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Master thesis

Stereotypes of Women Entrepreneurs:

*How do Women Entrepreneurs in the Dutch Tech-Sector cope with
Stereotypes?*

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Preface

With finalizing this master thesis I am on the verge of ending my school career and finishing my Master Business Administration in Innovation & Entrepreneurship. I happily and proudly look back over the past years and I am extremely grateful for all the amazing experiences and wonderful people I have met. Who would have thought that after failing my final exams at secondary vocational education (MBO) in 2019 I ended up here. I took valuable lessons out all of the ups and downs I experienced over these years, and it really helped me by forming myself as a person.

Writing this thesis was a massive challenge and I would like to thank a few people for this project. First, my supervisor Dr. Caroline Essers for all the support, feedback and chit-chats about random topics such as the Red-Hot Chili Peppers concerts or one of the books I brought with me. Also massive thanks to my second supervisor Dr. Paolo Franco. I'll never forget to "*iterate, iterate, iterate*". I also want to thank all the respondents who made time for an interview. It really helped me finalizing my master thesis. I also want to thank my fellow students for the amazing academic year and especially Elke and Romée who have been always by my side.

Of course, I also want to thank my mother and sister for just being there for me whenever it was necessary and the countless times I borrowed one of their cars. Same goes for my friends at home who bring a massive sparkle in my life with their (bad taste in) humor. To conclude an honorable mention to those who watch me from above.

I hope you enjoy reading my thesis.

Stijn Keizers

Nijmegen, June 2024

Abstract

Women entrepreneurs are marginalized in the highly masculinized tech sector and have to cope with the consequences of stereotyping. Therefore, this master thesis focusses on the way women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector cope with stereotypes. The study is conducted via a qualitative approach where data for this study was collected by semi-structured interviews with twelve women entrepreneurs.

The findings revealed that women entrepreneurs in Dutch tech sector indeed experience stereotyping but not only in a negative way. They often try to use the stereotype in their favor by incorporating their uniqueness in their identity. The women entrepreneurs in this dataset create a unique identity via the concept of identity work which deviates from the traditional gender norms that are more focused on a masculine environment. Additionally, this study emphasizes the need for a more gendered approach instead of looking at sexes.

The main limitation of this study is that the findings are difficult to generalize to other countries or sectors, since it has only focused on women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector. The findings contribute to the extensive literature about inclusivity in the field of entrepreneurship.

Key words: women entrepreneurs, stereotypes, identity, legitimacy, entrepreneurial ecosystem, entrepreneurial discourse.

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1. Introduction

According to the theory of economic development, entrepreneurship is favorable for economic growth. Thus, being an entrepreneur is actually seen as favorable for the economy (Manzanera-Román & Brändle, 2016). You would imagine that it is enabled by societies for everyone to be(come) an entrepreneur. Unfortunately, empirical evidence shows that due to ‘gender imbalance’ women are marginalized in a male-preferred entrepreneurial society (Marlow & McAdam, 2012; Wynarczyk & Marlow, 2010).

Historically speaking, the field of entrepreneurship is considered as masculine. ‘Being an entrepreneur’ is closely related to masculine characteristics and therefore, unsurprisingly, men dominate the role-model of a high-profile entrepreneur (Marlow et al., 2009). When looking at the numbers, men are responsible for the majority of entrepreneurial activity (Laguía et al., 2018). The Global Entrepreneurship Report states that in only three (Indonesia, Poland, and Togo) out of 49 analyzed countries the total rate of entrepreneurial activity is higher by women than it is by men (GEM, 2023). Specifically in the Netherlands, 37% of all entrepreneurs are women (CBS, 2020). This ratio seems arguably not that significant since it does not deviate that much from a 50/50 split, but looking closely to, for example, the tech-sector, only 7% of all entrepreneurs are women. (CBS, 2020). Although this ratio is relatively low, women-owned businesses are rapidly growing and make significant contributions to innovation in all sectors, including tech (Brush et al., 2009).

This master thesis focusses on the tech-sector. The tech-sector is one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial sectors (Wynarczyk & Marlow, 2010). Since this is a highly masculine-dominated sector, women are positioned as ‘others’ (Kubberød et al., 2021). This results in stereotypes towards women entrepreneurs. Gupta et al. (2009) stated that these prejudices have a negative impact on the professional career of a woman entrepreneur and the Stereotype Threat Theory by Steele & Aronson (1995) confirms that this is a disadvantage for women entrepreneurs since these prejudices can put them under pressure and therefore might affect their performance.

