the use of clichéd metaphors in entrepreneurship discourse. For example, Drakopoulou-Dodd and deKoning (2002) highlight how in the United Kingdom the metaphor embodying the epic hero is more related to the image of David versus

Goliath rather than to the hero engaged in a legendary quest that characterises the entrepreneurs more exposed to a north-American culture (such as Tony and Jazz).

This consideration is supported by the presence in both Anthony's and Lorna's stories of continuous references to *"big companies"*. The comparison between small and medium enterprises and major corporations could be considered a recurrent *cliché* in these stories of entrepreneurship (Verdujin 2007).

This *characterisation* can be linked to the symbols promoted by the enterprise culture that emerged in the United Kingdom since the 1980s (Gray 1998). This perspective was also reinforced by statements such as Anthony's *"we've got a lifestyle business, rather than a growth business"* or Lorna's *"yeah, we are no longer a home-based business, but you know…it's always us"* that portray the entrepreneurial identity of micro-businesses aimed at combining aspects of family, work, and leisure (duGay and Salaman 1992).

The role that a small business has in contrasting the market predominance of big companies is also an image that recurred in the discourse typical of the Public Relations industry. The dominant *cliché* in the industry implied constant comparisons between the activities of small companies with the aggressive competition through which big players dominate the market. On this perspective, the clichéd entrepreneurial identity invited to explain how victory could be obtained.

> (121) "There are all these **big companies** out there looking for stories and journalists were calling her instead […] and this is not how the industry works". (Anthony)

These considerations are supported by categorising the *plot* of the tale as an underdog story, in where Anthony and Lorna presented themselves as the less advantaged party that eventually succeeded against better equipped adversaries (Tobias 2003). The plot was reinforced by the use of images and *clichés* as the *"big companies"*.

In terms of *structure*, rather than crafting the narrative as a chronological flow of events, both Anthony and Lorna reproduced their accounts as a TV talk-show interview. This means that they were introducing each section in the form of an answer to what could have been a question by the (otherwise silent) researcher.

Their stories had a fragmented flow, offering opportunities to reflect on their statements and on the actions that they were recalling (Weick 1995). The use of the

talk-show structure is a stereotype evidently drawn from the discourse that characterises the PR industry. The decision to stage the stories in this specific format was influenced by the general images recurring in an 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997).

Anthony and Lorna's continuous exposure to 'interviews', due to the nature of their work in Public Relations, also played a decisive role. In the email exchanges before the meeting, for example, Anthony asked the researcher whether they were able *"to see the set of questions in advance"*, as they would have otherwise done with a client.

Lorna also stated that *"I am a very front-stage person and I enjoy talking in front of a camera"*. Moreover, she mentioned how she was more than happy *"to be interviewed…for once, I won't be the one asking the questions"*.

These considerations suggested a precise enactment of the entrepreneurial identity typical of such business stories. Particularly in small businesses, entrepreneurs tend to enact a presentation of confident individuals used to the pressures of media's attention (Fletcher 2006).

Table 9. A summary of the narrative analysis of Anthony and Lorna's story

Plot	Characterisation	Structure
Underdog Tale	Enterprising entrepreneur (Lifestyle business)	TV talk-show interview. Organised around potential questions
		Themes: Problems of SMEs, reflection on company's future

The use of this particular structure meant that events were organised not in a chronological order, but organised around specific *themes,* such as the problems of SMEs and reflections on the future of the company.

In discussing these themes, they both often introduced the academic literature on entrepreneurship. Anthony and Lorna expressed to the researcher how they were both familiar with the academic debate on opportunity recognition (Shane and Venkataraman 2000) as they had been doing some work with academics at a local University.

In the story, Anthony and Lorna recurrently used the words *"niche"* and *"opportunity"*. In talking of the 'niche/opportunity' they always referred to it as something 'out there' waiting to be discovered through some sort of entrepreneurial activity (Johannisson 2005; Fletcher and Watson 2007).

Anthony highlighted how they *"had been more alert than others to pick them up"* (Kirzner 1973). This concept particularly emerged from the verbs used by Anthony in discussing how they had been 'alert'. He used sentences such as *"we discovered a niche"*; *"we realized that there was clearly a niche"*; and *"the niche was there"* and he referred to the work of the academics they knew.

This presentation of the alert entrepreneur who is 'superior' to others was reflected in his wife's story, where Lorna generally adopted expressions such as *"we saw an opportunity [...] and, man, big companies didn't"*; *"we discussed the opportunity"*; and *"the opportunity was there in front of us"*. This image of the opportunity awaiting an 'alert' entrepreneur ready to exploit it was consistent with the mainstream positions in the field (Casson 1982; Shane and Venkataraman 2000).

On the one hand, the discussion of opportunities was used as a discursive resource to introduce their awareness of the academic debate (Watson 1995); on the other hand, however, its use complied with the expectations that they could have had in regard to the researcher's approach to the study (Giddens 1987).

These considerations confirmed how the entrepreneurial identity that Anthony and Lorna portrayed in their stories was constructed from their socially available discourses. As Cohen and Musson (2000) suggested, the couple was able to carve a particular figure of entrepreneur within the limits of the dominant discourses.

This occurred mainly by drawing from different available social identities, such as for example the prevalent notion of entrepreneur in the PR industry and in the academic realm (Watson 2008).

As in the other cases, the analysis also explored the existence of a unique discourse that could also have shaped the interaction between the partners. Following the same structure used for the other three cases, the next section presents a narrative deconstruction of Anthony and Lorna's 'tale'. This analysis, combined with the ethnographic work, favoured the identification of the locally produced discourse that the partners shared.

9.2 A narrative deconstruction of Anthony and Lorna's 'tale'

As in the other cases, the process of narrative deconstruction started with a *search for the dualities* that emerged in the stories. The analysis highlighted particular linguistic elements, which characterised the notion of opportunity. In his account, Anthony often used the words *"niche"* (seven times) and *"opportunity"* (fifteen times). He also always used sentences like: *"we discovered a niche"*; *"we realised that there was clearly a niche"*; and *"the niche was there"*.

Similarly, Lorna adopted expressions like *"we saw an opportunity"*; *"we discussed the opportunity"*; and *"the opportunity was there in front of us"*. The language used by both Anthony and Lorna in their main narrative was therefore consistent with a clichéd view of entrepreneurship, where opportunities exist 'out there' within the inefficiencies of the market ready to be picked up by alert individuals (Johannisson 2005).

This presentation differed from the form used by Anthony and Lorna when they met the researcher in other contexts. On such occasions, the couple used other expressions. For example, at a pub right after the main interview they were using sentences such as *"creating opportunity"*; *"the opportunity grew with us"*; and *"we talked so much about it that we believed it became an opportunity"*.

Lorna and Anthony repetitively used expressions like *"when we decided to create the business"*; *"we had never believed we could end up in a situation where we are working together"*; and *"we are happy that we decided to explore this route"*.

The only occasion when Lorna used expressions such as *"opportunity recognition"* and *"I discovered an opportunity as well"* outside of the interview context was a meeting that took place at the Annual Conference of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) at which both the researcher and Lorna were attending a track on enterprising and entrepreneurial opportunities. This is not surprising as the context where the interaction took place would have contributed to shape the language used (Zimmerman 1998).

Another dichotomy that clearly emerged from the story referred to a reflection on the masculine/feminine features of the couple's work. Both Anthony and Lorna often compared the differences between the *"masculine industry"* (i.e. mining) in which Anthony had been working before starting up Integral Relations, with the *"soft skills"* required in the public relations industry.

Anthony in particular stressed this dichotomy even further reminding how *"the mining sector was a hard environment"* and *"PR is a very feminine industry"*. He also recalled how he had been *"head marketer in a big company in the mining sector"* and that he had succeeded reaching top management positions. His view of the mining industry was clearly in line with the public image associated with it, and he strongly identified himself with these dominant values and images.

In a significant passage, he pointed out how "*in the '80s we went through times where we were tested as men*", stressing the character of the industry and of the people working in it. This discursive choice indicated, on the one hand, a desire for Anthony to reinstate his power within the couple by focusing on his condition of 'man at work' (Kondo 1990; Widdicombe 1998).

On the other hand, the latter focus on the elements describing what makes a man in the mining industry suggested an understanding of different notions of masculinity in different contexts (Collinson and Hearn 1996).

Moreover, it is important to notice how the non-verbal communication of Anthony changed while he was reflecting on his times in the coal industry. He visibly reduced the physical proximity with the (male) interviewer, moving his shoulder forward; he patted twice the hand of the (male) interviewer; and he closed his hand in a firm fist while he was enunciating statements supporting the masculine aspects of the mining industry.

As section 9.3 discusses, these observations on the notion of masculinity have a distinct importance in understanding the processes of identity construction. Here, it is important to focus on how Anthony used his proxemics and gestures in order to seek a level of empathy with the interviewer (Czarniawska 2004). Anthony also highlighted the feminine aspects of his new work environment (i.e. Public Relations industry) discussing the *"soft skills"* required. He recalled when the couple tried for the first time to hire a member of staff few months earlier.

> (40) "[…] and we thought she was perfect to work in this industry. She had good writing skills and she was good in dealing with people. Plus, she was nice on the phone and **you know** how this is important in PR." (Anthony)

The use of the marker *"you know"* enforces, in this part of the story, Anthony's desire that the (male) researcher would also recognise how these features contribute

to distinguish the two industries. The discursive marker is in this case used in the middle of the sentence as a tool for attracting the attention of the researcher, and it also "signals a speaker's attitude for solidarity" (Schiffrin 2001, p. 67).

Assuming that the (male) researcher would have understood his point, Anthony tried to include him in the story. The inclusion of the researcher's (otherwise) silent voice clearly contributed to producing a reading of the story as a polyphonic attempt to re-institute a stereotyped version of 'men at work'.

The comparison between these dichotomies suggests how, in spite of the acknowledgement of the notion of opportunity discovery in their presentations, the story offers a prominent role to the development of an 'opportunity' that reflected the couple's dynamics. In particular, the analysis of the dichotomy masculine/feminine finds its contextualisation in the rebalancing of roles within a traditional family. The *gender hierarchy is reinterpreted* with the feminine side becoming more prominent.

> (41) "And then, to my **horror** and **shock**, in 2001 I came home from somewhere one day, to find Anthony at home, with the **shocking** news that he'd been made redundant, which was a bit tough on us because one of the girls, our eldest daughter, had just accepted a place at Nottingham Girls High School. So we knew that life would be getting expensive, long-term. Well we sat down and it was a bit of a **shock** to start with […] This had never ever; we had never ever considered this as a couple. Because he'd had his life and his career; Cambridge graduate, fast-tracked into a nationalised industry, national role…We never really considered that we would have to make such a **life-changing** decision." (Lorna)

> (42) "we **discussed** a lot about what to do […] So, so **yes**, we've both had different pressures from making the change. And certainly it was a **major lifestyle change** for us both because Lorna went from being mainly a mother and a keeper of the house to a director of a business and a business that sustained us. […] It was a **major change** for both of us" (Anthony)

The frequency of the word *"shock"* introduces a *"life-changing decision"*, in which a traditional patriarchal family sees its roles reverted and its dynamics rebalanced (Kondo 1990; Hamilton 2006).

The feminine aspect emerges prominent with Lorna becoming the key person in the company because of her expertise and her contacts, and with the couple working in a feminine industry. This new gender hierarchy is also acknowledged by Anthony

as he stresses how this would have been a *"major change"* because of the re-shuffling of roles.

This continuous struggle with the re-configuration of the couple's dynamics at work and at home is enforced by the presence in the story of the *rebel voices* of *"the girls"* (i.e. the two teenage daughters of the couple). The importance of maintaining an adequate lifestyle for an appropriate developmental trajectory for the two daughters emerges as a recurring image in the stories. This seems to have helped the couple in curbing the discomfort when they re-approached their roles after the major changes in their lives.

Following Boje's (2001) suggestions, the narrative deconstruction lets *other sides of the story* hence emerge. The story then becomes a multifaceted account of how the couple balanced a series of transformations.

One refers to how Anthony dealt with the changes in his career and in his prominent role of resource gatherer for the family. Another one refers to how Lorna dealt with her new responsibilities and with her new working hours.

The subsequent step of narrative deconstruction is to *deny the plot* (Boje 2001). Taking in the consideration the different sides emerged, the story can be re-read as a transformational plot. In this plot, the story follows the difficulties and the identity crises that the protagonists might incur if precise situations force them to transform life as it has been known so far (Tobias 2003). In this plot, the processes through which such transformations are perpetuated and through which equilibrium is found become central.

In Anthony and Lorna's 'tale', a transformation is triggered by Anthony's redundancy. This alters the traditional roles in the family, with Anthony losing his role as resource gatherer and provider and Lorna assuming the responsibilities of the family income. In their experience, they seem to have made sense of these transformations through the Christian values they shared as a couple.

> (43) "Integral Relations was chosen because of the way we work and the people we are, really. It reflects us and it also reflects our beliefs because we're a Christian couple. We have a very strong Christian foundation to everything we do and the people who we are. So Integral Relations stands for…We believe PR should be **integrated** into PR, into the whole marketing and business strategy of a company, that PR should be integrated. As a team we like to be **integral** to the client. So, unlike some PR firms who are just agencies, who just bolt on at a distance, I like to

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feel part of the client's team and feel part of the family, really. And so we say, you don't just buy our time, you buy us, whether you like it or not. [laughter]. We want to know what's going on. And then the final thing is **integrity**. So there's integrated, integral and integrity and that means, if we use our **integrity**, there are certain projects we won't touch, certain things we refuse to do." (Lorna)

When they started the business, this background offered them an opportunity to integrate their private life with their work one. In the stories, this context seems to characterise a reflection *traced* by the words *"responsibility"* and *"integrity"* (in its different forms). The particular words emerge as an opportunity for discussing roles and identities within the Christian family.

These discursive resources not only offer them an opportunity to present their values to the researcher. In the context of the narrative deconstruction they trace a particular understanding that characterise the couple.

Starting a company becomes for them an opportunity to do something together for enacting their Christian values and for effectively managing the transformations in their lives. As Cohen and Musson (2000) suggest, Anthony and Lorna designed a peculiar understanding of Christian family within the wider discourse of Christian values. They then used these new images to construct their unique discourse of entrepreneurship.

The discourse of entrepreneurship they share does not reflect the academic debate or the discourse on enterprise. Drawing on socially available Christian images (e.g. integrity), they developed a unique discourse of entrepreneurship. In this, starting a business venture is a Christian mission that is an opportunity for living their values through continuous transformations.

Table 10 shows a summary of the entire narrative deconstruction process for the 'tale' "Integrating a business".

