

# Comparing sense-making of identities of mompreneurs in Malta and Finland

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*'We've been scribbled in the margins of a story; that's patently absurd.'*

Nick Cave

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to study a research gap in the current mompreneurship literature, which provides very little information on how mompreneurs view their identity and make sense of who they are: **How do mompreneurs in Finland and Malta make sense of themselves in the roles of both mother and entrepreneur?** Furthermore, a comparison between two such polar opposite yet similarly European countries, Finland and Malta was not done before.

The above gap was studied through the use of narrative interviews from six mompreneurs in which the mompreneurs were able to freely tell the stories regarding their lives, entrepreneurship, motherhood, and anything else they felt needed to be revealed. The interpretation of their narratives was conducted in line with *verstehen* or *understanding*, a tradition that allows for an open interpretation of the narratives and actions of the mompreneurs.

This study on mompreneurship offers a new dimension to the previous studies on mompreneurs. Unique traits that make up key themes of mompreneurial identity of six mompreneurs (3 from Finland and 3 from Malta) have been studied. The self-narratives provided a resource to extract key themes that in turn make sense of mompreneurial identity. A qualitative approach was used to gain intimate knowledge of the mompreneurs and to ensure rich data throughout the research process. Through analysis of these narratives the following themes were revealed that represent their sense-making and identity perception: Liberty/Freedom, Pride, Work-Life Balance, (mother's) Guilt, and mompreneurial identity.

*Results revealed that Finnish mompreneurs identified with both roles of mother and of entrepreneur, however further examination revealed that the role of entrepreneur was seen and believed to be more significant. In comparison, Maltese mompreneurs self-identified proudly and openly as mothers first with the role of entrepreneur being a significant one, however not one that supersedes that of mother. We have contributed to previous research by providing a window into these mompreneurs' personal identities, and shared how they legitimize their choices and identify their experiences.*

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**Keywords** Mompreneur, Finland, Malta, Identity, Sensemaking

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Background*

Momprenneurship (or Mumpreneurship) has been a topic that has been discussed in the recent years the years in combination with research conducted on work-life balance, female motivation to enter entrepreneurship and career transitions (Johnston & Swanson, 2006 and Kirkwood, 2009). The reasoning behind why women (in general as opposed to mothers) are interested in starting their own businesses and are making entrepreneurial transitions as part of a key step in their professional identity has also been thoroughly studied (Warren, 2004 ). However, with all the topics coinciding with the idea or fact that women are entrepreneurs, but also mothers, few have yet dared to delve deep into the topic of understanding the characteristics that these women have and how they self-identify whilst fulfilling the role of a particular subset of entrepreneurs; the mompreneurs (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012). Further, no study to date has looked at cultural differences within this subset by focusing on mompreneurs in two separate cultures, in this study Finland and Malta.

Based on previous research we know that mompreneurs have been a progressive, subgroup of entrepreneurs increasing in numbers since the 1990s. Prior research most notably by Ekinsmyth (2011), Lewis (2010), Korsgaard (2007) and Duberly & Carrigan (2012) has shown that this phenomenon is gaining speed, but also popularity in cultures around the world. Even though we have acquired a considerable amount of knowledge from the previous research there are still many aspects of mompreneurship that have yet to be studied and this thesis aims to shed light on a another corner of mompreneurship, that of cultural comparison between 2 European, yet polar opposite countries, Malta and Finland. After a lengthy review of the previous literature on mompreneurship it is clear that there is still much to be studied specifically when looking at identities of women in groups and specific cultures. This is opposed to the present literature that has expanded on entrepreneurial identity, discourse of enterprises and entrepreneurs, identity through entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurs which have all been thoroughly examined. These studies have all eluded at the idea of work-life balance and/or mompreneurship (although not by using the articulated term mompreneurs), however the lacking is in the details of what a mompreneur actually is, and why one would choose such a path (Warren, 2012). Further general identity traits that make up a mompreneur have been identified defined and accepted (that of, identity, motivation and opportunity) and these traits will be expanded upon in this thesis (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013).

Building on the previous research regarding mompreneurs, we can simply define who they are, but what is undeniably unclear is how they see themselves as and specifically how they feel their place in society and in other words how they make sense of themselves and view their own identity. In other words, where does the identity of these women lay; with the role of mother, or that of entrepreneur, a combination of the two or something entirely different. Culturally the women are all from Europe, however the cultural differences and female roles in their respected societies differ and that influence is also studied. This leads us to the current gap on mompreneurship in general, but also specifically the cultural comparison is one that has never before been attempted when looking at previous mompreneur research. That is the gap of defining cultural differences in the self-sensemaking (identification) of mompreneurs using two very different cultures.

The purpose of this thesis will be to shed light on the important and under-studied phenomenon that is mompreneurship and attempt to address the gap in the current limited research, that of sense making of identities of the individual mompreneurs. Further, we are looking at Maltese and Finnish mompreneurs to see if culture influences self-identification and the interpretation of what a mompreneur is. Filling this gap is important as it adds to the existing research on mompreneurs whilst complementing existing theories. The desire here is to study sense making of the different cultures from the perspective of these countries being such polar opposites. Results found in this research can then be used to identify traits and characteristics that reveal similarities and differences in these (Finnish and Maltese) women as mompreneurs of different cultures and in doing so be able to identify their individual sense making as mompreneurs. Therefore, building on these principles, the purpose of this thesis is to grasp an understanding of how mothers experience being entrepreneurs; for they were mothers before becoming entrepreneurs. The following research question will be addressed:

***How do mompreneurs in Finland and Malta make sense of themselves as mothers and entrepreneurs?***

This study aims to make the following contribution to mompreneur research by filling the research gap on mompreneurs, which has been neglected. Understanding the individual sense-making of the identity of mompreneurs will allow us to better understand not only the reason women/mothers become entrepreneurs, but also identify traits associated with these particular women. By doing so this study aims to give a clearer character description of what a mompreneur is and to see if mompreneurship was created as a means to avoid general role conflict that some working mothers have described experiencing (Houle et al., 2009). Its goal is to have the term mompreneur synonymous with these identity traits so that one can easily identify with the type of



women we are addressing. The term mompreneur itself is an underused term in many societies (including Finland and Malta) and in the sense-making of identity traits of these women, the hope is to bring forth new insights into the phenomenon of mompreneurship by showing that their character traits and hence identity are something solid and sound and should evoke a neutral response.

The clear limitations in the research specifically on mothers who are entrepreneurs acted as a guide through the route of exploration in this thesis. Essentially, studying the topic of self-identification by the mompreneurs themselves is lacking and is the basis of the research of this thesis. Beyond general work-life balance and beyond gender, exploring the identities of mothers and entrepreneurs is one of utmost importance. The significance here is supplemented by being able to add to existing literature with a new dimension, that of cultural influence on the existing ‘push-pull’ factors that turns women into mompreneurs. The women interviewed for the purpose of this thesis live and have businesses in Finland or Malta and understanding cultural differences in the formation of identity is also viewed as a key and relevant point as previous literature has never before made such a cultural comparison with two such polar opposite yet similar cultures, such as Finland and Malta. Wearing numerous identity hats is part of life for every individual; however as female entrepreneurs the hats can vary from gender to various roles, characters and memberships. The importance of this study will be to try to identify how mompreneurs construct their individual identities beyond the stereotypes and dichotomies placed on women in general (and cultural identities) and to see if it’s possible to pinpoint identity traits that the mompreneurs in this study have in common and to see if these traits coincide with existing literature (Essers & Benschop, 2007).

By taking a closer look at the culture in which these mompreneurs exist will open a door, to identify if cultural influences, governmental policies or other societal influences have any impact on their decisions to become mompreneurs. We aim to study and gain a deeper understanding of the word ‘mompreneur’ and to see if the word ‘mompreneur’ itself evokes any kind of emotion or association for the mompreneurs in this study. Furthermore, the goal is to see if this word somehow enables or hinders further growth for the mompreneurs from a cultural standpoint. Consequently, with this focus, this thesis contributes to existing literature by building on previous studies regarding mompreneurs in France and Canada (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013) and in the UK (Duberly & Carrigan, 2012) however, this thesis offers the addition of comparing two separate cultures while providing cultural knowledge about the environments which these women live.

This thesis is organized as follows: the next chapter is dedicated to the existing literature reviewed. The third chapter discusses the methodology while the empirical findings of the cases studied are revealed in the fourth chapter. The final chapter presents the contributions this thesis

makes on mompreneurship based on the previously discussed findings. It will also discuss the limitations of this study and provide any recommendations for future studies.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the following review literature relating to mompreneur and mompreneur related topics is reviewed. The amount of specific mompreneur literature is limited and other topics based on related literature are used to gain a deeper knowledge regarding the sub-category of mompreneurship, along with other familiar topics such as entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, identity, cultural influence, motherhood, work-life balance/ work-family integration and narrative interviewing.

### ***2.1 Entrepreneurship***

In the existing literature of entrepreneurship an important focus has been the definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Schumpeter (1965) defined 'entrepreneurs as individuals who exploit market opportunity through technical and/or organizational innovation'. Similarly, Bolton & Thompson (2000) have defined an entrepreneur as 'a person who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities'. Entrepreneurship according to Onuoha (2007) is 'the practice of starting new organizations or revitalizing mature organizations particularly new businesses generally in response to identified'. Knight (1921) and Drucker (1970) separated by nearly 50 years both defined entrepreneurship as, 'taking (a) risk'.

When we move forward even further, the face of an entrepreneur has slowly changed. No longer is it seen as all risk and blind jumping, and the identity of the entrepreneur carefully began an evolutionary process into someone who was strategic and innovative in their behaviors while being focused on growth and profits (Carland et al. 1984). All of those definitions draw up images of an entrepreneur. Someone that is strong, brave, creative, innovative and over all we are given a fairly positive image of an entrepreneur.

The very definition of entrepreneur is an important one. How the entrepreneur views themselves, defines the image they represent. In Finnish, according to Komulainen et al., in (Saade 2013) entrepreneur is defined as 'yrittäjä, a derivative of the verb 'yrittää', in which the closest English translation is 'he/she who tries'. In Finnish the word for entrepreneur, 'yrittää' itself fits better along the line of 'doing the best one can do'. There is no pre-meditated desired outcome, no end goal, the idea is one who tries and that definition in itself can lend influence to the Finnish view of entrepreneurship. According to one of the mompreneurs interviewed, Maryrose, in the Maltese language Malti the word for entrepreneur is, 'imprenditur'. Imprenditur is derived from the Italian word, 'imprende' meaning 'to do'. A definition that means what it says, but without much further

explanation regarding what the doing actually entails. Similar to the Maltese word is the Italian word for entrepreneur, imprenditore, or businessman. However, this definition specifies the gender of the one doing the business: the 'man' being an interesting fact to keep in mind. Lastly, the English definition is perhaps the most detailed, 'Entrepreneur is a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk' (www.dictionary.com). The English definition is the only one that elaborates, emphasizes and defines clearly what the person is 'trying or doing'.

It makes it hard to imagine that entrepreneurs were not seen in such a positive light at some point just a few decades ago in the 70s when entrepreneurship was not considered a type of career that just anyone would get in to (Warren, 2004). Since then policies were put into place supporting entrepreneurs, and the promotion of small businesses has been a positive one that evokes ideals of local shops and family run enterprises with both male and female entrepreneurs at the head. However, in spite of the leaps forward entrepreneurship is still often portrayed as a masculine field of work, evoking images of someone strong, risk-taking, being a hero, taking on challenges and fearing nothing (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004).

The ideal prototypical entrepreneur is someone that has started the business with the focus on grown and profit. This person is innovative, is familiar with strategic practices and is a person who puts the business first (Carland et al., 1984 and Essers & Benschop, 2007). The prototypical entrepreneur leaves little left for a family or social life. It appears the ideal entrepreneur indeed gives the proverbial 110% to the business or at least they should. To put it bluntly, the prototypical entrepreneur doesn't sound female or if it can be considered female, it doesn't sound like a mother and it doesn't sound like someone that would have to be faced with the double-bind or a work-life balance. The double bind being if women are seen too have too many masculine traits they aren't seen as enough of a woman, yet if they are perceived as too feminine they aren't considered to be able to fill the role of an serious business professional (Kelan, 2013). Typically female attributes such as being understanding, emotional, warm, gentle, helpful, altruistic are viewed as less entrepreneurial (Bird & Brush, 2002; Orser et al., 2011). However, similar traits and being perceived as maternal, whilst being business minded are traits which could be considered to contribute to the characteristics of mompreneurs.

According to Lewis (2010), entrepreneurship and the idea behind associating masculinity with the concept of entrepreneurship is, 'not simply something which is biological, material or essential, but something complex, historical and cultural in form.....it can be expressed in bodily terms with appropriately masculine individuals or females can be encouraged to sublimate their femininity so that they look like they belong in the world of business' (Lewis, 2010). Further, the concept itself of entrepreneurship is generally directly associated with males (Berg, 1997). Female

entrepreneurship however, is not a new concept. It is one that has been thoroughly studied, however being hard to conceptualize and build accurate theories has been researcher's biggest obstacles (Carter & Weeks, 2002).

### *2.1.1 Characteristics of Entrepreneurs*

Another important stream of research in the literature of entrepreneurship has been studies of characteristics of entrepreneurs. According to Andersson et al. (2010) entrepreneurs 'flourish at the crossroads when entrepreneurial capacity meets entrepreneurial opportunities.' Various types of people become entrepreneurs and although common characteristics have been identified, the types of people are as diverse as the fields in which they get into. The most common traits identified thus far include: self-confidence, capacity to think for oneself, sense of autonomy, risk taking, forward looking approach, passion for their product/service, and open-mindedness (McClelland, 1987; Sexton, 1990). Differences between genders has been noted and unequivocally females take on less risk and accept change easier than their male counterparts when it comes to business practices, however men have been shown to have more energy, be more autonomous as well as being greater risk takers (Sexton, 1990). However, gender differences do not determine the overall outcome of business success. Family support, background, age, education and training all have some impact on the success of the entrepreneurial venture (Nair & Panday, 2006).

The role of entrepreneur is one not taken lightly; some entrepreneurs are given the role through familial connections whilst others willing seek out entrepreneurship. The complex meanings embedded in each role we take on and are granted such as daughter, wife, spouse, mother, teacher, entrepreneur etc... all hold significance based on societal and personal weight. By focusing on the specific role at hand, at this very moment we are able to put into the correct context the project ahead. However, the fact is many roles can bear virtually no absolute significance unless granted it by an outside party. The role of entrepreneur from its commencement carries weight from within the individual as well as society, placing upon it a set of ideals or expectations the entrepreneur must uphold (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Entrepreneurial identity thusly is used to generate self-legitimacy and importance while trying to make sense of this multi-layered identity (Down & Warren, 2008).

### *2.1.2 Female entrepreneurship*

Studies of female entrepreneurship have also been a focus area in the existing literature. Females have partaken in the business trade for centuries, some were fruit sellers on the sides of the road or seamstresses with sewing rooms or even partook in the world's oldest profession, yet research has shown that the discourse on womanhood and entrepreneurship are often in conflict women having to 're-do' gender while 'acting' as entrepreneurs (Warren, 2004; Ahl, 2004; Head,

2013). The reasoning behind early female entrepreneurship was often a simple one, to earn money to feed their children. Female entrepreneurs have been studied since the 1970s (Swartz, 1976) where it was determined that the biggest mistake female entrepreneurs made was, 'underestimating the cost of business operation and marketing the product or service'. Similarly, in a repeat study by Holmquist & Carter (2009), the very same result was found with other researching going as far as saying that female lack of realism in business 'is striking' (Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990). It is no secret that female and males are different, but perhaps in business the differences are simply more pronounced. The motivations for becoming an entrepreneur differ between the genders as well as interpreting self-sense making.

Essentially, women in the business world must always be prepared to construct some kind of identity that is able to adapt to the existing systems already set into place in an entrepreneurial setting (Diaz & Welter, 2011). Mompreneurs being a combination of female, mother and entrepreneur have to draw on experience beyond cultural norms (in this thesis both Finnish and Maltese societies) and try to create a type of ideal image which successfully balances the three without compromising too much of the self, or the family. Studies have demonstrated that family is one of the highest reasons to become, maintain or initiate being an entrepreneur (Orhan & Scott, 2001). Having family members who have/had businesses has shown to influence and transform your business dreams from impossibility to reality, given the right circumstances and support.

