1. Advancing theory development in venture creation: signposts for understanding gender

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INTRODUCTION

Women are one of the fastest-growing populations of entrepreneurs worldwide and make a significant contribution to employment, innovation and economic growth in all economies (Kelley et al., 2011). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) shows that 126 million women in 67 economies started and managed businesses in 2012, representing more than 52 per cent of the world’s population and 84 per cent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) (Kelley et al., 2013). Another 98 million women across these regions ran businesses they launched at least three years ago. Yet, in nearly all of the 67 economies the rate of men’s venture creation is higher than that of women (Kelley et al., 2013). This raises questions as to why the rate of men’s venture creation exceeds that of women, and what factors explain these differences.

Theory development exploring the role of gender in venture creation and sources of possible differences between men and women in this process is limited. Notwithstanding a growing body of literature and notable initiatives (namely the Diana Project, which since 1999 has worked to grow research in the field), there remains a comparative paucity of theoretically grounded research on the topic (Brush et al., 2010b; Hughes et al., 2012; Sullivan and Meek, 2012). Without theory development regarding gender in entrepreneurship, we lack strong conceptual foundations for exploring variation in venture creation and growth between male and female entrepreneurs, and among groups of women (Jennings and Brush, 2013). A brief review of the literature shows that most current frameworks of venture creation are approached from an objective economic perspective, less often considering the influence of social settings, such as family and household, culture and context (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Bird and Brush,
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Therefore, gender differences between men and women that might result from context can be masked in the venture creation process. We address this shortcoming by building on a gender-aware framework that argued for explicit recognition of social embeddedness at the micro family level, and the meso and macro levels (Brush et al., 2009; Welter, 2011). Then, drawing from early work of Shapero and Sokol (1982) and their successors, we develop a framework and propose propositions that explore how perceptions of feasibility and desirability will differentially influence the venture creation process between men and women. We argue that variations in the degree of embeddedness will explain a greater or lesser likelihood of start-up for women entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts. We highlight how the start-up process may be constrained or facilitated by the impact of family and household resources, and how social roles can facilitate and/or impede entrepreneurial action of women compared to their male counterparts.

Following this introduction, we explore the concept of embeddedness and elaborate how it has featured in entrepreneurship literature to lay a contextually rich perspective from which we build our conceptual framework; positing that perceptions of desirability and feasibility lead to venture creation. Thereafter, we argue gender moderates the relationship aspects of embeddedness, desirability and feasibility, and venture creation. We then present propositions, discuss implications and research directions.

EMBEDDEDNESS PERSPECTIVE

The embeddedness concept emphasizes that economic behaviour cannot be understood outside the context of its social structure and social relations (Granovetter, 1985, 1990). Economic action is embedded in interpersonal relations and structural embeddedness is the ‘structure of the overall network of relations’ (Granovetter, 1990, p. 99). Structural embeddedness has a rich history in organizational strategy studies. For example, Gnyawali and Madhavan (2001) explore the structural embeddedness of competitive dynamics. Instead of identifying different forms of embeddedness, however, some studies broadly refer to ‘social embeddedness’ (e.g. Hayton et al., 2012).

Zukin and DiMaggio (1990, p. 18), similarly to Granovetter (1990), define structural embeddedness as ‘the contextualization of economic exchange in patterns of ongoing interpersonal relations’, but extend the typology further to include cognitive, cultural and political embeddedness.
Cognitive embeddedness refers to how structured rigidities and regularities of mental processes limit economic reasoning. Thus, entrepreneurs are socially situated and immediate and interactive conversations, relationships and interpersonal aspects influence entrepreneurial action (Mitchell et al., 2011). The environment could limit an individual’s cognitive ability to envision and create opportunities for new ventures. Although analytically separate, cognitive and cultural embeddedness are closely intertwined. Cognitive structures are also culturally acquired, resulting from social interactions as well as predominant norms and values governing individual behavior (Dequech, 2003). In the remainder of the chapter, we therefore subsume cognitive embeddedness under cultural embeddedness.