Table 10. A summary of the narrative deconstruction process for Anthony and Lorna

	Anthony and Lorna
Duality search	- Creating/discovering Opportunity - Masculine/feminine
Hierarchy	- Creating becomes fundamental

	- The importance of male/female roles
Rebel voices	The girls
Other side of the story	The story is not just masculine-centred (how Anthony dealt with the change); but it also explores how the couple transformed its dynamics
Deny the plot	The story can be observed not just as an underdog story, but also as a transformation story that discusses change
Traces	- Responsibility - The girls
Resituated discourse	The story is no longer a business story in the form of a talk-show, but a narration of how a Christian couple was able to transform its dynamics without compromising their values

9.3 A unique entrepreneurial identity: the 'integral entrepreneur'

The aim of this section is to discuss the production of a social identity of 'entrepreneur' that enacted the local discourse of entrepreneurship in the dialogical relation within the dyad. The above narrative deconstruction highlights the unique discourse of entrepreneurship shared within the dyad. This discourse characterises their economic activities as an opportunity for effectively managing the transformations in their lives and for portraying their Christian values.

As in the other cases, the identification of specific words that recur in both stories pinpoints reflections on the dyad's own identity. In Lorna and Anthony's stories, a key word is often *"the girls"*, an expression with which both partners indicate their teenage daughters. The following examples show how each of them enacts in their accounts the figure of 'integral entrepreneur'. Discussing the values the couple wanted to instil in their education of their two teenage daughters, Lorna mentions declining opportunities of new contracts in order to spend more 'quality-time' with the family.

> (44) "Money is always a worry, but that's not the only thing, right? We'd like to share our values with **the girls** [...] **you know,** we are a **Christian couple** and there are certain projects we won't touch, certain things we refuse to do. If they are in any way, not immoral, but I had a chap, I had a, I'll give you an example, we had a phone call two weeks ago from a garden centre in Essex - a very successful garden centre, where the owner grows topiary. [...] And this guy had decided he was going to do pornographic topiary, right? Or, you know, erotica – I mean, I've seen the photographs. And as soon as he called and said <I understand you've done some PR for Hampton Court Flower Show, you've done some, you've worked with the national gardening media…> and I said <Well, yes I have, however, what you're doing is not something I really want to touch.> We do have to be quite careful about who we work with and also, it's not just that. If we're talking to a client and it's obvious that it's not PR they need, they need to sort out their marketing plan or they're just not PR-able because there's nothing there, there's no story, we will say to them <Look, we're not going to shoehorn you into some project. We suggest you don't use PR>" (Lorna)

The development of the social identity of 'integral entrepreneur' informs how the couple portrays their 'entrepreneur' *personae.* This is particularly important for the external interlocutors of the business. By understanding the dimensions of 'entrepreneur' that Lorna and Anthony are projecting to each other, external interlocutors could make sense of the business activities of the couple.

For example, in Lorna and Anthony's perspective, the 'integral entrepreneur' has, amongst his/her characteristics, the attention to portray the values in which he/she believes. The 'integral entrepreneur' also carefully selects his/her external interlocutors such as customers and suppliers, avoiding the ones with *"immoral"* attitudes.

This moral awareness also emerges in the way competition is approached. For example, at the end of the passage, Lorna makes no mystery that the company prefers to be honest in recruiting potential contracts and swears to maintain always a coherent approach to the true nature of Public Relations.

Chapter 10 discusses in more detail how the construction of such entrepreneurial identities has a distinct influence on the shape of the business, with relevant implications for growth and for the structure of the entrepreneurial team.

In introducing the anecdote of excerpt 44, the expression *"you know"* seems to invite the researcher to share other aspects of the story. The presence of the marker *"you know"* is of a particular importance in this analysis for understanding the function that the social identity of the 'integral entrepreneur' has in Lorna's story, as "data never exist in a vacuum" (Schiffrin 2001, p.66).

On the one hand, the marker serves the traditional purpose of introducing a story, linking it with a previous discussion. On the other hand, it "reflects (and realizes) rich and multifaceted contexts" showing the researcher an aspect of Lorna's social identity he could not otherwise access (Schiffrin 2001, p. 66). The use of the *"you know"* has epistemological significance, as it introduces knowledge that is otherwise denied to the researcher (i.e. the Christian values of the couple).

This is also reinforced by the phrase *"Christian couple"*, which introduces a different presentation of their social identity. On the one hand, stressing the plural connotation of this passage (the dominant pronoun is the *"we"* rather than a more appropriate *"I"*), Lorna highlights how the meaning of *"Christian couple"* is highly contextualised in the relationship she has with her husband. On the other hand, this reference introduces the discourse on Christian values that contributes to crafting the entrepreneurship discourse locally produced by the couple.

9.3.1 The breadwinner and the 'integral entrepreneur'

In the stories, Anthony and Lorna introduce several aspects directly related to the notion of family and to the roles that they play in it. This is quite common in stories produced by partners in life and at work (Marshack 1998). In particular, Nelton (1986) observes how especially interesting images drawn from religious backgrounds are. These contribute to explicating the symbols that the couple would use for facilitating their interactions (Blumer 1969).

The couple's reverence for an institutionalised social structure (i.e. Christian marriage) shapes the process of identity re-configuration. The marital relationship in the family seems initially to be in line with these dimensions. Being profoundly inspired by the values of Christian matrimony, the couple reflects in their everydayness the specific roles expected by their cultural anchors (Goffman 1959).

A sense of obligation towards the socially shared notion of 'Christian family' pervades their narratives. The married couple uses several clichéd images and metaphors derived from the general discourse on family and in particular from the stereotypes of the 'Christian family' (Creighton 1999).

An important platform for this symbolic interaction is represented by the metaphor of the *"breadwinner"* (Gallagher and Smith 1999). The notion of the breadwinner is particularly common to the discourse on family in Westernized societies, and Anthony explicitly acknowledges how the role of the male partner as primary breadwinner is central in modern societies.

The metaphor of the breadwinner can represent a powerful discursive resource for introducing a discourse on Christian values (Watson 1995). This can also be used for discussing other couple's dynamics such as the balance of power in a household (Kondo 1990). Moreover, the 'breadwinner' is traditionally used as a discursive resource for exploring the upgrading and downgrading of identities and roles in married couples (Warren 2000). This notion gains particular relevance in religion-conscious families, where the concept is used as an "ideological tool" for creating distinctiveness for men within a society (Gallagher and Smith 1999, p. 221).

The word *"breadwinner"* is often used by both Anthony and Lorna in their narrations. The couple ultimately adopts it as a discursive resource for reflecting *ex-post* on some of their actions in the stories they tell, and to introduce the concept of family to the researcher (Watson 1995). In recalling the early stages of the company,

Anthony acknowledges how critical it was for him to revise his role as 'provider' of safety and subsistence for the entire family.

> (45) "I went from being the major **breadwinner** and in large organizations to working in small organizations and having...ehm...to work to some extent with Lorna on...on...building on her expertise was **a major change** for both of us" (Anthony)

Anthony often reflects in his story and on two other occasions during the observations on how the business had represented a way for integrating work and marriage. The presentation of the breadwinner enacts the Christian values typical of the couple's social structure (i.e. 'Christian family'). As Cohen and Musson (2000) suggest, Anthony and Lorna produced a unique interpretation of such values. The analysis of the different *personae* they enacted confirms this. For example, the anecdote of the 'topiary-business' presented above showed their independent understanding of what may represent these 'Christian values'.

The entrepreneurship discourse that pervades the dialogical relation within the couple is therefore constructed by taking into consideration this social discourse of 'Christian values', and by contextualising it in their dialogical interaction. The social identity 'integral entrepreneur' is constructed on the overlap of two such discourses. The 'integral entrepreneur' hence enacts characteristics such as the ability of continuously reconfiguring roles in order to deal with the transformations that occur in their lives without compromising their key values.

The enactment of a locally constructed discourse of entrepreneurship into the idea of the 'integral entrepreneur' is exemplified by peculiar linguistic solutions that Anthony and Lorna adopted through their stories. Although both Lorna and Anthony draw upon the same Christian value of 'breadwinner', in their accounts they use different words or phrases for naming it. Anthony incorporates the concept in the actual word *"breadwinner"*, whereas Lorna re-phrases it using the expression *"bread-earner"* or (on one occasion) *"hunter-gatherer"*.

According to the Oxford English dictionary, the phrase 'bread-earner' is not as common as 'breadwinner' and almost sounds like a neologism (Oxford English Dictionary 2010). These alternative linguistic forms of the 'breadwinner' suggest how the storytellers used them as 'interpretive repertoires' to contextualise the

societal images of the 'Christian family' in their own discursive relationship (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) theorise interpretive repertoires as concepts 'constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions' and 'often organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)' (ibidem, p. 149). Lorna develops the neologism *"bread earner"* as a statement of her role in the relationship. The different lexical constructions of the notion of breadwinner help in observing how the couple, in different ways and with different degrees of emphasis, uses social interaction not only to characterise themselves, but also to characterise others (McKenzie 2005).

> (46) "So it was almost like I was [pause]…**the main bread earner.** [long pause] … **I shouldn't**…it would be **unfair** to say that, [pause] but probably it's true that actually it was on the back of my contacts and so on that we were establishing the family income." (Lorna)

Excerpt 46 illustrates how Lorna often openly avoids the use of the actual word 'breadwinner'. This possibly hints at the willingness of the wife to refuse a word that ultimately implies a gendered competitiveness within the couple (Speakman and Marchington 1999).

In the second line, Lorna considers it *"unfair"* to say that, because of her contacts, the business had led her to be the main gatherer of financial resources for the household. The sense of discomfort is also testified to by the pauses interrupting the flow of the story giving an uncertain and 'wobbly' narrative style (Pitt 1998).

The pauses between the clause in which she proclaims herself to be the *"bread earner"* and the clause in which she is victim of a sense of immediate guilt (prompted by the *"I shouldn't"*) testify to a contextual process of up-grading and down-grading of her role.

The pauses contrast with the confidence Lorna otherwise demonstrates throughout the story. She rarely interrupts the flow of her account, in line with the stereotyped format of an interview (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). When she introduces the word "bread earner", however, her status changes suddenly. This is confirmed by a tentative narrative flow, which does not reflect anymore the image of confident entrepreneur.

Pauses are generally indicators of a need for the storyteller to carefully choose the words/expressions used (Schiffrin 1987). As in the other cases, the word *"breadwinner"* (in its different forms) is followed by a change in the narrative flow. This change is characterised by the presence of an anecdote, by a temporary narrative turn in the plot, or by a stumbling display by the storyteller.

It could be argued that the word "*breadwinner*" hence signals a moment of reflection on identity. Lorna took her time from the live account to contemplate about what she considered her self to be for herself and before the eyes of others. Tracing this particular expression through the different accounts produced by the couple would therefore give deeper indications on the development of a coherent identity across different presentations.

The sense of obligation towards the Christian values that Lorna shares with Anthony induces her to show respect for her husband through the selection of words and metaphors (Gallagher and Smith 1999). Although she adopted the role of the 'breadwinner' in terms of generator of the household income, she is reluctant in her story to fully acknowledge it in her presentational identity.

Lorna claims that it was not her, but her contacts that were generating the family income. Likewise, she moves to a plural form while talking of family income, linking again the success of the company to a family effort rather than to her capabilities. From this point on Lorna continues the account by elevating the role of 'mother' that she was also playing within the dyad.

The projection of the 'mother' is more consistent with the image of the Christian wife, framed in terms of those Christian values that "*orient us as a couple*" (Lorna). Whenever introducing the notion of family in the business story, Lorna carefully chooses words and expressions (e.g. *"the morality of our activity"*) as an obligation to her Christian values. This sense of obligation moulds the re-configurations of their presentational identities in fluid roles.

This sense of obligation is a golden thread that connects the different re-configurations of their social identities (e.g. entrepreneur; wife; mother) and offers a sense of cohesion and distinctiveness (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001). The social identity of the 'integral entrepreneur' is therefore introduced by the words *"breadwinner"* or *"bread earner"*.

At times words such as *"the worries"* and *"the responsibilities"* that the role implies allow the identification of their reflections on this social identity. Lorna's

reflections on her changing female identity also have implications for her roles as 'mother' and 'keeper of the family'. Hytti (2003) observes that re-constructions of identity, particularly in gendered relationships, support the redefinition of new roles for the family-man (e.g. father; lover).

The next section looks at the implications of these reflections for other social identities and discusses the processes of *identity work* involved.

9.4 An analysis of the processes of *identity work*

The emergence of *identity work* could be observed, in the narration, when Anthony chance reflects on the roles that modern men can assume within the family (Hytti 2003). In particular, while the reflections on the 'breadwinner' role highlights the implications of certain aspects of masculinity, the reflection on the roles of 'father', 'lover', and 'caring companion' presents an opportunity for balancing the emotional aspects of the marriage.

This is particularly observable in Christian couples, where the symbolic traditionalism of the religious ideals of companionship marriage leads to an exchange of support (Rubin 1994). Having grown up in a Christian family helped the researcher to better identify this process and to observe how Anthony traded his traditional responsibility (for the economic prosperity of the household) for more emotional intimacy in order to proclaim his symbolic headship (Gallagher and Smith 1999). The use of the phrase *"the girls"* introduces a reflection on his role as 'father' and signals the emergence of identity aspects of the 'integral entrepreneur'.

> (47) "this new dimension gives me time to spend with **the girls**. So, for example now we always have dinner together and it is nice to have spaces for talking […] this new role does not require me to travel so much, so I am enjoying the weekends with the girls" (Anthony)

The internalisation of specific aspects of the 'integral entrepreneur' transforms Anthony into a person who pays attention to designing social spaces (i.e. weekends, dinners) so as to balance his work life with his 'father' role. Similarly, in another reflection, the reference to *"the girls"* allows Anthony to introduce his role as 'lover'. This character is particularly well played in an account where he describes the story of a romantic weekend spent with Lorna in a country cottage:

(48) "we went away from **the girls** for a few days […]. It was lovely, we chatted for hours […] starting the business has been like a second honeymoon. Because I was so busy with work, we hadn't enjoyed spending the night talking in front of a bottle of wine for a while" (Anthony)

The role of the husband-lover is not only present in Anthony's narrative identity, but it was also observed through the interaction between the researcher and the couple in settings other than that of the formal interview. Anthony has been seen stressing elements of romanticism and chivalry more common in the relation of a young couple than in that of a long-married one.

For example, he was seen holding the door open for the wife, teasing her with cheesy nicknames, or gently spoiling her with compliments. At the pub, after the main 'interview', the researcher asked whether the 24-hour based relationship might have ever strained the relation. Anthony remarked that *"I simply love spending so much time around each other"*, gazed into his wife's eyes and gently caressed her hand. He then laughed, asking the researcher whether or not such things would be included in the research findings.

Another moment where *identity work* could be observed is when Anthony introduces his role of *caring companion*. Similarly to the use of *"the worries"* discussed earlier, *"the pressure"* signals a process of internalisation of aspects of the 'integral entrepreneur' and of his/her continuous attention to balancing aspects of his/her private and personal life.

