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Research on Gender Stereotyping and Entrepreneurship: Suggestions for Some Paths Worth Pursuing

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Abstract: Despite the tremendous growth in research on gender stereotyping in the context of entrepreneurship, scholarly understanding of this phenomenon is far from complete. Accordingly, the overarching goal of this paper is to stimulate greater attention to topics that warrant fuller consideration. Of the many paths worth pursuing, we focus on those that we term “Investigating Intersectionalities”, “Mapping Masculinities”, and “Revealing Rationales”. In our coverage of each, we describe the recommended route’s essence and intellectual origins, summarize extant work within the entrepreneurship literature, and raise illustrative questions for future research. We hope our efforts to demarcate these paths encourage their pursuit.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, gender, stereotyping, intersectionality, masculinities

Invited essay for the Entrepreneurship Research Journal Special Issue on “Gender and Entrepreneurship”

1 Introduction

Scholarly interest in the existence, nature, and effects of gender-based stereotyping emerged very early in the development of the women’s entrepreneurship literature. Indeed, the bibliographic analysis that we conducted as a backdrop to our invited essay revealed that the first entrepreneurship article to raise the notion of gender stereotyping—Schwartz (1976)—was also the first academic paper published on women entrepreneurs (as previously identified by Jennings and Brush 2013). As illustrated in Figure 1, our bibliographic analysis further indicates that entrepreneurship research on gender stereotyping has not only increased dramatically over the past 45 years but also shows little sign of abating. On this note, of the 374 entrepreneurship
articles that mentioned gender/female stereotypes, bias, or discrimination in their abstract, almost two-thirds (N = 239) have been published since 2015 alone.

Due to the sustained scholarly interest in the gender stereotyping of entrepreneurship, much knowledge has now accumulated on the presence and consequences of this phenomenon. With respect to the phenomenon’s presence, we know that individuals in general (Baron, Markman, and Hirsa 2001; Gupta, Turban, and Bhawe 2008; Gupta et al. 2009)—as well as entrepreneurs themselves (Swail and Marlow 2018; Verheul, Uhlaner, and Thurik 2005)—tend to associate entrepreneurship with stereotypically masculine traits (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004). We also know that the male-typing of entrepreneurial activity is prevalent across a wide range of outlets. Indeed, the masculinization of entrepreneurship is predominant within newspapers (Achtenhagen and Welter 2011; Nicholson and Anderson 2005), books/movies/television shows (Smith 2010, 2013), educational/training materials (Ahl 2007), policy publications (Ahl and Marlow 2021; Ahl and Nelson 2015; Arshed, Chalmers, and Matthews 2019), and even academic research (Ahl 2004, 2006; Hamilton 2014).

As for the phenomenon’s consequences, we know that the gender stereotyping of entrepreneurial activity contributes to women’s lower intentions (Gupta, Turban, and Bhawe 2008; Gupta et al. 2009; Gupta, Goktan, and Gunay 2014) and lower likelihood of starting their own business (Langowitz and Minniti 2007). We also

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**Figure 1:** Findings from bibliographic analysis of published academic articles related to entrepreneurship and gender stereotyping. *Note:* Peer-reviewed academic articles from scholarly journals were selected on the ProQuest search engine platform. Articles with keywords appearing in their abstracts (ab) were extracted using the following parameters: ab(Gender OR Female OR Wom*n) AND ab(Stereotyp* OR Discriminat* OR Bias*) AND ab(Entrepreneur* OR New Venture OR Founder OR Self-empl*).
Table 1: Paths worth pursuing in future research on gender stereotyping and entrepreneurship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed path for ENT research</th>
<th>Path 1: Investigating Intersectionalities</th>
<th>Path 2: Mapping Masculinities</th>
<th>Path 3: Revealing Rationales</th>
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<tr>
<td>Essence of proposed path</td>
<td>Examine how an entrepreneur’s gender intersects with other key social identities (e.g., age, race, sexual orientation, religious orientation, social class, accent, weight, beauty) to produce biased perceptions, processes, and outcomes pertinent to venture creation</td>
<td>Illuminate the heterogeneous masculinities exhibited by male business owners and potential entrepreneurs as well as the implications of non-hegemonic identities for entrepreneurship-related processes and outcomes</td>
<td>Develop an enhanced understanding of the various underlying cognitive and/or affective mechanisms that separately or jointly contribute to the differential treatment that individuals enact towards entrepreneurs of different genders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual origins of proposed path</td>
<td>Research from social psychology showing that different stereotypes tend to be evoked when gender is intersected with ethnicity/race, which have implications for an individual’s lived experiences, psychological well-being and work-related outcomes</td>
<td>Gender research demonstrating the considerable pressure that males experience to live up to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity—and the negative consequences associated with deviating from this normative expectation</td>
<td>Theories from social psychology (gender-role incongruity, lack-of-fit, status characteristics/expectations), economics (statistical discrimination, second-order gender beliefs), and sociology (homophobia, audience-based gender bias)</td>
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<td>Williams and Patterson</td>
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<td>Johnson, Stevenson, and Letwin (2018)</td>
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<td>Lee and Huang (2018)</td>
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Table 1: (continued)

