



A Theoretical Exploration of Gender Dynamics in Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

This paper conceptually explores the role of gender in entrepreneurship, focusing on how societal norms and gender roles influence opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurs. It examines structural and social evaluation theories to understand the distribution of resources and the impact of networks and societal norms on female entrepreneurs. Additionally, the paper addresses how stereotypes shape entrepreneurial behaviors. Through a review of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this study supports systemic changes to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, emphasizing the need for strategies to address the specific barriers women face in entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Gender Dynamics; Entrepreneurship; Structural Theories; Social Evaluation Theories; Stereotypes and Biases; Gender Roles

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been seen as a male-dominated field, but with more women entering the space, there is a growing interest in understanding how gender influences entrepreneurship. This paper seeks to explore the theoretical foundations and current discussions surrounding gender dynamics within entrepreneurship, focusing on how gender shapes the opportunities and challenges that entrepreneurs encounter.

The analysis of gender issues in entrepreneurship transcends mere participation statistics; it delves into how deeply rooted societal norms and gender roles influence entrepreneurial activities. As the entrepreneurial landscape becomes more diverse, it is crucial to examine the impact of these gender roles and biases. This involves dissecting foundational theories that lighten how social structures and norms affect the environment for female entrepreneurs.

We will discuss structural theories that look at how networks, organizational structures, and societal norms determine the distribution of resources and opportunities. These theories are crucial for understanding what supports or hinders women's entrepreneurship,

highlighting the importance of networks and social interactions. Additionally, social evaluation theories offer insights into the cognitive processes behind how individuals perceive and evaluate gender roles within entrepreneurship. These theories help us grasp how stereotypes and societal expectations shape the entrepreneurial behaviors that are deemed acceptable and successful. Furthermore, this paper will tackle the persistent stereotypes and biases in entrepreneurship and their impact on women's entrepreneurial journeys. It will examine how societal views on gender roles can distort perceptions of women's capabilities as entrepreneurs, often limiting their roles or intensifying the challenges they face.

By analyzing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence on gender issues in entrepreneurship, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of these complex dynamics. Through this theoretical exploration, we seek to advance the conversation on gender equality in entrepreneurship, advocating for systemic changes that recognize and utilize the potential of all entrepreneurs, regardless of gender.

2. Foundational theories

There are several core theories that lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the changing relationship between entrepreneurship and gender. It is essential to differentiate between structural theories and social evaluation theories. Both contribute significantly to the study of social interaction, but each provides unique insights into organizational behavior. These theories highlight different effects and viewpoints, clarifying the complex dynamics that influence the entrepreneurial space for women. On the one hand, structural theories examine how networks, including patterns of relationships, communication, organizational charts, and physical distance, impact the distribution of resources, information, and opportunities within a population (Pfeffer, 1991). They

encompass theoretical frameworks such as those related to social and human capital. The latter is based on the belief that people's learning capacities (e.g. skills, competencies, experience) are of comparable value to other resources in producing goods or services. When the resource is effectively utilized, the results are profitable for the person, the organization, and society at large (Schultz, 1980). Basically, people are considered as a form of capital for development (Nafukho *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, the social capital theory posits that interpersonal connections represent valuable resources conducive to the cultivation and accumulation of human capital (Bourdieu, 1985), and it is defined as "the aggregate of tangible or potential assets associated with the possession of a robust network of more or less institutionalized relationships characterized by mutual familiarity or acknowledgment" (Bourdieu, 1985).

Both theories mentioned above center around the idea that the functioning of an organization is based on human and social resources, which create value and contribute to achieving organizational goals.

While structural theories focus on resources and their impact on structures, social evaluation theory examines how individual evaluations within social contexts affect organizations. As a matter of fact, social evaluation theory delves into how societal norms, stereotypes, and cultural perceptions influence the evaluation of individuals and their ventures. More specifically, they delves into the mental evaluation processes of individuals: (1) by assigning positive or negative values to different behavioral patterns performed through social interaction; (2) by associating different people with specific types of behavior; (3) by performing different behaviors according to the previous evaluations made and consider the value they have previously assigned to their behavior (Abdai and Miklósi, 2016).

The two main drivers of social evaluation are the negative bias describing a tendency to avoid negative (social) stimuli, which may lead to the avoidance of the antisocial partner, and the positive bias is the inclination towards positive (social) stimuli, which can result in a preference for the prosocial partner (Abdai and Miklósi, 2016).