(49) "I had a lot of new **responsibilities** […] the administrative stuff, the boring documents and invoices, and the financial bits. But I like doing them and this takes **lot of pressure off** her. […] As we decided to build the business on her basic expertise and contacts and things like that, she suddenly discovered that not only was she having to work full-time but also that weight of **responsibility** was on her that she didn't have before. And in some ways it wasn't on me in the same way, in that it was her contacts and her area of expertise that we were looking to exploit. And I think she probably felt **that [pressure]** quite **strongly** and has felt it quite **strongly** over the intervening years. So that when things haven't been going that well, she's felt **that pressure** quite **strongly**. Now, because I handle the finances and the sort of structure of the business I've been able to **keep that pressure off her** to some extent, in that she's never fully known how bad or good the situation was. So I've managed **to keep the pressure off her** to some extent, but she can obviously tell by the number of clients we have how well we're doing or not." (Anthony)

Using the division of labour within the business as a discursive resource, Anthony introduces his responsible approach in looking after the wife, prompting the researcher to consider his self as being characterised by a continuous attention to integrating different aspects of family and business.

The paternalistic expression *"takes lot of pressure off"* is reinforced by the adverb *"strongly"*, suggestive of the masculinity of the benevolent caring companion, who regains his power shielding the partner from the difficulties of running a business.

As Reed (1996) points out, a paternalistic approach to the relation with a wife in married couple is a form of re-appropriation of a masculine role. Nonetheless, this is also an example of how elements of the 'integral entrepreneur' concept become part of the more private aspects of the self (Watson 2008). This is not only an example of inwardly *identity work*, but is also offers the opportunity to observe how such a definition of the self influences other social identities or roles.

This *identity work* also shapes some of the interaction with external interlocutors. For example, during the interaction with the researcher, Anthony's non-verbal communication and tone moved away from the clichéd talk-show interview that he was otherwise portraying to the researcher (as discussed in the reflection on the 'tale'). The expression *"keep the pressure off her"* was always accompanied by a wide lateral waving movement of the hands.

Anthony sensibly lowered the volume of his voice and his tone became low and tender-hearted. He visibly whispered the word *"pressure"* and the adverb *"strongly"* and reduced the distance with the (male) interlocutor. The reduction of the physical distance between interviewer and interviewee has been traditionally associated with the search for emotional proximity, and in this case could be read as a search for 'male solidarity' or 'gender understanding' (Czarniawska 2002).

This aspect also emerged during one of the company visits the researcher made. Lorna was struggling with the booking of a hotel in Bristol and this was particularly annoying her as she shouted *"this thing is driving me crazy"* (pointing at the computer). Anthony, who at the time was taking care of some documents, immediately rushed to his wife, reassuring and caressing her, and eventually going through the process of the booking with her. Gazing at me, he stressed that:

> (50) "This is why I should take care of these things, she does not like to do administrative stuff on her own and gets annoyed" (Anthony)

The attention to the worries generated by the new balance between the family and the business dynamics also involved a reflection on the financial aspects. As seen in 9.4, the couple had been withdrawing from the business quite substantially for the education of their daughters and this caused some *"financial worries"*. In terms of identity construction, Anthony presents again these *"worries"* in the story discussing how some of the skills he had learnt when he was working as a manager came to hand in this new venture:

> (51) "You know, journalists call her for stories, generally PR beg journalists to send their stories to press. She knows always which word our clients are going to love […] She is the director of a business, but I always handled the finance […] she's never known how bad or good the situation was". (Anthony)

Comparing the reflections on the roles played by Anthony, a continuous process of upgrading and downgrading of the self in the couple's relationship emerged (Warren 2000). This process is also illustrated by specific linguistic annotations. Anthony is consistent through his accounts in using the plural person (i.e. 'we') whenever he talks about himself and his wife. In focusing on the caring-companion, however, he suddenly switched to the use of *"her and I"* to indicate the plurality of the subject.

He strongly emphasises the *"I"*, particularly with the continuous focus on his role in *"keeping the pressure off her"*. In this part of the story, Anthony rarely calls his wife by name, addressing Lorna with a pronoun. This contributes to reinforcing the masculine idea of a man who had to protect 'his' woman against forces she could not face on her own. And the choice of hiding the financial aspects from one of the directors of the business underlies the ultimate protective role of the caring-companion.

Similarly, Lorna uses *"the girls"* to introduce a reflection on her roles within the family and the business. The use of *"the girls"* is particularly important in the analysis of Lorna's *identity work* as this process of re-appropriation of a maternal role is new in the presentations of entrepreneurial couples (Barnett and Barnett 1988; Marshack 1998).

(52) "And Anthony is very close to **my two…our two daughters**. They get on very, very well, probably more so than they do with me [pause]…**And that's a good thing**…In many ways they are very close. There were a few years, in the early stages of the business when I was away quite a lot and I would come home and Anthony would be at home, working from home. He'd be with **the girls**, he'd be chatting with them, he would be making the meal and everything and they would all be on the computers. And there was a time when I think I thought "Am I needed here?" you know "What is…am I…yeah, what's my role?" because we'd almost role reversed **because the business was, in the early days, was dependent on me** and my contacts." (Lorna)

Lorna recognises the important role of 'father', although she acknowledges in between the lines that a swap in family roles had happened. In the passage, the first sentence particularly calls out for attention. Although a slip of the tongue can be common in long accounts, the immediate use of the first person in the possessive adjective (*"my"*) hints at sense of 're-appropriation' of a role that the busy time had taken away.

This change is not consistent with the approach that Lorna had taken in presenting her story. Lorna presents her story as a story of the couple, offering always comparatively the two perspectives (Anthony's and hers) and showing a high sense of devotion to the marriage. This sudden hint of egotism signals the need to live more intensively a role that, at that specific time, she probably had felt to be no longer hers, as suggested by the rhetorical question *"am I needed here?"*

As Anthony reflects on his roles as lover, companion, and father, Lorna also understands her role as a wife in new terms. In particular, she ponders on her role of 'wife', but also on the one of 'educator'. In discussing the *"worries"* that the business had brought in her life, she recounts the following anecdote.

(53) "The **girls** have grown up, they've matured and they're not as stress-inducing as they used to be…You know, we had one or two incidents with one of our daughters when, you know, she'd bunk off school, you know she'd take a day off school without telling anybody and things like that. And you get the headmistress on the phone saying <Your daughter's not here…> <What?!?> and it's pretty scary, it's pretty scary when you're a couple and you're trying to run a business […] Before [the business], I was the funny one, **now because of all it,** I am the one telling them what to do" (Lorna)

Soon after, she bursts out laughing, shrugs, and repeats that this new role as 'educator' had not been chosen by her. The field notes also integrated the account of the business story. Before beginning the interview, the audio recorder taped how she apologised as she was going to keep the mobile phone switched on during the interview.

> (54) "because **the girls** can call […] I cannot be late as I have to check what **the girls** are doing…you know they are having a pyjama party with their friends at our place […] I really don't want to check on them, but it's my **responsibility**. **Now**, he makes me appear like the sergeant" (Lorna)

These examples show how Lorna has internalised into the more private aspects of her self elements of the 'integral entrepreneur'. In particular, the Christian values that inspire the 'integral entrepreneur' can be seen in the image of the 'good wife' highlighted by the pause and the addition of "…*that's a good thing*" in excerpt 52.

This also contributes to reinforcing the sense of respect towards the male partner, not only as a lover, but also as a counterpart of the institution of 'marriage' (Gallagher and Smith 1999). Furthermore, excerpts 53 and 54 show how Lorna took on the responsibility to continuously integrate her private and public life and to 'fill in' roles and responsibilities that remained uncovered by the new balance between family and business.

Lorna stresses how, because of her new 'entrepreneurial identity', she is now a *"sergeant"* who tells the daughters what to do. Inwardly, her self had been moulded by the entrepreneurial experience and by the entrepreneurial identity she and her husband had constructed in their dialogical relation. Outwardly, her other *personae* had been shaped by this new understanding of the self.

9.5 Conclusions

This chapter concluded the analysis of the different cases represented by the entrepreneurial dyads. The chapter focused on the experience of Anthony and Lorna and on how the couple balanced the interconnections between their private and their work lives.

The analysis highlighted the unique understanding of entrepreneurship shared by Anthony and Lorna. The couple sees their entrepreneurial experience as an

opportunity to live the transformations of their lives while defending the dynamics of the Christian family, and as an opportunity to present these Christian values to external interlocutors.

This discourse is constructed locally through the unique interaction between the couple and through the unique interpretation they have of the discourse of 'Christian values'. As Cohen and Musson (2000) suggest, Anthony and Lorna are able to craft a presentation of their selves as 'breadwinners' acting within the boundaries of the Christian discourse.

However, in their unique interactions they expand this process of 'personalisation' of discourse. They contextualise their 'Christian values' in the set of specific meanings that characterise their relationship, developing an original discourse of entrepreneurship and the social identity of the 'integral entrepreneur'.

Their relationship is shaped by the values they share and by the elements of interaction that society attributes to their roles (e.g. marital duty). As hinted at through the analysis, another element that contributed to shaping their interaction was love and, in general, their emotive interface.

Emotions characterise to a certain extent all the different cases presented in this study, and therefore a closer analysis of the role they play in the processes of identity construction and *identity work* is important.

However, as the concluding chapter of this thesis discusses in more detail, the complexity of the phenomenon deserves dedicated attention that is not possible to address in the context of this work. Accurate and more detailed analysis of emotions would have in fact shifted the focus of this study.

The next chapter explores the commonalities that emerge across the four cases in order to identify possible patterns across different entrepreneurial experiences and different social structures (marriage, sisterhood, friendship). Chapter 11 then contextualises the findings of the empirical part of the study within the existing literature, and discusses the contribution of this research.

Chapter X

A meta-level analysis of the cases

10.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to offer a meta-level analysis of the entrepreneurial dyads studied in order to highlight commonalities that may emerge from the different cases.

Section 10.1 illustrates the common words that emerge across the cases that help to trace the construction of locally meaningful discourses, and that signal the processes of identity construction and *identity work* in the 'tales'. The emergence of the notion of *linguistic portals* is discussed and a definition of these is offered.

The chapter also focuses on how the linguistic portals of *"responsibility"* and *"change"* characterise the processes of identity construction and *identity work* as a continuous tension between agency and obligation. Section 10.2 looks at the former and offers a definition of the category of *communal* social identities.

Section 10.3 discusses the commonalities between the interviewed entrepreneurs in doing *identity work*. The balance between agency and obligation is then contextualised in the different levels of social interaction that characterise each dyad.

The commonalities experienced by the dyads in structuring their business operations are analysed in section 10.4. The analysis focuses on how the sense of obligation contributes to the definition of each business across the cases, looking at, in particular, the notions of entrepreneurial team and business growth. Finally, section 10.5 reflects on the role played by the widespread sense of obligation experienced by the dyads in producing their business stories.

10.1 Exploring identity: the role of linguistic portals

A common element that recurs across the three dyads is the role played by particular words (e.g. *"the girls"* for Anthony and Lorna; *"entrepreneurial"* for Tony and Jazz; *"confidence"* for Stella and Irina).

Boje (2001) suggests that the process of narrative deconstruction comprises two distinct analytical processes. The first refers to the destruction of the story, its pulverisation into fragmented expressions, ante-narratives, and excerpts. The second

refers to the *resituation* of the story under another perspective so that it can be re-interpreted enabling hidden meanings may emerge.

The cases show how the *resituation* of the 'tales' indicates the discourses that characterise the dialogical interactions between the partners in each dyad. In re-approaching the 'tales' during the first process of deconstruction (i.e. destruction), it was noted that each dyad used the same cue words across their different accounts.

For example, Tony and Jazz's stories present the words *"entrepreneurial"* and *"revolution"*. Anthony and Lorna's reveal the use of phrase *"the girls"*. Stella and Irina's highlight *"confidence"* and *"pride"* throughout.

The analysis of the narratives and the ethnographic work carried out by the researcher highlight how, every time that these cue words are used, one or more of the following events occurs.

1. Introduction of micro-stories.

The use of the cue words is often related to the production of little anecdotal stories that are not explicitly related to the business story.

For example, chapter 8 highlights how, with the use of the word *"confidence"*, Irina introduces a little story about her night out with some friends. Chapter 9 shows how Lorna interrupts her business story to discuss her daughter's bunking off school. Similarly, Tony uses the word *"entrepreneurial"* to introduce the micro-story about his girlfriend; while Jazz links it to the anecdote about his family's scientific achievements.

2. Alteration of the story's flow.

The use of these cue words is also related to a sudden temporary change in the structure of the story. For example, chronological stories are interrupted by thematic reflections or thematic stories suddenly change their topics.

The cases show how this occurs in Tony's account, but also in Jazz's, Anthony's and Lorna's. In chapter 6, Jazz reflects on how he had confused the chronology of the events, while in chapter 9 Anthony discusses how he could not remember which theme he was originally talking about.

3. Use of rhetoric questions and/or reported conversations.

Whenever one of the cue words is used, Stella, Irina, Jazz and Lorna all punctuate their accounts with reported conversations with clients, suppliers, and even among themselves as a dyad.

Chapter 7 illustrates how Stella and Irina use the word *"confidence"* in discussing how they started creating a network of contacts. They immediately introduce in the account a series of conversations that they claim described the interaction with other businessmen.

4. Alteration of the presentation style.

All storytellers were able to produce high-quality accounts, narrating stories with no interruptions. However, the use of the cue words is often accompanied by sudden stumbling or by difficulties in finding the right words. The latter is highlighted by long pauses, utterances, and silences.

Chapter 6 notes how a confident Tony is unable to find adequate words when describing his past experiences as an *"entrepreneurial"* person. Chapter 9 pinpoints how Lorna's storytelling confidence halts whenever she mentions *"the girls"* or the *"bread-earner"*.

At one level, these cue words could be interpreted as *discursive resources* used for introducing other considerations and reflections (Watson 1995). The storytellers in general adopt these specific constructions to introduce other discourses such as the ones on the family or on the role of the industry they operate in.

The uniqueness of these cue words lies in the fact that they are present (in different forms and phrases) in each of the stories produced by each dyad. Some of these, such as *"responsibility"* or *"change"*, are present in all eight stories, suggesting a common thread. These words introduce a reflection that the individual has carried out on his/her identity during the production of the story (Weick 1995).

Their presence across the different stories also offers a reflection on the relationship between the partners. First, these cue words indicate moments in which the storyteller interrupts the business story in order to reflect on his/her own identity.

The direct observations showed how individuals drifted away from the boundaries imposed by the presentation of the self they were performing before their interlocutor (i.e. the researcher). In doing this, they revealed aspects of the consideration they

have of their own selves. As Jenkins (1996) put it, they disclosed aspects of their *internal* self.