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Conley and Bilimoria (2022)</td>
<td>Balachandra (2020)</td>
<td>Kanze et al. (2020)</td>
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Suggested questions for future ENT research

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<th>How do intersecting entrepreneurial identities change (i.e., mitigate, exacerbate, or overturn) resource providers’ gender-stereotypical perceptions of entrepreneurs?</th>
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<tr>
<td>What are the implications for the likelihood that resource providers will exhibit (positive, negative, or no) discrimination toward female versus male entrepreneurs with certain intersecting identities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the intersectional stereotypes associated with gender and certain other social categories contribute to occupational segregation in entrepreneurship?</td>
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| Is it possible for male entrepreneurs who subscribe to new models of fatherhood (e.g., ‘the involved father’) to live up to stereotypic prescriptions of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity? |
| Do resource providers tend to be biased against male entrepreneurs who endorse an ‘involved father’ identity? |
| Are resource providers more biased against male or female entrepreneurs who do not closely approximate the hegemonically masculine prototype? |
| What happens when stakeholders realize the discordance between the symbolic (stereotypically masculine) images portrayed by entrepreneurs and their actual (potentially female-typed) identities and behaviors? |

| Which rationale (or rationales) best accounts for the gender-differentiated treatment experienced by entrepreneurs? |
| In what ways do the key rationales examined to-date interact with one another to shape gender-differentiated experiences in the context of entrepreneurship? |
| What are the key correlates of each explanation proffered thus far for the inequitable treatment experienced by entrepreneurs of different genders—and do these correlates differ by underlying rationale? |

ENT, entrepreneurship.
know a bit about the strategies that some women enact to help overcome their lower perceived legitimacy as entrepreneurs (Alsos and Ljunggren 2017; Swail and Marlow 2018), as well as whether and how gender stereotypes shape founding teams (Jung, Vissa, and Pich 2017; Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter 2003; Yang and Aldrich 2014). Finally, we know quite a lot about the implications of gender-based stereotyping for resource acquisition. Numerous studies have illustrated the primarily negative consequences of such biases for the financing of women-founded ventures (for theory see Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021; for empirical evidence see Alsos and Ljunggren 2017; Eddleston et al. 2016; Kanze et al. 2018; Kanze et al. 2020; Malmström, Johansson, and Wincent 2017; Thébaud 2015). Emergent work has also revealed similar differentials with respect to network contact formation (Abraham 2020), human resource attraction (Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, and Jennings 2021), and treatment by other stakeholders such as employees, customers, and suppliers (Gupta, Javadian, and Jalili 2014; Jones and Cliffton 2018; Tak, Correll, and Soule 2019).

In light of the above, the overarching aim of this invited essay is to draw attention to what we do not yet know about gender stereotyping and entrepreneurship. To this end, we build upon and extend our recent reflections on this topic (Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021; Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, and Jennings 2021) by raising and elaborating three relatively unexplored paths worth pursuing. In the interest of memorability, we refer to these as “Investigating Intersectionalities”, “Mapping Masculinities”, and “Revealing Rationales”. To encourage other scholars to venture down these paths, we use the remainder of this essay to help ‘clear the trail’ for each envisioned trek. As previewed in Table 1, we do so by not only specifying the essence and intellectual origins of the three recommended routes, but also summarizing illustrative extant work in the entrepreneurship literature and raising additional research questions for each.

2 Path 1: Investigating Intersectionalities

2.1 Essence and Intellectual Origins of Proposed Path

As a first recommended route for future research on gender stereotyping in the context of entrepreneurship, we echo Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) in

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1 It is important to note, however, that some studies have shown that gender-based biases can work to the advantage of female entrepreneurs seeking crowdfunding (Greenberg and Mollick 2017; Johnson, Stevenson, and Letwin 2018). Moreover, Balachandra et al. (2019) found that financial investors judging an entrepreneurial pitch competition did not exhibit any favoritism (in either direction) towards male or female participants per se.
encouraging scholars to adopt an intersectionality approach. By doing so, work in the area would explicitly acknowledge that entrepreneurs belong to many social groups at once (such as women and White versus women and Asian, or men and gay versus men and straight). Work of this nature would also recognize that these intersecting identities arguably offer a fuller understanding of how actors in the social environments are likely to respond to the entrepreneur—and how the entrepreneur is likely to respond to the social environment—than is possible by focusing on one social identity alone. Accordingly, we call upon researchers to examine how gender intersects with other social identities (e.g., age, race, sexual orientation, religious orientation, social class, accent, weight, beauty) to produce biased perceptions, processes, and outcomes pertinent to venture creation.