Cultural, political (e.g. Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990) and institutional embeddedness (e.g. Baum and Oliver, 1992) are representative of social context pertaining to the overarching environment. Institutional embeddedness denotes interconnections with the institutional environment. In general, these three concepts highlight how the wider institutions of society influence economic actors. They align broadly with cognisance of ‘institutions’ both formal (constitutions, laws, rules, regulations, property rights) and informal (norms, values, traditions, taboos, customs, codes of conduct), that structure, constrain or promote forms of social, economic and political interaction and behaviour (North, 1990).

Subtle differences in the social, economic and politico-institutional concepts are sometimes highlighted. Zukin and DiMaggio (1990, p. 20) use power influences to differentiate political embeddedness, arguing that ‘economic institutions and decisions are shaped by a struggle for power that involves economic actors and nonmarket institutions’. Cultural embeddedness includes norms, values and conventions as well as everyday practices that shape behaviours. Zukin and DiMaggio (1990, p. 17) elaborate on cultural embeddedness, emphasizing, ‘[C]ulture, in the form of beliefs and ideologies, taken for granted assumptions, or formal rule systems, also prescribes strategies of self-interested actors.’ Hence, their exposition of cultural embeddedness encompasses the impact of institutions.

EMBEDDEDNESS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

The entrepreneurship literature considers structural, cultural and political, and institutional embeddedness, and more recently, family embeddedness. At the structural level, embeddedness is frequently presented in terms of the identification, formation and exploitation of networks and network
ties in relation to resources and other benefits that they yield (Allen, 2000; Anderson et al., 2010; Lechner et al., 2006). Johannisson et al. (2002) examine individual exchange relationships of small business owners within networks, considering first-, second- and third-order ties. Hite (2005) explores how network ties within social relationships represent a strategic form of organizing for the practices of emerging entrepreneurial firms. Literature that captures social capital implications for entrepreneurship also fits under the structural embeddedness umbrella. While limited studies mention structural embeddedness, it is safe to assume that this form of embeddedness applies when the discussion centres on networks, alliances and ties. Research also shows that the relational context within which prospective entrepreneurs are situated influences their social networks and opportunity recognition (Anderson et al., 2012; De Carolis et al., 2009; Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011), mentorship (Ozgen and Baron, 2007) and perceptions of feasibility or desirability of opportunities that affect intentions.

Institutional embeddedness is studied relative to the influence of the formal and regulatory framework on the nature and extent of entrepreneurship (Acs et al., 2008; Henrekson and Sanandaji, 2011; Stenholm et al., 2013). Minniti (2008) citing North (1990) refers to the institutional environment, which determines the formal and informal rules of the game, and places constraints on human action. These institutions (and policies) are crucial in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour, and several studies demonstrate how institutional elements such as legal systems impact on entrepreneurial cognition and the new venture creation decision (Lim et al., 2010).

Research also examines how entrepreneurship is embedded in national and local traditions, rules and values (Hechavarria and Reynolds, 2009). Kloosterman et al. (1999) study the multi-embeddedness of ethnic entrepreneurs and suggest the concept of ‘mixed embeddedness’ which embraces the interplay between social, economic and politico-institutional contexts, as well as structure and agency. Following this line, Jack and Anderson (2002) examine entrepreneurship as an embedded socio-economic process and explore the links between agent and structure. The notion of cultural embeddedness is implicit in research that examines the impact of the welfare state on women’s entrepreneurship. For instance, Neergaard and Thrane (2011) argue that while the Nordic welfare model might facilitate women’s wage employment, it does not favour women selecting an entrepreneurial career. Cultural embeddedness can also explain why Middle Eastern and North African economies contain the lowest proportion of women entrepreneurs (Kelley et al., 2011). Customs and traditions of Islamic and Arab society reserve the place of women to the home and private domain, and they do not have similar opportunities to
men (Ahmad, 2011). When women are embedded in conservative patriarchal families, such as home-based embroiderers in Jordan (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), their perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities could be constrained. Relatedly, cultural norms and family division of labour could restrict the time availability of women, limiting the desirability of ventures outside the home. This has been shown for women entrepreneurs in post-Soviet countries (Welter and Smallbone, 2008).