Interacting with antisocial individuals can lead to adverse outcomes; hence, avoiding them generally avoids potential harm. Similarly, engaging with unfamiliar individuals who lack information can be risky. In such situations, the circumstances heavily influence one's choice. If the cost of selecting an antisocial partner outweighs the benefits gained from choosing a prosocial individual, it is preferable to avoid the unfamiliar partner. Therefore, the unfamiliarity of a partner can yield negative partnership value (Abdai and Miklósi, 2016).

Conversely, positivity bias reflects a preference for positive (social) stimuli. While the inability to choose the more prosocial partner may incur smaller costs, in long-term closed groups, favoring prosocial individuals can yield significant benefits (Abdai and Miklósi, 2016).

However, in most studies exploring the ability to distinguish between prosocial and antisocial partners, the lack of comparison with a neutral partner hinders the differentiation between positivity and negativity bias (Abdai and Miklósi, 2016).

In conclusion, the theories discussed provide understanding of some fundamental aspects of social evaluation and perception of individuals, laying the foundation for understanding biases toward women and potential biases encountered by women entrepreneurs. Exploring these concepts enhance awareness about the complexities related to the impact of societal perception on women-led businesses.

3. Stereotypes and gender biases

Individuals' perspectives are profoundly shaped by their histories and deeply held beliefs, often leading to biased interpretations of the world around them. These biases influence personal perceptions and contribute to perpetuating inequalities within society.

According to Weber (1968), the main reason for social inequality is status. It has a dual aspect: it can be taken as a comparative evaluation between social groups within society (e.g. different occupations, racial or ethnic groups, or sexes) (Weber, 1968), or it can be understood as a hierarchical relationship among individuals that is enacted through differences in power (Goffman, 1969).

Status construction theory suggests that in social interactions, people judge each other's worthiness and competence, leading to the formation of hierarchies. These judgments can extend to entire groups based on shared characteristics like gender or occupation, influencing societal perceptions of status and competence (Ridgeway and Erickson, 2000). Individual evaluations, which underline social status attributions, frequently derive from stereotypical perceptions. These perceptions capture beliefs concerning the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors ascribed to distinct groups and provide conceptual frameworks for theorizing the connections and reasons behind these given attributes (Hilton and Von Hippel, 2003).

The origins of stereotypes stem from two primary sources: they may arise from mental representations of actual differences between groups; in some instances, stereotypes reflect reality or the immediate environment to which the observer is exposed. Stereotypes streamline information processing but can lead to overlooking individual differences and minimizing recognition of variation within groups (Hilton and Von Hippel, 2003).

Both social construction theory and stereotypes are concepts interconnected by the recognition of reality's socially constructed nature and the influence of societal norms,

beliefs, and institutions in shaping individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and interactions based on social categories.

In addition, social cognition theory suggests that humans' brains automatically categorize people into ingroups (similar to us) and outgroups (dissimilar to us), attributing favorable traits to ingroup members (Brewer, 1999; Fiske, 1998). This tendency influences how individuals distribute rewards and make judgments based on performance (Berger *et al.*, 1972; Ridgeway and Balkwell, 1997). Stereotypes also play a role in this context, as individuals associate certain traits with social categories and process information to maintain these stereotypes. In interactions between different status groups, expectations often lead higher-status members to outperform lower-status members, creating self-fulfilling prophecies (González-Jiménez, 2022). In their study, Baron *et al.* (1995) apply Trope's (2011) logic, confirming that "social class bias is more likely to occur when performance information is absent or ambiguous than when it is relatively unambiguous and inconsistent with stereotypes".

Age, race, and gender are powerful factors influencing social status by shaping others' behaviors through entrenched stereotypes and cognitive frameworks (Reskin, 2003).

In the structure of society, distinctions based on gender in terms of social status, respect, and expected behavior are widely recognized as inherent aspects that have a pervasive impact on social reality, subtly shaping individuals' conduct (Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway *et al.*, 2009; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; Tinkler *et al.*, 2015). Gender-based differences often lead to gender biases, i.e., systematic and often unconscious preference or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their gender. It can manifest in various forms, including unequal treatment, stereotyping, and marginalization, and it often results in disparities in opportunities, resources, and social status between genders (Garb, 1997). Research conducted by Banaji and Greenwald (1995) has shown that

individuals often possess subconscious gender biases. The latter tend to operate below the level of conscious awareness, revealing that individuals may harbor biases without being aware of their existence (Banaji *et al.*, 1993).