Second, individuals associate with these cue words new meanings that do not reflect the common usage. The words embody unique meanings that are specific to the dyad. For example, the phrase *"the girls"* does not merely signify the teenage daughters of Anthony and Lorna, but also describes their understanding of the Christian values they share and the fact that they want to enact in their lives and in the education of their family. These cue words are elements of that wider discourse that exists between these individuals and that is not directly accessible by third parties such as the researcher.

Third, these words introduce other characters and situations in the story. In these new circumstances, the entrepreneurs briefly present other projections of the social self. For example, Stella and Irina discuss their behaviour with their father or with other businessmen. The presence of these words signals the processes of *identity work*, through which the individuals project personal aspects of their selves into their entrepreneurial identities.

The metaphor of the *linguistic portals* is used to describe these unique discursive features. The Oxford dictionary (2010) defines a *portal* as "a doorway, gate, or gateway, especially a large and imposing one".

The cue words that characterise the stories of the entrepreneurs studied represent linguistic choices that work as gateways to specific meanings. These meanings indicate the discourses that were locally constructed in the dialogical interactions within each of the dyads and the entrepreneurial identities associated with them.

Linguistic portals constitute an epistemological resource that allows external interlocutors to make sense of narrated stories for investigating a dialogical phenomenon. This recalls Bakhtin's (1986) ideas that the social interaction between characters beyond the text can be revealed through a linguistic analysis of the text itself. From this perspective, *linguistic portals* can be defined as:

> analytical markers that signal, within a story, a narrator's reflection on his/her identity and allow external interlocutors to make sense of how a unique social identity is constructed through the interactions within a dyad.

Linguistic portals can be found in the form of single words or brief phrases that are recurrent across the stories. The process of narrative deconstruction carried out in the cases highlights these words when analysing the narrative traces that exist between the lines of a story.

The next chapter discusses how the identification of *linguistic portals* represents a significant contribution to the study of identity, and it also argues how future research might focus on a more structured approach towards identifying these resources.

The presence of such *linguistic portals* across all the dyads analysed in this study suggests a reflection on the terms of the debate between structure and agency as seen in chapter 2. In terms of agency, individuals shape a specific notion of 'being entrepreneurial' within a unique discourse they create with their partner.

The *linguistic portals* show how these notions emerge in the reflections on identity that each member of each dyad carries out in his/her story. This demonstrates how individuals also use these notions for building a sense of community that makes each dyad unique (Brewer and Gardner 1996).

In terms of structure, the *linguistic portals* signal how individuals often consider, in shaping their actions and behaviours, existing social structures such as family, marriage, and friendship as well as the unique structures they have created (e.g. *"Christian couple"*).

The next sections focus on how this tension between agency and structure emerges across the three dyads analysed in this study.

10.2 Observing obligation in identity construction

The analysis of the cases highlights how the processes of identity construction and *identity work* take place in the three different dyads. These processes reflect the three steps of the framework suggested by Watson (2008), which is used to carry out the analysis. The first step (i.e. identity construction) refers to the definition of a sound social identity of 'entrepreneur' that individuals produce in social interaction.

The process of *identity work* is observed in two steps: inward and outward respectively. The first one refers to the extent to which individuals embed aspects of the social identity of 'entrepreneur' in their private or internal aspects of the self (Jenkins 1996; Watson 2008). The second one (i.e. outward *identity work*) refers to

the extent to which individuals feed aspects of their selves into the social identity of 'entrepreneur'.

Interesting considerations emerge from the meta-level analysis of the cases. In particular, all dyads recurrently use two specific *linguistic portals*: *"responsibility"* and *"change"* (in their different forms). On the one hand, these allow the identification of how the local discourse of each dyad is enacted into everyday activities, decisions, and projections of the entrepreneurs in question.

On the other hand, these *portals* facilitate the observation of the processes of *identity work* undertaken in each case. For example, Tony and Jazz introduce their reflections on the decision to dismiss Christian from the company by stressing the notion of responsibility. They had to safeguard their relationship and their notion of 'business', giving them an opportunity to change the *status quo*.

> (55) "[it was] a **responsibility** towards the business, if we wanted the business to grow, we had to take that decision. We are still good friends with him…if he hadn't left probably our relationship would have been strongly affected too" (Tony)

> (56) **The business needed it from us.** […] We were friends, and we still are…I mean, but the situation required some **change** and we had to take that decision" (Jazz)

In these excerpts, Tony and Jazz show a sense of obligation towards the importance of commitment that their social understanding of entrepreneurship promulgates (Duck 1991). These considerations emerge in their accounts as they both clearly felt an obligation to stress how they were still friends with Christian in spite of the circumstances.

They almost seem apologetic to the researcher, and their pauses after their reaffirmation of their friendship with Christian confirm it. Even if parting with Christian was a difficult and painful decision, they were also morally bound to another structure. Their shared meaning of 'being entrepreneurial' created a sense of obligation to perform specific behaviours.

Their understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' is epitomised in the term *"business"*. The word 'business' does not only refer to the company/organisation but personifies their understanding of running an economic activity that enacts the

'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur'. This is confirmed by other comments the dyad made with regard to Christian's approach to the venture.

For Jazz, Christian also *"was doing the same thing over and over again"* and this implies that he was not committed to investing in learning and in change, as Tony and Jazz expected within their shared understanding of 'being entrepreneurial'. For Tony, Christian *"was not fitting in with all the changes"* that the notion of 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur' implies. Christian's lack of effort in committing to 'change' broke him away from the 'institution' they had created.

The *linguistic portals* of *"responsibility"* and *"change"* also emerge in Anthony and Lorna's account.

> (57) "we **discussed** a lot about what to do […] Lorna was now **responsible** for the family income […] So, so yes, we've both had different pressures from making the change. And certainly it was a major lifestyle **change** for us both because Lorna went from being mainly a mother and a keeper of the house to a director of a business and a business that sustained us. […] was a major **change** for both of us" (Anthony)

> (58) "You see … it was not for fun any more, now I had **responsibilities** […] My contacts were sustaining us and the **responsibility** for the family income was on me […] Now it was just the business and we could feel all the **responsibilities**". (Lorna)

The discourse of entrepreneurship as an opportunity for balancing life transformations and for promoting Christian values is enacted in the 'integral entrepreneur'. One of the characteristics of the 'integral entrepreneur' is the ability to change roles in order to cope with turnarounds of fortunes and new situations (Warren 2000).

This aspect is complemented by the attention each partner needed to give to re-balancing his/her roles so that the hierarchies typical of the Christian family are not altered. As with Tony and Jazz, in both excerpts above Anthony and Lorna's new understanding of living their lives is also personified in a *"business"*. They both highlight how they favoured this change, but how they then also felt the pressure that the responsibilities towards this new structure created.

The reflection on the identity introduced by the term *"responsibilities"* also represents the communal approach to the 'integral entrepreneur'. The use of the

plural form *"we"* highlights this shared platform of understanding. This is clear in Lorna's excerpt, as she suddenly moves from a first person singular to the plural subject.

Similarly, in Stella's first story, the *linguistic portal "responsibility"* introduces a reflection on identity. Stella also personifies in the *"business"* the understanding of 'being entrepreneurial' as an opportunity to show her maturity to others. For example, Stella presents the anecdote of how, before a meeting with the local bank consultant, she bought a new business outfit. Stella highlights a sense of obligation towards the structure that she and Irina have created through dialogue and discussion.

The action of buying new business attire is *"needed"*. A very personal action such as that of as buying a garment is presented in plural form. The use of the *"we"* highlights how the 'rebellious' entrepreneurial identity binds them as a team and offers a platform of shared understanding. Their local discourse and their social identities are shaped by their attention to change, but this in turn informs their 'we-ness' (Cerulo 1997); their decision making and their actions.

> (59)"the **responsibility** to look professional […] we discussed this a lot, but we needed to **show** that our business could **change** things" (Stella I)

The excerpt above shows how the *linguistic portals* introduce the discourse of entrepreneurship as an opportunity to show to others how their maturity was enacted into the social identity of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. The *"change"* and *"responsibility"* portals are also present in the second story produced by Stella and Irina. In that situation, the two sisters do not personify their relationship in the word *"business"*. As in the excerpt below, they at times refer to it simply as 'something to do with the other sister'.

Chapter 8 discusses how one of the characteristics of the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur that Stella and Irina constructed is the focus on peculiar aspects of the venture. The form taken by the activity is secondary to the fulfilment of other aspects, such as personal satisfaction and selection of preferred partner. The analysis of the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur in Stella and Irina's case underlines how the priority is to do something a person loves and with the people he/she loves.

> (60) "we were **responsible** for our own future and we had to do something else. I did not know what yet, but I know it would have been

with my sister. Why? Because you can only face **changes** with the people you feel close to. [...] I know that only Stella could have understood how I was feeling and this is the reason I could only **talk** to her" (Irina II)

During the reflections on the aspects of their identity, the emergence of these unique notions of 'entrepreneur' reveals a degree of agency. The members of the dyads shaped the social identity of 'entrepreneur' through the discourse they shared. The reference to change that is present across the different cases shows a proactive approach in shaping the understanding that others (in this case, their 'significant other') might have of them.

The dyads lived their experiences of transformation by developing a common *persona* that facilitated each other's understanding and provided a strong binding in approaching work and life. This approach highlights a common aspect that is present across the 'boundaries-breaking'; the 'integral'; the 'rebellious'; and the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur respectively. Entrepreneurs build their ideas of 'entrepreneur' by drawing on the shared images that their relational interactions produce.

In interacting with the researcher, the dyads drew their images of 'entrepreneur' from the set of socially available discourses and from the social roles that these create (Bandura 1977). However, when promoting locally meaningful discourses, the individuals in these cases constructed unique common and relational categories, which can be identified by tracing the *linguistic portals*.

These notions were also reinforced by the ethnographic work undertaken by the researcher. References to locally meaningful discourses were present in the talk, discussions, chats that occurred at margins of the actions that they had taken. This consideration confirms that the social identities of the 'entrepreneurs' are dialogically constructed through social interactions. At the same time, whenever a reflection on their social identity as 'entrepreneurs' was introduced, all the participants in the study used the plural form "*we*" rather than the individual form.

This observation suggests the emergence of a relational self through which each entrepreneur identifies the relationship he/she has with the significant other who is part of the dyadic relationship (Brewer and Gardner 1996). This social category is constructed through actions, reflections, and dialogues in dyadic relations that share significant interactions not only in the personal sphere, but also at work. This category of social identities is labelled as *communal* and defined as:

social projections of the self dialogically constructed from specific meanings unique to a significant relationship that unfolds both at a personal and at an organisational level.

If the common use of the *linguistic portal "change"* suggests agency, the presence of the *linguistic portal "responsibility"* implies a widespread sense of obligation. This is also confirmed by the fact that across all the four cases, respondents use expressions, such as *"the business needed it"* or *"we owed to the business".*

As the previous chapters of analysis show, all dyads indicate how their decisions, their actions, and their reflections were often taken in relation to expectations they needed to fulfil towards their relationship. Nevertheless, the *"business"* is the personification of the *communal* social identity that characterises their relationship and is a vivid representation of their shared beliefs.

All dyads show a sense of obligation towards their personification of the *"business".* At a superficial level this could highlight a sense of commitment towards the venture. However, while any such commitment is voluntary, the sense of obligation that emerges here seems to impose behaviours and orient choices.

The *"business"* is therefore not only a legal venture but also a representation of the self-imposed social rules that govern their relationship (Bliezner and Adams 1992). The representation of these rules emerges also in the sense of unity presented by the members of the dyads and on how this shapes the processes of *identity work* in the dyads.

The next section turns its attention on how this widespread sense of obligation pervades the dyads and shapes the processes of *identity work* they engage in. The analysis looks at all dyads while taking into consideration the different levels of interaction they are engaged in. Section 10.3 underlines the sense of obligation that the dyads experienced towards societal images and towards locally constructed meanings.

The former strongly characterises the social structure of each dyad respectively: marriage; siblinghood; friendship. By contrast, the latter is defined by the shared values and beliefs they produced through social interaction.

10.3 Observing obligation in the process of *identity work*

The process of narrative deconstruction highlights how each dyad develops a unique understanding of what 'being an entrepreneur' might mean.

In the case of Tony and Jazz, this becomes the 'boundaries-breaking' entrepreneur, where starting a venture is an opportunity to enact a desire to continuously push existing boundaries. Anthony and Lorna enact the 'integral entrepreneur' as a way to live the transformations in the life of a couple promoting to others their own Christian values. For Stella and Irina, entrepreneurship becomes first an opportunity to show to others that they have grown up, and then an occasion to demonstrate their maturity to themselves.

The analysis of the *identity work* processes carried out in these cases show how all the individuals concerned have internalised some aspects of these *communal* identities in their selves. More importantly, the cases illustrate that these aspects were also transferred to the other social identities that the dyads lived in their two other levels of interaction.

At the level of personal interaction, the respondents transferred these aspects in their being, respectively, husband; daughter; boyfriend. At the level of business interactions, these aspects were transferred in their presentations respectively of co-preneur; client; supplier.

On the one hand, the processes of *identity work* highlight a component of agency as entrepreneurs actively deal with both the internal and external aspects of their selves (Watson 2008). On the other hand, these processes are characterised by a widespread sense of obligation. In all dyads, expectations are also created by the images of marriage; siblinghood; and friendship that society has produced as well as by the locally constructed discourses of 'being entrepreneurial'.

From the discourse of entrepreneurship as a field which boundaries have to constantly pushed forward, Tony felt obliged to adopt the particular aspect of working long hours in his entrepreneurial identity, because of "*the respect we owed to the business*"; he also felt obliged to internalise it in the private aspect of his self because of his sense of "*responsibility*". Finally, he felt obliged to transfer it to other social identities as he became a boyfriend that was unable to "*to move things forward with her*" because of his work ethos.

The anecdote about Christian's departure from the team illustrates how they also experienced a sense of obligation towards the commitment that their relationship as

friends had implied. They both recall how they could not choose who had to break the news to Christian and this delayed the possible confrontation between the friends. The bounds of commitment reflect the expectations that (Western) society associates with the notion of friendship (Duck 1991). This is present in Tony's and Jazz's reiterated statements of them still being friends with Christian.

However, the two of them also experienced a sense of obligation towards the bounds they built through their contextual and unique understanding of entrepreneurship (Hogg 1992). As it emerges in the previous chapter, the common understanding of living a sort of all-round entrepreneurial life, permeated in every aspect by the elements of *"change"*; *"revolution"*; *"thriving for success",* represents a key dimension in Tony and Jazz's relationship. In the end, they decided to let Christian go because of the obligation they had towards this common belief *"if he hadn't left probably our relationship would have been strongly affected too"*.

