

# **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND STEREOTYPES: ARE ENTREPRENEURS FROM MARS OR FROM VENUS?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We examine gender-role stereotypes in entrepreneurship and their relationship with entrepreneurial intentions. We found that entrepreneurs are perceived to have predominantly male characteristics, though, women also perceived entrepreneurs and females as having similar characteristics. Perceptions of similarity of oneself to males were found to be related to entrepreneurial intentions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is a well known fact that more males, than females, pursue entrepreneurship as a career. Gender differences in entrepreneurial activity are both persistent and universal. However, for most of its history entrepreneurship research was based predominantly on and about males. To use Venkataraman & Sarasvathy (2000)'s metaphor, entrepreneurship research had long been 'Romeo and Juliet' without the Juliet. It is only in recent years that entrepreneurship researchers have begun to investigate the reasons for the difference in rate of entrepreneurial activity between men and women. In this study, we seek to further our understanding of gender differences in entrepreneurial activity by examining the role of gender role stereotypes of entrepreneurship and the relationship of gender stereotypes with entrepreneurial intentions.

Gender-role stereotyping- widely shared beliefs about the gender appropriateness of professions- has been a relatively under researched topic in entrepreneurship. Since there has been a lack of research investigating the existence of gender-role stereotypes and its relationship with entrepreneurial intentions, this study investigates what characteristics men and women attribute to males, females and entrepreneurs and seek to understand the gender-role stereotypes about entrepreneurs. We also seek to understand if gender role stereotypes influence men and women's intention to start their own business. While it is important to understand the extent to which gender-role stereotypical thinking about entrepreneurship exists within the United States, it is of equal importance to investigate this phenomenon in other countries. Thus, we examine

gender-role stereotypes and its relationship to entrepreneurship intentions across three countries with very different social, religious and cultural values- US, Turkey and India. The Schein (1973) 92-item descriptive index was used to calculate the similarity between respondents' description of themselves with their description of males and female respectively and the relationship of similarity between self & male and self & female with their entrepreneurial intentions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Stereotyping refers to the human tendency to categorize people into general groups based on attributes such as sex or occupation and to then develop beliefs about the characteristics and behavior of members of these groups (Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). Stereotypes are descriptive as well as prescriptive in nature. The two aspects of stereotypes, descriptive and prescriptive, are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap substantially in content. The behavior that is prescribed is directly related to the characteristics that describe the particular group. Stereotyping is not limited to certain professions or types of people but is an all-pervasive human phenomenon (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

One of the most enduring and easily perceived bases for stereotyping is gender. Visually prominent physical features, such as gender, enable people to quickly sort others into categories, and because gender is physically perceptible, it may be a universal dimension for stereotyping people (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Powell & Graves, 2003). Women are commonly believed to have more communion qualities (expressiveness, connectedness, relatedness, kindness, supportiveness, timidness) whereas men are associated with more agentic qualities (independence, aggressiveness, autonomy, instrumentality, courage). These gender stereotypes not only describe how men and women are but also how they should be (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Schein, 2001). Thus, scholars have suggested that the single most important hurdle for women wanting to go into leadership and management roles is the persistent stereotype that associates these jobs with males (Antal & Izraeli, 1993). Therefore, stereotypes can be powerful gatekeepers restricting access for people who do not fit the prevailing stereotypes.

However, to date a systematic investigation of gender stereotypes and its possible relationships with entrepreneurial intentions has been missing in the entrepreneurship literature. This is surprising considering that there is a growing body of literature (both theoretical and practitioner) that seeks to understand and encourage entrepreneurship particularly among women (e.g. Fay & Williams, 1993; Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993).

Just as in management and leadership, if individuals do not see themselves as able to fit the prevailing stereotype of an entrepreneur they may not choose this career track. All else being equal the perceived similarity between the characteristics of entrepreneurs and a particular gender increases the likelihood that members of that gender, rather than those of the other gender, will chose to be an entrepreneur. People influenced by stereotypical thinking are more likely to 'think entrepreneur' and then think of a particular gender. Gender-specific association of particular professions, like entrepreneurship, can lead to prejudicial beliefs and discrimination against the other gender (Swim, Bogrida, Maruyama & Myers, 1989). Also, men and women in gender-incongruent roles may "lack the authority required to organize people and resources to accomplish the task-relevant goals inherent in these roles" (Eagly & Schmidt, 2001, p. 791) further discouraging people from taking on gender-incongruent roles.