Similarly other factors, known as 'push' or 'pull' factors can lead one down the entrepreneurial path. Female entrepreneurs, historically have been widowed, divorced or still at home with small children at the onset of their venture, having to start a business with no formal business education, and with personal loans or savings (Buttner, 1993). These women saw starting the business was more out of necessity than anything else (push) and a way to combine work and family life in a cohesive manner. Entrepreneurship for women according to Barbara Noble is, 'a life strategy'. Children can be viewed as a positive push factor (as usually push factors have negative connotations), as having children can be seen as a push or rather 'nudge' to become more available/flexible for the children (Kirkwood, 2009).

Recent studies have narrowed down the most significant factors that influence and motivate female entrepreneurship into three broad categories. Along with the motivations mentioned earlier for mompreneurs, such as identity orientation, motivation and opportunity recognition, female entrepreneurs (regardless of their family situation) have been found to have intrinsic reasoning behind their motivation alongside the other reasoning factors. Such intrinsic factors such as a desire to use ones skills to their best potential scored high, as did a desire to have something to call their own and an outlet to express themselves while helping children or others (Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990). These motivations have evolved over time throughout the years of female entrepreneurship

and should not be seen as replacing the other categories for motivation, however, add an interesting angle into the motivations of the female entrepreneurs of today. Pull factors such as a desire for independence, creativity, make a difference, challenge could be said to be more powerful reasoning behind current female entrepreneurship (Kirkwood, 2006).

Overall, female ventures have the same success rate as men's, and sales (gross) and market share are just about equal for male and female entrepreneurs with male run ventures having greater longevity than female ventures (Buttner, 1993). However, many female entrepreneurs, including some interviewed for the purpose of this thesis have reported having to work harder (they believe) than a man. Some have further reported difficulties in getting a loan, and further difficulties, such as not being trusted or respected by others. Lastly, it is clear that female ventures differ from male ventures in many ways, from the nature of the business itself to the location of the business and the way business is conducted; female entrepreneurship is evolving all the time with innovative females taking business to new levels in all areas (Ahl, 2006; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990; Buttner, 1993).

### *2.1.3 Mompreneurship*

Mompreneurship is a topic that has been of increased interest in the last few years as numbers have shown that mompreneurs in the USA are near the 5 million mark and in Canada well over 1 million (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013). Further, mompreneurship in Europe has been increasing with numbers in Europe rising, although the exact numbers are somewhat undefined as the childcare benefits in some parts of Europe are still being accepted by women who are also mompreneurs (Duberly & Carrigan, 2012). However, in countries like the UK (Warren, 2004 & Duberly & Carrigan, 2012), Netherlands (Essers & Benschop, 2007) and France/Canada (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013) literature exists on mompreneurs and their increasing numbers.

The term mompreneur was first coined in the 1990s by two women, Patricia Cobe and Ellen Parlapiano who are two mothers and entrepreneurs that worked from home while raising children. Together these women massed over 25 years work experience in combining the roles of mother and entrepreneur. As the women began writing books, conducting seminars and started their website directed at moms who were also entrepreneurs or who were thinking of starting their own businesses (<http://www.mompreneuronline.com>) so grew the phenomena of mompreneurship. From the beginning the website attracted millions of visitors with an average of 7 million visitors a month and it was clear that mompreneurs were something that piqued the interest of many who perhaps never heard of the term before, but were aware of the phenomena. By October 2011 the Collins English Dictionary had added the term mompreneur with a definition as 'a mother who combines running a business enterprise with looking after her children'. Naturally female entrepreneurs have been raising children and running households for centuries, and it should be

noted that only the term and general concept are new not the phenomenon (Richomme-Huet et. al., 2013).

Some previous studies have indicated that mompreneurs in particular draw on mainly 'push' factors, such as need for flexible work schedules with children at home, insufficient family income and dissatisfaction with current job situations along with lack of growth in current employment (Orhan & Scott, 2001; Hughes, 2003). However, 'pull factors too have strong influence, the greatest being the idea that harmony could be achieved through entrepreneurship or that entrepreneurship would be able to provide some kind of independence allowing for creativity and self-significance (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). A third motivation, that of work-life balance combines the push and pull factors together to create strong motivation (Patterson & Mavin, 2009) and significance has been placed on a combination of all factors relating to mompreneurship (Brush, 1992).

The definition of a mompreneur is quite precise and essentially hard to deter from as was defined in the Collins English Dictionary, however some researchers have gone further to expand the term mompreneur in more broad or even semi-scientific terms. Ekinsmyth (2011) has stated the definition of a mompreneur as 'an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership'. Although this definition does explain what a mompreneur is, in its attempt to remain politically correct it muddles up the simple and concrete facts that are much more clearly put into a definition from Korsgaard (2007), where he states, 'Mompreneurs are female business owners actively balancing the role of mother and entrepreneur.

Furthermore, Moore and Buttner define a mompreneur as 'a woman who has initiated a business, is actively involved in management, owns 50% if the firm and has been in operation for one year or longer as well as being a mother' (Moore and Buttner, 1997). Regardless of the definition it is apparent that the lives of these women is interwoven within the fabric of basic daily life; the lives of their children and the life of their business carefully meshed together to form her basic identity. Why Ekinsmyth (2011) chooses to use the term 'individual' and not 'woman, female or mother' isn't clear, as the sheer essence of the definition of mompreneur is Mom-(Entre)preneur.

The definition is viewed across the board as a general one, of that combining motherhood and entrepreneurship; however there are some slight variations as the table below illustrates definitions of what mompreneur/mumpreneur is based on existing and emerging academic literature.

**Table 1. Definition of mompreneur based on existing and emerging literature**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Collins English Dictionary (2011)	Mumpreneur: ‘a mother who combines running a business enterprise with looking after her children’
Duberley & Carrigan (2012)	Mumpreneurs: ‘a subset of women entrepreneurs who set up a business in order to enable them to both work and care for young children. (...) They reflect current discourses on lifestyle entrepreneurship and a new approach to ‘having it all’.
Ekinsmyth (2011)	Mumpreneur: an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership’.
Harris et al. (2008)	Mumpreneur: ‘ a woman who moves from traditional employment to owning and operating new ventures, either to better fit with their role as mothers, or motivated by opportunities identified by the experience of pregnancy or having children’.
Ho, et al. (2010)	Mumpreneur:’ mothers who balance family and starting and managing a business’.
Jean & Forbes (2011)	Mompreneurs*: a woman who had at least one child at the time of business startup and who is the owner of at least 50% of a business’.
Korsgaard (2007)	Mompneur: ‘female business owners actively balancing the roles of mother and entrepreneur’.
Lewis (2010)	Mumpreneur: ‘not (...) a quirky label or play on words, but (...) an emerging identity with specific attributes within the enterprise discourses’.

\*) For the purpose of this thesis, only the term mompreneur is used.

In regards to motivation, in addition to those of female entrepreneurs, the ideals that mompreneurs set out to achieve are easily identifiable for anyone with or without a family or own business. According to Kirchmeyer (2000; p. 81), a balanced life consists of ‘achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across all domains.’



According to Richomme-Huet et al., (2013) to date there are three identified characteristics of mompreneurs, these are: 'identity orientation (that blurs the boundary between the roles of mother and business woman), motivation (and the desire to achieve work-life harmony), and opportunity recognition (opportunities identified by the experience of pregnancy or having children).' Looking solely at these characteristics it could be said that indeed an entire new form of entrepreneurship has emerged, fused together the motivation, desires, push/pull factors and abilities to create a cohesive new form of entrepreneurship. Further, mompreneurs have learned that it is possible to contribute to the household budget whilst caring for their family and finding self-importance and attain more self-fulfillment and stimulation (Rehman & Frisby, 2000). In this way becoming a mother has giving them the push to integrate all the different aspects of their lives, while still being hands on with their children and without having to sacrifice any certain aspect of their lives entirely (Garey, 1995).

Lastly, mothers are often in contact with other mothers, either in daily life, or online. Nowadays mothers are more educated, have more work experience and perhaps in the hopes of creating something innovative, exciting and lastly to make a bit of money, collaborations are easily formed and new ventures started. Studies have shown that the areas in which children and parents gather can be a hot spot for collaborations and exciting happenings through these social channels (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). The potential within everyday neighborhoods and play yards has flourished with so called 'seed-beds' for mompreneur start-ups, and according to Still and Tims (2000), women (mompreneurs) often start their own businesses, with their main objective being to 'make a difference', making their ideas, contacts and goals more personal in comparison to businesses run by males (Orhan & Scott, 2001). Mompreneurs starting ventures that combine their (own or shared interests) with their family, skill-set, work history, interest whilst creating a sense of worth for themselves and contributing to the family's finances would be the ideal full package of a successful mompreneur.

Finding specific numbers on the growth and achievements of mompreneurs is more than deficient, it is severely lacking. According to Korsgaard (2007, p. 43) the whole concept of mompreneurship is a bit vague, he states that mompreneurship is 'an emergent phenomenon, which has yet to settle on a widely accepted definition or be researched from a social scientific point of view'. To further validate his point, to date there have been no empirical studies that actually support or confirm mompreneurship as a recognized form of entrepreneurship (Richomme-Huet et al., 2013). Is it possible that the phenomenon of a mom-entrepreneur actually doesn't exist?

The preceding research on mompreneurship and female entrepreneurship has been informative and innovative filled with intense interviews and quantitative surveys of mompreneurs and exploring the issues and lifestyle choices made in succession to guide them to the point of

momprenurship. According to research by Greene et al. (2003) ‘the average mompreneur is first born, middle class, college graduate with a major in liberal arts, married with children and a supportive spouse in a professional or technical occupation. Furthermore, mompreneurs traditionally set up businesses in areas thought of as more female industries such as hospitality, retail and services.’ It will be further studied in this thesis if female entrepreneurs consciously take part in self-making and identifying as mompreneurs or only if they are placed there by society or by the researchers in the previous and current studies?

The focus of this study is to take a closer look at Maltese and Finnish mompreneurs and to see how they identify themselves while holding the role of mompreneur, and to detect if culture influences their self-identification and decisions for becoming mompreneurs. Furthermore, their own interpretation of what a mompreneur is will be studied and elaborated. Results found in this research will be used to achieve a greater understanding of the identities of these mompreneurs of different cultures and in doing so enable an inside look at the identities of these mompreneurs told personally through individual narratives factors influence their self-identification. Identity itself is a fluid concept, one that changes through time. These narratives offer a snapshot of their strongest identity role at this moment, as identities of mompreneurs are often in competition or even conflict of one another (Medved & Kirby, 2005)

## **2.2 Identity**

Identity is a term that has been a hot topic for researchers for many years. Identity construction can be seen as ‘work’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), as it is referred to as ‘forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness’ of identity construction (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), or can be viewed more as ‘positioning’ (LaPointe, 2010). With positioning terms such as ‘adopt, resist, relate’ are used since these are steps in processes that one goes through to get to the construction of one’s identity (LaPointe, 2010). Identity is something we all have, one in fact that fluctuates, evolves and adapts according to life situations. Identities develop as we take on roles, interact with people shifting and turning in order to find our way through this world. Weik (1995) states that ‘identities are constituted out of the process of interaction. To shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of self. Identity construction is a fluid process that is adaptable and never concrete.

When looking at mompreneurs we have to whittle down their identities until we are left with essentially the core, the beginning, that of a girl. From there her upbringing, childhood environment, family influences, life choices (including education, career, partner, decision to have children, friends etc.) all influences and shape who she becomes, leading up to the moment we meet her as a fully formed mompreneur with a rich history to match.

When looking at the identity of mompreneurs an imperative question is how they see themselves in society. What do they feel is their main role and do they welcome the role society has placed on them. It has been recognized that individual identities are transformed by how they believe others perceive them and that individuals identify themselves as separate independent entities regardless of their role (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This can be how they are perceived in a work environment or in daily life; however it should be noted that individuals are powerfully motivated to maintain a positive image and will strive to clear up a negative one (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

The role of mother would not be considered a negative one, nor would the role of entrepreneur be necessarily considered negative, however it is unknown if the perceived societal projection of a mother that is also an entrepreneur is thought of (at the very least) to these mompreneurs as something negative. The representation itself of the mompreneur as a positive or negative phenomenon has yet to be investigated in depth, but was touched upon in a study by Ekinsmyth (2011) which mentioned the term mompreneur in association with a negative connotation.

Identity is formed over time, in stages throughout life, where eventually it reaches a stronger sense of stability and thus more concrete identity over time (LaPointe, 2010). Also, for many women the roles of mother, worker, and entrepreneur are constantly contradicting and competing with each other, reflecting societal views on these very roles. This could be seen to their detriment when looking at constructing their identity roles (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Medved & Kirby, 2005). This is another aspect of the work-life balance, along with the juggling of many roles.

Entrepreneurial identity is something that comes with its own set of challenges. The mere title of entrepreneur grants the individual a sense of responsibility, and sets others up with an expectation upon meeting. Those individuals that 'identify, evaluate and exploit opportunities' relating to entrepreneurship are expected to uphold some kind of image to that title. Various identities are combined in the formation of all identity, but in the addition of the entrepreneur title, the change of one's self-perception (sense-making) into a more multi-faceted and complex one is often a challenge (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

In the existing studies narratives have been found central in identity work and identity construction (Bruner, 1990). The use of narratives (chosen in this study in lieu of standard interviews) therefore provides a fine example of identity representation as told from the person themselves. Our identity as told through a narrative is constructed out of our past experiences (or perceived past reconstructed to the best of our remembering), our present (and however we perceive things at this moment) and our hopes for the future (be that imagined or real). The narratives in this thesis should be viewed as a story or play with roles, characters, scenery, backgrounds, with plots

and twist that keep the stories interesting and the listener engaged (Angus & McLeod, 2004). For the narrator establishing a connection and a sense of credibility with their audience is also particularly important in constructing their overall identity. The image that they are able to convey of themselves and the representation passed on through this narrative all helps in building the identity of the person and story from this standpoint.

### *2.2.1 Motherhood*

Mothering and motherhood holds significant implications and according to Forcey (1994) is seen as “the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society.” Glenn, Brown, and Forcey define mothering as “a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people.”. However you view motherhood, it conjures up much of the same image. You picture a female in an active role, protecting, nurturing, supporting, and teaching; functioning in quite possibly the ultimate calling for some women, a role in which you can fully pass on everything you’ve learned, improve the mistakes, become a role model and start clean. Womanhood and motherhood might sometimes be seen interchangeably, although we all are aware that not all women want to become mothers or partake in mothering just as not all mothering is done by females (Kaplan, 1992).

For the sake of this thesis we look at motherhood and mothering as being performed by the female gender (although males can also ‘mother’) and thusly motherhood is performed by each woman differently. We instinctively have some mothering skills from mothering in which ever form it was received. We take on cultural beliefs, rituals, and expectations of what it is to be a good mother; we are influenced by media and our own friends and family and we struggle with our roles relating to identity that guides us throughout our days. On top of it all we are impacted strongly by our social status and the habits and means of doing things that are involved in the daily rituals of the society we live in itself (Johnston & Swanston, 2006). When looking at personal identity, mothering is more significant than either marital status or occupation and being a mother gives life more meaning in women who are mothers than those not (Rogers & White, 1998 ; Ross & Van Willigen, 1996).

Further, the ideology of a ‘good mother’ is something that is also up for debate. Nowadays we have mothers in all forms and the way in which we become mothers has evolved and expanded over time. With the advancement of science, motherhood is now possible for many where it wouldn’t have been before (Johnston & Swanston, 2006). Still, the idea of a ‘good mother’ is not a distant memory. The ideal that a mother is full-time at home, and even white and middle class (Boris, 1994) is an image that many can identify with being white and middle class or not.

Ideologically a mother could be seen as putting others needs ahead of her own; of someone who gives and although has her own goals and ideals, isn't always voicing them. Traditionally if food was scarce, mothers went without so that their children could eat. The child is placed in the most important role, with the mother taking steps back to let the child flourish. "Mothering is learned in the process of interaction with the individual mothered" (Barnard & Martell, 1995).

The definition of a good or proper mother cannot be easily defined. We each hold our own ideas about what a good mother entails, perhaps she works outside the home, or has her own business or maybe she stays at home until the children enter high school. In any situation, the good mother is one that does her best to balance her own and her children's happiness, which allows for her children thrive and grow (although this may be the ideal of this author). It is a complete impossibility to define, as even the 'best' mothers have flaws; even the most ideological mother has doubts and regrets along with stress and anxiety in the ever shifting emotions that are tied to motherhood. That doesn't mean they are 'bad' mothers, only human (Roxburgh, 1997).