As evidenced by historical and contemporary examples, sex segregation within the labor market has perpetuated gender disparities in employment outcomes for centuries. Historian Joan Wallach Scott describes 19th-century textile factories as characterized by near-universal separation of male and female work. Historical gender norms and societal expectations have influenced how women engage in economic activities and the challenges they may face in business (Mirchandani, 1999).

Numerous studies indicate a common perception that men are generally perceived as possessing more of the traits necessary for managerial success than women (Deal and Stevenson, 1998; Schein *et al.*, 1996), indicating a prevalent tendency among individuals to attribute qualities commonly associated with successful managerial, leadership, and entrepreneurial roles more frequently to men than to women (Meyer *et al.*, 2017). This is because individuals observe each other and make inferences about their corresponding dispositions in leading roles. Based on this evaluation, they believe that men and women possess attributes that equip them for certain roles instead of others (Eagly and Wood, 2016).

That said, it has been observed that the announcement of female executives tends to result in a more negative market response than that of male ones (Campbell and Mínguez-Vera, 2008). However, Lee and James (2007) discovered that this reaction could be moderated by contextual factors such as the position to which the executives are appointed. For instance, appointments into positions where gender is less emphasized, such as management roles, are likely to result in a less negative response (Lee and James, 2007).

Research found differences between women's perceptions of leadership and their evaluations after holding a leadership role. Women are often judged as less effective than men in leadership roles due to the masculine standards that are typically used to evaluate women's leadership. However, despite this bias, women tend to receive positive evaluations when they hold leadership roles that are defined in feminine terms (Bartol and Butterfield, 1976; Eagly *et al.*, 1992, 1995; Eagly and Karau, 1991).

Moreover, workplace attitudes indicate a preference for male supervisors over female ones, as demonstrated by studies such as Simon and Landis (1989). Additionally, a significant portion of men and male managers harbor skepticism regarding the efficacy of women leaders (Bowen *et al.*, 2000; Eagly *et al.*, 1992; Sczesny, 2003).

Consequently, women often find themselves relegated to lower-ranking positions compared to men. Tabak's study has confirmed a consistent pattern with what has been previously stated: the average number of women occupying positions decreases significantly as the hierarchical level within organizations rises (Tabak, 1997).

All this taken together, reinforces what Schein *et al.* (1996) call the “think manager think men” (TMTM) bias. In their study, Schein *et al.* found a prevalence of managerial sex typing across different cultural contexts. Despite variations in historical, political, and cultural backgrounds, a common belief persists among male worldwide: that women are less likely than men to possess the requisite characteristics for management roles.

Furthermore, it has been found that female CEOs are 45% more likely to be fired than male CEOs. This percentage is even higher when the company is doing well (Gupta *et al.*, 2020).

All of this literature about women in managerial roles serves as evidence of an invisible barrier preventing their advancement: the “*glass ceiling*” (Kanter, 1977; Morrison *et al.*, 1987). Ryan and Haslam (2005), while analyzing the performance of FTSE 100

companies before and after the appointment of new board members, found that during periods of overall financial decline in the stock market, companies that selected women for their boards were more inclined to have encountered sustained poor performance in the preceding five months compared to those that selected men. These findings reveal an extra, often overlooked, obstacle that women must navigate in the professional sphere. They called this phenomenon “*glass cliff*”.

The study was validated with a psychological experiment where participants evaluated three resumes for an executive role for a company facing diverse crisis levels. One was subpar, while the others were equally strong, belonging to a man and a woman. Interestingly, as the crisis worsened, they were more inclined to select the female candidate's resume (Haslam and Ryan, 2008).