Hence, we argue that women’s entrepreneurship is highly dependent on the specific contexts in which it occurs (Welter, 2011). This includes the overall political and cultural context, as well as family and household contexts. While family embeddedness considerations are relevant in other areas of study such as family conflict (e.g. Carr et al., 2008), in entrepreneurship the family and private domain factors have only recently gained importance (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Jennings and McDougald, 2007). Family embeddedness is participation in family roles, household resources and social network relationships (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Ruef et al., 2003). This captures the characteristics of the entrepreneurs’ family systems (transitions, resources, norms, attitudes and values) that influence the processes involved in venture creation (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003). Ahl (2006, p. 604) notes that women’s entrepreneurship studies fail to address interconnections between work and family satisfactorily because they commonly ‘assume a division between work and family and between a public and a private sphere of life’.

Family is at the core of family business literature but its relationship to the venture is viewed in different ways. For instance, Carter and Schwab (2008) consider the embeddedness of family relationships and their impact upon business performance, but not the impact of the business upon family relationships. This unidirectional impact of family on firm is variously replicated in several other articles. In contrast, Hall and Nordqvist (2008) and Litz (2008) view interactions between family and business as more recursive and interactive. The interesting exposition by Litz (2008) uses the Mobius Strip metaphor to examine the interconnectedness of family and business over time, but equally, the image is useful in describing ways in which business and family can appear as distinct entities yet seamlessly morph into one another.

In sum, we propose ‘embeddedness’ as the basic building block, and theoretical rationale, for explaining the venture creation process and accounting for gender differences, and to obtain a holistic understanding of entrepreneurial activity. We distinguish three types of embeddedness: family, cultural and structural. For analytical separateness, our conceptual framework differentiates structural embeddedness as pertaining to all characteristics of social exchange relations, networks and alliances.
BUILDING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Entrepreneurial activity is likely to occur when an individual makes a shift from one life path to another, and there are positive pushes and pulls, as well as negative displacements, that can form an entrepreneurial event and motivate entrepreneurial behaviour (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). The concern is about what brought about the action that led to a change in the entrepreneur’s former life path, and why this path generates an entrepreneurial event and not another available possible action (Shapero and Sokol, 1982, p. 78). Extreme negative displacements may be political and religious refugees; but there are also job-related displacements; or job dissatisfaction may also push someone to entrepreneurship. Shapero and Sokol (1982) suggest that positive pulls can be the perception of an opportunity, and that desirability precedes feasibility.

More recently, Krueger et al. (2000) expand on these arguments, pointing out that before a new venture event can take place, perceptions and other cognitive aspects influence the viability or feasibility of the opportunity. Explaining organizational opportunity emergence and creation, they argue that perceptions of opportunities can be catalysed by either positive or negative factors. Further, they posit that desirability and feasibility are linked to intentional behaviour, which can have a venture creation outcome. The antecedents to desirability include perceived social norms and personal desirability, while perceived feasibility is influenced by perceived self-efficacy and perceived collective efficacy.

Perceived Desirability

According to Shapero and Sokol (1982), these are the social and cultural factors that enter into the formation of entrepreneurial events, and are most felt through the formation of individual value systems. If a social system places high value on the formation of new ventures, then more individuals will choose that path in times of transition. Krueger et al. (2000) follow Ajzen’s ‘theory of planned behavior’ and define this as personal attitude, which depends on the consequences of outcomes from performing the target behaviour; their likelihood, as well as the magnitude of positive or negative consequences. This is an expectancy-based perception, whereby an individual will act in a certain way based on expectations that the act will be followed by a certain outcome (expectancy), and depending on the attractiveness of that outcome to the individual (value or valence) (Vroom, 1964). Preferences for certain outcomes are established by employing criteria for desirability, which is a form of value (Steel and König, 2006).
Further, social norms that are the perceived normative beliefs of family, friends, co-workers or others influence perceptions of the individual as well (Kolvereid, 1996). Household and family norms and values influence work behaviours, time spent working on the venture, and the social support received by the entrepreneur (Brush and Manolova, 2004; Welter and Smallbone, 2008). Family members and peers play a role in establishing desirability, together with the prevailing social attitude towards entrepreneurship. For example, in both Russia and China it has been shown that entrepreneurs have many more entrepreneurs among their relatives (parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins) and also among their childhood friends (Djankov et al., 2006a, 2006b).