### *2.2.2 Work-life balance and work-family integration*

For some, the title of mompreneur itself somehow lends as a guide without speaking, revealing just the kind of entrepreneur she is, with a possible negative or positive connotation. Self-employment can present great opportunities for women of all realms of life, but particularly for women with young children who strive to create the difficult/harmonious balance of work-life and who can easily take on both roles graciously (Cromie, 1987). Ideally, mompreneurs try to attain 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimum of role conflict' (Clarke, 2000). However it's the daily balances that may not be as easy to attain as the initial thought of stay-at-home business might suggest. Decision making and time allocation isn't easy when gendered stereotypes and roles have been influencing all personal decisions since infancy. Being able to work within and modify decisions accordingly within the work-family-play part of our lives (Lippa, 2005; Poelmans, 2005).

According to previous research striking a work-life balance continues to rank as the highest motivating reason for becoming a mompreneur (Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990; Ahl, 2006; Manolova et al., 2008). Striking a unified work-life balance however can be quite the challenge. As mentioned earlier female entrepreneurs have been shown to underestimate various areas of entrepreneurship responsibility and this area is no different (Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990). The most underestimated area was that of financial responsibility; however it was followed by hours of work, networking and childcare, respectively. Some studies have gone as far as to say that running a business from home and running a household simultaneously are two very incompatible feats (Shelton, 2006).

If children are at home, there is still childcare to arrange in times the business becomes more active, and arranging proper childcare in some situations can be a challenge and costly. Finding a solution is something that would likely still fall on the shoulders of the mother at home, regardless of being an entrepreneur thus increasing stress and distress within the family unit (Shelton, 2006). Mothers by our very nature put children first when they are in need of immediate attention, thus the business would have to be set aside for however long the child needed anything. Women simply set their role priorities to their family, regardless if they run a business or not (Daly, 2002). Being unable to give this attention easily leads to feelings of guilt for the mother, guilt for her 'neglect' to her children, but ultimately guilt for neglect of all areas of her life, including business, social life, household duties and lastly time for herself (Brannen, 2005). Finding a cohesive way to integrate work-family and decipher which roles hold the most significance at that moment is paramount to the successful implementation of a functioning work-life balance model (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

Being able to work at home and be able to care for children (including sick children), household duties and manage a business can be a 'mixed blessing' (Brannen, 2005). Without the rigid daily schedule of a traditional working environment, including scheduled meetings, regular lunch breaks and trainings, the day is left open to fill as the mompreneurs please, often leading to work being done late into the evening to compensate for time 'lost' during the day. Further, the social aspect of working outside the home is partially removed as the daily contact with people outside the home for a home-based business might be quite limited, especially when young children are at home.

However, successfully being able to combine work and life and even integrate it into the lives of family members including children can bring a great sense of accomplishment to anyone able to manage both. With the right balance and support of a partner (this can be a life partner/spouse, close friend or parents nearby) the 'time-style' of the household slowly coincides with the 'time-style' of the business allowing both to run with relative ease (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2006). Ultimately, the work-life dichotomy searches for balance as Kirchmeyer (2000) said: 'a balanced life consists of achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time and commitments to be well distributed across domains'.

### *2.2.3 Cultural impact from Finland*

According to Porath (2010) individuals are the product of both culture and personal identity. When looking at culture this would include things such as: 'The way a group of people live, the way people dress, make shelters, eat, communicate, find companionship, work, learn, are

entertained and find justice in their society.’ These simple things which are encountered daily in individual societies all contribute to our identity

Identity on the other hand is something that is comprised of the various traits that make you uniquely you. Not one specific trait or characteristic, but a comprising of various ones that create individuals. In these next two sections on culture and identity it is briefly shown what kind of society these mompreneurs were born into, raised in and continue to live and thrive in.

The first group of 3 mompreneurs hails from Finland. Finland is a high ranking well-being country, located in Northern Europe. In Finland 68% of the women hold full time employment positions. In a country with 5,4 million people, this makes it slightly higher than the European Average of 66% (Organization for economic co-operation and development, 2013).

According to the Finnish Women’s Entrepreneur Society, Yrittäjänaiset (literally Entrepreneur Women) female entrepreneurship in Finland is strong and continuing to grow. To date this society has over 7,000 members who lead companies in a variety of sectors. Started in 1947, it is the goal of this organization to ‘promote the economic, social and operating conditions of women entrepreneurs in Finland’ (Yrittäjänaiset, [www.yrittajanaiset.fi](http://www.yrittajanaiset.fi)). Traditionally Finland has a history of supporting women and encouraging growth in society. Having granted women equal suffrage in 1906 and the first taking of parliamentary roles in 1907, Finland is often seen as one of the most gender equal societies in the world and a pioneer in equal rights (Ray, Gornick & Schmitt, 2008). Further, according to statistics on well-being and equality, by the Organization for economic co-operation and development, it is said that ‘the Finnish model of work and family reconciliation stands out in international comparison because of the manner in which it provides choice to parents with young children Finnish policy reduces barriers to employment by ensuring all families with young children have access to a subsidized childcare place’ (Organization for economic co-operation and development, 2013).

Finland ranks high in 2<sup>nd</sup> place just behind Sweden when it comes to paid maternity leave, both in duration and fiscal amount. This system enables women to stay home for about 4 months in which she is paid a majority of her previously earned wages in full-time employment. The average Finnish woman has 1.8 children, and rules are also in place so that expectant mothers without any employment, students and entrepreneurs also receive a minimum allowance for at least 4 months. In the months following the basic maternity leave, Finland offers paid benefits for either the mother or the father for 9 months. After this time, further leave is available up until the child is 3 years old, with the Finnish government providing a basic monthly amount as a supplement, in 2013 this was 336,67 eur (Kansaneläkelaitos, [www.kela.fi](http://www.kela.fi)). Fathers in Finland although are not able to take the maternity leave, are offered various times off permitted their employer has agreed on the terms.

Further, up to 70% of the children ages 7 and under attend full-time daycare. Day care centers in Finland begin accepting children from the age of 10 months (when the mother's maternity leave ends) and continue until the child begins its formal schooling at the age of 7. Additionally, day care center costs are heavily subsidized and parents pay based on how much they earn on a so called, sliding scale. Children receive meals at day care centers, including, breakfast, full warm lunch and an afternoon snack. Services such as these are subsidized by the government so that parents are able to return to full-time employment when they are ready while children begin learning the fundamentals of learning such as counting, name writing, reading from the age of 3 upward (Mead, 2008).

Information on gender equality regarding household duties is not readily available however through this thesis some details will be revealed. Overall, Finland strives for equality of the sexes and that has perhaps helped enable the over 7,000 female entrepreneurs. Support at home, and governmental subsidies for mothers, childcare and education all help provide the tools necessary for a Finnish women interested in starting her own venture.

Lastly, when looking at Finnish women in particular, it has been said that they are more readily willing to speak about a truly Finnish culturally sensitive topic, Shame. Finns have an interesting relationship with the word 'shame'. According to Professor Matti Kortteinen in Helsingin Sanomat, a special characteristic of Finnish shame is that 'people here try to control their emotional reactions, thinking that they can hide and cover up their own affairs. Keeping things hidden and covering things up add to shame, and get people to isolate themselves. In many other cultures people show emotions more readily than we (Finns) do, and there is more willingness to share personal matters, even difficult ones, with each other. Philosopher Pekka Himanen speaks in the same lines about Finnish shame in collaboration with entrepreneurship, 'The social cost of both failure and success is too high and Finland can only tackle its economic sustainability gap and demographic challenges by first addressing issues in its culture' (Mustavuori, 2010; Helsinki Times, 2013). It will be studied in the discussion section of this thesis if the Finnish relationship with shame has any impact on self-identification in relation to the mompreneurs in this study.

#### *2.2.4 Cultural impact from Malta*

The second set of 3 mompreneurs hails from Malta. Malta is a small island located in the Mediterranean sea with a population of just over 402, 000 thousand people and a land mass of 316km<sup>2</sup> which makes it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The percentage of women in the workforce in Malta as of 2012, was 44 %, well below the average of the rest of the European Union: 66 % (Malta in Figures, National Statistics Office, Malta 2013) That number doesn't specify an important fact that only 25% of married women work part-time and even less,



just 13% of all married women in Malta work full-time (Abela et al., 2005). The reasoning behind such small numbers can be linked to the diverse history and religious beliefs of the Maltese people.

Malta being a devout Catholic country (98.5% practicing Catholics) is often clumped together with other southern European countries when talking about a 'southern model of welfare' and 'familialism' both of which look at the impact of small Catholic communities and the dependence of family for support and overall care that of child or the elderly (Darmanin, 2002). Most Maltese people do not leave their home until their wedding day, and still the majority live in the same town or village as one of their parents, making the family unit a close and familiar one (Tabone, 1995). Further, Malta is still very much a male 'bread-winning' /dominated society, with men working outside the home and women, even highly educated women, taking care of the household duties, (Abela, 2004). Up until 1993 when the rules were slightly amended men in Malta had complete governmentally ordained rein over the household, children, finances and the rights of their wives' finances including the right to file her own income taxes. This has since been slightly amended with women not being as dependent on their husbands in certain areas, and a legislation granting divorce on the island passed in 2011. Overall however, the woman's place (in Malta) is still seen as in the home.

In addition, Maltese women surveyed across different ages, agreed by 80% that being a housewife is as fulfilling as working for a salary (Abela, 2000). That being said, the average Maltese woman has just 1.37 children, but places high values on raising their own children, and there is a small amount of maternity benefits available to all (working) women in Malta and have recently been increased from 2 to 4 weeks in which the mother will receive some compensation, presuming she has not accepted any other benefit or paid leave from her place of employment (Government Services: Government of Malta, <http://www.gov.mt>). Additionally, according to Darmanin, 2002 'An ESF funded ETC Child care Project which was set to provide incentives to SMEs to encourage them to start-up childcare services at the place of work has been scrapped for a variety of reasons and another ETC project 'Modern Man in an Enlarged Europe', had difficulty finding enough men on parental leave to fulfil the research methodology' revealing that incentives aren't entirely enough to encourage women out of the homes once the first child is born. Additional studies have been conducted and it was revealed that 'Malta and Spain are the only countries in the EU to combine low labour market integration with acceptance of women as working mothers' (Hantrais, 2004).

Subsidies are put into place as well as some initiatives to encourage mothers to return to work after giving birth, however overall child day care facilities are costly and space is limited especially in heavily populated areas (Kids Malta, [http:// www.kidsmalta.com](http://www.kidsmalta.com)).

The leading front runners for supporting working and specifically entrepreneurial women and to help break through the stereotypical yet traditional female roles in Malta, is the foundation for women entrepreneurs, Malta founded in 2001. According to their website, they aim ‘for the promotion of opportunities, awareness building, training and research in the field of Women Entrepreneurs and other gender issues.’ Additionally, the foundation ‘aims at establishing entrepreneurship as a culture and way of life for women – not only business owners, but workers, mothers and citizens on a national, European and Mediterranean level’. This groundbreaking organization headed by President Angele and Executive coordinator Maryrose (both which are used as narratives in this study) offers support, guidance and encouragement for women interested in starting up their own business in Malta and the EU. Maryrose (2013) is outspoken about the amount of resources available to women in Malta, and continues ‘on paper there are no differences when a woman wants to start up her own business, but in reality women face barriers such as lack of confidence, opposition from family members, full responsibility of home management and rearing of children amongst others’. Malta is still very much a boys club especially when it comes to the business world. Through the establishment of networks around the EU this foundation is paramount in helping women break through glass ceilings and into the world of entrepreneurship and business and try to even out the inequalities in Maltese business society.

#### 2.2.5 Narratives

Narratives or story-telling have been around as long as humans existed. In the following classic statement by Barthes (1977) he enraptures the true essence of what narratives are and what they mean for our very existence.

*‘The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting . . . stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives . . . Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Roland Barthes 1977: 79)’*

Knowledge and antidotes are transferred from one generation to the next, we warn of dangers, boast of loves, it shapes everything regarding who we are and it is a key player in the role of getting to the heart of the narrator in research (Czarniawska, 1998).

Through narratives interest in how individuals compartmentalize social discourses and their development their narrative accounts from the beginning of the journey starting with, childhood history, education, first career choices, and partner choices etc., to the then big transition into self-employment (mompreneurship). Through to the process of retrospective reflection, the women can narrate their lives in a way that it becomes meaningful and understandable to any outsider (Duberly & Carrigan, 2012).

Societal discourses influence the ways in which individuals try to interpret their own current reality and act accordingly, but the association is one that is tightly bound to who we are. The listener also plays a key role in the story-telling process. The previous relationship to the narrator, the ways in which the listener engages in the narrative and the overall comfort level of the narrator to the listener can all determine how the much or how little is being conveyed McLean et al. (2007).

These narratives aim to focus on not only the facts and basic description of a story, but the actions and emotions to provide the audience with a feel of what the narrator has experienced. Using their own interpretation told in their own words, a sense of the situation is gained and the audience experiences the history through them (Søderberg, 2006). The narrator is able to use the audience and their narrative as their voice to convey their experiences from a certain starting point (in this case from the start of their education) to the present (as life as a mompreneur). Also, narratives by their nature can only exist with the co-creator/ audience engaging, listening, observing, note-taking varying the interpretation of the narrative depending on the participants (Peterson & Langellier, 2006).

Storytelling from the beginning of their education to the current position of mompreneur will show an evolution in the continuance of the narrator's life. Through this narrative we can deeper study the meaning of the term 'sense-making' specifically of the identities of these mompreneurs (Weick et al. 2005). A clear definition was exemplified by Weick (1995), as definitions were random and made by combining others. Weick simply says that 'sensemaking is what it says it is, namely, making something sensible. It is to be understood literally not metaphorically'. By having these narratives told in their own words without coaxing or guiding we are given the most genuine, clear representation of spontaneous speech (Pavlenko, 2007).

Even though there has been particular focus on narratives used to understand identity, the difficulty in this type of interpretation is trying to decipher between the 'intention of the reader and the intention of the text spoken' (Eco, 1990. 1992). Eco continues, 'To interpret means to react to the text of the world or to the world of a text by producing other texts...The problem is not to

challenge the old idea that the world is a text which can be interpreted, but rather to decide whether it has a fixed meaning, many possible meanings or none at all. It is left to the interpretations of the author and further the readers to determine the true intention in the meaning of the mompreneurs own words and to take them to mean exactly what was intended by the narratives themselves acting as so called ‘co-authors’ in the identity construction based on a told narrative Söderberg (2006).

Studying identity through narratives is greatly beneficial especially when viewed from a more functional point of view or that of Bruner (1990). Here it is relied heavily on using these narratives as a mean of making sense of these mompreneurs’ lives and through shaping various life changing events into cohesive turning points that in turn make it easier to interpret and find meaning in. These events themselves shape the lives of these mompreneurs and in turn the entire narrative and our interpretation of it (Bruner, 1990).

According to Burr (1995), our outward identities are linked in whatever we do. In fact it can’t be separated from one identity, be that of mother, wife, employee, entrepreneur and they are all intimately inter-linked with our identities. Furthermore, Söderberg (2006) adds to narratives contributing to our identity by stating, ‘Narrative interviews can thus be treated as a site for the narrators’ identification processes rather than as a textual object for the study of identities as products’ Söderberg (2006). In this way the narratives told directly contribute to the self-identification process by helping place identifying traits into the correct categories, i.e. identities which may be excluded or transformed through the story-telling. Including any opinions they hold regarding their entrepreneurial identity as well as anything else they wish to reveal. We can take their stories as evolving pieces of the individual themselves and their identity at that precise moment of story-telling and interpret it as fit.