In recent historical contexts, notable instances of the "glass cliff" phenomenon have emerged, such as Theresa May's assumption of the role of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 2016, becoming the second woman to hold the position after Margaret Thatcher since 1990¹. This transition occurred shortly after the Brexit referendum, following the resignation of David Cameron² and the refusal of Nigel Farage³ and Boris Johnson⁴, who were prominent Brexit proponents, to lead the coalition government. Similarly, Christine Lagarde, who became the first woman to lead the International Monetary Fund in 2011, tackled the institution's most severe crisis since its establishment

¹ Wallenfeldt, J. (2024, February 16). *Theresa May | Biography, Facts, & Policies*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theresa-May> Last visit: 29/02/2024

² Stewart, H., Mason, R., & Syal, R. (2020, February 3). *David Cameron resigns after UK votes to leave European Union*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/david-cameron-resigns-after-uk-votes-to-leave-european-union> Last visit: 29/02/2024

³ BBC News. (2016, July 4). *UKIP leader Nigel Farage stands down*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36702468> Last visit: 29/02/2024

⁴ Erlanger, S., & Castle, S. (2016, June 30). *Boris Johnson won't seek to lead Britain, but Michael Gove will*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/world/europe/britain-conservative-party.html> Last visit: 29/02/2024

in 1945, precipitated by the subprime crisis and the Strauss-Kahn scandal⁵. In a recent interview, Lagarde expressed her support for female leaders to embrace roles during times of crisis, viewing it as a calculated risk⁶.

In summary, biases influenced by past experiences shape societal perceptions and contribute to inequalities. Despite progress, women still face challenges in leadership roles due to the "glass ceiling" and "glass cliff" phenomena. Recent examples, like Theresa May and Christine Lagarde, highlight the persistence of these challenges.

4. Role congruity theory

The pervasiveness of gender biases and stereotypes rooted in deep-rooted prejudices has presented formidable challenges for women aiming to climb the ranks of organizational hierarchies. Nevertheless, social role theory provides insights into the establishment of gender roles in society, which can shed light on how these roles contribute to disparities and biases in economic opportunities within the workforce.

The concept of the division of labor, i.e. the specialization of tasks and responsibilities within societies and organizations, serves as the cornerstone for the development of social role theory. At its core, the division of labor operates on the premise that individuals or groups allocate themselves to particular activities guided by factors like skill sets, capabilities, and prevailing societal norms and expectations (Wood and Eagly, 2002). In the context of the social role theory, the division of labor based on gender roles has significant implications for how societal perceptions of masculine and feminine behaviors

⁵ Segal, D., & Tsang, A. (2019, July 3). *In tense times, 'Call in the Woman': Lagarde will lead the E.C.B.* The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/02/business/christine-lagarde-european-central-bank.html> Last visit: 29/02/2024

⁶ Werber, C. (2022, July 21). *Christine Lagarde says women should use the "glass cliff" to their advantage.* Quartz. <https://qz.com/work/1658829/christine-lagarde-says-women-should-embrace-glass-cliffs-roles> Last visit: 29/02/2024

influence society at large (Murdock and Provost, 1973). In fact, social role theory states that variations in behavior between sexes stem from societal gender role norms, which, in turn, embody perceptions of men's and women's societal roles within their respective communities (Eagly and Wood, 2012).

As a matter of fact, prejudice stems from the perceived mismatch between societal expectations and the attributes necessary for specific social roles. When individuals perceive a discrepancy between a stereotyped group member and a role typically associated with them, it diminishes the evaluation of that individual's suitability for that role (Eagly, 1987).

Stemming from the social role theory, role congruity theory suggests that a group is evaluated positively when its attributes align with the typical social roles associated with the group (Eagly and Diekmann, 2005). In the specific case of female leaders, prejudice arises from the perceived incongruity between the traits traditionally ascribed to women and the qualities expected of leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The two main prejudices are: (1) a bias leading to a less favorable evaluation of women's potential for leadership in comparison to men. It arises from the stereotype that leadership ability aligns more closely with male characteristics than female attributes, stemming from the descriptive norms associated with gender roles. It involves the activation of societal beliefs regarding women's traits, leading to the attribution of stereotypically female qualities to them, which are perceived as incongruent with the qualities typically expected in leaders; (2) a bias resulting in a less favorable assessment of the actual leadership behaviors exhibited by women compared to men. This bias stems from the perception that such behaviors are less desirable in women than in men, stemming from the injunctive norms of gender roles, which dictate expectations about how women should behave. When female leaders deviate from these expectations by demonstrating assertive qualities typically associated

with leadership, they may face negative evaluations for violating these gender-prescribed norms (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Female leaders encounter a triple constraint wherein conformity to traditional gender roles may conflict with the demands of their leadership roles, and vice versa, specifically: less favorable attitudes toward females compared to male counterparts, less opportunities for women to access leadership roles and pose additional obstacles for women striving to succeed in these positions, and the greater difficulty for women to be recognized as effective in these roles.