**Perceived Feasibility**

This concerns perceptions as to whether or not creation of a business is feasible, and is related to the perception of having the capability to act on an opportunity and start a business. Feasibility and desirability interact, so if a venture is perceived as undesirable, the person may never consider its feasibility (Fitzsimmons and Douglas, 2011). Similarly, if a new venture is perceived as not feasible, it might be viewed as undesirable. Krueger et al. (2000) use self-efficacy as a predictor of perceptions of feasibility, arguing that action takes into account not only expectancy of outcomes but also perceived self-efficacy about an individual’s ability to execute some behaviour. Self-efficacy perception involves the internalization of competencies and the belief in mastery of skills, and is influenced by the psychological and emotional support of peers (Boyd and Vozikis, 1994). Similarly, self-efficacy perceptions play a powerful role in managerial and employee behaviour, whereby gender and ethnicity differences in work interest and performance can often be traced to differences in self-confidence (Krueger et al., 2000). This in turn might also partly, and indirectly, reflect social roles and norms within a society.

Entrepreneurs perceive feasibility as their ability to support the venture financially, including the ability to secure capital from external sources (Erikson, 2002). Perceptions of feasibility in relation to finance can be linked to the entrepreneur’s view on capital as a commodity rather than a scarce resource. When entrepreneurs perceive informal venture capital as a commodity then capital acquisition is about finding ‘competent capital’ where investors have requisite expertise and contacts (Saetre, 2003).

Our proposed framework is dynamic, where feasibility and desirability might be considered simultaneously instead of sequentially. It also captures how structural, cultural and family embeddedness influences
perceived feasibility and desirability differently for men and women (see Figure 1.1).

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER IN VENTURE CREATION

Several studies have investigated factors explaining disparities between male- and female-owned businesses in the start-up process. For instance, research examining start-up decisions found that men tend to start businesses in manufacturing, construction and high-technology industries, and women within the service industry or in retail due to human capital and experience (Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Neider, 1987). Furthermore, women are especially motivated to start their own businesses in the hopes of attaining a better balance between work and family (Hughes, 2005). While both men and women are motivated by opportunity and necessity, and these motivations vary widely by level of country development (Kelley et al., 2011), there is evidence that, on balance, women are more often motivated by economic necessity in the USA (Buttner, 1993; Hisrich and Brush, 1983; Hughes, 2005; Orhan and Scott, 2001). There is growing evidence that women entrepreneurs in transition and less-developed economies, as well as ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, are more likely to be motivated by economic necessity (Welter et al., 2006; Smith-Hunter, 2004).

Research examining socio-cognitive influences on entrepreneurial behaviour suggests that a better understanding of the intentions of nascent entrepreneurs in the early phase of new venture development
might help to explain the start-up process, as well as why women-led firms ultimately end up smaller, and grow more slowly (Krueger et al., 2000; Orser and Hogarth-Scott, 2005). Intentions have proved the best predictor of planned behaviour, particularly in the context of new businesses which emerge over time and involve considerable planning (Krueger et al., 2000). Expectancies also have an impact on aspirations for growth in nascent entrepreneurs, and women are more likely to have more complex expectancies, economic and social, whereas men are more likely focused on economic expectancies (Manolova et al., 2012).

There is a strong theoretical rationale as to why we might expect differences in the entrepreneurial start-up behaviour of men and women. Social learning theory argues that as a result of women’s different socialization experiences they may lack strong expectations for personal efficacy with regard to career-related behaviours and, therefore, may not fully attain their potential (Hackett and Betz, 1981). A variety of factors influence gender development (for example, peers, media, educational practices, occupational systems) and explain differences in female and male socialization (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). In the entrepreneurial context, performance accomplishments and vicarious learning are two major sources of difference (Hackett and Betz, 1981). Successful performance on a task provides information increasing the expectations of efficacy, while vicarious learning via role models, sex roles and occupational stereotypes can increase efficacy expectations from vicariously observing others succeed.

APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

In this section we present generalized propositions framed in line with three types of embeddedness: structural, cultural and family (with cognitive embeddedness, as mentioned earlier, subsumed under both cultural and family embeddedness). Separation of desirability and feasibility is often not possible because they are interconnected and interact. The portrayal of our conceptual framework shows this interaction. Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011, p.433) also stress that entrepreneurial intentions are likely to be ‘in the general case, not only a function of the main effects of perceived feasibility and perceived desirability but also a function of the interaction between these factors’. Given this interaction, and to shed light on the gender gap in venture creation, we wished to highlight the importance of distinguishing the differential impacts of forms of embeddedness on a holistic entrepreneurial motivation where both perceived feasibility
and desirability intermingle. Therefore, our propositions specify both perceptions.