In short literature on the various topics relating to mompreneurs such as entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, identity, cultural influence, motherhood, work-life balance/ work-family integration and narrative interviewing is and rich with influences from as far back as the 1920s and spanning countries around the world. The literature reviewed provided an opportunity to gain a deeper knowledge regarding the sub-categories of mompreneurship and thusly enriching the available (limited) mompreneurship literature. Author John Updike has an interesting take on narratives, ‘A narrative is like a room on whose walls a number of false doors have been painted; while within the narrative, we have many apparent choices of exit, but when the author leads us to one particular door, we know it is the right one because it opens.’ and so we view the narratives used in this thesis, as an entry to the world of these mompreneurs, the door they are leading us through.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### *3.1 Research Method and Design*

The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the important and under-studied phenomenon that is mompreneurship and attempt to address the gap in the current limited research, that of sense making of identities of the individual mompreneurs. Further, we are looking at Maltese and Finnish mompreneurs to see if culture influences self-identification and the interpretation of what a mompreneur is. Filling this gap is important as it adds to the existing research on mompreneurs whilst complementing existing theories. The desire here is to study sense making of the different cultures from the perspective of these countries being such polar opposites. In this thesis a qualitative study of 6 mompreneurs, 3 from Finland and 3 from Malta is used to further our understanding of mompreneurship, mompreneur character traits and how the mothers themselves view their roles, through the eyes of mompreneurs with businesses and under school aged children. The number of the subjects used was carefully considered to allow for rich acquisition of data and to gain an in-depth knowledge of the individuals involved (Polkinghorne, 2005). The small sample facilitated the ability to gather data on numerous occasions and through these gatherings of the individual subject's life story and self-viewing clear conclusions was able to be deduced. Furthermore, the small size of the study allowed for numerous points of contact and a great opportunity to learn about the lives of these mompreneurs from an up-close standpoint (Stake, 2005).

This is a novel study as the subjects (mompreneur) identities have never before been studied to this depth, and specifically within these two differing cultures. Taking on an interpretive approach the subjects themselves are able to give some definition and meaning to their own behavior, self-identifying in their own words and interpretations (Welch et al., 2009). Looking ahead, this study provides us with a look at the women behind the mompreneur and to further our understanding of holding both roles of mother and entrepreneur. Through their own narratives the mompreneurs were able to tell their own stories and in doing so we look at gaining (entrepreneurial) knowledge and discourse through the narrative genre. Through this narrative process links between the mompreneurs are looked for to answer the research question and to identify constructs that contribute to identity construction of these mompreneurs; whilst simultaneously accepting that the act of mompreneurship (or entrepreneurship) is constantly changing and never static (Hytti, 2005).

Mompreneurs here are asked to tell their own life story and to feel free to include or exclude what they wish. Human agency does determine what the mompreneurs choose to speak about, assigning characters or roles to others in their story as they feel appropriate. It is up to the researcher to sift through the narrative and to construct a form of structure that enables data to still

be found (Jones et al., 2007) Narrative interviewing allows the true voice (identity) of the subject to come through as, 'Narratives are theorized as an ontological aspect of identity' (LaPointe, 2010). Through these narratives these mothers are building their identity and we try to find meaning in that identity construction, through their open narratives.

The gathered empirical data was conducted over a period of two months and consisted of three meetings/Skype calls. The first being an informal lunch or coffee meeting in which together we were able to get to acquainted with each other as well as to see if there was any kind of connection or unusual tension before proceeding further. The next meetings were conducted in quieter locations, such as their own home, library or cafe where in a similarly relaxed nature the in-depth narratives were told. The last meeting was recorded and transcribed for accuracy and provide the basis of the empirical analysis. In total the meetings lasted 2-4 hours for each participant involved, for a total of 12-24 hours of meeting and analysis. The first meeting was not recorded although it was considered. It was dismissed on the grounds that these first meetings were simply preliminary and it was not entirely clear who was going to be selected for the purpose of the thesis, and subsequently a good decision as some potential subjects were eliminated on bases of not being suitable to the study.

Narrative story-telling/interviewing was chosen as the best option to have these mompreneurs make sense of their identity through their own accounts. According to Polkinghorne (1988), the narrative interview is of great importance when seeking to establish the core story of an individual as it enables someone to give meaning to their experiences and personal actions over time: 'It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. Of narrative storytelling, 'it is the primary scheme through which human existence is rendered meaningful' (Polkinghorne, 1988: 11). Similarly, Söderberg states that 'A narrative is a retrospective interpretation. A narrative always has an identifiable voice reflecting the specific point of view from which the narrator views a selected number of events' (Söderberg, 2006). Through narrative story-working or story-telling we aim to understand the truth as the speaker tells it and to be able to transfer their stories to others. Further, it should be noted the term Mompreneur, will flow throughout this thesis. Although this is a term comprised of the words 'mom' and 'entrepreneur' it is a grammatically recognized term that illustrates the fact that a woman is an entrepreneur and a mother at the same coinciding time. Both mompreneur and mumpreneur are used in existing literature and are used throughout the narratives simultaneously, as in Malta the term '*mumpreneur*' is most commonly used.

The philosophical approach of this study is interpretive, and it follows the scientific tradition of *verstehen*. The essential aim of *verstehen* and as seen in this work is to *understand* the actions

and the experiences of these subjects and to try to appreciate their own feelings on identity (Welch et al., 2011).

The purpose of this section is to allow the reader to get a complete overview of the theory used; methods studied and further discuss research problems, limitations and theoretical background of this thesis (Zalan & Lewism, 2004). It also serves a justification of choices made by the researcher and to validate how decisions were made.

The research question, 'How do mompreneurs in Finland and Malta make sense of themselves as mothers and entrepreneurs?' is addressed by using narrative interviewing (story-telling) by the mompreneurs to have the answers revealed in their own words. Narratives are vital as they put together elements of life in some kind of sequence that as whole creates a story telling of the creation of the mompreneur from the starting point she felt most comfortable (Polkinghorne, 1990). Data was gathered over a period of 10 months in which contacts were made, appointments set and previous research reviewed, all prior to the actual meeting of the mompreneurs.

### ***3.2 Qualitative Narrative interviewing***

The study was carried out by a series of narrative interviews that focus on storytelling and the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world. The aim is not to find the truths or faults of the narrative being told, but to accept the narrative as an interpretation of the view of the mompreneur. These narratives are seen as a direct representation of themselves. Ricoeur, (1965) has argued that a narrative is the key means through which people produced an identity, linking the past to the present and offering an open of the future. This choice of research method is justified as the most fitting to the narratives involved. Further, taking note of Polkinghorne, (1988) some 'narrative smoothing' is done to eliminate data not directly relevant to the specifics of research question and to re-direct focus (Polkinghorne, 1995).

#### ***3.2.1 Selection of participants***

The most important reasoning behind the women chosen as participants was to ensure the gathering of rich data in a concentrated group which offered an interesting opportunity for learning. The women were selected based on who would provide the most in-depth narrative, given their personal time constraints and obligations. Only the women who were not only willing participants, but ones that were able to offer time freely when needed and follow-ups were considered. The second process was the process of elimination. Initially 6 potential women in Finland were located and 4 in Malta.

After meeting with all the Finnish women, it was apparent who would be able to offer the most valuable narrative. Of the potential Finnish candidates, 2 were eliminated as they were not

Finnish born women, but had immigrated here in their mid-30s. Furthermore, they had foreign partners who do not qualify for the Finnish government benefits that are allowed for Finnish residents and partners. The 3<sup>rd</sup> eliminated potential Finnish candidate was indeed a Finnish born Finn, but had recently given birth to her first child. It was felt (from both sides) that she had not built up enough experience as mother to really relate to the other mompreneurs in a similar way. Of the Maltese women, one simply never responded to repeated contact after initially showing interest and fitting the criteria, so was eliminated thusly, and the other 3 fit the profile in every sense so no other participants were necessary. It should be noted that it was considerably more difficult to find Maltese women than Finnish that fit the criteria, so slight changes in the research goal were made.

**Table 2. Research participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Family situation</b>	<b>Type of company</b>	<b>Date interviewed</b>
Sanna	Finland	41	Partner, one child	Online child-care/ gift boxes	12.09.2013
Hanna	Finland	37	Husband, 2 children	Interior design	10.09.2013
Katriina	Finland	40	Husband and 3 children	Party/event planning	24.09.2013
Maryrose	Malta	46	Divorced, one child	Former importing business	22.09.2013
Angele	Malta	36	Divorced, one child	ICT development, training, software	20.09.2013
Mary	Malta	61	Married, mother of 4, granny of 6	Recycling-garbage collection	21.09.2013

### **3.3 Data gathering**

The data was compiled from meetings and interviews that took place during September of 2013. The first meeting was informal and the subsequent meeting (and more in-depth story-telling) slightly more formal, but with a relaxed atmosphere. It was important that the interviews were told in a setting most comfortable and convenient to the participants, be that home, a library, a café, on the computer or elsewhere. The amount of times we met depended if the persons were located in Finland or Malta. Finnish mompreneurs were met 2 times with the narratives were recorded (using an online program) and lasting between 1-2 hours each time after which they were transcribed verbatim with a total of 12-24 hours of data was gathered and analyzed. Maltese mompreneurs all told their narratives online via Skype and were recorded using an online program. Narrative dates were only finalized after some initial emailing which began in the spring of 2013. One Maltese



momprenneur had a business trip in Finland and our initial meeting took place then, with the follow-up intense narrative being recorded later, which lasted 1 hour. Furthermore, the participants agreed to make themselves available for follow-up information, as needed. In a few cases this has been used.

The narratives were told in a casual manner and felt more like friends meeting up for coffee (and treats) than actual interviewing. Due to the nature of narrative interviewing it was the reviewers job not to lead the conversation with any guided or structured questioning, but to have the mompreneurs themselves expand on the how and why they got involved in mompreneurship and have the story itself unfold (Søderberg, 2006). Further, it should be noted the words "story telling" are used interchangeably with "narrative (interviewing)" throughout the study.

For the most part all of the narratives were told with ease, in English which is not the native language of any of the women. Two of the Finnish women are married to Canadian men and use English on a daily basis, while the third had studied in English and was fluent and confident in using the language. Furthermore if there was any difficulty in locating a word, the author does speak some Finnish and the right word was located. The Maltese women were all very fluent in English (one was previously married for over 20 years to an Irishman) and the stories flowed easily for the most part. One mompreneur was a bit more reserved when speaking, but eventually her story was told at her own pace. This however, should be noted, was not attributed to lack of comfort in the language, rather her own personality.

The transcripts were later repeatedly reviewed and all notable mentions relating to mompreneurship, specifically: *motivations, motherhood, work-life balance, identity and sense-making* were noted.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

In order to examine identity traits commonly associated with female entrepreneurs and mothers (momprenneurs) exclusively, the interviews were carefully transcribed and reviewed many times, in which the key phrases and mentions of topics relating to mompreneurship were noted. This included terms, work-life balance, guilt, pride, liberty, freedom, children and identity. Next data was gathered regarding societal support in Finnish and Maltese cultures and to identify if it supports or hinders the growth of females and in particular entrepreneurs and see if their roles in their own individual societies influence career choices. In my analysis I achieved this in this by comparing the different social services available to parents, particularly new parents and studied the differences in how the mothers accept or decline this support. It was studied what if any steps if any are needed to cross over from being a female entrepreneur to becoming a mompreneur, aside from the acquisition of a child(ren). Through the narratives key words and phrases that related to the

acquisition of children and identity changes were noted as well as any mention of the term 'bored' in any form, 'boring', 'boredom'. Lastly, it was studied if the term mompreneur itself in its own right evokes any kind of emotion or feeling, be that negative, positive or neutral. This was also done though the analysis of the narratives and the notation of key words or terms relating to positive or negative feelings or connotations and the word mompreneur.

With this kind of narrative/story-telling data, I found it important to look at the mompreneur at *this* time, in *this* setting at *this* venture of her life and to reflect upon the past while forming the current (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Using a combination of various narrative analysis methods, to achieve richer and more complex results due to the limited size of the sample, a pluralistic approach is used. By combining what Riessman (2008) refers to as dialogic/performance analysis as well as Labov's thematic organization and a dash of Polkinghorne's chronological organization approach it is believed that more multi-faceted sides of the mompreneur will emerge that will contribute to the validity of the findings (Frost, 2009).

All of the narratives began in much the same way. It was generally asked to the author how or where they should begin and every time I responded in the same way, 'start at the beginning'. I left the door open for them to decide to tell at the beginning of what. It was perhaps too vague of an opening, as all except 1 respondent began with their childhood (and not beginning of their career, motherhood, education as I had thought). The remaining 1 did begin with her education and the subject of her childhood was not returned to.

### ***3.5 Evaluation of the study***

#### ***3.5.1 Ethical issues***

As written in Zalan & Lewis (2004), the gathering of valid and just qualitative data depends greatly on trust. In this case trust between the author and the mompreneurs was built up through a series of emails and initial meetings. However, it would be inaccurate to say that a high level of trust was achieved in such a short time. Furthermore, some of the mompreneurs by their very nature are more reserved and it was clear that although they spoke freely and openly, there were still some things being hidden behind their smiles.

No formal agreements were made with the mompreneurs regarding their privacy or secrecy regarding any topic discussed and they were feel to reveal as little or as much as they personally felt comfortable. The only observance that has been made is the omitting of the surnames of those involved, however, company names are revealed.

### 3.5.2 Limitations

The philosophical approach of this study is interpretive, and it follows the scientific tradition of *verstehen*. As mentioned above, the essential aim of *verstehen* and as seen in this work is to *understand* the actions and the experiences of these subjects and to try to appreciate their own feelings on identity (Welch et al., 2011). For that reason, it should be noted that no generalizations should be concluded from this study.

The sample of the mompreneurs consisted of just 3 women from each culture and is much too small for overt findings; however it does provide an interesting insight to a certain degree. This study is restricted to Finnish mothers who started their businesses after their children were born, but while they were still at home caring for them and Maltese mothers who started their businesses before their children were born, but continued as mompreneurs after their birth(s). This study however restricted the age of the children at the start of the business to be between 0-6 years of age. There is no age restriction on the age of the mothers.

Due to the limited nature of the study, and the mothers available, only mothers who became business owners after having children were thought to be interviewed initially, setting up this study with clear limitations from the beginning. However, due to the lack of finding suitable candidates in Malta (perhaps with more time and an actual visit to the island, exactly suitable candidates who started their business after the children were born) would have been found. Also, it should be noted, that although English was the language used in the narratives, and one that is familiar and fluent for all of the mompreneurs involved, it can be assumed that some deeper understanding of the stories is lost. It is very possible that the women chose other words or phrases that although made perfect sense, grammatically and otherwise, it simply does not reflect the passion of words in one's native language. In order to establish as clear narratives as possible, elaborations were asked to items that the author felt were not clearly interpreted. This was done without guiding or insinuating, rather with a simple phrase as 'could you tell more about that?'

Lastly, the study was restricted with the interviewees being citizens born in the country in which they inhabited. Of the sample of six narratives of mompreneurs; all 3 are of Finnish born descent and all 3 are native born Maltese. No exceptions were made for the purpose of this study, although it should be noted the sample could have been larger had the requirements been more lenient. However, it was thought that in the amount of detail that would be put into each interview and each narrative, it was best to focus on the mompreneurs that didn't deviate from the set guidelines.

## 4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### 4.1 Narratives in the sense making of mompreneurs

The term mompreneur was unknown to all of the Finnish subjects, but was a familiar term in Malta, one that was used although not frequently and not in daily life. The aim of this study was to make sense of the mompreneurs' identities, and to study the re-construction of an ideal of ones identity from woman to mother to entrepreneur. Rich data was gathered from women in both Finland and Malta in a innovative study comparing the two cultures and its influence on the women and their decisions to initiate entrepreneurship. The title of mompreneur has been a topic of question in previous research, and it has been suggested that this title alone ignores other reasons why women feel they have to leave organizations to develop their careers (Kelan, 2008). The limitations or possibilities of taking on the title (mompreneur) will be examined and studied as a possible hindrance or advantage to the mompreneurs in this study.

The following section introduces us to the mompreneurs and reveals their narratives. The factors revealed in the tables below are exemplified as the motivation in becoming a mompreneur, which is simply a small part of their identity, not an entirely defining factor in the self-identification.

#### 4.1.1 Finland

##### **Sanna, Almondella**

Sanna is a 41 year old Helsinki native and mother of a 3 year old daughter as well as being the owner and creator of an online company/blog called Almondella. Two meetings were held at a café in the center of Helsinki whilst Sanna was in the middle of updating her current inventory and company website. Having graduated with a degree in Psychology and worked with dyslexic children, specifically focusing on brain science, a 25 year old Sanna wanted to do something new. She found herself '*bored*' in her current occupation, and had a partner that was interested in computer sciences. She became interested in the studies of people using computers and incidentally computers themselves which lead to a transition role where she would be teaching usability to students. However, that became too stressful often keeping her up at nights and she decided to take on an entirely new role. She joined a company of 200+ employees and had the title of concept designer for about 3 years in a new media consultancy type of company, before noticing that '*the rats were leaving the ship, from the top first*' and she too decided to make her exit. She landed in Nokia where things were ok for a while, but she started to get tense once projects were closed down and people were relocated. It was at this time she was already on maternity leave and had already

had thoughts of starting her own business, but deemed them unfeasible at least at the moment, so they were put aside.