This call builds upon broader research that has burgeoned since the introduction of the term ‘intersectionality’ by Crenshaw (1991) and its subsequent importation into the social psychology literature (Cole 2009; Shields 2008). Consistent with the core premise of intersectionality theory, the accumulated body of empirical evidence indicates that intersecting identities must be considered to fully understand how members of a particular social group are perceived and evaluated. Ghavami and Peplau (2013), for example, demonstrated that the stereotypes for many ethnicities (e.g., Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Middle Eastern Americans) were more likely to be associated with the characteristics of men rather than women of that particular group. Of the 15 most frequently cited attributes, for instance, only five overlapped with characteristics used to describe “Black women”, but 10 overlapped with those describing “Black men”. Research such as this demonstrates that different stereotypes tend to be evoked, for instance, when gender is intersected with ethnicity.

Empirical work has also shown that intersectionality is consequential, impacting not only the lived experiences and psychological health of individuals (e.g., Nadal et al. 2015; Walker et al. 2022) but also their work-related outcomes (e.g., Hall, Galinsky, and Phillips 2015). Nadal et al.’s (2015) qualitative study provides a vivid example of how intersectional identities impact lived experiences. These scholars reported, for instance, that Asian-American women felt “exoticized” and “fetishized”, Asian-American men felt “invisible” and “desexualized”, Black women received dubious compliments on their appearance (e.g., you are “pretty for a Black girl”; p. 153), and Gay men felt stereotyped with respect to their interests (e.g., as liking fashion but disliking sports). As for career outcomes, Hall et al.’s (2015) investigation is informative in this regard, revealing how masculine-typed demographic group members (Black men and Black women) were perceived to be more hirable for highly masculine positions, whereas feminine-typed demographic group members (Asian women and Asian men) were believed to be more hirable for highly feminine positions.
2.2 Illustrative Work in the Entrepreneurship Literature

An increasing number of gender and entrepreneurship scholars have explicitly applied an intersectionality approach within their research. Essers and her colleagues were among the first to do so, analyzing how the interaction between gender and ethnicity shaped the identity work engaged in by ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the Netherlands (Essers and Benschop 2007; Essers, Benschop, and Doorewaard 2010). Other studies attentive to the intersecting identities of gender and ethnicity/race appear within the special issue edited by Romero and Valdez (2016). An additional example appears within the set of competitive articles selected for the current special issue.

Analyzing qualitative interview data collected from entrepreneurs in the US, Conley and Bilimoria (2022) offer evidence of the barrier-mitigating strategies frequently used by African American women entrepreneurs.

Notably, intersectionality research within the entrepreneurship literature has expanded to consider the combined effects of gender (and sometimes ethnicity/race) with other social identity categories. So far, these other categories include age (Stirzaker and Sitko 2019), social class (Constantinidis, Lebègue, El Abboubi, and Salman, 2019; Martinez Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2017, 2018; Scott and Hussain 2019), place (Owalla, Nyanzu, and Vorley 2021), and disability (Williams and Patterson 2019). Several of these cited papers were published in a special issue on “Intersectionality and Entrepreneurship” edited by Abbas et al. (2019). Most recently, Heizmann and Liu (2022) showed how multiple intersecting identities—specifically “white, elite-class, heteronormative, [and] able-bodied” (p. 411)—are leveraged to produce the “idealised” image of a woman entrepreneur on social media.

2.3 Suggested Questions for Future Entrepreneurship Research on Gender Stereotyping

Considering the intersectional entrepreneurship research conducted to date, the first research question for future inquiry that we suggest is the following: How do intersecting entrepreneurial identities change (i.e., mitigate, exacerbate, or overturn) resource providers’ gender-stereotypical perceptions of entrepreneurs—and with what implications for the likelihood of (positive, negative, or no) discrimination toward them? Our baseline expectation is that intersectional identities can overturn traditional gender-stereotypical assessments of who an entrepreneur is and what makes him/her successful. We use technology entrepreneurship, as an example of a ‘high-resource commitment’ context (Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021),
to flesh out some ideas for empirical testing in future work. Previous research has shown that gender-stereotypical perceptions about the competence, agency, warmth, and job commitment of female entrepreneurs operating in male-typed industries color judgments of resource providers (Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021). Despite demonstrating equivalence to men on key performance indicators and/or professional accolades, such female vanguards tend to be viewed as less likely to ‘have what it takes’ to succeed in these environments (Bigelow et al. 2014; Lee and Huang 2018, Kanze et al. 2018, 2020; Thébaud 2010 and 2015; Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, and Jennings 2021). We believe, however, that this general result masks important heterogeneity amongst female technology entrepreneurs.