Drawing from the discourse of entrepreneurship as an opportunity to demonstrate maturity to others, Stella and Irina embed the particular aspect of looking after their appearance because *"the business needed it from us"*. The 'rebellious entrepreneurs' prepares professional stationery so *"they are surprised when we say <Actually, we have got business cards!>"*.

The tendency of the 'rebellious entrepreneur' social identity to *"show/demonstrate"* to others also shapes some of the private aspects the selves. While others address her as a young, inexperienced *"female"*, Stella thinks of herself differently, mentioning that *"We'll demonstrate what it's all about. You know, we don't like to be criticised…"*

The development of such aspects of self-confidence is used to re-shape other social identities such as the one of 'daughter'. When their parents advised them to leave their ambition and to look instead for a 'proper job', Irina dismissed the advice: *"it was almost like we were rebelling against that and saying <No. We're going to go and do something else instead.> [laughter]"*.

In their second story, Stella and Irina construct the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur. One of the main aspects of this *persona* is to do what one loves, and to be creative while disregarding what other people might think. The internalisation of these aspects emerges from the data, as Stella now considers herself *"a very creative person"* who likes *"to do things that can allow me to work with my creativity"*.

Similarly Irina states how she is a happy person only when engaged in projects where she is able *"to use my creativity"*.

Once internalised, these aspects were transferred into other social identities. For example, Irina mentions how she was a *"very creative wedding planner"* for her sister's wedding and she recalls how she *"loved to do that for Stella [...] I had to take that role"* implying a sense of obligation in performing the role with aspects that were originally derived from the 'self-satisfied' *communal* identity. This sense of obligation also emerges in Stella's story as she mentions that after the experiences with Irina she could only get involved into *"something creative"*.

The *communal* social identity of 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' expresses their unique relationship as siblings. Chapter 8 mentions how Irina cannot explain the innate reasons that inspired her to consider her sister as her only possible business partner. Similarly, Stella stresses how they could understand each other immediately because of the unique passion for creativity they shared.

They live their processes of *identity work* as a tension between the freedom of shaping the self and obligation. The latter is felt towards the discourse and the *communal* social identity they had created as well as towards the constraints of society. Being part of a *"Polish family"*, they were expected to make their parents proud and to share information with them.

For example, Irina mentions how *"we had to stick to those expectations"* and Stella recalls some anecdotes from the organisation of her wedding, saying that *"everyone wanted to get involved, I was never on my own"*. When they decided to not disclose their second venture until the inauguration of the Antique shop, they transgressed this societal duty of sharing information. The obligation towards the 'self-satisfied' entrepreneur prevailed over the obligation towards the expectations that society had imposed on the notion of 'family'.

The role of obligation in the process of *identity work* also emerges in Anthony and Lorna's case. Both spouses seem to be influenced by the role of marital duty, and they show an obligation to respond to the expectations of society (Kondo 1990; Mulholland 1996b). The sense of duty that socially characterises marital relations shapes Anthony and Lorna's social identities.

In his story, Anthony continually upgrades and downgrades his role as 'husband-caring companion' highlighting the duty to protect his wife and to *"keep the pressure*

off her". Similarly, Lorna assumes her new role as 'wife-bread-earner' to be a duty to the family as she is now *"responsible for the family income"*.

Their roles of husband and wife are also shaped by a sense of obligation towards their unique interpretation of social structure. Anthony and Lorna are not only a married couple as society understands it; they are also a *"Christian couple"* (Lorna) and a *"couple with strong values"* (Anthony), and this defines the business and the notion of 'integral entrepreneur' that they construct, as chapter 9 illustrates.

Their personal relationship seems to be influenced by the images deriving from society with regard to 'marriage' as well as by the image of the 'integral entrepreneur'. They have transferred some of the aspects of the 'integral entrepreneur' to their being a 'wife' and 'father' respectively.

For example, Lorna proves to be very uncomfortable in ascribing to herself the adjective *breadwinner* and acknowledges it as *"unfair"* for her to say that her husband no longer has that role. Lorna enacts an obligation to be a wife as expected by the societal values they embrace. She also adopts the role of 'bread-earner' instead of the 'breadwinner', so that it appears that she is able to deal with the transformations in their lives without altering the hierarchies that their idea of a Christian couple implies.

Similarly, Anthony recalls how, despite having a dedicated and secluded office space on the third floor of their house, they had to move the location of Integral Relations. The rationale for the move is that they had an obligation to not have *"our life exposed"* and to protect the way of living in which they had been bringing up their daughters. At the same time, they had an obligation towards the business, to enact it as opportunity to portray their Christian values. They hence needed to take it out of the familial environment.

> (61) "We couldn't allow people looking for it [Integral Relations] to come into our house. We owed to it. [...] **The girls** are not kids any more" (Anthony)

Anthony and Lorna's processes of *identity work* are hence shaped by the obligation they experience towards the discourse of 'marriage' as social contract as well as by the obligation felt towards their *communal* social identity. This is explained in the excerpt above by the expression *"we owed to it"*, through which Anthony signals his obligation towards the *communal* social identity.

This section illustrates how the processes of *identity work* as identified by Watson (2008) present similarities across the different dyads. The processes of *identity work* are in particular influenced by a tension between the active role of the individual in shaping the self and a widespread sense of obligation. Chapter 11 draws specific theoretical implications from this analysis.

The comparison of the cases also highlights another element of commonality, which emerges from the analysis of the interface between the different levels of social interaction that occur in entrepreneurial dyads. The sense of obligation towards the *communal* social identities that the dyads have developed seems to have shaped the enactment of their businesses. The next section looks at this aspect in more detail.

10.4 Obligation and the shaping of the business

Chapter 4 discusses that contextualising the study of the construction of entrepreneurial identities and of the process of *identity work* in entrepreneurial dyads has specific research objectives. Entrepreneurial dyads are a unique context as they share not only the dynamics of a specific social relationship (e.g. marriage), but also the ones of a business experience.

This section explores how the obligation towards the local entrepreneurial discourse and towards other socially available discourses shapes the business itself. This phenomenon is observed at two levels: that of the notion of team boundaries and that of the approach to growth respectively.

With regard to the former, the unique understandings of entrepreneurial identity enact different notions of 'entrepreneurial team'. With regard to the latter, the businesses show various approaches to growth, demonstrating four different forms of organising and managing an entrepreneurial venture.

10.4.1 Shaping the entrepreneurial team

The involvement of external actors in the managerial direction of the company varies sensibly across the dyadic experiences. Anthony and Lorna, in spite of being both considerably involved in networking due the nature of Public Relations, rarely rely on external interlocutors (e.g. consultants) to contribute to decision making; finance; ideas generation.

By contrast, Tony and Jazz strongly engage with external professionals, as they constantly look for experienced managers to facilitate their decision making; for venture capitalists to provide financial and managerial support; and for consultants to advise in the generation and refinement of products and concepts.

Stella and Irina's case show how their engagement with external interlocutors changed in relation to the different businesses they started. In the first story, the two sisters were open to seeking advice and support. In their stories, they refer to the managerial support they received from a business mentor and recall how they asked for recognition and advice from their family. In the second story, they do not mentione to have included anyone in their decision making processes. They both in fact stress how family itself was not even informed of the new business.

The relation between the obligation towards the 'boundaries breaking entrepreneur' and the shape of Courier's 'team' emerges clearly in Tony and Jazz's accounts. For example, this is clear in Christian's dismissal from the venture. Ucbasaran *et al.* (2003) suggest how entry and exit dynamics are common in entrepreneurial teams. However, in this experience, Christian did not just leave, but he was asked to leave because he did not embrace the discourse of continuous change and learning that characterised the relevant *communal* social identity.

(62) "So we then did something quite unusual and we went to the one person that didn't respond, who was Dr C. B., who is the director of XXX's logistics lab and we tracked her down and we got on conference call with her and basically said, you know, "Why didn't you?" (Tony)

(63) So one of the things that we did together was to gather as much information as possible and to speak to as many people as possible. So we spoke to T. R., [a key person in the courier industry]. […] **I don't remember the chronology of it**, but she was very encouraging because her loyalty was to the industry and not to any particular company and she was convinced that there was an opportunity for technology to move the industry forward. You know, the thing is not much has happened since the 70s; everyone just sort of plods along." (Jazz)

The above excerpts illustrate how the desire to approach their business in an unconventional manner led the pair to involve other external interlocutors in the decision-making process. Tony mentions how their decision to contact Dr C.B. (i.e. the UPS consultant) was *"quite unusual"*. Even the method of contact was far from

orthodox as they broke into her private life, contacting her baker and ultimately *"started harassing her"* with gifts and fruit baskets.

The link between the common understanding of being an entrepreneur as a person who continuously breaks the boundaries and the decision to involve others is reinforced by Jazz in excerpt 63. Moving the business forward and making it *"real"* is their priority all along, and this is directly linked to the decision of contacting the largest number of people possible. Involving T. R. facilitated the enactment of their entrepreneurial identity, as this allowed them to break the boundaries of an industry that had not seen much innovation in decades.

Similarly, Stella and Irina, in their first venture, put forward the importance of networking and an 'elastic' understanding of the notion of entrepreneurial team. An interesting point emerges from the analysis of the role of the mentor. The two sisters had regular meetings with their business mentor; she officially sat in their 'boardroom'; and she helped them with decision-making and strategic planning.

In excerpt 6, Stella highlights how having a (female) mentor helped them to share their understanding of the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. This consideration is supported by Irina. She mentions how the inclusion of the mentor in their entrepreneurial team facilitated the enactment of the entrepreneurial identity she shared with her sister.

> (64) "**you know**, they look at us and they think 'why these girls want to **play the entrepreneurs**?'. Then they realize that we have good ideas and good contacts and that [the mentor] supports us" (Irina I)

The Gruber sisters also engaged with other interlocutors. In the following story extract, Stella first recalls the role of the mentor's involvement in their personal 'crusade' to be taken *"more seriously"*. She also introduces how they involved other interlocutors because of the social implications generated by the cultural relations within their family. The use of the discursive marker *"you know"* invited the researcher to comprehend how involving others was almost a due act in the dynamics of a *"Polish family"*.

> (65) "**you know**, we are really good at networking. We attend these events regularly to meet people that can help with the business. It is important to develop contacts, so they will **take us more seriously** […] you know, we are a **Polish family**. We talk a lot to our parents and everyone **has to** give you advice […] we share everything". (Stella I)

A comparison between these considerations and the story of the antique shop highlights how their sense of obligation has shifted. In the second story, the two sisters still experience the sense of obligation towards the family dynamics, but this time their entrepreneurial identity is characterised by doing together something they like, disregarding the inputs from other people.

The story itself does not show any secondary character and even Stella's newly-wed husband appears only after a prompt from the researcher. The focus is all on themselves and on their personal, intimate relationship with the business. The choice of a business partner was, for Stella, immediately clear, as she stresses that:

> (66) "We've always, because we've always done things together, **you know** it's … **natural. You know…"** (Stella II)

The word *"natural"* at first seems to highlight a sense of obligation towards their relationship as siblings. However, the recurring use of the marker *"you know"* is often used as an intrinsic justification for unexpected behaviours (Schiffrin 1987). Stella seems to justify the use of *"natural"* not with a family liaison but because of their understanding of doing things together.

This observation moves their relationship away from the context of the family, where instead their Polish heritage would have demanded a stronger involvement of other external interlocutors. Similarly, Irina stresses below how they decided not to involve the family in their decisions and in their actions.

> (67) "And we were going to trade fairs as well, so we had to tell our parents again that it was for interior design and things like that, but really we were choosing our stock, January, February time **[laughter]**" (Irina II)

Irina's reflection on the secrecy of their endeavours implies how their relationship is not just shaped by a family linkage, but by something that binds them together and superimposes a sense of obligation in terms of moral constraints (e.g. *"it wouldn't seem right"*). This binding element is clearly represented by their understanding of entrepreneurial identity as an opportunity to do something together to re-build their confidence.

On the one hand, these dynamics present an element of individual agency in shaping their entrepreneurial identity. On the other hand, they highlight a predominance of the structure defined by the common understanding of that entrepreneurial identity.

The sense of obligation is a concept that generally remains under the surface and is often obscure for the storyteller. This excerpt illustrates how the definition of the dyad's boundaries could be moulded by the sense of obligation they felt towards their understanding of 'entrepreneur'. Irina cannot explain ("*I'm not sure why*") the rationale of the decision to describe the dyad as bounded by their relationship, but this refers to a level of ethical dilemma and as such remains in the sphere of obligation and moral lessons (Ahl 2007).

(68) "**It wouldn't seem right** to do something on our own or with someone else. […] **I'm not sure [why]**. It's always been our business – us working together…**I'm not sure why**…but we work well together and that if we're going to have a business it's going to be our business together" (Irina II)

Anthony and Lorna's case presents a definition of a team characterised by rigid boundaries. The stories of the couple are built around the two personalities and their relationship. In describing the important moments of the life of the business, they never mention potential investors and make no reference to other people being potentially involved in the decision making. Even the extended family and close friends have no role in the life of the business, in spite of Lorna pointing out how important they are in her personal life. Lorna mentioned that:

(69) "Often I seek refuge from work at my parents' mansions […] There I can do something else […] refresh the spirit […] and forget about business talks for an afternoon". (Lorna)

In meeting the researcher, Anthony stressed the intention of the couple to minimise external disruptions to the *equilibria* of their private and work life. This includes, for example, their reluctance to seek external capital because of their distrust for banks' ethics.

On the one hand, this decision seems due to a sense of obligation towards the protection of the privacy of their Christian marriage. On the other hand, this is also

appearing as shaped by a shared notion of entrepreneurial identity as an opportunity for transforming their lives while living their Christian values.

Relaxing the boundaries of the business team by including external interlocutors could have affected the equilibria of the couple and the presentation of the family's values in everyday activities (such as for example, refusing an unethical client), which instead Lorna defends as fundamental to their relationship.

10.4.2 The development of the business

The widespread sense of obligation also informs the different approaches to growth of each of the dyads. For example, Tony and Jazz orient the activities of their business toward potential growth, both in terms of size of the business (e.g. number of employees) and in terms of structure of the entrepreneurial experience (e.g. looking for venture capitalists and intention to apply for an initial public offering). At the other end of the spectrum, Anthony and Lorna decide to fund their business through reinvestment when possible or to otherwise leave their activities on a small scale.

The case of Stella and Irina exemplifies how a change in the understanding of the entrepreneurial identity shared by the dyad can influence the shape of the business. In their first experience, the sisters oriented their decisions pursuing potential growth. They prepared a professional business plan and sought (and obtained) external funding. On the other hand, in their experience with the antique shop they decided to leave their activities on a small scale and to think of developing their business almost on a day-to-day basis.

During the time the researcher spent at Courier's premises, both Tony and Jazz showcased key aspects of their business, continuously highlighting its recent growth. For example, Tony explained the fleet of couriers, discussing the increase year-on-year of vehicles owned by the company; Jazz presented the numbers of clients, comparing Courier's growth with other competitors; and Tony again introduced each of the managers with a reflection of how a great number of managers had joined Courier since the foundation.