Sanna had become acquainted with an online shop catering to moms, babies and toddlers that specialized in gift boxes and was interested in something similar as she too loves pretty things, especially finding the right things for her daughter and knew that other mothers must do the same somehow when looking for something. Similarly in Finland, the government provides each new child with a gift box containing a variety of necessary and useful as well as adorable items. Sanna took inspiration from these places and knew she could make something amazing.

However, as she was working she strived to remain enthusiastic about her job. Finding a happy balance between work –life and general work joy is not an easy one to achieve. As classic motivations for entering entrepreneurship has shown, for female entrepreneurs and employees alike, money isn't the major motivator for staying in a position (Hughes, 2006). Sanna returned to Nokia when her daughter was 1 year old, but quickly realized she was making nearly 5,000eur a month, for 4 days of work and:

*'Was bored out of my mind without much work to actually do.'*

Nokia offered start-up grants for employees interested in business and she was awarded one for 10,000eur and thus Almondella started in the 2012. It wasn't until the fall of 2012 that the website was up and running, and it is currently in development along with the ideas for new and exciting boxes. During this time she notes that her identity took on a significant change and she has to take on more of an accurate role when coordinating her day:

*'A year before I wasn't sure I could do this, but I approached this as tackling one problem at a time. I haven't got there yet, and making the product boxes are hard, but in a company, it's distant. You do your tasks you make money for the company so you can keep your job and you go home. Now I have to plan things more carefully. My time is restricted, even if I am working from 9-4 it is still not enough time.'*

At this moment in time Sanna is trying to balance work and home life while being a mompreneur. She mentions that she does have a cleaner as it is *'one less thing to worry about, but I still have to do my own dishes'*, she says with a smile.

She sees mompreneurs in companies that mostly relate children, such as baby care products and refers to another company known for clothes for pre-mature children. She says that *'maternity leave is a good place to start thinking of change.'* When the topic of mompreneurs comes up, the

title itself is one that is not familiar to Sanna, however she finds it clever and could be used as an advantage, as, *‘being a mom and an entrepreneur is actually like having 2 jobs.’* The title itself isn’t offensive or discredits women at all in her opinion and further she doesn’t feel that investors aren’t interested because she is a woman or a mompreneur, rather they are more interested in growth and that is something she herself struggles with. At the moment her company is manageable, *‘just’* manageable. Soon she will need to find a new or larger storage facility for her stock, she might need to employ someone, and she realizes that she isn’t always *‘present’* with the family and that she is always feeling there is something that can be improved or can think of new things she wants to add to the webpages.

There isn’t any specific talk about her daughter, which can be acquainted more to being Finnish rather than making assumptions as to any other reason; however, her daughter is featured prominently on the company Facebook page. When Sanna was asked which role she identifies most strongly with, she said she identifies equally with all her roles, mother, entrepreneur, woman, partner and doesn’t see a differentiation between them.

**Table 3. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Sanna**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Challenge, creativity, success (pull)	‘I found I was bored in my job’/ ‘‘Was bored out of my mind without much work to actually do. I love being able to pick out things for these boxes, and to assemble them, making great things for people.’
Other: stress (push)	‘I was unable to sleep being so stressed about job situations’
Nature of job (push)	‘A year before I wasn’t sure I could do this, but I approached this as tackling one problem at a time. This is something totally different from what I’ve studied or worked as, and I love it’

### **Hanna, Hanna C & CO.**

Hanna is a 37 year old mother of 2 who was met for coffee, tea and toffees on 3 separate occasions. During the first few meetings time was of the essence so time was spent engaging in basic small talk and familiarizing with the situation. It was surprising to learn that she has a

Canadian husband and that she had studied in the US as a high school exchange student. Her English is impeccable and can be said it is more than a second language. During the last interview, conversations flowed easily and it was a relaxed atmosphere speaking privately in the gazebo of her beautiful home in Espoo enjoying a fire. She starts by telling about her day and how life is so much better now that they have a new au pair.

She is open in telling that her life has been a busy one and that without outside help, things would be very difficult if not impossible to run smoothly. She continues:

*'We have had au pairs for the past 5 years, but the last 2 months we have been without and it has been so difficult! I have been exhausted and honestly don't know how people do it!'*

We both laugh, and she continues on about how it is really hard not having the help. She continues on that combining the business of her dreams in a field she is genuinely skilled in with her home life has been *'a dream come true'*.

Hanna received her MBA from Helsinki School of Economics in 2000 after receiving a BBA earlier. She had completed a short stint in sales at a large photocopying company and was in Tokyo for a year when a colleague mentioned she should join him and come and study for her MBA. She thought it would be a great idea, and if only she knew she would have found the *'love of her life'* in the MBA program she *'would have done it sooner'*, she laughs. She returned to the photocopying company and later went on to another company where she had a lot of perks, but found it too technical. She found herself very miserable realizing she is more of a *'hands-on'* or *'people person'* and she found the IT sales *'boring'* even though she was *'very very good at it!'*

Coming from a smallish town in Finland, Mikkeli, with an entrepreneur father who never quite had a big break and a mother that worked for the tax authorities she realized early on that although she was raised well, and was quite content, she simply wanted more. Her parents' divorce made her see that she really wanted to be happy in life, and to find something that she had passion for. Her big break so to speak came when she saw an ad for a company seeking a sales person for office furniture. Although she didn't have any *'real'* design experience, she learned in the United States and in an entrepreneurial class while doing her BBA was that *'you have to find what you really want to do, what you are passionate about.'*

She got the job and was soon taking over the designing of the office spaces herself as she had picked up an interior design degree along the way, and was excellent at her position. She was the perfect combination, of designer and sales person. However the work situation was less than ideal and she found herself dreading the commute and becoming less enthusiastic about the place itself.

She uses big bold phrases when talking about her work that are fuel for her entering the entrepreneurial world:

*'I really felt like I was wasting my life there'*

A few years went by she was now pregnant with her second child and had received promotions insisted on by Hanna herself, but she was increasingly unhappy with *'the whole work for someone else experience. My skills I feel are a gift that I have gotten for whatever reason'* she states and she felt that it was not being used in the right way. She quit her job and without any *'starttiraha'* or start-up money available to some new start-ups in Finland she started her business. The children were 1 and 4 at the time and she had a nice web page and a google campaign and was suddenly very busy.

She found life as an entrepreneur very challenging at first. The daily household tasks and mess kept being a distraction. She was unable to clearly focus and it was then the assistance of an au pair came to mind. She was able then to fully focus on her work, creating a small home office and being more present when she needed to be. She talks about this identity change very whimsically, and a note that she knew herself before she became an entrepreneur and that hasn't changed.

*'I'm a free spirit, I've never been a very obedient worker, I felt limited by the 8-16 routine, and now I am liberated and free from all of that. Today after 5 years I still have no interest in working for anyone else.'*

About being a mompreneur, being a mom is *'something that is not a defining role, it doesn't define who I am. My family is the most important thing to me, but I don't feel the need to mention it especially in Finland, we are more private about these things. If I am decorating a child's room, naturally I bring it up, but I wouldn't think of it at an office decorating meeting, unless some woman there brings it up on her own.'* It is clear she is passionate about her current position and loves her family as well and tries to combine both, but she isn't afraid to admit that without help it would be nearly impossible. She continues about combining motherhood and entrepreneurship with:

*'This month I have had to take my daughter to a meeting with me. I asked ahead of course and it wasn't a problem, but it's not something I make a habit of. Strangers would know that I am an entrepreneur, but not a mother and that's ok too'.*



She feels the hardest thing is not to lose yourself in your family and work. This is something reflected in previous literature as well, that the separation of woman and mother and woman and entrepreneur are significant challenges (Calas & Smircich, 1999). She continues by saying:

*‘You can lose your identity in all the confusion. I am a much better mother for having time for myself and an au pair to help with the smaller things like taking them to their hobbies. Marriages fail, things fall apart if you don’t take time for yourself.’*

She now feels at this point in her company, having no employees is just fine. She and her husband have been busy working on a second small company together and it has taken a lot of time and effort. At this moment she is content with how things are and that has to be *‘good enough’*.

**Table 4. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Hanna**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Challenge, creativity, success (pull)	‘I worked in company where I had a lot of perks, but found it too technical, I’m a hands-on people person and I grew bored with that job, even though I was good at it!’
Independence, freedom, own boss (pull)	‘The whole work for someone else experience, I was over it and wanted something for myself’/ ‘I really felt like I was wasting my life there’/‘now as an entrepreneur I am liberated and free.
Money (pull)	‘I love doing this job, something I’m also very good at, and to be paid for this is a bonus, I feel very lucky to make a living from this’

**Katriina, Mehubileet**

Katriina is a 40 year old woman that is the founder and creator of Mehubileet party/event planning. Meetings were held on 2 occasions for lunch in a large shopping mall that followed with her narrative being told in a library. She has 3 children, ages 7, 6 and 5 months old and never exactly saw herself as an entrepreneur, but never fit in with her family’s background of economists and professors of economic history (her mother and father respectively). She started university (higher education in Finland) and received a BA in International Business, although her heart was

always yearning for art school and something creative. She pressed on however, and later received a Masters in International Business and through her studies met her husband who was a Canadian student in Finland at the time.

Together they moved back to Toronto for 1.5 years where they worked in a start-up and she helped with the exports and maintenance of the company. She felt however, that something was missing. That there was no real creativity or joy in what she was doing and that left an empty feeling. They returned to Finland where she got a job at HSE (Helsinki School of Economics) as a research coordinator, arranging meetings, conferences etc..., but was happy to get pregnant in 2006 and take some time off with her daughter. The years at home, she felt as if she was drifting, not really sure which direction to take her career, or even her life. She knew she loved being at home and was always an artsy, creative person who enjoyed acting and theatrics and was thinking if there was something she could do in that area. After her daughter's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday she received so many rave reviews and compliments she started to wonder if it was possible to actually create a business out of something so simple that she loves. Her initial thought was to just create special and amazing birthday parties, but quickly extended to corporate events. The business was created in 2009 and in 2010 they landed their first big customer, Ikea.

Building on the fact that entrepreneurship not only builds but breeds confidence, she beams as she says,

*'The biggest thing this business has done is build my confidence. I am proud of being that entrepreneur and to be doing something I am so passionate about.'*

Her narrative takes a slightly different turn as she gets a bit quiet when the conversation flows to importance and the weight of importance placed on work or family. There is obviously a struggle within herself (and all mompreneurs) as she says shyly,

*'Is it bad to say I love being a mom, but also love being an entrepreneur equally? I haven't stopped working one single day since becoming an entrepreneur, and in the mean time I have had 2 more children so that tells you something!'*

At the moment she feels particularly lucky as her husband has been able to stay home since last April with the children, so it has given her the opportunity to work more on the business and come back home for feedings, she clarifies the situation by stating

*'he is fully responsible for all other areas, such as taking them to school, making snacks, bringing them to their hobbies etc. and we also have a cleaning lady that comes every 2 weeks for the big jobs.'*

*'I feel a little bad saying the business is so important, but it's the truth. I think of my business all the time. But, I think of my kids all the time too. I know that if I put more time into the business it could expand more. I also know that if I put more time into the family, we could do more together, trips etc. It's really a double edge. At the moment I'm giving a lot more to the family than the businesses', she continues.*

**Table 5. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Katriina**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Challenge, creativity, success (pull)	'I completed business school, but my heart was always yearning for art school and something creative.'/ I was left with an empty feeling from every job I did.'
Work-life balance (push)	'I feel a little bad saying the business is so important, but it's the truth. I think of my business all the time. But, I think of my kids all the time too.'/ This is a business my family is proud of, my kids love testing out mom's new ideas, showing things off to their friends. It's part of who they are.'
Independence, freedom, own boss (pull)	'The biggest thing this business has done is build my confidence. I am proud of being that entrepreneur and to be doing something I am so passionate about.'

Her son is still an infant, and she has decided to breast feed exclusively which means she is in charge of the feedings at least for the next few months, but she admits it has been harder since the 3<sup>rd</sup> child was born. Her children however love the business, and are very active in not only promoting it to their friends, but love testing out mom's new ideas, and are *'big actors themselves'*. The title of mompreneur is one she wears with much pride. She recognizes that both jobs are

equally important and time maintenance is really essential, but it's part of her life. Her *'very busy life, which I love!'*

#### 4.1.2 Malta

##### **Maryrose, Across Limits Malta**

Maryrose is a 46 year old divorced Maltese woman with one 20 year old son. Maryrose currently holds a position of coordinator of the foundation for female entrepreneurship in Malta and is a mompreneur having started her first company, an import business in 1993 when her son was a few weeks old. She also works for Across Limits a company founded by another one of the mompreneur interviewees, Angele. Maryrose is an active, vibrant woman who wears many hats and is quick to say that with entrepreneurship:

*'You have to be a risk taker. It's not for everyone.'*

Meetings were held once in person during a conference here in Helsinki, but for the purpose of this thesis recorded interviews were conducted via Skype at her own home. Maryrose studied languages in college and left school when she was 18, but re-took up her studies 5 years ago where she received a degree in Management studies. She has a saying she sticks by regarding business students in Malta:

*'In Malta, people who study business end up teaching it and usually entrepreneurs here (in Malta) do not have a university degree, it's something in you or not.'*

Her brother who is 10 months younger is also an entrepreneur as was her father who has since passed. When she starts telling her narrative, she begins with the early days in her company and beams with pride, joy and enthusiasm, happy with memories of her son as a baby. She started her first company when her son *'was still in his maxi cozy'*. She recalls him running around their warehouse as a toddler and answering his mother's phone. She talks openly about her son's childhood in the business and how it is inseparable and it is clear she has fond memories of that time. Her son knew she was a business woman from the start and Maryrose talked about typical mompreneur feelings of guilt. She conveyed an assurance that she always set weekends aside for him and planned things they could do together that he too enjoyed.

Maryrose has always been a strong willed person who has done things her own way and felt that entrepreneurship was the best fit. She liked being able to be her own boss and to make her own salary without having others tell her how to conduct business. She notes that in Malta 20 years ago:

*'There were no daycare centers up until a few years ago. If you were a woman you'd have to leave your child with your mother if you worked, or you didn't work. It's that simple.'*

Today she reports that today there are day care centers and a tax incentive to help women become entrepreneurs; however, 20 years ago when she started her business, the only choice was to bring her son with her. When Maryrose started her business she put up her own home as collateral and after many struggles with the bank for a relatively small loan of 10, 000eur she decided that *'failure was not an option. If I failed, I would be out of a home, my son would be out of a home, so I knew I had to give this 100%.'* She had her mother help occasionally with things like hanging up or taking down the laundry, but she had no help from her husband at the time with any housework including the cooking of dinner.

*'In Malta, it's still a very macho type of culture. I would work just as hard as my husband, harder because I had my son, but still, when we came home, I had to prepare and clean up after the meal. Men didn't like taking orders from me either, or even asking me questions. I had to tell them over again, you can speak with me, you are dealing with me, I am the owner. In the beginning maybe I was a bit shy when sending a bill, or asking for payment, but I gained confidence. I provided a service and I deserve to be paid on time and that was hard for some men to listen to, maybe they were used to doing a different kind of business.'*

As Maryrose is in daily contact with mompreneurs she is familiar with the fields of trade they are usually associated with. In Malta, the most common businesses are those related to handy-crafts including making of cards, traditional lace making, baking of traditional and trendy foods like cupcakes, as well as businesses like hair dressers and clothing makers. However, the term mompreneur is one that isn't commonly used in Malta. She says that for herself, she is always a mother first, as *'being a mother is something I am most proud of'*. She identifies with the term mompreneur, but says it is simply not often used in Malta. Being a female entrepreneur itself has offered its own struggles especially in Malta. Further, Maryrose has a bit of outside help from a cleaning woman that comes just half a morning once a week to help with household tasks. This is something quite new for Maltese women she explains,

*‘Usually families lived close together and the mother or mother-in law took care of the household chores if the mother had to work, but today many women have their mother’s working as well, and with busy lives the household tasks get pushed to the bottom of the list. Also, it can be seen as a bit of a status symbol as well, that I can afford help.’*

Maryrose feels she absolutely had to work harder being a female and a mother. Some people didn’t take her seriously, some didn’t believe in her company, but what mattered is that she was taking care of her son. Looking back, she states, she is ‘*proud*’ of what she has achieved and would do things the same if she could.