Eagly et al.'s (2002) role congruity theory suggests that various factors influence prejudice towards females. It depends on how leadership roles are defined, and the emphasis placed on conforming to traditional gender norms versus leadership expectations. Women encounter greater challenges in roles defined with masculine traits, such as executive positions, while men tend to exhibit stronger biases against female leaders. However, the disadvantage of females diminishes over time, possibly reflecting evolving societal attitudes. Despite that, instances where women display assertive behavior often evoke negative reactions, reflecting deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and biases (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

The systematic mismatch between female gender roles and the professional demand of entrepreneurship presents a formidable challenge. As society persists in perceiving this incongruity, women face greater hurdles than men in advancing their careers. Addressing these biases and redefining societal perceptions of gender roles within entrepreneurial contexts are essential steps toward fostering a more inclusive and equitable landscape for aspiring female entrepreneurs (Anglin *et al.*, 2022).

All in all, societal preferences that dictate women should not exhibit traits typically associated with a leader represent an obstacle to their success (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

5. The female entrepreneur

Gender roles and stereotypes play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions and expectations regarding the roles and capabilities of men and women. As Eagly and Wood Campo (2016) noted, people often form assumptions about individuals based on observed behaviors and subsequently assign roles aligned with them. In the context of entrepreneurship, these assumptions and assigned roles have particularly noteworthy implications for women.

Entrepreneurship is often associated with masculine traits and has a masculine-centric approach (Ahl, 2006; Baron *et al.*, 2001; Green and Cohen, 1995; Gupta *et al.*, 2009); thereby, the traditional successful entrepreneur does not align with the gender role typically associated with females (Ahl, 2006; Jennings and Brush, 2013). Usually, women are perceived as outsiders or intruders, encountering skepticism about their suitability for the role (Eddleston *et al.*, 2016).

Goffee & Scase (1983) create a four-way classification of the types of female entrepreneurs by considering subjects' attachments to: entrepreneurial values and conventional female values.

		Attachment to Conventional Gender Roles	
		<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
Attachment to Entrepreneurial Ideals	<i>High</i>	CONVENTIONALS	INNOVATORS
	<i>Low</i>	DOMESTICS	RADICALS

Figure 1 Types of Female Entrepreneurs (Goffee & Scase, 1983)

The four categories of female entrepreneurs they have identified are: (1) Radicals, who are primarily interested in collective political and economic ventures to promote female issues, often identified as feminists. They focus on collective ventures for societal change; (2) Innovators question conventional assumptions about women's roles and see entrepreneurship as a means to achieve economic and personal success due to limited career prospects in traditional organizations. They seek autonomy and success outside traditional organizational structures. (3) Conventionals have a strong commitment to both entrepreneurship and domesticity, often starting businesses to supplement low family income without seeking greater personal autonomy. Often, they come from working-class backgrounds, starting businesses to supplement family income without seeking personal autonomy. (4) Domestics have limited commitment to entrepreneurial ideals and prioritize traditional female roles as mothers and wives, viewing their businesses as secondary to family obligations. They prioritize family roles and personal skills over profit and business growth, maintaining small-scale operations within family parameters. Moreover, the authors have identified some connections between the typology of female entrepreneurs and the labor market difficulties women face. While radicals aim to challenge societal subordination, innovators seek to avoid workplace discrimination. On the other side, conventionals counteract labor market subordination, and domestics challenge the primacy of the domestic role to varying extents.

The typology established by Goffee and Scase (1983) highlights the tension between traditional gender roles and entrepreneurial ideals. For instance, conventional businesswomen adhere to both entrepreneurial ideals and conventional gender roles, while innovative entrepreneurs prioritize entrepreneurial ideals over gender roles. However, the entrepreneurial ideals identified by Goffee and Scase (1983) parallel assumptions of traditional male roles, indicating a masculinist orientation. This suggests

that traditional masculine traits are often used to define success in entrepreneurship and that societal structures perpetuate gender differences (Mirchandani, 1999).

This confirms that the TMTM bias also extends to entrepreneurship, translated into "think entrepreneur, think male", underscoring that entrepreneurship is predominantly perceived as a male domain (Laguía *et al.*, 2019). Studies on women entrepreneurs frequently reinforce this bias by perpetuating an androcentric entrepreneur mentality, where hegemonic masculinity remains unacknowledged. These studies often depict women's organizations as "the other," reinforcing social expectations of their perceived differences and implicitly elevating male experiences as the preferred normative standard (Bruni *et al.*, 2004).