> (70) "Jazz and I had tried to give the impression of being…you know…a
> **real** company. There was headed paper and a very basic logo […]. If you

were to call there was also a sort of electronic voice mail with a message like "welcome to Courier" […] but now, **the business had** to raise some venture capital to make it all **real**. […] Eventually there was the opportunity through some personal connections to find a venture capital that could make it **real** with financial support and management suggestions." (Tony)

In excerpt 70, Tony repeatedly stresses how the route to growth is the only option to make the business *"real"*. On the one hand, this emphasis is consistent with the presentation of the cover-page entrepreneur portrayed in their interactions with the researcher. It is common in business stories: the (re)presentation of the dream envisaged by the entrepreneurs and what he/she had had to achieve in order to turn it into reality (Verdujin 2007).

On the other hand, this emphasis is also in line with the desire to break away from the tradition in the industry that characterises the 'boundaries-breaking entrepreneur'.

Tony highlights, both in the text and in the other interactions with the researcher, how the route to growth needs to be pursued through massive investments and the involvement of venture capitalists, *"even if that was something completely new for it"*.

During a meeting, Jazz points out how venture capital is not a traditional sourcing strategy in the courier industry, but how in the end Courier is *"more a hi-tech company that happens to operate in the courier industry"*. This last comment underlines the role of their entrepreneurial identity as an approach that constantly breaks the boundaries and re-shapes existing dynamics.

A final consideration draws attention to the widespread sense of obligation that emerges from the story and that facilitates the enactment of shared entrepreneurial identities into a unique approach to business practice. As in the discussion about Christian's dismissal presented earlier on, Tony and Jazz abandon once again the use of the first plural person to describe their actions. Therefore, it is the business that has to raise capital for growth and they are not the ones who actively seek the opportunity to engage with venture capitalists.

Compared to Tony and Jazz, Anthony and Lorna relate to growth with an opposite approach.

(71) "What are the **worries**? The worries are always in terms of the monies available. I mean I think the constraint on our business has

always been the amount of money we've taken out of it because we've had a reasonably high mortgage. [pause] **The girls** are being privately educated at the moment […] we probably would have been able to grow more quickly…had we been taking less out. But we haven't [laughs]. To some extent we've got a lifestyle business, rather than a growth business and it may be a couple of years before that changes, because then the girls will be away from home and we'll perhaps spend less on them. But maybe not…I've forgotten why I was telling that story…So yeah, essentially that's been the constraint of… Oh the worries, that's right…" (Anthony)

(72) "Now, we haven't grown that far. I mean our turnover, I think, and Anthony will confirm this, has plateaud at xxxxxx£ …has plateaud at xxxxxx£ give or take and we're always…We have to withdraw quite a lot of that in terms of our own income…[long pause] to keep **the girls** going and [pause] we've got **two girls** at Xxxxxx High School and we've got, you know, the house and it was quite expensive. In some ways we withdraw quite a lot as directors, rather than keep it in the business and say <Oh, we can live off perhaps 5,000 a year…> – well, we can't **[laughter]**. So we haven't expanded like some companies might have done by now" (Lorna)

Chapter 9 highlights how the use of the portal *"the girls"* introduces either a reflection on the role of identity or *identity work*. In here, it is possible to observe how the priorities for the couple remain the private education of their daughters and the promotion of the Christian family values that contribute to defining the understanding of entrepreneurial identity shared by the partners.

As in Tony and Jazz's case, an element of obligation emerges and shapes the approach that Anthony and Lorna take to the definition of the business. In particular, it is interesting to note the playful use that both spouses make of laughter. This interrupts the narrations (as in excerpt 71 for Anthony) when Anthony and Lorna are carrying out a reflection about the enactment of their specific strategic choices (i.e. growth).

More precisely, these reflections focus on the expectations that other interlocutors have with regard to their strategies as 'entrepreneurs'. The clichéd understanding of a small business enterprise they shared with the researcher implies growth. However, both Anthony and Lorna stress how they could have grown the business, but they did not. In this context, the laughter suddenly truncates the narration. The laughter is introduced by the expressions *"we can't"* (Lorna) and *"but we haven't"* (Anthony). This symbolises an obligation towards the 'integral entrepreneur' to act in this way.

Stella and Irina's stories show how a change in the definition of the *communal* social identity is linked to the structure, size, and prospects of a business. The structure of the first venture reflects the traditional features of an innovative internet company oriented towards growth. This is in line with the cover-page story presented in the 'tale' and also reflects the 'rebellious entrepreneur'. The following two excerpts highlight this linkage and show how the portals *"show/demonstrate"* introduce their constructed entrepreneurial identity. From this perspective, the venture becomes an opportunity to *"show/demonstrate"* the potential of women in business.

> (73) "The idea is to **show** a steady **growth** in the next couple of years and then expand into other markets […] we really think we can launch different franchise versions like … I dunno… Housewifeshopping.co.uk" (Stella I)

> (74) "We would like to **grow** quickly so that we can **demonstrate** the full potential of the business" (Irina I)

The business of the antique shop is radically different from *Studentshopping.co.uk*. The first venture was an innovative on-line retail service, whilst the second is a traditional antique shop in an exclusive neighbourhood. The first venture was characterised by plans for growth; a search for external funding; strategic partnerships with suppliers. The second venture aims at survival and at providing subsistence for the directors. Both the following excerpts exemplify this understanding as the Gruber sisters link the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' to the nature of the venture.

> (75) "There is one thing we know for sure and that's that **we would like to be self-employed**, you know, so we don't have to live on part-time jobs to pay the bills anymore". (Stella II)

> (76) "And my friends are all on 25-30 grand a year, but I am happy. You know, as long as I can do **something I like** and I can work with Stella" (Irina II)

For both sisters, the paramount priority is now to do something they consider enthusing. Money, growth, and success are no longer key factors, as long as they are able to pay the bills and to work together. The discursive marker *"you know"*

introduces a level of engagement with the researcher as he can now understand, at the end of several meetings with them over 18 months, how this choice was (in)formed by a sense of obligation. The sense of obligation towards their idea of the 'self-satisfied entrepreneur' strengthens and supports a unique binding between the two sisters.

10.5 Obligation and the production of business stories

A final reflection emerges comparing the different business stories told by the entrepreneurs. A widespread sense of obligation plays a key role in shaping how events and characters were portrayed to the researcher.

The narrative analysis of the 'tales' carried out in the previous chapters highlights how the entrepreneurs used specific stereotyped images and *clichés* in portraying their entrepreneurial experiences. These stereotyped images and *clichés* are drawn from socially available discourses that entrepreneurs considered to be shared with the researcher (Watson 1995; Down 2006; Czarniawska 2005).

These include images drawn from the mass-media (Goffman 1974; Atkinson and Silverman 1997; duGay 2000; O'Connor 2004); from industry (Kärreman and Alvesson 2001); from the subject of interaction (duGay and Salaman 1992; Fletcher 2007).

The four 'tales' characterise the figure of the entrepreneur using two stereotypes typical of entrepreneurship discourses. The tales of Courier (Tony and Jazz) and of *Studentshopping.co.uk* (Stella and Irina first story) draw on the figure of the cover-page entrepreneur. The character of the entrepreneur in the tales of Integral Relations (Anthony and Lorna) and of the antique shop (Stella and Irina second story) is instead constructed from stereotypes developed from the enterprising discourse that has characterised the media and the government policies in the United Kingdom in the last few years (duGay 1996; 2004).

The adoption of the stereotype of the cover-page entrepreneur emerges from analysing the communication that occurred during the meetings with the researcher, the narrative style adopted, and the themes that emerged in the 'tales'. With regard to the latter, the two pairs used the *cliché* of the *"success story"* (O'Connor 2002; Down 2006). Stella and Irina, in their first story, always make reference to what their business has achieved so far. They stress how they are often invited to showcase their

success story to University events and in schools. Stella claims how *"it is amazing to see all those kids inspired by your success story"*.

Similarly, during the first meeting, Tony and Jazz listed the awards they had won to the researcher and showed to him a folder with the different magazines that had reported their *"success story"*. In the narration, when discussing the reasons that had moved him and Jazz to start Courier, Tony states that *"there is no need for me to spend time on that part of the story, you know, I am sure you have read it in the papers"*.

As in the stereotype of the successful 'dragon', success is also analysed in terms of social implications. Another *cliché* that emerges is the reference to the recognition that others had of their *"courage"*. Irina recalls how *"all friends always ask where we found the courage to deal with all this"*, while Stella stresses how important was for them that once the parents' reluctance was overcome their mother was *"telling everyone her daughters have their own business"* and *"not every girl could have done it"*. Similarly, Jazz reminisces how *"everyone in my town now knows about Courier and asks if I am not scared"*.

With regard to narrative style, chapters 6 and 7 illustrate how both the friends' and the sisters' 'tales' are constructed in the form of heroic narrations (Czarniawska 1998). In both cases, the heroes and the heroines have to show their courage and deal with a series of obstacles that threaten their plan, before eventually succeeding. Examples are their difficulties in securing the technology, the funding, the support of their families, and the respect of older interlocutors.

In the meetings at margins of the 'interviews', both dyads related to the researcher as to a journalist. Chapter 6 discusses how Tony and Jazz addressed the researcher like one of the journalists that had previously interviewed them. This approach was also visible in how Stella commented that she was now *"like a proper rock star"* when she saw the digital recorder of the researcher. Moreover, the cases showed how all four entrepreneurs sat in front of the researcher quite relaxed and mocking the stereotyped interviewee that the mass-media portray (O'Connor 2004).

As anticipated, the other two dyads draw principally from the enterprising discourse in producing their social identity of entrepreneur (duGay and Salaman 1992; duGay 1996). The characterisation in the 'tales' emphasises this point. Anthony and Lorna stress on several occasions that they have a *"lifestyle business"*, while

Stella and Irina often report the clichéd phrase of *"being our own boss"* and repeatedly describe themselves as *"self-employed"*.

This understanding of entrepreneurship is also embedded in the *plot* of the underdog story that characterises both 'tales'. In particular, the analysis in chapter 9 shows how Anthony and Lorna present their activity in comparison with the approach to Public Relations that *"big companies"* have. Similarly, Stella and Irina in this second 'tale' repeatedly compare their lives with the ones of their friends and university colleagues who chose traditional careers.

These examples show how the definitions of the entrepreneur that the dyads projected in their interactions with the researcher were strongly influenced by a sense of obligation to find a common platform of meanings with the researcher in order to facilitate communication. The use of discursive markers such as *"you know"* highlights this point in the case of all dyads (Schiffrin 2001). This phrase reveals how the storytellers looked for a socially available discourse that would have facilitated the exchange of knowledge between them and their audience (i.e. the researcher).

The sense of obligation towards the researcher is also confirmed by the observation of how these entrepreneurs used specific 'discursive resources' to introduce the academic discourse on entrepreneurship (Watson 1995). Czarniawska (2004) suggests that the common knowledge about academic interviews might influence the narrative productions of 'interviewees'.

All dyads show some understanding of the academic debate and find opportunities for referring to it in the stories. For example, in presenting their characteristics as entrepreneurs, all dyads use clichéd expressions such as being able to *"discover an opportunity"* and being *"alert"*. However, whenever they became more familiar with the researcher or in settings other than the 'interview' one, they never adopted such scripted approach. The analysis shows how the married couple and the friends avoided the use of these *clichés* in other social events and how Stella and Irina did not use them once they became acquainted with the researcher.

The notion of *double hermeneutics* offers an adequate interpretative key for understanding how a sense of obligation invites the use of these *clichés* in dialogical interactions. Giddens (1987) stresses how, in dialogical interactions, an individual enacts a presentation of the self so that it would conform to the expectations that he/she assumes the 'other' has with regard to the dialogical encounter.

For Giddens, individuals are concept-using beings "whose concepts of their actions enter in a constitutive manner into what those actions are" (Giddens 1987, p. 18). The notion of *double hermeneutics* explains the sense of obligation that an individual experiences in projecting his/her self before a specific interlocutor.

Hence, individuals engage in dialogues by drawing the source of their discourses from what they expect to be a shared background of knowledge. The expectation of a shared background (in)forms the topics along which the interaction takes place and the interactive modalities utilised, such as for example the *clichés* used (Giddens 1987).

The storytellers anticipated the expectations of the researcher and constructed their own responses accordingly. They ultimately felt an obligation to *perform* actions and behaviours in order to *position* themselves in the dialogical relation (Davies and Harrè 1991). During the co-production of the 'tales', the entrepreneurs positioned themselves according to their language, their experiences, and 'the complexity of social typifications' (Downing 2005, p. 191).

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter compared the dyads studied in the empirical analysis and highlighted how, along with a common presence of a degree of agency, the entrepreneurs all experienced a diffuse sense of obligation.

Such a sense of obligation is present in all three steps of Watson's framework. First, it emerges in the definition of their *communal* social identity from a shared discourse. Second, it pinpoints the process through which individuals 'internalised' aspects of this social identity in their selves (i.e. inward *identity work*). Third, it is visible in the process of outward *identity work*, through which individuals input elements of their self into their social identities.

The comparative analysis highlighted how individuals do not simply make inputs in their social identity of entrepreneur. They also transfer some aspects of the *communal* social identity into other roles they live. Chapter 11 discusses the theoretical implications of this finding in light of Watson's (2008) framework.

The comparative analysis also showed the dual nature of obligation that dyads live in their different levels of interaction, at work and in life. On the one hand, an obligation emerges towards the elements of society, embedded in the expectations produced by the relevant social structures (e.g. family, marriage, business) and by

other socially available discourses. On the other hand, obligation emerges towards the elements of community that the dyads have themselves created in their unique dialogical understandings of 'being entrepreneurial'.

Section 10.5 presented how the sense of obligation is linked to the definition of the entrepreneurial dyads' activities. In particular, the analysis illustrated how two key business notions such as 'entrepreneurial team' and business growth were enacted while taking into consideration the obligation towards the *communal* social identities of 'entrepreneur' that the dyads developed.

Finally, section 10.6 reflected on the sense of obligation as experienced by the entrepreneurs in producing the 'tales' during their interactions with the researcher. The use of *clichés* and stereotypes has been interpreted using the notion of *double hermeneutics* (Giddens 1987).

The next chapter contextualises these findings of the empirical analysis within the existing literature, highlighting the contributions to knowledge that this thesis puts advances. The challenges faced by the study and the directions for future research are also discussed.

Chapter XI

Contributions, challenges, and directions for future research

11.0 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the findings of the empirical study and highlights how these contribute to identity research. Both theoretical and empirical contributions are presented and discussed. Directions for future research are offered in order to move the study of identity construction in entrepreneurial dyads forward.