**Structural Embeddedness**

Networks with more structural holes produce better information (Burt, 1992). Personal and professional networks define the types of people one interacts with, and can be an asset or a liability in entrepreneurship. Improved or diminished access to information will affect the ability of an entrepreneur to access funding or other key resources. Further, social power in formal networks can exclude some entrepreneurs and welcome others. Social power in a network is a function of position and access to unique informational resources (Burt, 1992). It is advantageous for aspiring entrepreneurs to be embedded in interpersonal networks where they can access resources pertinent to venture creation (for example, financiers, business service providers). There is increasing recognition that both networking activity and social capital play an important role in women business owners’ access to finance (Carter et al., 2007; Shaw, 2006). Hence, women spending more time and having more ties in networks where resource exchanges can occur would have a greater degree of structural embeddedness and be more likely to have success at venture creation.

Some women entrepreneurs and ethnic minorities are embedded in networks that have different characteristics and which may produce different constraints (Ibarra, 1993). For instance, the network structure for a woman entrepreneur with caring responsibilities for young children might be more likely to have a network of other mothers and caregivers. This homophily of personal contacts (Ruef et al., 2003) might be disadvantageous because this network may not have the information, or access to financial resources, needed for a particular venture. For women deeply embedded in a network of other women with primary caregiving responsibilities, the effects of their family roles in managing non-standard work (part-time, home-based), as well as career interruptions, affects their ability to maintain, diversify and intensify business networks.

Entrepreneurial networks tend to comprise more males than females in nearly every country, partly because men are more likely to be entrepreneurs. Further, it is well known that the venture capital industry and angel networks are heavily male-dominated (Becker-Blease and Sohl, 2007). Empirical evidence suggests that gender differences in network composition disadvantage women (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin, 1997). Allen (2000) refers to women’s networks including fewer entrepreneurs than male networks, which might restrict their outreach and usefulness to a female entrepreneur. Other studies report more homogeneous and less outreach-
Women tend to rely more on homogeneous networks with a larger share of relatives; on family (that is, strong ties) advice and less on professionals, such as their accountants, than their male counterparts (Renzulli and Aldrich, 2005). This has an impact on their perception of opportunity (Brush et al., 2010a). While these tendencies might be changing, when aspiring women entrepreneurs are deeply embedded in predominantly female networks they may miss opportunities to interact and develop relationships with male entrepreneurs, service providers, or financiers to support their ventures. Therefore, we posit:

**Proposition 1**: The degree of structural embeddedness differentially influences men and women entrepreneurs’ perceptions of feasibility and desirability which influences the likelihood of venture creation.

### Cultural Embeddedness

Cultural embeddedness comprises political (Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990) and institutional embeddedness (Baum and Oliver, 1992), reflecting the social context pertaining to the overarching environment. These institutions influence the ways entrepreneurs behave due to rules, values and societal norms. Early social learning experiences are related to career decisions, with males having a higher preference for entrepreneurship (Matthews and Moser, 1996). A national study of entrepreneurial tendencies among youths finds females less interested in starting a business and less confident in their abilities (Kourilsky and Walstad, 1998). Other studies show female students had lower self-efficacy than male students, and during start-up men were more likely to stress economic expectancies (risk and profitability) while women more often stress personal expectancies (autonomy and challenge) (Chen et al., 1998; Ljunggren and Kolvereid, 1996). However, social learning varies when women are raised in family firms, and/or have mothers or husbands as entrepreneurial or business role models (Coleman, 2007). When women are educated in business and entrepreneurial training, they can develop more confidence in their entrepreneurial skills (Wilson et al., 2007). Hence, women who may not have role models or may not have business education can be less culturally embedded in the entrepreneurship community.