This master thesis seeks to understand which stereotypes are present within the Dutch tech field and investigate how women entrepreneurs deal with these stereotypes. To explore how women entrepreneurs manage coping with stereotypes, this thesis gains insight in an entrepreneurs’ identity and the way this identity is constructed. Identity is a persons construct of understandings about who they are, and what they desire to become, and, therefore, explain

everything about how a person operates in an organization, but also why a person makes certain choices or actions. (Brown, 2015).

A person's identity is a multidimensional concept where the women entrepreneurs in this case have to deal with multiple roles such as 'being a woman' and 'being an entrepreneur' (McAdam et al., 2018). Therefore, gaining legitimacy, which is necessary to feel competent as an entrepreneur (Liu et al., 2019), can be considered difficult. Strong relations provide a form of legitimacy and are necessary to develop as an entrepreneur (Xie & Lv, 2016). This thesis investigates the role the entrepreneurial ecosystem where women entrepreneurs experience the stereotypes, but also need to gain their legitimacy.

1.1 Research objective

The objective of this research is to seek understanding how Dutch women entrepreneurs are affected by stereotypes or prejudices and how they use their entrepreneurial identity to cope with these stereotypes. The research question is constructed as follows: *how do women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector cope with stereotypes concerning women entrepreneurs?* Sub-questions of this research are: (I) What kind of profile does the entrepreneurial discourse construct? (II) How do women entrepreneurs experience such stereotypes stemming from this traditional entrepreneurial discourse? (III) How do stereotypes affect the perceived legitimacy of women entrepreneurs? And (IV) how do women entrepreneurs engage in identity work to deal with stereotypes?

1.2 Theoretical contribution

Research in the tech sector has ignored the experience of women entrepreneurs within this sector (Alsos et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2015). This study tries to fill this gap by researching how women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector cope with stereotypes. The aim is to provide an overview of how women entrepreneurs in this field deal with prejudices.

1.3 Structure of the report

The structure of the report is as follows: chapter 2 consists of the theoretical framework in which the most essential concepts will be explained. Chapter 3 is the methodological framework where is explained how the research is done and how it is analyzed. The data is analyzed in chapter 4 and chapter 5 offers the discussion together with limitations, implications and recommendations for further research. Lastly, in chapter 6, a conclusion is given.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides an extensive theoretical background about the major concepts that are relevant to this research. The first focus is on the entrepreneurial discourse to investigate what the general perception of entrepreneurship is. Secondly, an elaboration of the stereotypes that exist concerning women entrepreneurs and the problems with these stereotypes. Third, the importance of legitimacy is elaborated. After that the value of an ecosystem is highlighted and lastly an analysis on identity & identity work.

2.1 The entrepreneurial discourse

Several authors in literature argue that entrepreneurship and being an entrepreneur are masculine concepts (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Meyer, 2017). Laguía et al. (2018) stated for example that there is such thing as the “think entrepreneur – think male” paradigm where the perception of an entrepreneur is affected by gender. There is a stronger association between entrepreneurial characteristics and masculine characteristics than entrepreneurial characteristics and feminine ones (Hancock et al., 2014) and, therefore, it is easier for men to fulfill the ideal image of an entrepreneur compared to women. For example, male entrepreneurs are associated more often with traits as ambitious or self-confident, which are also entrepreneurial traits, and women entrepreneurs are more likely to be associated with traits as kind and sensible which are not considered entrepreneurial traits.

Looking into entrepreneurs in general, everyone with the right mindset can become an entrepreneur, at least that is how it is presented most of the times (Meyer, 2017). Although there might be some truth in the former statement, within the field of entrepreneurship there are still strong influential stereotypes that shape the field, and the most influential one is based on gender (Ahl, 2006). Most role-models of ‘super-entrepreneurs’ are men (e.g. Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk) and a major part of entrepreneurial case studies is done around male entrepreneurs (Bird & Brush, 2002). By looking to what it takes to be an entrepreneur, Lent (2013) explains that ‘entrepreneurial alertness’ is an important factor that explains why some people are better and more successful at being an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial alertness means that an entrepreneur is able to rely on his/her sensitive perception when encountering an entrepreneurial opportunity (Gaglio & Katz, 2001).