**Table 6. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Maryrose**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Nature of job (push)	‘Coming from a family with my dad and brother as entrepreneurs, I knew this was the best career choice for me’/ I wanted to have this business and failure was not an option/’ I am proud of what I have achieved and would do the same over again’
Independence, freedom, own boss (pull)	‘I love being able to be my own boss and to make my own salary without having others tell her how to conduct business.’/ ‘ I only have to answer for myself and take care of my son. Not being dependent on anyone else to do that is important.’
Flexible hours (pull)	‘I travel a lot, and work in the evenings if I need. When my son was a baby I’d take him to work with me in his maxi cozy. I worked hard, but they were my hours.’

**Angele, Across Limits**

Angele is a 37 year old divorced Maltese woman and mother to a 10 year old son, as well as being the founder and CEO of Across Limits a dynamic Maltese technology research and consulting SME with its roots firmly planted in innovation and ICT. Our first conversation is

conducted via Skype in between her other meetings. She immediately apologizes for her lack of time, but states that as she is away from Malta 2-3 times a month, sometimes for a week at a time that when she is in Malta she has to have meetings with people based there.

Angele has always been interested in ICT, and has worked since she was 16 years old teaching local people how to use Windows and other computer programs. She found computers challenging and fascinating and received a BA in computer science when she was 21 years old. In the university of which she was one of the only females in the ICT department, she learned a lot about herself, men and business. *'Most things are a lot less complicated than we give them credit for'* she says, referring with a laugh to both men and computers, and maybe also business. She recognized early on that she wanted to make a change in the IT scene in Malta. She and her then partner set up their first company where she conducted cold calls. The company created websites which back in 1996 in Malta was something quite new and it was a challenging job where she gained a lot of experience and confidence, but the company eventually couldn't succeed. From there she became a software production manager with a team under her. She enjoyed the job, and the company was briefly successful winning an award for their production of a documentary, but the company eventually folded. Angele has *'a bit of outside help'* from a cleaning woman that comes half a morning once a week to help with household tasks.

Not one to back down at a challenging opportunity Angele and the marketing director together forged a new company, which after a year no longer worked on a personal level for Angele and she pulled out. She sold her share and lost a lot of money, but she again learned lessons. Her family during this time showed little support for her entrepreneurial spirit. Her grandfather had been and unsuccessful entrepreneur which left lasting marks on her father who never embraced the entrepreneurial spirit. She isn't shy about talking about how she gets bored with things easily and is confident when saying:

*'I have a low boredom threshold and even though I believe my father had a real fear of entrepreneurship, I found it a challenge and still do.'*

After the closing of yet another company, Angele fell into a 3 month black hole. She was completely *'burned out'* and didn't know what to do next. Since she had always enjoyed teaching she returned to that, this time in a school for teenage boys. She enjoyed teaching, but it hardly offered the challenge of running your own company. After 2 very happy years teaching she wanted something new and was chosen to be an expert IT developer in Brussels in a large EU project in which she as a Maltese IT female expert fit in perfectly. She was here able to use IT to help society in things such as building companies, enabling work forces. She saw that *'IT can help as an*

*enabling force for society*'. When she realized this project was ending, she thought it was a perfect time to have a baby. She was then 27 years old and things were slowing down in the big EU project, and it was then that she had her son.

While she was teaching in the boys' school she had a colleague that had a printing press and together with her then husband and 2 others, they created Across Limits which she gladly heads with her '*crazy ideas*'.

**Table 7. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Angele**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Work-life balance (push)	'I noticed immediately after giving birth I was bored again. Even though my son was great, I wanted to be back at work, and had to combine both.' / 'Although I can't entirely choose my own hours, I can make time for my son and feel like I'm making a difference for women all over the EU'.
Challenge, creativity, success (pull)	'I have a low boredom threshold'/ I enjoyed teaching, but it hardly offered the challenge of running your own company.
Independence, freedom, own boss (pull)	' I see IT can help as an enabling force for society and this is really important to me'

For Angele it was clear she was a woman who couldn't stay in the same spot for long, within 3 weeks of giving birth she returned to work, again having been plagued with the boredom that hit her before.

*'I noticed immediately after having him that although I was still the same person, the same business savvy woman I had also softened a bit. I decided then onwards not to work weekends and too take a tiny pause. Perhaps without my son I would have been able to do more quantity wise, but I would not have been as happy (in life) without him.'*



## **Mary, Green Skip Services**

Mary is a 61 year old, 43 years married, a mother of 4 and granny of 6 who 21 years ago decided together with her sister to go into business for themselves. Our first conversation is conducted via Skype in between her day at work (\*\*Note: She is the most senior of the women interviewed, however she started her business at an age the other women in the interviews currently are and was therefore seen as a wonderful asset and look into the possible future of the other women.). Mary is a busy women, not only is she the head of her company, she also holds the role of president of the national council of women in Malta. Mary starts off by saying,

*'I was 40 before my own life started. Before that time when I started my own business, I worked in my father's business or my husband's, you know filling in gaps here and there. Now I get to create'.*

Mary's journey into the world of mompreneurship started over 25 years ago. She comes from a family of entrepreneurs, as her father, husband and even grandmother were all entrepreneurs. Today some of her children are also entrepreneurs, and although it was in her blood, it was not something she saw herself doing. She recognized the entrepreneurial fire in her own daughter when she began selling cakes at daycare at about 6 years old, but for Mary it was already an ok life, raising children and helping out in the businesses where she could.

At the time the business opportunity arose she was working in her husband's company and at home with her youngest child, who was then 5. She was familiar with a British couple that had a waste management company that wasn't very successful. She had asked them to come to Malta and they had refused on numerous occasions, but eventually they agreed and this gave Mary the idea of creating the company essentially from the ground up, but this time in Malta, with whatever they could salvage from the UK.

It was just a 'skeleton' of a company that dealt with waste management, something women in Malta never would have thought of doing, as traditional businesses run by women in Malta are hair dressers, lace making, law, baked goods, teaching etc., however she talked with her sister and together they decided they would use all their inheritance money and give it a chance. Mary is adamant in telling that in Malta, it is more of a male dominated society and you are generally required to have your husband with you at the bank. *'Either your husband or father have to vouch for you at a bank and that was no different in my case, but I fought it!'*. She tells about fighting with the bank not only to leave her husband out of the entire process, including not using any of his money or names on loans, but to also get the full value of a small piece of land on which they were going to set up the waste management site.

Mary openly talks about the struggles of work-life balance and notes that many women in Malta divorce or separate once they decide to start a business. She gives reasons as the partner not being very supportive or the women themselves feeling overwhelmed with guilt. She has a cleaner come to her home 2x a week to help with tasks as she is busy as the moment. She advises openly not to even start thinking of starting your own business if your partner isn't entirely supportive. She continues:

*'My husband is very supportive and I honestly could not do it without him and being a wife and mother comes first. My identity, I make it very known that I have a family and don't see it as a negative thing at all. Especially in Malta, knowing that you are mother, you have extra skills. You can manage your time more wisely; I do things correctly the first time because I do not have the time to do them a second.'*

**Table 8. Motivating factors that lead to mompreneurship, Mary**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Joined/took over family business (push)	'Malta is a male dominated society, getting loans from a bank without your husband's signature was a challenge, but I fought it and did everything on my own'/My sister and I took our inheritance and started this together.
Work-life balance (push)	I do things correctly the first time because I do not have the time to do them a second.'
Independence, freedom, own boss (pull)	'I was 40 before my own life started. Before that time when I started my own business, I worked in my father's business or my husband's, you know filling in gaps here and there. Now I get to create and inspire young women all over the EU'.

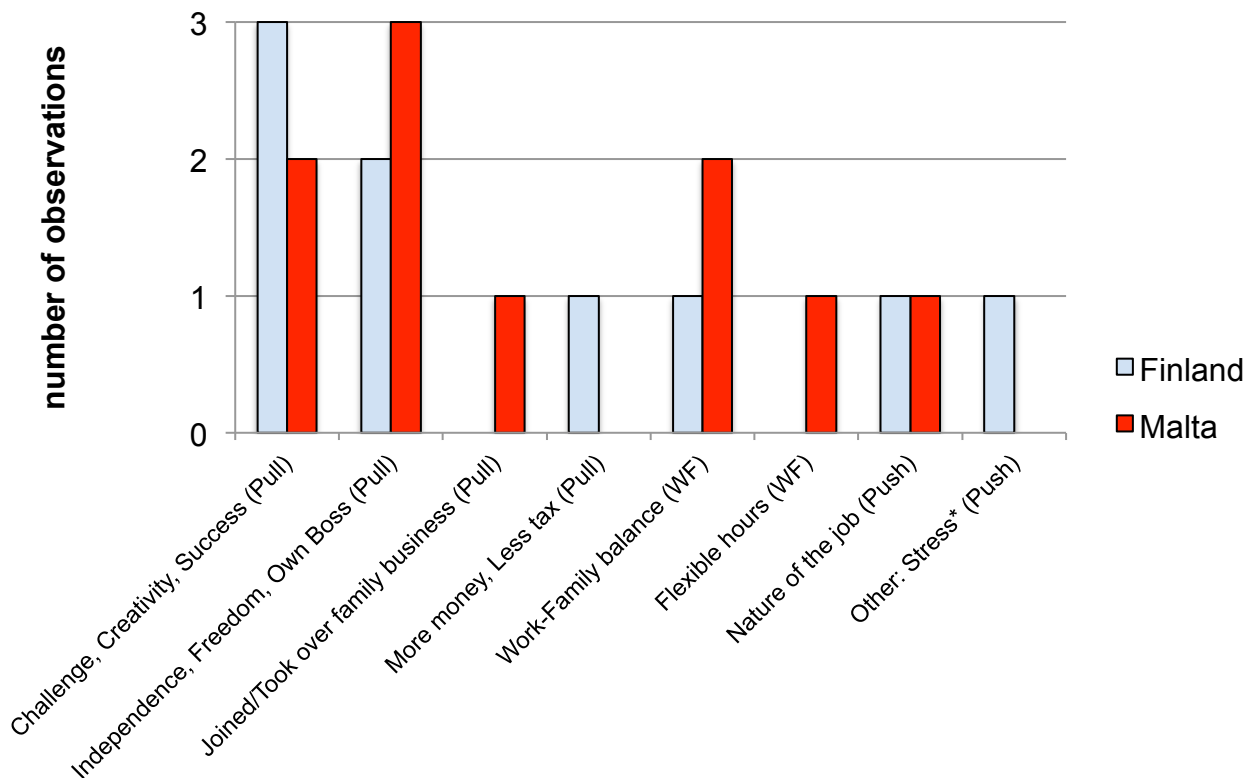
Overall, Mary has become a source of inspiration and influence for young women all over the European Union. Today she is one of the entrepreneur ambassadors traveling around the 27 European states promoting female entrepreneurship especially to younger generations. She ends our

talk by telling that Malta has always had strong female entrepreneurs, but that they were ‘hidden’. She ends:

*‘These women, they sold vegetables on the sides of the roads, they were seamstresses, they sold rabbits, pastries, and some even like my grandmother owned wine bars. This isn’t a lifestyle for everyone; you have to do what is best for you and your family. It’s either in you or it’s not.’*

#### 4.1.3 Motivation factors leading to mompreneurship

Even though motivation factors are only part of mompreneurial identity, from the narrative we can elucidate a difference in motivation from the Finnish versus the Maltese group as summarized in figure 1. From the narratives it was not possible to pinpoint *the* main reason, thus the 3 major factors were identified and listed (tables 3 – 8).



**Figure 1: motivational factors identified from the narratives according to Hughes (2006); Pull stands for pull factors, WF for Work-Family balance factors and Push for Push factors.**

Derived from the pull-, push-, and work-family balance-factors in figure 1 the major components are summarized in table 9. Since the data can be directly compared to the study done by Hughes (2006) on female and male entrepreneurial motivational factors, this data is added to the

table for comparison. The relevance and implications of this comparison are discussed later in chapter 5.1.2.

**Table 9. Typology of motivations**

	Finland (%)	Malta (%)	Hudges (2006) Women	Hudges (2006) Men
Classic Entrepreneurs (Pull)	67	56	53	72
Work-Family Entrepreneurs	11	33	25	7
Forced Entrepreneurs (Push)	22	11	22	22

#### **4.2 Defining mompreneurs from their own words**

The mompreneurs all showed great openness when expressing themselves in their narratives. Some people ‘click’ /connect better than others and that might have something to do with the length of the narratives or the amount of personal details revealed, however regardless all women showed great pride in talking about their lives and futures. This next section will discuss the key themes identified by the reviewer as most valid empirical rich results derived from the motivational factors and which became apparent through the narratives. The themes revealed here exemplify themes directly related to and are inseparable from the mompreneurs not only mompreneurs who share similar, yet different motivations for entrepreneurship (Hudges, 2006).

When finding threads between these mompreneurs that represent their sense-making and identity perception, the following solid themes are revealed: Liberty/Freedom, Pride, Work-Life Balance (mother’s) Guilt, and Personal role definition. An interesting observation was discovered as all of the themes (aside from work-life balance) are pull factors. Children, especially having children whilst being a mompreneur can have a positive push effect on some mompreneurs (Kirkwood, 2009). For that reasoning alone, work-life balance is not seen as a push or pull factor rather somewhere in the middle, offering motivation and challenge simultaneously.

##### **4.2.1 Theme 1: Liberty/Freedom**

It becomes evident in the identity constructing of mompreneurs one of the leading themes is liberty or freedom. This is exemplified in many of the narratives, with all of the mompreneurs in both countries discussing the feeling of freedom as a key motivator to bring forward their entrepreneurial careers. Liberty/Freedom ranked as the highest motivating factor by the Maltese women and second highest motivating factor by the Finnish mompreneurs. Being liberated is nicely exemplified in this following quote by Hanna, Finland:

*'I'm a free spirit, I've never been a very obedient worker, I felt limited by the 8-16 routine, and now I am **liberated** and free from all of that. Today after 5 years I still have no interest in working for anyone else'.*

In the sense-making of liberty/freedom it is clear that both cultures identified with their liberty being increased on how and when to work, freedom financially, freedom from a large organization, and freedom from the 9-17 routine. Mary, Malta had similar feelings,

*'I was 40 before my own life started. Before that time when I started my own business, I worked in my father's business or my husband's, you know filling in gaps here and there. Now **I get to create**'.*

All of the women identified having the ability to make your own hours, create and develop ideas and expand on them doing something you love are one of the best parts of being a mompreneur. Katriina, Finland adds:

*'Being able to create great parties for children and companies is a huge passion. I **feel so lucky** I can just wake up and start planning something great that will make people happy'*

*'No one can tell me what to do and that helps. I run my business with 7 women here there are always kids running around, it all balances me and allows me to be free and live how it suits me (and my son) best.'* Angele, Malta

The resounding expression of freedom/liberty to create something they believe in, set up their own schedules and serve customers (in which ever form) has been a great factor in contributing to these mompreneurs' identity. They have all stated in some form that they are better people for being able to have the freedom to live as they choose.