Consider the implications of intersecting an entrepreneur’s gender with his/her age. Gender-stereotypical assessments that mothers are less competent, on average, than either fathers or single women—due to lower investments in work experience, professional training, and due to interruptions in their work careers to take care of children (Becker 1976)—are likely to spill over to assessments of female entrepreneurs’ task competency, leadership ability, and job commitment. Such biases are arguably especially prohibitive in male-typed, high-achievement settings such as technology entrepreneurship, where the norm is to work overtime, and tremendous pressure exists to attain ambitious career milestones (e.g., Brush et al. 2018; Leitch, Welter, and Henry 2018). Consequently, a venture capitalist evaluating the competence and work ethic of a young female technology entrepreneur trying to raise equity funding is likely to discriminate against her. This is because the venture capitalist is likely to recall the more frequent examples of women who had to either leave their stressful jobs for family-related reasons or scale back their career ambitions after becoming mothers (e.g., Goldin 2021), while overlooking the less frequent examples of those who remain committed to their careers upon doing so.

Other intersectionalities raise a host of unanswered questions for entrepreneurship research on gender stereotyping. For instance, is the ‘strong Black woman’ (cf., Liao, Wei, and Yin 2020) stereotype likely to ameliorate the resource acquisition constraints experienced by the prototypical White female entrepreneur? Or, is the dual minority of being Black and a woman (i.e., the combination of both racial and gender stereotypes) more likely to result in a ‘double whammy’ (i.e., a double negative) for these women? And what about the intersectionality between gender and minority sexual orientation? Although there is a clear shift in attitudes towards homosexuals (Smith, Son, and Kim 2014), with public opinion today more strongly endorsing their civil rights (such as gay marriage), these positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into greater acceptance of homosexual behavior (Herek 2016). Indeed, the need for stigma management (Cain 1991) might have powerful work-related consequences for homosexuals, such as
choosing careers that shield them from the discrimination of employers and/or co-workers (Griffith and Hebl 2002). A question worth exploring, then, is whether homosexuals disproportionately self-select into entrepreneurship to escape stereotyping and prejudice. Another promising topic is the occupational segregation of lesbians and gays in entrepreneurship. Are lesbians more likely than heterosexual women to be represented in male-majority entrepreneurial jobs; similarly, are gay men more likely than heterosexual men to be represented in female-majority entrepreneurial jobs? Moreover, do rates of sexual minority entrepreneurship vary within contexts where the stigma surrounding homosexuality is more versus less pronounced (cf. Knight, Tilscik, and Anteby 2016)?

3 Path 2: Mapping Masculinities

3.1 Essence and Intellectual Origins of Proposed Path

Our second suggested path stems from a refrain heard with increasing frequency within gender-aware discussions in the context of entrepreneurship: “Men have a gender too!” We encourage scholars to take this point seriously within future research; first, by acknowledging that men are also subject to ascribed and prescribed stereotypes; and second, by considering the likelihood that some men will depart from stereotypical perceptions of the quintessential (highly masculine) entrepreneur. By attending to such considerations, the findings from future research will contribute to a much-needed mapping of the alternative masculinities that male business owners and potential entrepreneurs possess and much-needed insight into the consequences of these non-prototypical identities and characteristics for their entrepreneurial processes and outcomes.

Gender scholars, more broadly, have long recognized that not all males conform to the normative model of manliness that Connell (1987, 2005) famously termed ‘hegemonic masculinity’. As Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf (2016) and others (e.g., Anderson 2009; Rumens 2017) have emphasized, new forms of masculinity “are emerging and striving to be accepted” (p. 202), including those that incorporate “elements [typically] associated with femininity” (p. 196). Prior research has demonstrated, however, that boys and men have historically been discouraged from exhibiting feminine characteristics, receiving this message not only early on but also from various sources (i.e., parents, peers, teachers, and the media). The more feminine a boy is perceived to be, the more unpopular he is expected to be—especially amongst his male peers (Zucker et al. 1995). Feminine boys thus experience considerable pressure to change (Thomas and Blakemore 2013). As adults, men are expected to be in control, standing on their own two feet, risk-taking, daring, and striving for
power and success (Fleming, Lee, and Dworkin 2014). Manhood, however, is a precarious phenomenon: it is hard-won yet quickly lost unless men can continue to prove their honor (e.g., Vandello et al. 2008). Indeed, the pressure on males to ‘man up’ to meet hegemonic cultural expectations of masculinity can produce unintended and harmful consequences, including low self-esteem, increased likelihood of drug use, and, in general, poorer physical and mental outcomes (O’Neil 2012).

(Non-)adherence to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity also possesses important work-related implications. For instance, while both men and women believe that women should be able to engage in both feminine and masculine occupations, they believe that men should only hold masculine jobs (DiDonato and Strough 2013). Relatedly, other research has shown that men incur penalties for gender-inconsistent success. When men are successful at a female-typed job, they tend to receive less respect and to be characterized as less effectual than either successful women in the same job or successful men in a gender-consistent position (Heilman and Wallen 2010). Summaries of additional empirical findings can be found within the article by Rumens (2017), which also contains intriguing suggestions for future gender and organization research on “how men variously perform postfeminist masculinities and the implications for addressing gendered inequalities within the workplace” (p. 245).