Gupta & Turban (2012) found that highly sexist women favor male-typed venture ideas over female-typed ones. This tendency perpetuates gender biases and leads women to evaluate new business proposals based on masculine criteria. Conversely, low sexist men view female-typed ideas favorably over male-typed ones, indicating a positive evaluation of female-typed work. However, this advantage diminished when gender-stereotypical information was emphasized, highlighting the impact of gender stereotypes on evaluations. This leads to potentially disadvantaging female-typed ventures, highlighting the influence of gender stereotypes on business decisions and contributing to understanding biases in evaluating new business ideas (Cetindamar *et al.*, 2012).

In order to close the legitimacy gap, as called by Edelman *et al.* (2018), women must navigate additional hurdles to gain support from the key external stakeholders (Lauto *et al.*, 2022; Prochotta *et al.*, 2022), including the necessity to disclose more information, demonstrate heightened commitment to their ventures, and exhibit stronger signals of legitimacy (Alsos and Ljunggren, 2017; Eddleston *et al.*, 2016; Murphy *et al.*, 2007). Despite these efforts, female entrepreneurs still contend with biases, evidenced by the

more critical scrutiny of their management teams and the tendency of investors to evaluate male-led pitches more favorably, even when content remains identical (Dean *et al.*, 2019). Women entrepreneurs continue to encounter significant obstacles due to a complex interplay of social and contextual factors. These challenges stem from deeply ingrained occupational gender role socialization and stereotypes, which perpetuate societal expectations and biases regarding the roles and capabilities of women in entrepreneurship (Armuña *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, systemic disparities persist, leading to a systematic lack of resources, opportunities, and support mechanisms tailored to women entrepreneurs. Access to financial capital, mentorship networks, and business development resources remains limited for women, contributing to disparities in capabilities and motivations compared to their male counterparts (Avnimelech and Rechter, 2023). Despite strides towards gender equality in entrepreneurship, these structural barriers persist, hindering the full realization of women's entrepreneurial potential and perpetuating inequalities in the entrepreneurial landscape (Tonoyan *et al.*, 2020).

Scholars have revealed that the assessment of entrepreneurial opportunities is affected by two distinct gender-related factors. The first factor is the presence of gender stereotypes, as uncovered by Gupta *et al.* (2014). The second factor concerns the cultural environment in which individuals operate, which can shape expectations based on gender and contribute to differences in entrepreneurial perception (Shinnar *et al.*, 2012). After exploring the former in the previous section, the next paragraph will analyze the latter.

6. Cultural biases affecting gender stereotypes

As previously mentioned, the assessment of entrepreneurial opportunities is also affected by the cultural environment within which individuals operate. This cultural context can

shape gender-based expectations and contribute to variations in how entrepreneurship is perceived (Shinnar *et al.*, 2012).

Culture refers to a collective set of values, beliefs, attitudes, meanings, and practices that influence the daily existence and behavior of a group of individuals. These shared characteristics are transmitted across generations and shape a group's identity and behavior and are strongly connected to: (1) Cultural practices that are learned through common experiences and are often deeply ingrained in the collective, and (2) Cultural norms that inform the way individuals interact with each other and their environment and are an integral part of their daily lives. As such, understanding the cultural context of a group is critical to effectively engaging with its members and facilitating positive relationships (Hofstede, 1980; House *et al.*, 2004).

Hofstede's research on the issues encountered by large American multinational IBM in coordinating their operations on a global scale has provided a valuable reference point for identifying some of the most critical dimensions of differentiation of organizational cultures in different countries. The aim was to address the feasibility of applying the same rules, procedures, and programs to enterprises worldwide and rooted in systems of rules and norms in very different institutions. The study's findings underscore the challenges of managing multinationals in different cultural and institutional contexts and highlight the need for a nuanced and context-specific approach to organizational management, underscoring the importance of understanding and adapting to local cultures and institutional norms.