#### 4.2.2 Theme 2: Pride

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the definition of Pride is, 'a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements' (www.oxforddictionaries.com). The mompreneurs in this study spoke openly about pride and what they are most proud of. Finland has a culture where pride is not something openly boasted about. '*Ylpeys käy lankeemuksen edellä*' is a Finnish proverb meaning the same as the English proverb, '*Pride goes before the fall*' and is one used often. The idea behind this being that pride, displaying wealth and boasting are some of the

most grave sins one can commit. All sin talk aside; a few of these mompreneurs share no shame in talking about their achievements as mothers and business women (www.everything2.com). They construct their pride as part of themselves and as something that is an achievement and also something to promote. Maltese women view pride slightly different than their Finnish counterparts and this is exemplified in the narratives, as best shown in the following statements:

*'I am proud of being that entrepreneur and to be doing something I am so passionate about.'*  
Katriina, Finland

*'My skills I feel are a gift that I have gotten for whatever reason and I would do this job for free I love it so much'* - Hanna, Finland

*' I am proud of making a difference in my own way in this big world we live in... and it's not important for me to receive prizes and awards, but if I manage to make things better for even one person, then I will look back on my deathbed and smile.'* Angele, Malta

*'I am proud to be an inspiration and influence for young women all over the European Union. Today I am one of the entrepreneur ambassadors traveling around the all the European states promoting female entrepreneurship especially to younger generations. My grandmother had a grocery store/wine bar; it's something I'm very proud to have in me.'* – Mary, Malta

*'Looking back on things I am of what I have achieved and would do things the exactly same if I could. I love being able to share my experiences with young women all over Malta and Europe and to show them what is possible.'* - Maryrose, Malta

It should be noted that the third Finnish mompreneur found pride very difficult to talk about. When the subject came about she found it initially hard to elaborate on, but given the space started:

*' I am **going to be** most proud if I ever get this business going so well that I am can actually make a living, I'm not sure if I feel proud now about it, but I do feel very good when a customer compliments and is happy with their product. I look back and see I have made accomplishments and that makes me happy about the business.'* - Sanna, Finland

Some of these statements were quite unexpected. The background of the researcher would indicate that the perceived results would include proud, strong Maltese women, thus in that regard,

the statements of the Maltese women were somewhat expected. Despite Malta's clearly machismo image as stated through the narratives and through personal experience and the previous literature (Abela, 2004), Maltese women would not be considered so called 'shrinking violets', i.e. timid, shy, quiet women without voices. It was no surprise that the women would find themselves in a position where they are proud of making differences and paying it forward through their current work, and although they have personal pride in their achievements, they all described their current work and taking their knowledge to the schools and especially to young women in Malta and abroad as very fulfilling. The idea behind the Maltese sample was that of not only being able to achieve something today, but to have it perpetuated for generations forward through their current work. That can be seen as Maltese women today having overcome struggles simply for being a different gender have decided to provide as much support and knowledge possible to future generations so that Malta can continue to move forward, along with the rest of Europe in terms of female employment, entrepreneurship, education and employment. This is the message of Across Limits, the organization where all three of the women in this sample are involved in in one way or another.

In contrast two of the statements from the Finnish sample were most surprising. Sanna, (Almondella) provided perhaps the most anticipated type of statement, which in itself proved difficult to produce. When it was revealed, it was filled with restraint and without any bold or flashy images of her company or personal pride.

#### *4.2.3 Theme 3: Work-Life Balance*

As mentioned in previous literature, women struggle in the face of societal expectations in regards to motherhood, career and family (Duberly & Carrigan, 2012). The narratives provide an insight into the lives of these mompreneurs navigating the often complex world of mompreneurship and motherhood. All of the women spoken openly about their children, and further talks have continued outside the direct narrative setting where children and work-life balances were discussed openly. Flexible scheduling inside their own work schedules and for some of the mompreneurs working from home, provide them to be a mom when necessary and urgent, such as in the case of illness, but also provides them the freedom to be able to work when they need once the child(ren) are asleep. However, as flexible as it sounds, it can provide stress when you are the only one responsible for your business AND your children. The following samples from the narratives exemplify the struggles of work-life balance.

*'I haven't stopped working one single day since becoming an entrepreneur, and in the meantime I have had 2 more children so that tells you something. I feel like I have 2 jobs, and I couldn't be busier. I have to really plan to use my time as efficiently as possible.'* Katriina, Finland

*'Being a mom and an entrepreneur is actually like having 2 jobs but it's never enough time. I only work from 9-16 as I pick up my daughter from school, and if I'm in the middle of something it's a bit annoying to stop. I will think about where I left off, but I try not to work while she is awake'* Sanna, Finland

*'I try to keep evenings and weekends free and when the kids go to bed I have time to work, but I still feel like my time is always limited. The au pair helps with the taking of the kids to their hobbies and activities and with doing the shopping which would generally take a great deal of time.'* Hanna, Finland

*'I take the time to do things the first time, because I have no time to do things over again. I wish I had 36 hours in the day, so I wouldn't have to rush so much and be able to focus on other projects.'* Mary, Malta

*'After my son was born I started to slow down and take proper weekends off free. I also take my son with me when possible when I go abroad which is 2-3x a month. It's hard on him, and his school administrators have been concerned with our family life, not because I'm an entrepreneur, but because I travel so much. We do his homeworking through Skype, we talk daily a few times a day, and when he has exams I block the whole month, no trips abroad. It's hard, but no one can tell me what to do so that helps.'* Angele, Malta

The work-life balance equation has been discussed in literature for years and will likely continue. The women in this narrative have expressed they have had to employ outside help in order to maintain the simple things, like a clean home and sometimes childcare. The Finnish women have all spoke of having help in the form of a cleaner, an au pair and of a stay at home partner. In contrast the Maltese women have mentioned having a cleaner and help from their mothers when the child was young (Mary) and currently (Angele). This was explained further by Maryrose:

*'Families in Malta still continue to live close to each other, well Malta is small'* she laughs and continues, *'my mother watched my son when he was very small and I couldn't take him to work'*.



Angele also adds, *'I took him to the office when he was small, or my mom helped out. Now I travel and since the divorce things are harder on him, so family is important.'*

Lastly, when looking at constructing family, the Finnish narratives didn't include any mention of help from family members, including mothers (in-law) 2 of which are located in Canada, sisters (in-law) or any other kind of family help with the children or the care of them. The Maltese narratives in contrast mentioned family helping with household chores, childcare and general support from the onset of the narratives. The idea of a family unit in Malta is very important and especially with distances in general being close, the ability to see family often is a possibility. Nowadays, however, *'grandmothers are working (such as Mary) and they aren't able to watch the grandchild(ren), but if they are retired and able, they are the first choice.'* Maryrose explained. Distances in Finland are larger than in Malta, which might have an impact on the ability of grandparents to help with childcare, however as the daycare system in Finland is an efficient one, the likely explanation (it was not discussed by any of the Finnish mompreneurs) is that families choose a fine daycare close to their home without considering family help). Furthermore, as it is not in the Finns nature to boast and reveal intimate details close to their hearts, mention of an extended family was completely excluded and not questioned.

#### 4.2.4 Theme 4: (Mother's) guilt

A topic spoken about by mothers whenever they gather and by the mompreneurs in this narrative is mother's guilt. Guilt is something that is spoken about freely and openly as it is something that every mother can relate to, the women in these narratives being no different. In speaking about guilt it is often done in a slightly defensive tone, as in some of these narratives. Some mothers may feel under attack and through their own choices feel intense feelings of guilt. In constructing the identity of these mompreneurs it would be impossible to exclude the guilt factor.

*'I try to focus on them when they are at home'*, a statement from Katriina, Finland, was repeated almost verbatim by Angele, Maryrose, Sanna and Hanna (likely not by Mary as her youngest is 26 and oldest 41 years old). This clearly reveals that as mompreneurs the intention is there to be ever present and available even if it is not always possible. Guilt is what helps change their actions and make decisions that best provide for their family and current work situation. It is guilt that helps mompreneurs realize what is important and prioritize, organize and legitimize their actions on a daily basis. In many cases these businesses were set up in order to give their children better lives and to be able to spend more time with their families, however time conflicts with these intentions

often causing stress and tension in both of the samples. The statements below best exemplify these intense feelings of guilt that have helped form the mompreneurial identity of these women.

*'I often feel guilt when it comes to my son, I have toned things way down since he was born, but still when the school accuses you of causing stress in your child because you travel for work, it makes you feel like a bad mother. I know I'm not, that he is a happy boy, and I am doing the best I can for him and for us, but it still isn't nice.'* Angele, Malta

*'Sometimes he would ask me to go to the park and I'd have to tell him later, and I felt bad, but I would make it up to him on weekends we would do things together.'* Maryrose, Malta

*I feel a little bad saying the business is so important, but it's the truth. I think of my business all the time. But, I think of my kids all the time too. I know that if I put more time into the business it could expand more. I also know that if I put more time into the family, we could do more together, trips etc. It's really a double edge. At the moment I'm giving a lot more to the family than the businesses'. Katriina, Finland*

*'I realize that I'm not always 'present' with the family and that I am always feeling there is something that can be improved or can think of new things I want to add to the webpages. I try not to work until she has gone to bed though.'* Sanna, Finland.

*'It's hard to relax even at home, because I work from home. I feel bad that I can't be 100% present. I can't relax if I know I have things to do. I can't focus if I know they need something'.* Hanna, Finland

These examples above simply bring forth the very basic connection between not only mompreneurs but mothers from all cultures. In spite of the differences between these two cultures, the fundamental basis of motherhood is still identical and it's the fragile balance of managing it all is something that these mompreneurs strive for. However, regardless of the guilt that these mompreneurs feel, they all concur they would unanimously not change their decision to become mompreneurs.

*'My grandmother, father and even some of my children are entrepreneurs. It's something that is a part of you or it's not. It's not easy, but nothing is. Everybody needs to know what works for them. There are no rules. It's in you, just like being a mompreneur is in you.'* Mary, Malta.

#### 4.2.5 Theme 5: Personal role definition

The uniqueness of the identity of a mompreneur is one that is clear to describe. On one hand they are balancing their own business (work) and the motherhood (life). The definition of the role of the mompreneur is clearly defined for them. The objective to balance work and life is one that can provide more challenges than a working mother will face. The goal for these mompreneurs was not for financial gain, although that is surely a bonus as exemplified by Hanna, Finland, *'I love this work, I am so happy to be able to do this that I would do it for free, the bonus is to be paid for it!'* However, it should be noted that the Maltese narratives and other Finnish narratives made no mention of finances or reasoning for continuing mompreneurship aside from Mary, Malta who said, *'it's nice to make my own salary'*. There was also no need to defend their choices at least not harshly in these narratives. These women told their stories and sometimes through their very speaking itself it was clear they were reflecting on their current and past experiences as mompreneurs.

By examining personal role definition we take a closer look at the individuals themselves and in essence their individual meaning of life and their most defined role in their own words.

*'I sometimes get very confused with my identity. With the flu, work, kids, kids sick, school, my husband travelling I get overwhelmed, without my au pair, I could not maintain this all as a normal life. I most strongly identify with being an entrepreneur. I am proud of being a mom, but it doesn't define me. It doesn't define who I am.'* Hanna, Finland

*'I don't see being a mom and an entrepreneur as an advantage. Maybe I am too soft. I see being a mompreneur as having 2 jobs, and it **should** be seen a plus, (potential) investors should see that, but maybe I'm looked as a just a kept woman... but I don't know. For me, I find myself more as a mom sometimes and somewhat of an entrepreneur other times, usually not both at the same time.'* Sanna, Finland.

*'At this moment, my son is still nursing, and all the focus throughout the day is on him. I don't feel like much of a mompreneur at the moment, but I do know that I have 2 jobs, I just want to get back to the entrepreneurial one as soon as he is done nursing.'* Katriina, Finland.

These Finnish narratives show us the struggle these women have daily regarding their roles as mothers and entrepreneurs. For Hanna, without having help from an au pair she feels she would be unable to be the mother or entrepreneur that she sees herself as. For Sanna, it's one or another;

she is able to separate the roles as needed and without (virtually) influencing the other. The last Finnish narrative from Katriina is taken at a time when she was nursing an infant. Her vision and identity might be entirely different in a few months, once the nursing stops, but as we are looking at the narratives at this precise moment in these womens' lives we take her narrative with its value as is. She is perhaps at most at odds with her identity as she is aware she is able and wants to do more for her business, but feels the restriction of being the nutrition provider for her child. The Maltese women exemplify the identities of themselves in the following statements.

*'Being a mother firstly is something I am most proud of, of course I am proud and I identify with being an entrepreneur, but my son he is really something amazing!'* Maryrose, Malta

*'I know in my life I would never have been as happy if I didn't have my son. Because of him I stopped pushing myself across limits. I took a step back and was able to slow down, become softer and to have balance. I am his mother first everything else after.'* Angele, Malta

*'When it comes to my identity, being a wife and mother absolutely comes first'* Mary, Malta

In these Maltese narratives the role of mother or wife and mother comes up as the front runner for representing ones identity. The role of entrepreneur doesn't necessarily take on a 2<sup>nd</sup> place role, rather equal too (although mentioned later). The intention and the emphasis was on the role of mother (wife) being the closest to their heart and business mind at this moment in time. Their identity and the desire to balance work and life is a challenge in Maltese culture as the women's role is still seen as not necessarily *in* the home, but responsible for the children and home. Maltese mompreneurs revealed that the household chores are still exclusively seen as the responsibility of the female, whether she is working, staying at home or somewhere in between.

In contrast from the Finnish mompreneurs we have learned that men play an active and reasonably equal role in the care of household duties. Division of labor is generally equal and done by the one who according to one Finnish mompreneur, 'hates the least'. There is an understanding that the household duties are for everyone, children included, with children in Finland given regular tasks around the house.

In contrast to the Maltese mompreneurs, Finnish mompreneurs emphasis was not on the home or motherhood, rather a desire to balance it all while being able to move forward in both their business and professional careers. However, it has to remain in mind that these narratives are just snapshots of the current situation, an interpretation of the internal dialog revealed in which ever manner comfortable to the narrators. These narratives are clearly situational depending on many

different discourses including the mood of the narrator and therefore no generalizations can be deducted. Specifically stating that specific set of characteristics can be attributed to the identity of mompreneurs is impossible, as there are evidently a number of various elements in place that contribute to the overall picture of a Maltese or Finnish mompreneur.

As an understanding of the meaning of personal identity within the narratives is identified, it is revealed that the narratives proved the mompreneurs are trying to combine motherhood and entrepreneurship, in a coherent way, the best way they know possible. Some are doing everything on their own, some have outside help and others have a combination of both to bring forth the true identity of these women, one must also be aware of personal limitations and weaknesses.

Additionally, when looking at the role of the fathers, discussions with the Finnish mompreneurs in these narratives the following statements were revealed, *the ease in which a father is able to take paternity leave is grossly over-estimated*, (she had asked to be anonymous with that and other statements). Another continued, *everyone thinks that it's so simple, but firstly, they (KELA) take a huge amount of his salary away, then they put restrictions on time and dates. Lastly it was said, 'for example he wanted to take time after our child was one year old. He was in the middle of a 2 year study-programme at the time, and the school wouldn't allow it. We opted for him to take the leave anyway, as this is the last chance to be with our child while she/he is this small, and he lost his study rights. In a year we will see what we do, but this is how he wanted to spend his paternity leave and take part of raising our child.'*

When looking at support offered in Malta, no governmental aid or program is in place to have father's take paternity leave or otherwise. According to [www.gov.mt](http://www.gov.mt), Malta's governmental pages, 'Maltese law does not cater specifically for paternity leave, however in terms of the Parental Leave Regulations (S.L. 452.78) and the Minimum Special Leave Entitlement Regulations (S.L. 452.101) fathers are entitled to 1 paid day of birth leave and parental unpaid leave of up to 4 months (availed of in periods of one month each) until the child has attained the age of 8 years'. Criticisms of governmental systems are nothing new, but for the sake of the accuracy in this thesis, over-generalizations on the ease and access fathers have to leave, had to be clarified, especially for readers outside of Finland.

Lastly, the topic of re-doing gender never was specifically elaborated upon; however as mompreneurs the topic cannot be entirely avoided. Overcoming gendered assumptions is something that proved to be a great challenge in Malta where business is still viewed as a masculine thing (personal reference, Maryrose). The narratives further revealed that overall a family friendly environment is ideal with the children either being a part of or somehow incorporated with the business, if even in a small way (Ahl, 2004; Head, 2013). This can be from making the work place family

#### *4.2.6. Cultural differences*

##### *4.2.6.1 Pride*

Regarding many of the themes, the women in both cultures were vastly similar and in accordance to previous literature on mompreneurs regarding the themes identified: Liberty/Freedom, Pride, Work-Life Balance (mother's) Guilt, and Personal role definition. (Rogers & White, 1998). The greatest differences and the ones which are highlighted here between the Maltese and Finnish mompreneurs is how they regard pride and personal role definition. Starting with Finland, there was modesty and a note of self-doubt, in Sanna's description regarding pride, but as she continued to contemplate the entire situation, a sense of accomplishment did come through her statement as well. This is very typical with previous literature regarding Finnish shame (Mustavuori, 2010), as boasting and showing pride for a Finns nature wouldn't be expressed first and foremost; however, the statements by the other two Finnish mompreneurs (both of whom are married to Canadians) were unexpected. The statements were filled with self-pride and even boasting, both of which are not readily associated with Finnish culture or identity. Both statements were given without hesitation or shame and were offered in a way that suggested they were genuine statements these women feel represents their current identity. In contrast to the Maltese statements these showed more of a personal satisfaction in things achieved, without mention of paying it forward and without apologies.