### 3.2 Illustrative Work in the Entrepreneurship Literature

Research on the nature and consequences of hegemonic versus alternative masculinities is still at a very early stage in the gender and entrepreneurship literature. Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) attribute this state to the tendency for scholars in the area to treat women “as the personification of gender itself” (p. 8); that is, as if “only women have a gender” (p. 9). Consequently, male entrepreneurs tend to be portrayed not only as normative but also as ‘genderless’ (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Marlow 2014)—and thus not in need of more nuanced analysis from the perspective of masculinity. Indeed, only a handful of studies constitute exceptions to this observation. The article by Bird and Brush (2002) is an example of an early conceptual piece. Central to the authors’ theorizing is the explicit recognition that male (and female) entrepreneurs can exhibit heterogeneity with respect to their ‘gender maturity’ level; that is, the extent to which both masculine-stereotyped and feminine-stereotyped characteristics are integrated into their identities and behaviors. These scholars further posited that less gender-mature male entrepreneurs tend to enact more masculine-typed organizational creation processes and attributes, whereas those with a higher level of gender maturity tend to enact processes and attributes with a greater balance of stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics.
As for empirical work, foundational ethnographic research by Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004) and Giazitzoglu and Down (2017) has provided insight into the differentiated masculinities exhibited by male business owners, revealing the characteristics of those that were performed (and rejected). Relatedly, Smith’s (2010, 2013) qualitative documentary analyses shed light on the place-specific masculine entrepreneurial identities narrated for men, while Jernberg, Lindbäck, and Roos (2020) documented differences in how hegemonic versus subordinate male entrepreneurs were depicted in a Swedish business magazine (both before and after the #metoo movement). With respect to consequences, Balachandra et al. (2019) quantitative analysis showed that investors judging an entrepreneurial pitch competition tended to favor male entrepreneurs who displayed highly masculine-stereotyped behaviors, such as assertiveness, forcefulness, and dominance, over those who exhibited highly feminine-stereotyped behaviors such as warmth, sensitiveness, and emotiveness.

3.3 Suggested Questions for Future Entrepreneurship Research on Gender Stereotyping

To encourage additional research that attends to the diverse masculinities that male entrepreneurs are likely to exhibit in practice, we build upon prior provocative calls by Hamilton (2013, 2014), Marlow (2014), and Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018). The latter scholars suggested that researchers focus upon male entrepreneurs who are fathers—i.e., “dadpreneurship”—as a way “to challenge the association between traditional heteronormative masculinity and entrepreneurial activity” (p. 10). We not only endorse this suggestion but also echo Gatrell, Ladge, and Powell (2022) in recommending that scholars consult extant work in the broader literature that has specifically examined the new models of fatherhood (e.g., ‘the involved father’) that are emerging in many contemporary societies. Examples of this work include the studies by Banchefsky and Park (2016), Cannito (2020), Eerola and Mykkänen (2015), Johansson (2011), Johansson and Klinth (2008), and Jordan (2020).

Several questions worthy of future investigation arise when one considers emergent models of fatherhood in the context of entrepreneurship. For instance, is it even possible for male entrepreneurs who subscribe to these new models to live up to stereotypic prescriptions of the hegemonic masculinity that successful entrepreneurs are ‘supposed’ to exhibit—or are the two masculinities fundamentally irreconcilable? Do resource providers tend to be biased against male entrepreneurs who endorse an involved father identity; i.e., being highly engaged in childcare activities (Banchefsky and Park 2016; Cannito 2020)? Given that such
men tend to experience career-related penalties as employees (as noted by Gatrell, Ladge, and Powell 2022), similar outcomes seem likely for male entrepreneurs. Perhaps it is the case, however, that some potential resource providers—such as male jobseekers who themselves subscribe to the involved father identity—are biased in favor of male entrepreneurs who exhibit this non-hegemonic masculinity. Notably, research that addresses questions attentive to new models of fatherhood possesses the potential to offer timely and important extensions to extant work on how gender influences not only the stereotyping of entrepreneurship but also the family embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity (for a recent review of the latter topic, see Hughes and Jennings 2020).

Future work on the Mapping Masculinities path does not need to focus solely on the nexus of fatherhood and entrepreneurship, however. We can easily envision another strand attentive to between-gender comparisons. An illustrative query in this regard is as follows: Do potential resource providers tend to exhibit greater biases and discrimination against men or women who do not closely approximate the idealized image of the hegemonically masculine entrepreneur? Because resource providers are likely to possess stronger expectations that men will (and should) resemble this prototype, it seems plausible that they will exhibit more negative biases and discrimination against male entrepreneurs with non-hegemonic masculinities than female entrepreneurs who display equivalent characteristics. Indeed, the strong pressure on men to live up to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity (O’Neil 2012) raises questions related to the potential disjuncture between symbolic versus authentic displays of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity. We know from prior research that male business owners tend to talk in stereotypically masculine ways even though, just like their female counterparts, they tend to organize and manage their firms with a combination of stereotypically masculine and feminine approaches (Cliff, Langton, and Aldrich 2005). We do not yet know, however, about the implications of this discrepancy. What happens, if anything, when stakeholders realize the discordance between the symbolic (stereotypically masculine) personas portrayed by entrepreneurs and their actual (potentially feminine-typed) identities and behaviors? Does the gender of the entrepreneur who is not ‘walking the talk’ make any difference?