Women’s intentions for launching and managing new businesses may differ from men’s (Langowitz and Minniti, 2007; Verheul et al., 2012). A study of new venture strategies suggests that male and female
entrepreneurs have different socialization experiences, which shape different expectancies, effort and beliefs explaining performance differences (Carter et al., 1997). GEM data shows that perceptions of the feasibility of the opportunity vary dramatically based on the country level of economic development (Kelley et al., 2013). Similarly, women’s confidence in their capabilities and perceptions of risk in starting a business vary depending on country development and perceptions of the value of entrepreneurship in their economy. Cultural norms and expectations for women’s roles are influenced by the degree to which cultural expectations are stronger or weaker for women to be entrepreneurs. Gender and culture do matter in relation to perceptions of barriers to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions (Shinnar et al., 2012).

Fuwa (2004) documents how housework is embedded in complex and social factors relating to gender norms, and reproduction of society and other macro-level variables such as welfare regimes. He confirms that women in less egalitarian countries benefit less from their individual-level assets (relative resources, time availability and gender ideology) and suggests that cultural settings directly affect the family and household, entrepreneurs’ motivation and perceptions of entrepreneurial activities. Family policies and labour market institutions (for example, gender wage inequality and public expenditure on childcare) impact indirectly on the decision to start a business through their effect on societal perceptions (Elam and Terjesen, 2010). In areas where property rights and other laws disadvantage women, these institutional factors may culturally embed women into more female roles, making it less likely that they would be interested in perceiving entrepreneurial opportunities, or able to.

Many societies mainly define women through roles connected to family and household responsibilities; societal values implicitly interpret women’s entrepreneurship as less desirable and, as a result, provide lower normative support (Baughn et al., 2006; Welter and Smallbone, 2008, 2010; Welter et al., 2006). Further, culturally produced and socially learned gender stereotyping leads both men and women to self-impose occupational segregation in entrepreneurship (Gupta et al., 2009). For ethnic minority entrepreneurs or women entrepreneurs, there is no denying that institutional factors and cultural embeddedness can impact at the micro level. For example, women can subconsciously internalize certain behaviours from an early age (Babcock et al., 2003), which can influence their personal ambitions and willingness to choose among different opportunities in order to identify or create and pursue an idea. Also, entry may be self-restricted to feminized professions, sectors and business fields such as personal services or care professions (Marlow, 2002) because of early socialization. In societies or areas where the stereotype of the
entrepreneur is more often associated with men, women are less likely to identify as entrepreneurs, and have more challenges in overcoming these perceptions. Social roles consistent with gender stereotypes may anchor women in a gendered social view, making it harder for them to become entrepreneurial.

Therefore, we posit:

**Proposition 2:** The degree of cultural embeddedness differentially influences men and women entrepreneurs’ perceptions of feasibility and desirability, which influences the likelihood of venture creation.

**Family Embeddedness**

As entrepreneurs are embedded in family relationships, family member perceptions of desirability and credibility may encourage or discourage an entrepreneur’s intentions in the venture creation process (Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Fitzsimmons and Douglas, 2011). Family dynamics can affect social learning and attitudes towards independence and achievement which are also associated with entrepreneurial behaviour (Vesper, 1980). The ‘5M framework’ deliberately positioned the construct of ‘motherhood’ as the centrepiece of a framework, signalling that standard models of entrepreneurship, which tend to focus solely upon ‘market/opportunity’, ‘money’ and ‘management’, could not adequately account for the experiences of female entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009). In other words, the nature and effects of family on women’s entrepreneurial activity are likely to vary across different institutional, societal, and cultural contexts. Society manifests itself through cultural norms, traditions and religion that influence roles ascribed to men and women (Welter et al., 2006).

Women in traditional businesses (for example, services, retail) have stronger career expectations of security and a balance between the demands of work and home than women in non-traditional businesses (for example, manufacturing) (Anna et al., 2000). Also, role models, self-assurance and marriage were positively related to the supply of female entrepreneurs; while education and experience were negatively correlated with entrepreneurship (Shiller and Crewson, 1997). Alternatively, social encouragement leads to the likelihood of a successful venture start-up, and resources available to the entrepreneur are influenced by household size, head and health of members of the household (Brush and Manolova, 2004). Research on portfolio entrepreneurship in the context of farm households supports this notion (Carter and Ram, 2003). Hence, family support is another dimension of embeddedness, in that women receiving less social support from their families are more likely to have less
confidence in their entrepreneurial activities, and would be more deeply embedded in their family and, therefore, have less propensity to launch a venture.