Maltese women conveyed a pride essentially though their actions regarding their family and what they are able to provide to future generations. Their pride comes from an entirely different place, yes pride for their achievements is mentioned, but it is not paramount to who they are. Their pride comes from being able to achieve something they have created and to have it flourish in their personal communities. This is similar to previous studies conducted on Mexican Americans who maintain a close sense of 'familialism' much like the Maltese as both are close-knit Catholic countries (Darmanin, 2002; Arce 1981), and who share their personal role identification.

For the mompreneurs in Malta used in this study, working together with other women offered a sense of security and support. This was something that with the Finnish mompreneurs wasn't mentioned, as each of the Finnish mompreneurs worked independently.

##### *4.2.6.2 Personal role definition*

When looking at their personal role definitions, Finnish mompreneurs were in conflict of their own when trying to express the exact role they most associate with. There was a clearly conveyed conflict with all of the Finnish women, who expressed a desire for more time to be available for their businesses and family (in that order) in order to achieve the greatest potential in

both. Hanna explicitly said, *'being a mother does not define me'* when talking about carrying both titles of mom and entrepreneur.

Maltese mompreneurs in this study all identified first and foremost as being a mother/wife. Even Angele who was the least expressive about her son still identified with being a mother as something that was significant and inseparable from who she is as exemplified in her statement, *'I might have been able to do more without him, but I would not have been such a good person'*. Children have clearly given the Maltese mompreneurs a greater sense of purpose and identifying strongly as a mother is something Maltese women were not ashamed to convey.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Mompreneurship is a significant and forward-thinking phenomenon that has been a part of the entrepreneur family for centuries. Mompreneurs have not only contributed to the household income, but have expanded mother's sense of being and overall family enjoyment as opposed to traditional employment (Rehman & Frisby, 2000). Mompreneurs have skillfully attempted to balance the home and their desired business outlet creatively whilst maintaining their sense of self and managing the demands of both (Kelan, 2008).

The purpose of the study has been to study a gap in the current mompreneurship literature, which provides very little information on how mompreneurs view their identity and make sense of who they are. Furthermore, current research has yet to make a comparison between two such polar opposite yet similarly European countries, Finland and Malta.

The above gap was studied through the use of narrative interviews from six mompreneurs in which the mompreneurs were able to freely tell the stories regarding their lives, entrepreneurship, motherhood, and anything else they felt needed to be revealed. The interpretation of their narratives was conducted in line with *verstehen* or *understanding*, a tradition which allows for an interpretation of the narratives and actions of the mompreneurs (Welch et al., 2011).

The ultimate objective in this thesis was to answer the following research question:

**How do mompreneurs in Finland and Malta make sense of themselves in the roles of both mother and entrepreneur?**

This study on mompreneurship offers a new dimension to the previous studies on mompreneurs. Unique traits that make up key themes of mompreneurial identity of six mompreneurs (3 from Finland and 3 from Malta) have been studied. The self-narratives provided a resource to extract key themes that in turn make sense of mompreneurial identity. A qualitative

approach was used to gain intimate knowledge of the mompreneurs and to ensure rich data throughout the research process. Through regular contact, personal interactions and regular reflection bonds were made that could not have been established using a quantitative research angle (Stake, 2005). Through analysis of these narratives the following themes were revealed that represent their sense-making and identity perception: Liberty/Freedom, Pride, Work-Life Balance, (mother's) Guilt, and personal role definition.

Mompreneurs identifying and functioning in different roles is not any groundbreaking revelation; the mompreneurs in this narrative have not transcended any barriers or conquered any mountains aside from personal ones that in themselves are significant. These narratives represent solid, hard-working, creative and driven women from both cultures and in this study we sought to understand how mompreneurs view their own roles in society and within themselves. Extensive reviewing of literature on the topic of mompreneurship, work-life balance, motherhood and narrative interviewing was done and common threads drawn out throughout the process. The expected results were that the women would be vastly similar in their sense-making and self-identification. The results showed that this was partially true.

From the very onset of the study, changes had to be made in the type of mompreneur used for this study. Initially mompreneurs who started their businesses after their children were born were targeted, however when seeking out Maltese mompreneurs it was impossible (within certain time constraints) to locate any mompreneurs who fit this criteria. It was then decided to have mompreneurs who had their children prior to starting businesses also included in this study, but only in the Maltese sample to offer even more contrast to the Finnish sample. When the narratives were reviewed striking differences were immediately apparent. Even though identities are related to the way others construct and view them, the mompreneurs were able to convey their personal histories and view-points clearly and without hesitation. All of the women were clear in vocalizing what role is of most significance and the reasoning behind that feeling.

Through the process of narrative interviewing/story-telling the mompreneurs were free to reveal as much or as little as they chose. In the empirical section of this thesis the key themes were revealed and studied in relation to each individual mompreneur and in comparison with the opposite country. Similarities and differences were found and traits were identified that related to culture and personal beliefs which are exemplified below. The results of the study contribute to previous research in two levels that being the differences in the way these mompreneurs self-identified and their motivations for entering mompreneurship.



## ***5.1 Contributions to existing literature***

### *5.1.1 Narrative identity roles illustrated*

#### *5.1.1.1 Finland*

The first results that contribute to existing literature are that of narrative identity roles in the mompreneurs in two polar opposite, yet European countries, Finland and Malta. To do these identity roles illustrated though their narratives were revealed and by specifically looking at the cultural backgrounds of both Finland and Malta where a source of personal and cultural motivation for entering mompreneurship was provided, clear views into their narrative identities were shown. It is through this very difference that the clearest identity role was revealed and our first contribution was made to existing literature, that if the role most strongly identified with.

In looking at the unearthing of the identity of these mompreneurs, it was revealed through their narratives which roles they most identified with, in all cases, that of mother or entrepreneur. Initially findings indicated that the Finnish sample of mompreneurs identified with being both a mother and entrepreneur equally; however upon deeper examination it was revealed that the identity most related to was identified as that of an entrepreneur. Previous literature has concluded that identities are consistently changing and evolving over time, but eventually reach a state of stability due to life situations or simply by time itself (LaPointe, 2010) and our findings concurred.

The Finnish mompreneurs were settled, (seemingly) without shame or insecurities in their roles (both of them), however simply identified more strongly with that of entrepreneur. It could be seen that (in Finland) the role of entrepreneur carries more respect or weight to the Finnish mompreneurs than that of mother, however previous literature has revealed (generally and not culturally specifically) that the role of mother carries more significance than that of spouse or any other role (Rogers & White, 1998 ; Ross & Van Willigen, 1996). Findings on Finnish mompreneurs were therefore in partial contradiction to previous research.

In contrast to Maltese mompreneurs Finns are time and again separated from families geographically often by hundreds of kilometers and there was no mention of family helping with childcare or household duties in any of the Finnish narratives. Furthermore, the Finnish state provides financial and social support in regards to child rearing and specifically care up to school age, something that is lacking in Malta (Kansaneläkelaitos, [www.kela.fi](http://www.kela.fi)).

In some ways the identities for the Finnish mompreneurs seemed to be conflicting. That is the added pressure of the expectations of the listener imposed on the narrator, which could have been an influence in confusion of identity revelation. The Finnish narratives were told in person, in contrast to the Maltese narratives which were told over Skype. Perhaps the added pressure of having the researcher directly in front of them affected the way in which answers were told to fit

any preconceived expectations (Søderberg, 2006). The intention was that of the narrator able to speak freely and without judgments expressing from the heart (Czarniawska, 1998).

However, at some points the Finnish mompreneurs back-tracked and clarified previous statements, almost correcting their narrative and one went as far as to ask that what was just said to be removed and another statement be accepted. This was not done in any of the Maltese narratives. Previous literature regarding narratives indicates it being one of the most useful means of gaining a sense of the person, situation, and history from the narrator and findings here were in accordance with prior research, however, the nature (cultural backgrounds) of the mompreneurs had to be taken into account and perhaps it's the nature of the Finnish people and their relationship with feelings of guilt or shame that made these mompreneurs back-track in their story-telling (Mustavuori, 2010).

The conflicting role identification is best exemplified by Katriina, Finland as she started to talk about being a mom and entrepreneur: *'Both roles are such parts of my life; I know that I **should** say my family is much more important, but the truth is, they are equally important. I try to focus on them when they are at home, but also I do think of my business a lot, and knowing I could do so much more there.....(long pause). I really like the term mompreneur. It really fits both perfectly, 2 such valued jobs, with such prestige, I like it a lot...(long pause) but I do feel a bit bad about how saying important the business is.'*

It was shown by the mompreneurs in Finland that it is not easy to define one's role and wholly stick by it. In the case of Sanna, mention of her daughter was kept to a minimum, which can be personal choice, cultural or her personal nature, however she did mention her as being a significant part of her life, just as her business is. Hanna referred to her children often, however it was mentioned in conjunction with the time spent with them somehow not fitting with her business, and how having children and a business would be impossible without outside help, which she and her family use regularly.

#### 5.1.1.2. Malta

In contrast and without hesitation when the Maltese mompreneurs spoke of their roles, that of being a mother and/wife was of the utmost importance and revealed as much. This is in line with previous research on mompreneurs in general (not country specific) (Rogers & White, 1998), however the cultural backgrounds provided a key insight to the differences in self-identification. The Maltese are close-knit people both geographically and socially with families living in close proximity and helping with childcare and household duties and thusly intrinsically link family and motherhood high on the identity scale (Tabone, 1995).

Maltese women were strong in their definition and in their statements, as exemplified by Mary: *'Being a wife and mother is my identity. It is who I am.'* Maryrose stated, *'being his mother is the thing I am the most proud of. He made me who I am'*

Maltese mothers look to their family to support each other in households and communities with the childcare and support of under-school aged children (Darmanin, 2002). None of the Maltese women took back remarks or back-tracked their statements as what occurred in the Finnish narratives. However, it should be noted that all of the Maltese narratives were told online through Skype without the added presence of the researcher. Previous literature regarding narratives indicates it being one of the most useful means of gaining a sense of the person, situation and their history however the narrator always takes the expectations of the research into account which could account for the candidness of the Maltese mompreneurs and some reservation on the part of the Finnish mompreneurs (Angus, & McLeod, 2004).

Defining ones role in these mompreneurs' cases has proven to be a challenging one, for the women themselves and for this study. However, it is felt that a strong definition for each mompreneur was identified and can contribute to existing literature on the topic.

#### *5.1.2 Motivations behind entering mompreneurship*

This study's second contribution to previous literature was that in the exploration of the motivation behind entering mompreneurship. Narrative roles were self-identified by revealing the most rational aspects of past experiences (or perceived past reconstructed to the best of our remembering), our present (and however we perceive things at this moment) and our hopes for the future (be that imagined or real) view of the self to aid in identifying a current role (Angus & McLeod, 2004) and the motivations driving those roles was examined further.

To start off, two of the Maltese mompreneurs were quick to speak freely about their motivations and to emphasize that it entrepreneurship is more than just a job, it's a lifestyle.

*'You have to be a risk taker. It's not for everyone.'* Maryrose, Malta

*This isn't a lifestyle for everyone; you have to do what is best for you and your family. It's either in you or it's not.'* Mary, Malta

Entering an entrepreneurial lifestyle is not one that is taken on lightly and motivations behind the mompreneurs in this study were quite consistent and similar to previous studies (Cromie, 1987; Hughes, 2006). Hughes used a Canadian sample identifying push/pull factors that lead to

driving motivations behind entrepreneurship, and in this study push/pull factors were studied to find the greatest source of motivation.

When looking at motivating factors, Liberty/Freedom ranked as the highest motivating factor by the Maltese women and second highest motivating factor by the Finnish mompreneurs. Challenge, creativity and success ranked as the number 1 motivating factor for Finnish mompreneurs is surprisingly comparable to that of Canadian men (Hudges, 2006) and thusly not a clear-cut female entrepreneurial trait.

Especially for the Maltese mompreneurs the ability to have your own business, your own control over your finances and freedom to make choices has a huge impact on the overall quality of life. In contrast to Maltese women, Finnish women haven't had the restraint of living in a society when even your finances were under the umbrella of your husband or father's control (Abela, 2000). For Maltese women this is truly liberating and some women choose to work closely together in a tight unit of (female) support such as in Across Limits where both Maryrose and Angele work. Here they offer each other support of any nature, including childcare should that be necessary. Furthermore, 'familialism' of small Catholic communities and the dependence of family for support and overall care that of child or the elderly are influences on the Maltese people and one that is reflected in the results of the Maltese mompreneurial identity (Darmanin, 2002; Tabone, 1995).

The succeeding motivating factors were that of the mompreneurs wanting to do something they were passionate about, but also have the ability to make all the decisions personally as also indicated by (Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990). Furthermore, the desire for a challenge and to have something of their own using an outlet where they can be creative while making a difference are all stated as reasons for becoming an entrepreneur by all of the women in this study as another strong motivation. These are also in line with previously conducted research and the motivations revealed (Jean & Forbes, 2011; Orhan & Scott, 2001).

## ***5.2 Relating to previous mompreneur literature***

Lastly, the mompreneurs in this study all fell significantly in line with previous research on mompreneurs (Diaz & Welter, 2011). Greene et al. (2003) stated 'the average mompreneur is first born, middle class, college graduate with a major in liberal arts, married with children and a supportive spouse in a professional or technical occupation. Furthermore, mompreneurs traditionally set up businesses in areas thought of as more female industries such as hospitality, retail and services.' Birth order was not discussed in any way through the narratives however, every mompreneur in this study was middle class, college educated with varying majors (from ICT to business to liberal arts), married (or divorced, however they were married when the ventures were started), and naturally with child(ren).

The fields in which the mompreneurs in this study conduct their business fall partially in line with previous research (Cromie, 1987; Holmquist & Carter, 2009). All of the Finnish mompreneurs in this study had conducted business in the services or retail industry; and the exception is of the Maltese mompreneurs who all conducted business outside the gendered stereotypical sectors (Import/Export, ICT and trash recycling businesses). For the most part the women in this study did not vastly diverge from previous mompreneurial profiles, aside from the line of work they ventured in. However, there is a slight greying in the lines as the Maltese mompreneurs all multi-task with roles of teaching, public speaking and holding of positions on boards relating to female entrepreneurship that would put them more in lines with ‘traditional’ mompreneurial roles.

### ***5.3 Conclusions and future recommendations***

In this thesis the goals were set to gain rich data and a deep understanding of the identities of six mompreneurs in Finland and Malta. A unique outcome was revealed in how these mompreneurs’ self-identity differed based on cultural backgrounds. The Finnish mompreneurs identified with both roles of mother and of entrepreneur, however further examination revealed that the role of entrepreneur was seen and believed to be more significant. In comparison, Maltese mompreneurs self-identified proudly and openly as mothers first with the role of entrepreneur being a significant one, however not one that supersedes that of mother. This study contributes to previous research by providing a window into these mompreneurs’ personal identities, and shared how they legitimize their choices and identify their experiences. Important implications were made in identifying the motivating factors that leads a mother into mompreneurship, especially when factoring in cultural diversity such as that in this thesis.

This subject on a whole would make an interesting follow-up study. Richer data could be gathered if more mompreneurs would be interviewed. Further, a follow-up study 5 or even 10 years from now could provide significant interest concerning the evolution of identity as goals, (family) situations and projects change so must mompreneurs.

A further relevant subsequent study containing narratives re-told by mompreneurs who became business owners after they became mothers would be of great interest for further study. This would allow for examination of the implications of becoming a business owner and having small children at home especially from a Maltese societal side and see if that has any impact on cultural or mompreneurial identity. Furthermore, to be able to compare the outcome of the resulting story-telling from before (the acquisition of children) and after would be quite exciting. Lastly, the unique trait of Finnish mompreneurs identifying more with being an entrepreneur should be studied in more detail.

Clearly much is still to be studied in the field, both in width and in depth involving not only Maltese culture, but perhaps other more conservative/religious cultures as well.

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