The study focused on work-related values as they are the most stable element of mind programming and as they reflect the deepest and least modifiable layers of cultures (Hofstede, 1980). The analysis showed significant differences between values in national subsidiaries related to four factors or dimensions of national culture (Beugelsdijk *et al.*,

2017; Hofstede, 1980): (1) Individualism versus collectivism: whether a person's actions are primarily driven by their individual interests or group affiliations. In individualistic societies, people typically prioritize their personal goals, and relationships among people are less significant. The norm is competition for resources, and those who perform the best are usually rewarded financially, such as in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. On the other hand, collectivist societies view life as a collaborative experience, and interpersonal connections are highly valued. Business is conducted within a group setting, and the opinions of others are given great importance. Conformity and compromise play a pivotal role in maintaining group harmony. Examples of strongly collectivist societies are China, Panama, and South Korea. (2) Power distance: how a society deals with the inequalities in power that exist among people. Countries like Denmark and Sweden have low power distance, with more equitable distribution of income and power among citizens. In contrast, countries like Guatemala, Malaysia, and some Middle Eastern nations have high power distance, with upper management holding most of the power. In low-power-distance organizations, managers and subordinates work collaboratively towards shared goals. (3) Uncertainty avoidance: the extent to which individuals can tolerate risk and uncertainty in their lives. In high uncertainty avoidance societies, institutions minimize risk and ensure financial security. In low uncertainty avoidance societies, people are accustomed to uncertainty and are more comfortable taking risks. Examples of high uncertainty avoidance societies include Belgium, France, and Japan, while India, Ireland, Jamaica, and the United States are examples of low uncertainty avoidance societies. (4) Masculinity versus femininity refers to a society's orientation towards traditional male and female roles. In masculine cultures, both men and women prioritize achievement, competitiveness, and boldness. Examples include Australia, Italy, and Hispanic cultures. In feminine cultures, such as Scandinavian

countries, gender roles overlap, and both men and women emphasize nurturing interdependence, and quality of life. (5) Long-term versus short-term orientation relates to the extent to which individuals and organizations delay immediate gratification to pursue long-term goals and success. Many Western countries prioritize short-term goals, with time playing a significant role in business dealings. It impacts people's expectations of planning, scheduling, profits, and punctuality. Different cultures have varying orientations toward the past, present, and future. For instance, those with a past-oriented outlook evaluate plans based on how they align with established traditions, customs, and wisdom. Innovations and changes are infrequent and must be justified in relation to past experiences. People in past-oriented cultures believe plans should be evaluated in terms of their fit with established traditions, customs, and wisdom. Innovation and change do not occur very often and are justified to the extent they fit with experience. (6) Indulgence versus restraint: how people manage their desires. Indulgent cultures prioritize individual happiness and expression, promoting freedom in the workplace. Examples include Mexico, Sweden, and the United States. In restrained societies, gratification is controlled, and expressing personal needs is less common, limiting job mobility.

Breaking down culture into these dimensions not only facilitates scholars' use of this framework but also enhances their ability to grasp and analyze cross-country differences. Throughout its evolution, the Hofstede model has played a key role in revealing the interplay between cultural dimensions and gender dynamics. Many scholars have delved into the intricate connections between cultural values, traditional gender roles, and the representation of women in leadership positions.

Parboteeah et al. (2008) applied the previous cultural dimensions to identify a correlation between traditional gender role attitudes and cultures marked by high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance. These cultures typically exhibit limited educational access,

success, and societal importance, pronounced gender role differences, and scant regulation or legislation promoting gender equity.

Furthermore, Carrasco et al. (2015) also applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyze the level of women's representation on corporate boards. The researchers conducted a comparative study of 32 countries in order to ascertain whether the cultural context of a given country has any bearing on the presence or absence of women on corporate boards. They found out that certain cultural dimensions, such as high levels of power distance and masculinity, are positively correlated with lower levels of female representation and deeply impact the representation of women on corporate boards.

Another study conducted by Toh and Leonardelli (2012) argue that tight cultures, characterized by strong adherence to cultural norms, create a resistance to changing existing beliefs and practices, including the predominance of male leaders. Tight cultures have strong social norms and less tolerance for deviation from those norms. In cultures with high levels of cultural tightness, there is resistance to changing existing norms that predominantly favor male leaders. This resistance makes it more difficult for women to emerge as leaders in such cultures. For instance, countries like Spain and France, despite having ambitious equal opportunity laws similar to Norway, may not see significant improvements in the emergence of women as leaders due to the looseness of their cultures, which inhibits the swift implementation of egalitarian practices (Bullough *et al.*, 2017).