4 Path 3: Revealing Rationales

4.1 Essence and Intellectual Origins of Proposed Path

As a third envisioned path worth pursuing, we encourage scholars to reveal the rationales that underlie gender-based differentiation/discrimination in the entrepreneurial context. The objective of this proposed direction for future research is to
develop an enhanced understanding of the various cognitive/affective mechanisms that separately or jointly contribute to the differential treatment enacted by others towards men versus women who are entrepreneurs. Because such a quest is oriented towards surfacing underlying dynamics, it is an especially important precursor to the development of practical initiatives for attenuating gender-based differentiation/discrimination in the context of venture creation.

The rationales surfaced to date have their intellectual origins in social psychology, economics, and sociology. Theories of ‘gender-role incongruity’ (Eagly and Karau 2002) and ‘lack-of-fit’ (Heilman 1983, 2001) constitute two examples from social psychology. The essence of these explanations is that individuals tend to exhibit biases against women in male-typed domains (such as entrepreneurship) due to the perceived mismatch between the characteristics considered necessary for success in such domains and the gender-stereotypical roles or qualities ascribed to women (Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021). A related explanation from social psychology is status characteristics/expectations theory (Berger et al. 1977, 1986; Wagner and Berger 1993), which emphasizes the poorer performance expectations that individuals tend to form for members of lower-status (e.g., women) than higher-status social groups (e.g., men). Notably, the preceding arguments are consistent with a broader rationale, popular among economists, known as ‘statistical discrimination theory’. As summarized recently by Tilcsik (2021), the crux of this explanation is that when uncertainty exists about an individual’s future performance (as is arguably the case for entrepreneurs), decision-makers tend to rely on stereotypical beliefs about the group to which the individual belongs (e.g., women). Statistical discrimination theory thus contrasts sharply with the economics theory of ‘taste-based discrimination’, which emphasizes the antipathy that a decision-maker possesses towards a certain social group (Tilcsik 2021).

An alternative rationale is provided by ‘homophily theory’ (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Originating in sociology, this view emphasizes that the differential treatment experienced by members of certain groups can also result from the simple tendency for individuals to prefer associating with similar others. Demographic characteristics such as gender, race, and age frequently serve as the basis for similarity assessments. Although homophily theory suggests that the underlying reason for the preferential treatment displayed towards members of one group over another is more benign (especially relative to taste-based discrimination), the outcome for those deemed dissimilar is nevertheless the same, i.e., inferior treatment if not exclusion.

Yet another distinct explanation derives from the notion—evident in both the economics and sociology literatures—of ‘audience-based’ or ‘second-order’ gender bias (Becker 1971; Bordalo et al. 2019; Correll et al. 2017; Troyer and Younts 1997). Instead of attributing discriminatory behavior to an individual’s own beliefs or
preferences, the premise of this theory is that such actions can also result from the individual’s perceptions of the stereotypes that others are likely to hold of women. Thus, even if a decision-maker does not personally hold gender-stereotypic beliefs, his/her belief that influential others do so can still provoke the decision-maker to treat women differently from men.

4.2 Illustrative Work in the Entrepreneurship Literature

To date, much of the emergent research attentive to the rationales underlying the differential treatment experienced by men versus women in the context of entrepreneurship has drawn upon the social psychological theories of gender-role incongruity and/or lack-of-fit. Illustrative studies include those focused on the evaluation of new business ideas (Gupta and Turban 2012) or entrepreneurial ventures (Gupta, Wieland, and Turban 2019; Lee and Huang 2018). They also include investigations of gender differences in firm survival (Yang and del Carmen 2019) and an entrepreneur’s ability to secure network contacts (Abraham 2020), financial capital (Alsos and Ljunggren 2017; Eddleston et al. 2016; Johnson, Stevenson, and Letwin 2018; Kanze et al. 2020; Malmström, Johansson, and Wincent 2017), and job application intentions from potential employees (Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, and Jennings 2021). Another example is the conceptual framework delineated by Tonoyan and Strohmeyer (2021). Drawing on gender role (in-)congruity theory and research, these scholars offer empirically-testable propositions regarding whether, how, and when entrepreneurial resource-providers are likely to under-, over-, or equi-value female-led innovative ventures relative to equivalent male-led innovative ventures, introducing the gender-typing of the entrepreneur’s core product or service offering as a key contingency factor.