11.1 Contributions to knowledge

The empirical analysis presented in the previous chapters contributes to the knowledge on identity. This thesis enhances the framework developed by Watson (2008) introducing the category of *communal* social identity and discussing how, in doing outward *identity work*, individuals transfer elements of their 'being entrepreneurial' into their other social identities (e.g. boyfriend, mother, daughter).

 The thesis proffers a new perspective on the debate between agency and structure, a critical aspect of the literature, as highlighted in chapter 2. The evidence that emerges from the data analysis highlights the degree of agency enjoyed by individuals in casting their selves, in joining specific discourses, and in creating discursive and narrative realities. However, the data also show obligation as an element that constrains specific behaviors and actions.

Specific empirical and theoretical contributions emerge from this evidence. In particular, the theoretical contribution is the proposal that the tension between change and obligation is the mechanism that regulates the processes of *identity work* and that enables an individual to produce a coherent self.

Three different empirical contributions also emerge. The first suggests that *communal* social identities involve the enactment of a locally produced discourse that represents a sense of community unique to each dyad. The second introduces the notion of *linguistic portals* as an epistemological tool for investigating the processes of *identity work* and *communal* social identities. The third links the sense of obligation dyads have towards their locally constructed discourses to how individuals shape, where possible, their work and their organisations.

11.2 The tension between change and obligation as source of a coherent self

The tension between change and obligation characterises all of the three dyadic relations considered in this empirical study. Chapter 10 shows how these concepts are widely present within the processes of *identity work* involved, and are highlighted by the *linguistic portals* of "*change*" and "*responsibility*". Building on the suggestions of Kärreman and Alvesson (2001), this study addresses the following research question:

> RQ1: in doing *identity work*, how are individuals able to maintain a coherent identity amongst the different presentations of their social identities?

This thesis suggests that the continuous tension between change and obligation is the key element securing consistency across different social identities that individuals use to construct coherent selves.

This consistency is enacted by encapsulating the main connotations of the social identities of '*entrepreneur*' into other aspects of their personal lives (Watson 2008). The empirical analysis highlights how, through inward *identity work*, aspects of the *communal* identity of an entrepreneur are internalised in his/her self identity.

The empirical analysis of the cases demonstrates how these *communal* social identities are constructed by the partners of the entrepreneurial dyads by drawing on locally meaningful discourses. Chapter 10 illustrates how these social identities can be identified through the means of linguistic portals.

Individuals not only consider these aspects of their social identities as a characteristic of the self. These aspects are then transferred to other social identities through what Watson (2008) calls 'outward' *identity work*. Data analysis underlines how this *identity work* from the self to social identity is not exclusively limited to inputs towards the social identity of the 'entrepreneur'. This outward *identity work* may also be carried out towards other categories of each individual's social identity.

For example, Tony developed an understanding of change as a continuous pushing of the boundaries in every aspect of his life and in the lives of others, and it was his 'responsibility' to enact it even if this meant sacrificing his love life and becoming a 'broken-hearted boyfriend'. Lorna adopted new roles without compromising her

Christian values and it was her 'responsibility' to become a 'bread-earner' with the researcher or a 'sergeant' with her daughters.

In this way, Lorna could allow her husband to remain the head of the (Christian) family even in his new roles of 'lover' or 'companion'. Stella and Irina, in their first account, developed an understanding of change as showing their maturity to others and it was their 'responsibility' to rebel not only against old businessmen, but also against the advice of their family, thus becoming 'rebel daughters'.

The study enhances Watson's framework as it is presented in figure 6. This illustrates how the different social identities (and therefore the different discourses) are cross-germinated through the process of *identity work*. Therefore, social identities are (in)formed by the discourse(s) in which they initially emerge and by the transfer of specific aspects of other social identities, via the private aspects of the self.

It is important to remember that this thesis supports Jenkins' (1996) and Watson's (2008) assumptions that the internal (self) and the external (social) aspects of identity are merely analytical distinctions. Even the internal and more private aspects of the self are in essence 'social' as individuals relate their understandings of what they might be to the social structure or the community they consider themselves to be part of.

The empirical analysis shows how identity is a coherent notion, of which the different social identities are merely facets of an otherwise 'crystallised', yet coherent self (Tracy and Trethewey 2005). Individuals maintain consistency through their different social identities, making sense of the continuous tension between the opportunity for change and the sense of obligation.

Figure 5. A revised version of Watson's (2008) framework of identity work
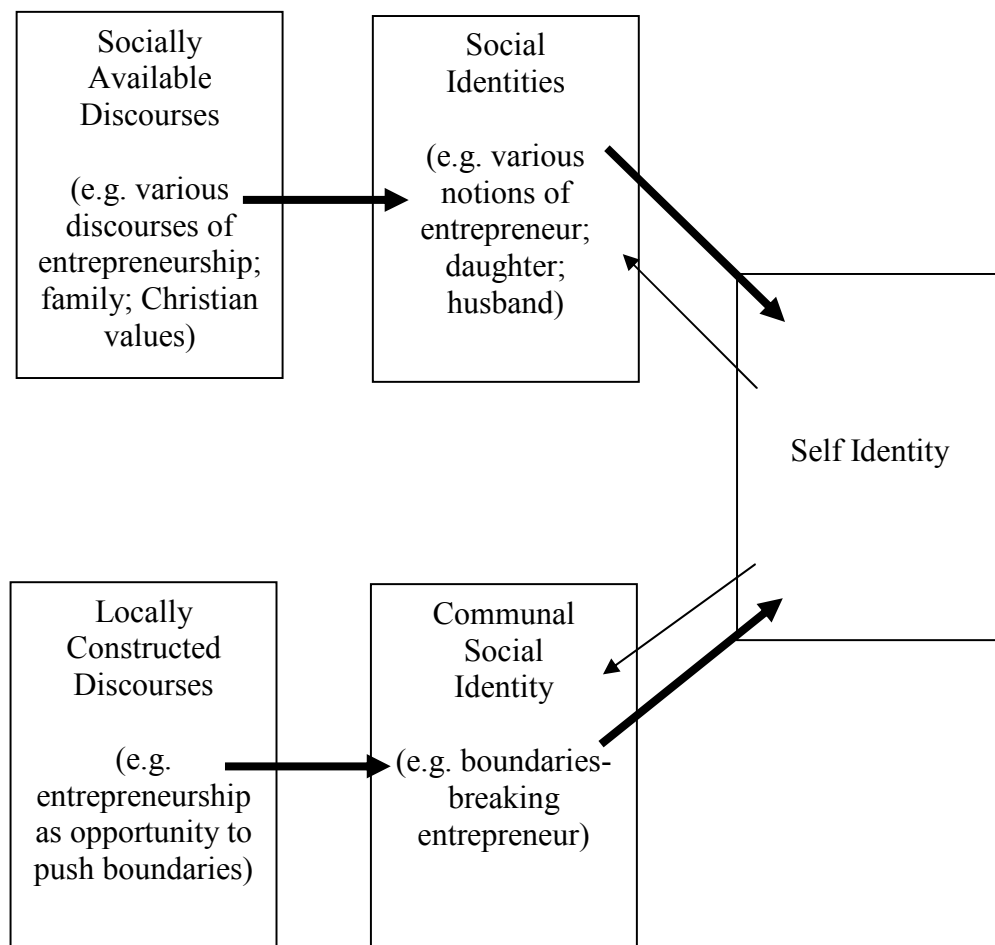
11.3 The construction of *communal* social identities

One of the empirical contributions of this study is the identification of a sixth category of social identity.

This thesis uses Watson's (2008) framework as a conceptual approach for interpreting the data collected. This allows the empirical study to address the main research questions. Some of the findings contribute in turn to expanding Watson's (2008) ideas and the field of identity research. Chapter 3 presents research question two and introduces the importance of *discourse* in constituting the 'space' in which individuals interact (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

RQ2: How are specific discourses of entrepreneurship constructed within emerging organisations, and how do they contribute to the generation of a locally meaningful entrepreneurial identity?

This thesis highlights how discourse is not only a communication tool or linguistic practice, but it contributes to producing the practice that, in turn, eventually legitimates it (Foucault 1972; Gregory 1994). From this perspective, locally meaningful discourses of 'being entrepreneurial' emerge and stories, words, and gestures gain unique meanings that are specific to each relationship. Members of a dyad draw images and linguistic expressions (e.g. *clichés*) from the different discourses they share and make them coalesce into new discourses.

This unique discourse constitutes the system of meanings that characterise their interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Burr 1995). From this locally produced discourse, dyads generate images of 'entrepreneur' that are unique to them. More importantly, this image drives the understandings of actions and reflections in the dyad's everyday life.

These images enact a sense of community, re-presenting the beliefs and values entrepreneurial dyads share. Chapter 2 illustrates the five social categories identified by Watson (2008) in designing his framework. Watson (2008) suggests that individuals develop from these categories the aspects of their social identities. This is the analytical aspect of the self that describes what other might think of an individual. As figure 1 on page 30 illustrates, the five categories identified are: *social; formal roles; local-personal; local organisational; cultural-stereotypical.*

Chapter 10 introduces *communal* social identities as a sixth category from where social aspects of the self can be drawn.

While the categories identified by Watson are produced by cultural, societal, and historical dynamics, the social identities in the *communal* category are locally co-produced by the members of a dyad in their dialogical interactions. Figure 5 shows a revised systematisation compared with the one presented in chapter 2.

As described in the empirical analysis of the cases, this category arose from the observation of particular words, which acted as cues to signal a reflection on identity. These cue words have been later theorised as *linguistic portals* in chapter 10. The *linguistic portals* are epistemological tools that allow access to the unique discourse that is locally created and to the construction of a *communal* social identity, and they support a deeper understanding of the dynamics within dyadic relations.

Figure 6. A revised systematisation of Watson's (2008) social categories
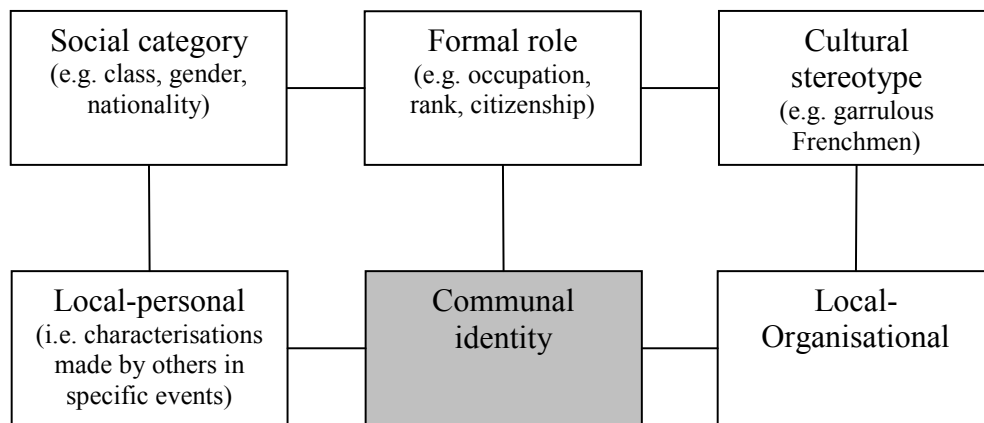
Section 11.6 discusses how the identification of this category also has implications for the debate between agency and structure. Individuals construct their identities continuously, balancing between opportunities for change and a sense of obligation.

This is also the case for *communal* identities. On the one hand, the members of a dyad actively constitute the characteristics of this social identity. On the other, they feel an obligation to enact these characteristics in different aspects of their everydayness.

Chapter 10 anticipates that another feature of *communal* social identities is that they particularly emerge when individuals are part of significant relationships that unfold both at a personal and at an organisational level. These relationships include the entrepreneurial dyads that are studied in this thesis.

The definition of such *communal* social identities might also be observed in other dyadic relationships that involve both the private and the public spheres. Examples might be a married couple who work for the same organisation; or friends who share the same professional practice; or a father and son who serve in the same battalion.

This *communal* category could recall, at a first glance, the notion of collective identity as proposed by Cerulo (1997). However, even with both being products of the social, the two notions are substantially different. As Brewer and Gardner (1996) put it, "both interpersonal and collective identities differ in whether the social connections are personalised bonds of attachment or impersonal bonds derived from common identification with some symbolic group or social category" (ibidem, p. 83).

The category of *communal* social identities synthesises aspects of the collective identity with the 'common bonds' that the structure of the relationship imposes (e.g. marital duty) and with the sense of community that emerges from a unique interpretation of phenomena and realities. Watson's (2008) categorisation of social identities can be therefore expanded in order to include the category of *communal* social identity.

11.4 *Communal* identities, local meanings, and the role of *linguistic portals*

A *communal* social identity is specific to the context of interactions between people in complex relationships. This therefore makes its identification particularly difficult. Nevertheless, the thesis not only introduces such a phenomenon, but also proposes an opportunity for investigating it.

The empirical analysis shows how narrative inquiry, using the process of narrative deconstruction and ethnographic elements, can help in identifying alternative discourses. This facilitates the exploration of the business story as experienced in the relationship between the partners rather than in the relationship between the partners and an external interlocutor.

As Bakhtin (1986) suggests, this thesis not only considers the systems of meanings constructed through the stories co-produced by each storyteller and the researcher. It also takes into consideration the system of meanings that the dyads locally co-produce and that would be otherwise overlooked by an external interlocutor such as an academic researcher. Chapter 5 discusses how observation plays a significant role in integrating the textual data obtained (Watson 2008).

This thesis also illustrates, in Chapter 10, the notion of *linguistic portals*, discussing its epistemological value. *Linguistic portals* facilitate the identification of the process through which these unique *communal* entrepreneurial identities are enacted from specific discourses constructed within the dyadic relation. On the one hand, *linguistic portals* act as discursive resources in Watson's (1995) terms, allowing individuals to introduce 'outer' discourses in their accounts. On the other hand, *linguistic portals* signal a wider reflection on identity that individuals may carry out in telling a story.

The latter allows the identification of *communal* social identities that are otherwise not directly visible in the dialogical interaction between the researcher and the entrepreneurs (see Chapter 5). This analysis also considers that identity

construction is a complex process, as multiple and concurrent discourses can be taken into consideration by individual agents.

For example, in the case of the 'integral entrepreneur' highlighted in chapter 9, *linguistic portals* permit the understanding of this process and allow one to observe how individuals draw from concurrent socially available discourses (e.g. Christian values) to construct specific local discourses and to enact a *communal* social identity.

11.5 Social structure, local meanings, and *identity work*

Chapter 4 outlines how entrepreneurial dyads represent a unique context in which entrepreneurial dynamics can be observed. This is due to several factors. First, the nature of the relationship within a two-person 'team' is essentially dialogical. In this perspective, meanings are constructed through the exchange of symbols, values, and understandings that occur through social interaction (Fletcher and Watson 2007).