Scholars have shown that cultures valuing charismatic/values-based leadership styles, emphasizing inspiration, motivation, and strong core values, foster an environment conducive to women in business leadership. Conversely, cultures prioritizing self-protective leadership styles, focused on personal safety and security, clash with women's tendencies toward collaborative, democratic, and authentic leadership (Bullough and de

Luque, 2015). Additionally, the research by Bullough *et al.* highlights the importance of a balance between collectivism and individualism, particularly within close social circles, for supporting women in business leadership. This balance allows for encouragement from family and friends to pursue individual goals while enjoying the freedom and recognition associated with achieving them.

In addition to research on the cultural environment's connection with women's participation in leadership, some studies examine cross-cultural differences between men and women. For example, Ye *et al.* (2016) conducted a global study on coaching and discovered that female managers tend to coach subordinates more than male managers. This trend aligns with previous research that suggests women are typically more nurturing and interpersonally oriented than men. However, cultural factors may influence this coaching behavior. Specifically, cultural practices that prioritize collectivism and gender egalitarianism have a stronger positive impact on male managers' coaching behaviors than on female managers. Understanding these nuances is crucial for creating effective coaching strategies that can be applied in various cultural contexts.

In culturally supportive environments where less directive leadership is practiced, men tend to engage more in coaching compared to cultures that are more individualistic and less gender equal (Javidan *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, research comparing women and men across countries has revealed differences in global leadership abilities, with women excelling in interpersonal relations and men scoring higher in global intellectual capital. Furthermore, women perceive acting respectfully and emphasizing equality as more effective in dealing with gender-based conflict tension (Gentry *et al.*, 2010). Cross-cultural studies on women's leadership have examined behaviors across multiple countries, revealing nuanced differences. For instance, a study by Peus *et al.* (2015) found that basic categorizations like "Asian" vs. "Western" leadership fail to capture the

complexity of cross-cultural nuances among women leaders. They found variations in success factors, barriers, leadership styles, and motivation to develop employees across countries like the USA, Singapore, China, and India, highlighting the importance of understanding cultural contexts in women's leadership research.

Examining gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship through cross-cultural investigations offers insights into their socially constructed nature (Costa *et al.*, 2001). In conclusion, the study of culture on a national level underscores the importance of recognizing the cultural specificity of social science findings. This approach helps to challenge the assumption that such findings are universally applicable and not merely reflective of Western contexts. By acknowledging cultural differences, researchers can better understand how cultural contexts influence various phenomena such as female entrepreneurship.

Conclusions

Exploring gender dynamics in entrepreneurship reveals deep-seated biases and structural barriers significantly influencing women's entrepreneurial experiences. The theoretical frameworks discussed—from structural and social capital theories to social evaluation theories—provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ways gender impacts entrepreneurship. These theories highlight how both overt and subtle biases shape the distribution of resources, opportunities, and perceptions within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The persistence of stereotypes, such as those that link leadership and entrepreneurial success predominantly with masculine traits, continues to disadvantage women. This is reflected in the way women entrepreneurs are perceived and evaluated and in the tangible outcomes, such as funding and support available to them. The "think manager, think

male" bias in business settings extends to entrepreneurship, reinforcing gender disparities in such a field.

Moreover, the discussion of cultural biases and the role of societal norms underscores the importance of context in shaping women's entrepreneurial journeys. Different cultural settings can either worsen or lessen the challenges faced by women, indicating that interventions need to be culturally sensitive and tailored to address specific local dynamics.

The theoretical exploration throughout this paper points to the need for systemic changes that go beyond individual organizations or sectors. To foster a truly inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape, policymakers, educators, and business leaders must collaborate to dismantle the barriers erected by gender biases.

Additionally, enhancing women's access to networks, mentorship, and financial resources can level the playing field, enabling more women to launch and sustain successful entrepreneurial ventures. Encouraging and supporting diverse models of entrepreneurship that challenge traditional norms and celebrate varied entrepreneurial identities can further enrich the ecosystem.

In conclusion, while significant progress has been made in recognizing and addressing gender issues in entrepreneurship, much remains to be done. The insights gained from this theoretical exploration should serve as a call to action for all stakeholders involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to intensify their efforts toward creating a more diverse and inclusive environment. Only through such concerted efforts can we hope to see a future where entrepreneurial opportunities and successes are not dictated by gender but by innovation, vision, and capability.

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