Intra-family role expectations, and the extent to which there is an equal or unequal distribution of power and assets at the family level, are influenced by the degree of family embeddedness. Role expectations may mean that there is an unequal distribution of power and assets at the family level, so the degree of family embeddedness might be much stronger for women than for men. The extent of family embeddedness will also influence the time spent in creating and maintaining networks, as well as the formal and informal interactions among the entrepreneur and network members. If women are more involved in caring duties, and have less time for building and consolidating business and professional networks, the feasibility of venture creation is reduced.

Therefore, we posit:

**Proposition 3:** The degree of family embeddedness differentially influences male and female entrepreneurs’ perceptions of feasibility and desirability, which influences the likelihood of venture creation.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

We have argued that differences in women’s rates of entrepreneurship, and subsequent aspirations for growth, can be explained by applying an embeddedness perspective to our understanding of perceived feasibility and desirability. Following early work by Shapero and Sokol (1982) that argues venture creation is subsequent to perceptions of feasibility (capability and confidence to act) and desirability (beliefs in socio-cultural support, and expectancy for performance and outcomes), we suggest that these are influenced by the degree of embeddedness. Embeddedness is a methodological principle, advocating a holistic approach that incorporates institutions and social relations as an integral part of individual action and organizational operation (Gemici, 2008). Studies from entrepreneurship show that embeddedness influences venture creation, and we propose that existing differences in men’s and women’s actions can be explained by the degree of structural, cultural and family embeddedness. We argued that the degree of embeddedness differentially influences men and women in terms of their perceived feasibility and desirability for entrepreneurial activity. We allow for a dynamic perspective, in that embeddedness factors can operate collectively, and feasibility and desirability also interact.

The notion of embeddedness need not be static. Emirbayer (1997) high-
lights the socially negotiated, dynamic nature of social action and moves the idea of embeddedness forward by bringing in a spatial and temporal dimension to supplement relational aspects. We recognize spatial and temporal dimensions as relevant to our framework. For example, at the individual level of the entrepreneur, dynamic life-stage elements could impact on the degree of family embeddedness. This is of particular relevance to women since child-bearing and caring activity have life-stage implications. Spatial embeddedness is useful for encapsulating the importance of ‘place’ as a fostering or constraining element for entrepreneurship (Berg, 1997). Place is socially and culturally bounded (Thornton and Flynn, 2003), with cultural rules and shared meanings defining not only societies, but also local communities. Therefore, we suggest that the spatial element can be encapsulated in the broader embeddedness perspective brought forward in this chapter.

A better understanding of the ways different types of embeddedness influence entrepreneurs has the potential to explain why some groups of entrepreneurs are more likely to be funded than others. In the case of market access, ethnic or racial norms in communities may make it unacceptable for some entrepreneurs to break out of their community to sell products or services to those of other ethnic groups as they pursue growth. To the extent that embeddedness explains differential approaches to venture creation, there may be implications for policymakers to explore why certain cultural norms, institutions or political processes may inhibit women (and not their male counterparts), and how the extent of these differences depends on the level of economic development.

Embeddedness is ‘a puzzle that, once understood, can furnish tools for explicating not only organizational puzzles but market processes’ (Uzzi, 1997, p. 22). Endorsing this, we add that solving the embeddedness puzzle helps understanding beyond superficial market processes, enables comprehension of underlying forces that impinge on market and non-market outcomes and, therefore, can be a powerful tool for finding explanations for the venture creation gender gap. Research shows that male and female business owners enact very different strategies for managing the work–family interface, and that gender differences can be masked when examined at the aggregate (Jennings et al., 2010; Jennings and McDougald, 2007). Yet no significant gender difference emerged at the aggregate level, but when Jennings et al. (2010) tested for gender differences at the industry sector level, across-context differences were revealed: gender differences were more pronounced in some contexts despite being limited in others. Hence, we contend that fine-grained examination of context can unveil why venture creation by women consistently lags behind that of males. Disaggregating the contextual embeddedness of women in relation to how
family, structural and cultural embeddedness impacts on the desirability, and feasibility, of venture creation by women can give more nuanced insights into reasons why the rate of women’s venture creation remains persistently, and significantly, lower than that of men.

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