Other emergent work has drawn upon status characteristics/expectations theory. Examples include the studies of founding team composition and task position allocation, respectively, by Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter (2003) and Jung, Vissa, and Pich (2017). Another illustrative study is Gupta et al.’s (2014) investigation of the differential responses of new recruits to the managerial styles enacted by female versus male entrepreneurs. Yet another is the set of experiments conducted by Thébaud (2015), which revealed how the interplay between a founder’s gender, the innovativeness of a firm’s business model, and the gender-typing of the industry impacted assessments of the entrepreneur and the investment-worthiness of his/her venture. Thébaud and Sharkey (2016) provided further evidence consistent with a status-based explanation, showing that lenders applied “gender-differentiated standards of performance” (p. 23) to new firms led by women versus men during the 2009–2010 recession.
In contrast, other entrepreneurship research has called attention to the sociological notion of homophily. Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter (2003), for instance, demonstrated the pronounced influence of social similarity on the composition of founding teams. The homophily argument is also prominent within numerous studies of gender differences in entrepreneurial resource acquisition. It appears within proffered explanations for the persistently small proportion of venture capital funding obtained by firms with a woman at the helm (Alsos and Ljunggren 2017; Balachandra 2020; Brush et al. 2018). It is also core to the crowdfunding study by Greenberg and Mollick (2017), which revealed that the stronger support provided by (female) crowdfunders to ventures led by women, especially in industries where women are least represented, could be attributed to ‘activist choice homophily’; that is, “perceptions of shared structural barriers stemming from a common social identity” (p. 341). Most recently, Snellman and Younkin (2021) invoked homophily theory to examine whether and how a founder’s gender and race influence the willingness of job seekers to apply for employment within a new firm.

Finally, some nascent work in the entrepreneurship literature has drawn explicitly upon the theory of audience-based/second-order gender bias. A key illustrative example is Abraham’s (2020) study of entrepreneurial networking, which revealed how decision-makers were less likely to introduce female than male entrepreneurs who were operating in a male-typed context to one of their network contacts—even though they had not exhibited such a bias when not in the presence of a third party. Notably, this study further demonstrated that the presence of a third party did not result in a reciprocal advantage for female entrepreneurs in female-typed contexts. Reflecting on these findings, Tonoyan and Strohmeyer (2021) recently called for researchers to investigate when “second-order gender beliefs [are] likely to trump first-order gender beliefs in the evaluation of female (and male) entrepreneurs” (p. 234). Below we raise additional suggested questions for future research related to the rationales that underlie gender-based differentiation/discrimination in the context of entrepreneurship.

### 4.3 Suggested Questions for Future Entrepreneurship Research on Gender Stereotyping

Although the preceding summary might seem to suggest that the ‘revealing rationales’ path is already well-trodden, many important questions relevant to this recommended route remain unasked—or at least insufficiently addressed. One overarching query of this nature is as follows: Which rationale (or rationales) best accounts for the gender-differentiated treatment experienced by entrepreneurs?
Ruef et al.'s (2003) study of founding team composition offers an empirical precedent for the 'competing explanations' design implied by such a question. We also call for future work that raises and addresses more nuanced corollaries. For instance, does the answer to the above question depend on the focal entrepreneurial outcome? In our view, it seems plausible that the key mechanism underlying gender-differentiated decisions with respect to founding team composition or role distribution is likely to be quite different from that underlying the acquisition of externally provided resources. As an additional example, we encourage exploration of the following speculation. If stereotypical notions of gender-typed roles and characteristics continue to evolve (Eagly et al. 2020), will homophily based on other indicators of similarity become the primary—or even sole—determinant of any remaining differential treatment experienced by entrepreneurs of different genders?

Another question that has not yet received systematic consideration in extant research is as follows: In what ways do the key rationales examined to date interact with one another to shape gender-differentiated experiences in the context of entrepreneurship? Abraham's (2020) investigation of gender bias in the networking behaviors of entrepreneurs constitutes a useful precedent in this regard. More specifically, this scholar argued and found that a key inference from gender-role incongruity theory (i.e., the stronger perceived lack-of-fit for female entrepreneurs in male-typed industries) establishes an important boundary condition on the primary inference derived from the audience-based rationale (i.e., that female entrepreneurs will receive fewer third-party connections than will male entrepreneurs). We encourage future researchers to examine other ways in which the implications associated with one theorized rationale are contingent upon—or at least moderated by—the implications associated with another. For instance, can gender-role incongruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002; Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021) also serve as a basis for delineating plausible boundary conditions on hypotheses derived from status characteristics/expectations theory in the context of entrepreneurship? Likewise, does status characteristics/expectations theory offer a conceptual foundation for specifying boundary conditions on inferences derived from audience-focused explanations for the gender biases experienced by entrepreneurs?

As a final suggested overarching question for future research, we offer: What are the key correlates of each explanation proffered thus far for the inequitable treatment experienced by entrepreneurs of different genders—and do these correlates differ by underlying rationale? In our view, the sub-query of who is more likely to invoke each mechanism represents an especially important question worth pursuing. On this note, we acknowledge that some extant work has investigated the role played by an evaluator's gender (Gupta, Wieland, and Turban 2019; Snellman and Younkin 2021) and endorsement of modern sexist beliefs
(Gupta and Turban 2012). That said, while these studies examined whether and how these individual-level considerations contributed to gender-biased outcomes experienced by entrepreneurs, they did not investigate whether and how the factors were correlated with any underlying mechanisms per se. Specific questions such as the following thus remain unanswered. Do certain types of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial resource providers, or other members of entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g., educators, policymakers) tend to be more susceptible, for instance, to perceptions of gender-role incongruity rather than gender-based homophily? If so, why and with what consequences?