## HYPOTHESES

*H1: Entrepreneurship will be perceived to be a masculine field such that entrepreneurs will be perceived to have predominantly masculine characteristics.*

*H2a: There will be no difference between males and females in the relationship between their stereotype of males and entrepreneurs.*

*H2b: There will be difference between males and females in the relationship between their stereotype of females and entrepreneurs such that females will see a higher similarity between entrepreneurs and females than males.*

*H3: Males will have higher entrepreneurial intentions than females.*

*H4: The extent to which individuals see themselves as possessing masculine characteristics will be related positively to entrepreneurial intentions, whereas the extent to which individuals see themselves as possessing feminine characteristics will not be related to entrepreneurial intentions.*

## METHOD

Data were collected from 451 students in three campuses, one each in the U.S., India and Turkey, in 2003-04. Our sample was predominantly business students. We collected data from business classes for several reasons. Students in such classes are a significant share of the pool of potential entrepreneurs in both developed and developing countries. In addition, the increasing focus of business schools on entrepreneurship education (Finkle & Deeds, 2001) suggests not only that business students are more aware about entrepreneurship but also that institutions, academia and policy makers expect (or at least, hope) that today's business students will become entrepreneurs. Furthermore, sampling only students in business classes enhances cross-national comparability by effectively controlling for important variables such as literacy, education, and to some extent unwanted variance in work experience and age. Finally, the use of students is quite common in entrepreneurship research (e.g. Mueller & Thomas, 2000) and appears particularly desirable in our context in which we investigate factors related to entrepreneurial intentions at the pre-entrepreneurial stage.

In the United States and India, where the medium of instruction is English, the survey was administered in English. In the case of Turkey, the survey instrument was translated as per the procedure recommended by Brislin (1979). Instructors administered the survey to the students enrolled in their course. Subjects were informed that data would be collected at two time periods with a gap of 5-6 weeks. At time 1 subjects were requested to complete the Schein Descriptive Index (SDI) for one's self and another SDI for entrepreneurs. At time 2, the subjects were randomly assigned to complete the SDI for either males or females in general and also completed the Erikson's entrepreneurial intentions measure and demographic variables. Data was collected at two different times to ensure that the measures were independent. Consistent with Schein (1973, 1975, 2001) respondents rated the descriptive terms on a 5-point scale ranging from 1- not characteristic to 5- characteristic, with a neutral rating of 3- neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic. Entrepreneurial Intentions was measured using a 10 item scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ) developed by Erikson (1998) based on Bird's (1988) model of entrepreneurial intentions. Items were measured on a five point Likert scale (1- Strongly disagree to 5- Strongly agree). Data was also collected on a range of control variables including age, GPA, religion etc.

## RESULTS

We investigated whether national culture influenced the pattern of results for each of our hypotheses. Results indicated that national culture does not influence any of the relationships we had hypothesized; stated differently the pattern of relationships was consistent across the three countries. More specifically, the extent to which entrepreneurs are seen as masculine was consistent across the three countries. Similarly, there were no differences across countries in the perceptions of men and women about the relationship of stereotypes of entrepreneurs with stereotypes of females and males. Additionally, there were no differences between men and women on entrepreneurial intentions in the three cultures.

Results also indicated that there was a large and significant correlation between the ratings of males and entrepreneurs whereas there was a near zero, non-significant correlation between the ratings of females and entrepreneurs. These results support our first hypothesis and indicate that entrepreneurs are perceived to have predominantly masculine characteristics.

Results also indicated that both men and women see a similar and moderately strong relationship between males and entrepreneurs. However, women perceived a stronger relationship between the stereotype of females and entrepreneur as compared to that perceived by men. Such results provide support for hypothesis 2.

Somewhat surprisingly, results indicated no significant difference between male and female respondents on entrepreneurial intentions and thus provided no support for hypothesis 3. Finally, in support of hypothesis 4 we found that seeing oneself similar to males is related to entrepreneurial intentions although similarity to females is not related to entrepreneurial intentions. Taken together, our results suggest that gender-role stereotyping does play a role in perceptions of entrepreneur and entrepreneurial intentions.

## DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that students, in particular male students, tend to gender-role stereotype entrepreneurs as a male-typed role. Research is needed to determine whether such gender-role stereotypes generalize to other subject groups and other settings, and importantly, whether such stereotypes influence decisions about entrepreneurs. For example, if our results generalize to other subjects, then there are important implications for the development of entrepreneurs. Nascent entrepreneurs need support and resources from many other people (venture capitalists, bankers, suppliers, etc.) in developing and growing their venture. More often than not, resource providers make decisions under uncertainty and without access to complete information and thus may be vulnerable to influences of stereotypes. We theorize that individuals, such as bankers, are more likely to provide support and resources when the individual fits their stereotype of an entrepreneur. However, if many of the individuals who control resources needed by entrepreneurs are men, who are more likely to see entrepreneurs as possessing masculine but not feminine characteristics, women who are seeking resources may not fit the stereotype of an entrepreneur and thus, all else being equal, may receive fewer resources. Such logic is consistent with the theoretical and empirical work in social psychology indicating that gender stereotypes may lead to discrimination in availability of opportunities and distribution of resources (Fiske, 1998).

Our results confirmed the hypothesis that individuals who see themselves as more masculine have higher intentions of starting a business compared to individuals who see themselves as less masculine. Further, these results were consistent even when we controlled for respondent sex and whether any of the respondent's immediate family has/had their own business. We believe that this is the first study to demonstrate a relationship between an individual's gender-role stereotypes (Am I more like a male or more like a female?) and the intentions of starting a business, a job that our respondents perceived as a masculine-typed task. If career intentions for entrepreneurship are influenced by gender-role stereotypes as our study found, we encourage future researchers to explore how entrepreneurial intentions can be encouraged by influencing people's gender-role stereotypes. We also encourage researchers to use experimental studies to explore how gender-role stereotypes can be changed and the effect of these changes on entrepreneurial intentions.

It is also notable that there is a similar pattern of gender-role typing of entrepreneurship among students within US, India and Turkey. It appears that the 'think entrepreneur- think male' phenomenon transcends national cultures, especially among males. Despite the many historical, religious and cultural differences that exist among the three countries in our sample (e.g. US is a country founded on predominantly Protestant values, Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country and India is based on Vedic Hindu culture), the similarity of gender-role stereotypes and their role with entrepreneurial intentions was notable. Scholars examining entrepreneurship cross-culturally (e.g. Mitchell et al, 2002) have suggested that some parts of entrepreneurial thinking may be "universal". Our results suggest that gender-role stereotyping may be one such 'universal' dimension of entrepreneurial thinking, although our results need to be replicated in more feminine countries (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden). Nonetheless, the 'universal' nature of entrepreneurial stereotyping should be of concern, particularly to those interested in promoting gender equality and/or entrepreneurship worldwide.

## **LIMITATIONS**

There are several limitations of our study. First, even though the three countries in our sample differ from each other in important ways, we also recognize that they are similar to each other on an important dimension- Hofstede's (1980) masculinity index. Second, our sample from India is gender imbalanced. We had far fewer women from India than we have males. Third, we collected data from relatively young students in business courses and thus the extent to which our results generalize to older, more experienced individuals, such as venture capitalists and bankers is unclear. Fourth, we collected our data using self-report surveys, which may be susceptible to various errors, such as impression management effects and common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Finally, we recognize that despite the care taken to translate the survey instrument, it is still limited by its origin in the North American research tradition, using theory and methods derived from predominantly North American journals (Hofstede, 1994)

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study provide compelling evidence of the existence and importance of gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship. Gender-role stereotypes about entrepreneurs are strongly biased in favor of men. If women experience difficulty in becoming entrepreneurs because men do not perceive women to possess the characteristics that entrepreneurs are believed to have,

there is a need for policy makers and educators to seek and develop ways to reduce such stereotypes among men. Further the relationship between individual's gender stereotype and entrepreneurial intentions highlights the important role that gender stereotypes may play in individual's choice of career. Finally, the consistency of gender stereotypes across cultures suggests that gender stereotypes may be a "universal cognition" and that women in different parts of the world wanting to start their own business may have to face many similar problems. In summary, our results provide strong initial evidence regarding gender-role stereotypes in entrepreneurship and its influence on entrepreneurial intentions.

#### **REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM AUTHORS**

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