ABSTRACT

THE SCIENTIFIC REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY
A Discourse Analysis of Research Articles on Women’s Entrepreneurship

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Observing the reproduction of women as “the other” in feminist, or at least pro-women, scientific articles about women’s entrepreneurship, this paper asks why this happened. 81 papers were analyzed. The majority were written within an objectivist tradition, using mail surveys and statistical analysis. Male and female entrepreneurs were investigated on factors such as demographic background, personality, value systems, strategies, networking behavior, and management practices, and access to capital. Contrary to hypotheses, men and women scored similarly.

Such lack of difference seemed disappointing to many, however. I found three ways of arguing for the existence of gender differences in spite of research results to the contrary. I labeled the first “making a mountain of a mole-hill”. It celebrated any small difference found, confusing statistically significant with socially significant, and ignored overlaps and within-sex variation. Another was the proclamation of “the self-selected woman”. It constructed women entrepreneurs as exceptions to regular, “feminine” women. The women entrepreneurs were assumed to be “more like men”, while regular women were constructed as secondary.

The third strategy, “the good mother” combined the first with theories of women as relational, ethical and caring. This strategy celebrated women’s “difference”, but did not challenge the taken for granted male norm for entrepreneurship. Women’s entrepreneurship was positioned only as an alternative or a complement.

The articles give me no reason to think that this was intentional. Then why did it turn out that way? Using Foucault, I analyzed the discursive practices that brought this about. These concern certain taken for granted assumptions about men, women, the individual, work, family, entrepreneurs, and the economy, but also methodological and theoretical preferences, ontological and epistemological points of departure, the writing and publishing system, and institutional support. These practices concern not only entrepreneurship research. The findings are therefore relevant for gender research in general.