5 Discussion

With our interest in the gender stereotyping of entrepreneurship piqued by recent work that we conducted separately (Tonoyan and Strohmeyer 2021) and jointly (Tonoyan, Strohmeyer, and Jennings 2021) on the topic, we utilized this paper as a venue for accomplishing two key tasks. The first was to organize and summarize the fast-accumulating body of existing work in the area as a way of helping new scholars quickly grasp what other researchers have discovered thus far. The second was to share our ideas for future paths worth pursuing as a means of illuminating the understandings that have not yet been uncovered. While many such paths undoubtedly exist, we focused upon those that we called “Investigating Intersectionalities”, “Mapping Masculinities”, and “Revealing Rationales”.

If asked to prioritize these three suggested paths, we would be hard-pressed to offer a rank ordering. This is because we consider each to possess considerable timeliness and importance considering recent critiques of the gender and entrepreneurship literature as well as contemporary social trends and issues. An intersectionality approach to the gender stereotyping of entrepreneurship, for instance, resonates not only with calls for greater scholarly attention to the heterogeneity that is evident amongst women entrepreneurs (Brush, Greene, and Welter 2020; Henry et al. 2021; Hughes et al. 2012; Marlow 2014; Strohmeyer 2019; Tonoyan, Budig, and Strohmeyer 2010), but also with societal concerns about diversity and inclusion more broadly. Indeed, by building a more nuanced understanding of the unique stereotypes, biases, and discrimination faced by entrepreneurs (or potential entrepreneurs) with particular combinations of gender and other social group memberships, researchers will be able to construct an empirical basis for grounding the design and delivery of more targeted—and thus arguably more effective—educational and other public policy initiatives.
A masculinities approach possesses similarly dualistic potential. On the one hand, this approach offers a way for scholars to address the critique that gender and entrepreneurship scholars have historically treated the concept of gender as “just something women do or have, which distorts the debate into a woman’s problem” (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018: 16; see also Ahl and Marlow 2012; Marlow 2014). On the other hand, explicit attention to the different masculinities that male entrepreneurs are likely to exhibit is consonant with the growing awareness that contemporary enactments of fatherhood, in particular, differ considerably from the ‘household provider’ role emphasized within traditional (if not outdated) notions of the nuclear family (Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf 2016; Gatrell, Ladge, and Powell 2022; Rumens 2017). Enhanced understanding of how entrepreneurs who subscribe to ‘new male’ identities combine involved models of fatherhood with venture creation activity—and the consequences of doing so—are likely to prove invaluable to the current generation of young men in classrooms worldwide who are considering entrepreneurship as a career.

Similarly, greater attention to the rationales that underlie various instantiations of gender stereotyping in the entrepreneurial context possesses timely and important implications for both scholarship and society. With respect to scholarship, research of this recommended nature constitutes a way to address entreaties for gender and entrepreneurship scholars to shift their focus away from the historical emphasis on whether gender impacts entrepreneurial activity—and toward why this is the case (Marlow and Patton 2005). Moreover, by revealing the mechanisms by which gender-based cognitive biases and discriminatory behaviors arise and occur in the context of entrepreneurship, researchers will be able to offer empirically grounded advice for interventions aimed at attenuating such beliefs and practices. On this note, we acknowledge that much more research is needed on how gender-based stereotypes/biases pertinent to entrepreneurship—as well as the gender-differentiated treatment of actual or potential entrepreneurs—can be attenuated.

We also acknowledge that we are not the first to call for future research on the three paths elaborated herein. We recognize (and greatly appreciate) the work by predecessors, such as Hamilton (2013, 2014), Marlow (2014), and Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018), who have raised similar directions for future exploration. We believe, however, that our article extends these prior entreaties in two key ways. For one, we summarize not only the intellectual origins of each recommended route but also relevant work published subsequently within the entrepreneurship literature. Second, and more importantly, we offer a detailed set of specific research questions to help guide future investigations along each suggested path. For ease of reference, we remind readers that Table 1 contains succinct summaries in these regards.
6 Conclusion

We wrap up this paper by articulating the key conclusions that we have reached through the process of putting it together. Based on the bibliographic analysis that we conducted at the outset, we can conclude that academic research on gender stereotyping and entrepreneurship has accelerated dramatically since the 1990s (and appears to show no signs of abating). That said, we are also confident in our conclusion that several paths are deserving of even greater scholarly attention—including those of “Investigating Intersectionalities”, “Mapping Masculinities”, and “Revealing Rationales”. We hope that we have demarcated these paths sufficiently so that others are motivated to explore and expand them.

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