Second, entrepreneurial dyads show, within the same *milieu,* different types of social interaction: a personal and a business one, respectively. At a personal level, individuals experience a series of structural dynamics that potentially shape their actions and beliefs and that are informed by societal expectations. Amongst these dynamics, chapter 4 identifies marital duty (Kondo 1990); friendship commitment (Francis and Sandberg 2000); and family respect (Dhaliwal 1998).

The emergence of specific understandings of the *communal* identity contributes to define that "sense of we" that constitutes the relationship (Brewer and Gardner 1996, p. 84). In particular, the empirical analysis in this study shows that the personal level is also shaped by non-structural dynamics.

These dynamics enact the sense of community that the partners of a dyad negotiate in their social interactions. Amongst these dynamics, for example, the analysis highlights the unique notion of married couple enacted by Anthony and Lorna, which represents a personification of their unique interpretation of Christian values.

At a business level, the dyads studied experience a sense of responsibility in line with the expectations of societal actors such as the industry; the social network; or the stakeholders in the business. At the same time, the dyads develop unique understandings of what the implications of a business relationship are.

Chapter 10 shows how the business relationship puts forward a different meaning in terms of the division of roles or in terms of the shape of business dynamics such as

growth patterns or the level of involvement of primary stakeholders. For example, Tony and Jazz adopt an 'elastic' understanding of entrepreneurial team, including in their decision-making processes investors, consultants, and other managers.

Chapter 10 discusses how a diffuse sense of obligation mediates between the societal and the community aspects of both the personal and the business relations. This diffuse sense of obligation contributes to producing specific understandings such as unique notions of what 'being entrepreneurial' or 'doing business' might mean. These notions are enacted in the *communal* social identity of 'entrepreneur' and in how entrepreneurial dyads shape their entrepreneurial activities.

This is a valuable contribution of the thesis, as it invites the key interlocutors of the business to reflect on what the rationale behind specific business decisions of a dyad might be. Currently, interlocutors such as primary stakeholders, but also (as seen in the cases) academic researchers rely, for drawing their conclusions, on social identities they could easily observe and that are often co-produced with the dyad or available in the social discourse.

For example, (Down 2002) notes that in looking at small businesses, interlocutors often assume that they aim at growth, in terms of size, turnover, number of employees, brand recognition.

Chapter 10 demonstrates how the four businesses studied all enacted a unique relationship with 'growth', showing how this notion may be considered in different ways by small businesses. These considerations address research question 3:

> RQ3: Taking into consideration the role of both societal dynamics and local discourses, how does the tension between agency and structure contribute to the development of localised understandings in entrepreneurial dyads?

This empirical contribution offers instead the possibility of reflecting on other rationales that may transcend the social structure characterising the dyad. The data analysis shows how this process of engaging with entrepreneurial activities, balancing the web of obligations that individuals experience, not only changes the dynamics at work, but it also alters how individuals relate to the understanding of the self in private life.

The process of *identity work* hence links the social structure and the development of localised meanings in different ways. In doing *identity work*, individuals cast the

internal aspects of their selves so that they would reflect what they consider to be their relationship to society. For example Stella and Irina in their first experience internalise the desire to manifest their own maturity to others and cast selves characterised by self-confidence.

Individuals also shape other social aspects of the self so that the idea that others might have of them would reflect their roles, their beliefs, and their way of being. So, Stella and Irina inform their 'being daughters' with the aspects of rebellion and self-confidence, transforming their filial relation with the father in a challenge to patriarchal authority.

In doing *identity work*, individuals also make sense of their obligations towards both the societal aspects and the community aspects of their relationship. The social role of the daughter was continuously struggling between the obligation to follow the patriarchal advice embodied in the notion of a *"Polish family"* and the obligation to challenge the establishment of 'old businessmen' of which their father was part.

11.6 Structure and agency: moving the debate forward

Overall, the thesis makes headway in certain aspects of the long-term academic debate on the relationship between structure and agency in the study of identity (Giddens 1991). As chapter 2 discusses in detail, different positions exist.

On the one hand, authors suggest that the self is flattened by general, dominant discourses (Foucault 1972, duGay 1996); suffocated by political structures (Deetz 1995); or oppressed by social rules (Mulholland 1996a). On the other hand, other scholars propose a degree of agency, suggesting that each individual "is a thinking, feeling subject and social agent capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions" (Weedon 1997, p. 105).

This thesis, then, suggests that individuals engage in processes for shaping specific social identities and for joining specific discourses; whilst their actions remain constrained by a diffuse sense of obligation. This obligation is felt towards both the structures that society produces and those locally constructed.

Considering structure and agency as a duality (Giddens 1986), the empirical analysis demonstrates how in the process of identity construction, structure and agency not only co-exist but also influence each other. The case of the creation of a series of *communal* social identities shows how this paradox has emerged. Individuals work towards the constitution of an idea of a social self and shape it

through dialogical interactions. Hence, entrepreneurs are "responsible and actively engaged in creating a new, better, self-motivated self" (Tracy and Trethewey 2005, p. 176).

However, in *identity work*, these individuals keep a balance between their actions and the expectations that are created both from the social structures they were part of (e.g. marriage; friendship) and from the communities and identities they contributed to creating in the first place.

The tension between change and obligation, therefore, characterises the development and the sustainability of a coherent identity across different presentations.

As anticipated in chapter 10, the interaction existing within each dyad can be related to Tonnies' (2001) distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Chapter 2 discusses how Tonnies (2001) considers married couples and siblings as the classic examples (along with motherhood) of *Gemeinschaft*.

As Giddens (1991) points out, friendship could also be considered a 'pure relationship' in terms of Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft*, as it is one of those "kinds of social co-existence that are familiar, comfortable, and exclusive" (Tonnies 2001, p. 18). Tonnies opposes these 'immediate' relationships to the relational structures mechanically constituted in society (i.e. *Gesellschaft*).

This thesis discusses how these 'pure relationships' might show more complexity as they engage with different levels of interaction: as personal relations and as structured joint activities (i.e. starting a business). The literature suggests that during the interaction with external interlocutors, such 'pure relationships' are encapsulated in societal, cultural, and discursive entities (Hamilton 2006; Watson 2008; 2009).

These are commonly re-presented by social structures such as 'marriage'. While the latter is a "mechanical aggregate and artefact" (ibidem, p. 19) produced by society (*Gesellschaft*), the unique notion of a married couple (e.g. *"Christian couple"*) is an example of *Gemeinschaft*. Similarly, while siblings experience an innate mutual understanding, their relationship in society is framed in the culturally-relative notion of 'family' that is often framed as an 'institutionalised myth'.

This thesis suggests that entrepreneurial dyads experience a dual process for constituting their identities, both at a personal level and at a business one.

11.6.1 The dual process at a personal level

At a personal level, the dyadic relationship is constituted as *Gesellschaft* as it reflects socially shared structures (e.g. 'marriage', 'family'), but also as *Gemeinschaft* as it reflects uniquely constructed meanings. In both aspects, the tension between agency and structure is visible.

The socially shared structure shapes the understanding of the self in different relations. As the literature review in chapter 4 highlights, the relationship with the significant 'other' is influenced by enactments of this social obligation such as duty, respect, and commitment (Kondo 1990; Mulholland 1996b; Dhaliwal 1998; Hamilton 2006).

In addition, a dyadic relationship expression of *Gesellschaft* facilitates the interaction of the dyad with external interlocutors, as notions of 'family' and 'marriage' constitute common knowledge (Schiffrin 2001).

In terms of agency, the empirical analysis highlights an attempt by the individuals to 'personalise' the societal images within the boundaries suggested by ideology (Fairclough 1992; Cohen and Musson 2000). For example, in their stories Stella and Irina foreground the concept of *"Polish family"*, and Anthony and Lorna the one of *"Christian couple"*.

The dyads also draw the meaning of their relationship from the experience of their sense of community. This occurs both as an innate sentiment and as a purposeful action. With regard to the former, chapter 10 confirms Tonnies' (2001) argument of an innate *Gemeinschaft* by showing how Stella and Irina are unable to explain what makes them understand each other so easily.

With regard to the latter, the unique discourses emerging through the process of narrative deconstruction show how dyads develop a sense of community that uniquely characterises their bound.

For example, the two friends share a unique understanding of their friendship as opportunity for sharing a lifestyle of creativity and innovation, and Anthony and Lorna show a unique understanding of marriage as being missionaries of the their Christian values to others.

11.6.2 The dual process at a business level

These processes are visible in the business relationship as well. On the one hand, entrepreneurial dyads draw notions such as that of 'entrepreneur' from societal images. On the other hand, dyads experience a notion of 'doing business' as expressions of their sense of community (i.e. *Gemeinschaft*). In both aspects, the tension between agency and structure emerges.

The entrepreneurs interviewed perceived an obligation to embody the societal images imposed by society, and the processes of *double hermeneutics* in the interview settings underline this. For example, the 'tales' illustrate how such images (e.g. 'entrepreneurial venture') are used in presenting the business.

Individuals also experience some agency in choosing how to use these images and *clichés* to facilitate the interaction with external interlocutors (e.g. the researcher). For example, Anthony and Lorna adapted images from the industry to structure their stories (Cohen and Musson 2000; Kärreman and Alvesson 2001).

The sense of 'community' shows agency as the dyads studied nurtured the development of locally meaningful discourses, and from there they produced the *communal* social identities that made their respective understandings of business so unique. For example, Anthony and Lorna constructed their idea of business venturing as an opportunity for balancing the changes in their lives and for presenting to others their Christian values.

This sense of community may be innate to the relationship, suggesting structure. For example, Stella and Irina showed how they could not engage in experiences such as starting a venture with anyone else, and Tony recalled how only Jazz could have understood the idea of business he had.

More structure is suggested by the sense of obligation that the dyads studied presented towards the *communal* social identities they create. For example, the 'boundaries breaking entrepreneur', personified in the "*business*", imposed actions and beliefs to Tony and Jazz.

11.7 Research challenges and limitations

Without incurring in the temptation to indulge in pure relativism typical of social constructionist studies (Harrè 1998), the inductive nature of this thesis does not allow for a generalisation of the results (Bryman and Bell 2008). The data analysis in chapters 6-9 illustrates how an analysis on a case-by-case basis is important in order to explore the different and unique discourses that can emerge in dyads.

The meta-level analysis in chapter 10 highlights a series of similarities experienced by the different dyads specifically in the process of identity construction. Each of these is informed by the sense of obligation experienced both towards the societal and the community elements in dyadic relations. This consideration is important for studies that approach dyads trying to distinguish, for example, between family and non-family businesses.

These studies should not only take into consideration the structural elements, but also investigate the sense of community that emerges from interactions. The methodological approach to the study could therefore be used for investigating similar phenomena in different contexts.

A critical challenge this study faces is the dual role of the researcher as both co-producer of the narrative data and investigator of identity construction dynamics. The role of the researcher as part of the empirical study is widely discussed in chapter 5. Moreover, the process of narrative deconstruction highlighted in the cases also debates this particular issue. The aim of this thesis was never to imply a hierarchy between 'realities' (Burr 1995). It is worth acknowledging, however, that the investigation of the system of meanings constructed by the members of each dyad could not have been completely 'depurated' by the consciousness of the reality constructed by the storyteller and the researcher. Furthermore, the process of narrative deconstruction, as integrated with ethnographic elements, might not have allowed a complete understanding of the local dialogical dynamics as these can only be accessed by being a constitutive part of such relationship.

11.8 Directions for future research

Future research could develop the study of identity construction processes by building on the contributions (both empirical and theoretical) of this thesis. In terms of the empirical contributions, research can move forward in a number of ways.

First, the study observes how the sense of obligation towards a specific *communal* social identity invites the entrepreneurs to shape critical aspects of their business. The study focused on aspects such as the size and boundaries of the management (i.e. entrepreneurial) team and the patterns of growth, looking at elements such as the sources of financing. These elements emerged from the analysis of the specific cases explored in this study. Future research could investigate whether and how the sense of obligation shapes other business dynamics.

Second, the study contributes to clarifying how dyadic relationships should not only be investigated in terms of the social structure that characterises them, but also in terms of the sense of community that they create and enact into the category of *communal* social identity. On the one hand, further research might explore different settings and different dyadic configurations. For example, future studies could observe dyads based on parental relations (e.g. father-son) or based on an interest (e.g. investor-'solo' entrepreneur). The analysis of identity can be also carried out in exploring the notion of other (work) identities, such as the so-called 'managerial' and 'professional' (Dent and Whitehead 2002; Cohen *et al.* 2004).

On the other hand, studies on dyadic relations might further investigate the dynamics that contribute to the development of such sense of community and to suggest it as alternative to the sources of behaviour and expectations represented by the social structure.

Third, research can also be moved forward in terms of the empirical contribution of the theorisation of *linguistic portals*. Further research could be carried out in order to extend both the scope and the knowledge of *linguistic portals*. The relevance of this methodological tool could be observed in other fields of the social sciences, transcending the domain of organisational studies.

More research could also be aimed at detecting common patterns for the emergence of *linguistic portals* and for the analysis of their role. For example, Chapter 10 pinpoints some narrative changes that are introduced by *linguistic portals* and that signal a reflection on identity. Further studies might identify more of these narrative features and contextualise them within specific discourses.

Finally, in terms of the theoretical contribution of this thesis, the study presented the tension between change and obligation as the mechanism that governs *identity work* in entrepreneurial dyads and that enables individuals to enact coherent selves.

The thesis does not claim that these notions are exhaustive. An element that must be considered in observing entrepreneurial dyads is the role of emotions. These have emerged at times in the analysis.

For example, Lorna experienced with "*shock*" the news of Anthony's redundancy, and the couple often discussed about the love that bound them together. Similarly, emotions emerged when Stella and Irina discussed the period of depression deriving from their lack of confidence, or when they recalled the rage they experienced against 'old businessmen'.

Although it did acknowledge the importance of emotions, their analysis would have expanded the scope of this thesis. It was considered more appropriate that such important aspects would receive dedicated attention. The emotional aspects of entrepreneurial dyads and how they might relate to a diffuse sense of obligation might be the focus of future research.

11.9 Conclusions

This chapter offered a conclusion for the thesis and it reinforced the hypothesis that the balance between opportunities for change and a widespread sense of obligation constitutes the mechanism that governs *identity work* in entrepreneurial dyads. In doing so, this thesis enhances the framework put forward by Watson (2008). By addressing the research questions that emerged from the literature (chapters 2-4), the empirical analysis of entrepreneurial dyads also suggested other contributions to the study of identity. The use of the narrative method and of ethnographic inquiry has supported the identification of an epistemological tool that has been theorised as *linguistic portals*.

These linguistic portals allowed the investigation of the unique discourses and of the locally meaningful identities that are constructed within entrepreneurial dyads. The sense of obligation towards these discourses explained the different forms enacted by the four businesses studied.

This final chapter also proposed reflections on the challenges that this study faced and on the opportunities that future research might produce to move forward the debate between agency and structure.

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