The embedded masculinity makes the male entrepreneur superior and frames the women entrepreneur as ‘opposite’ or ‘other’ (Ahl, 2006). This is also the perception in the tech sector,

which by itself is highly masculine, not only in numbers but also by the way of dealing with each other (Marlow & McAdam, 2015). This has a negative influence on the legitimacy of women entrepreneurs who have to construct a particular form of identity to gain more legitimacy compared to male entrepreneurs. Therefore, within this masculinized field which fits the male entrepreneurs more, women entrepreneurs may encounter an identity crisis where they question ‘who they are’ and ‘how they fit it’ (Swail & Marlow, 2018). Stories and notions of women entrepreneurs are most of the times interpreted through a negative framing (Marlow & McAdam, 2015) and this ‘gender blindness’ can be considered as a disadvantage for women entrepreneurs (Hamilton, 2014)

2.2 Stereotypes of women entrepreneurs

Stereotypes about gender are formed through shared beliefs about matching characteristics associated with each sex (Powell & Graves, 2003). A distinction can be made between descriptive characteristics and prescriptive characteristics (Heilman et al., 2004). Descriptive characteristics state that men and women ‘are’ something and prescriptive are about how people ‘should be’ (Hentschel et al., 2019). Descriptive characteristics are that, in general, women have more relational-based qualities and men more agentic qualities, where the male-characteristics correspond more to entrepreneurial characteristics (Gupta et al, 2009).

Researchers argue that the field of entrepreneurship is indeed masculine (Marlow, 2002; Meyer, 2017). However, there are some problems with this statement. Recent discussions in entrepreneurship literature assess the problem that the “lens of gender” is either used wrong or not being used at all. Researchers look to sex as described in biology and anatomy, so male or female, and connect the masculine or feminine characteristics to the sexes (Gupta et al., 2009). Sex is something different than gender and this is not always taken into account. Gender is constructed through social, cultural and physiological means and can more easily contain both masculine and feminine characteristics (Ahl, 2006). Gender is not fixed, but more a result of actions and accomplishments that are performed. It is more fundamentally something one ‘does’ and not something a person ‘is’. In a manner, it is not a fixed identity based on characteristics, but more a self-developed identity on the basis of actions (Butler, 1990). According to (Ahl, 2006) gender is more important than sex. For example, a woman might have better entrepreneurial characteristics than a man, solely based on the action that she takes. Ahl (2006), therefore, questions the view other researchers take when arguing that the field on

entrepreneurship is masculine (Marlow, 2002; Meyer, 2017), since their foundation is based on sex instead of gender.

Another problem with assumptions in mainstream research is that it assumes the high-profile entrepreneur to be male and therefore women cannot be anything than ‘more’ or ‘less’ than is already imagined (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). This indicates a problem that women are a priori assumed to be deficient, then ‘proved’ to be deficient, since their characteristics do not match with those of a typical entrepreneur, and even held accountable for their own deficiencies (Ahl, 2004).

Adopting a critical point of view, multiple papers have biases and prejudices towards women entrepreneurs in advance. Performance of a woman entrepreneur is measured against ‘male-standards’ which is criticized by many authors (Ahl, 2006; Constantinidis, 2021; Marlow & Dy, 2018). There is a stigma that, although the amount of women entrepreneurs is rising, companies managed by women tend to be smaller in size and profit compared to those of male entrepreneurs and therefore underperform compared to male-managed companies (Fairlie & Robb, 2008; Rietz & Henrekson, 2000). Marlow and McAdam (2012) strongly criticize claims about underperforming and state that the under-performance of woman entrepreneur is a myth which has arisen due to former mentioned stereotypes. They suggest that a more reflexive interrogation of assumptions is necessary and that researchers should question themselves what they take for granted as assumptions about women entrepreneurs.

Stereotypes are present towards women entrepreneurs, and this may have negative consequences according to the Stereotype Threat Theory by Steele & Aronson (1995). This theory states: “*When people are aware of stereotypes associated with their social group and believe that they may be judged based on those stereotypes, they tend to feel threatened by the stereotype*” (Laguía et al, 2022, p. 1002). As a result, women entrepreneurs may disengage from the stereotyped task and feel less motivated which results in a decrease of performance (Davies et al, 2005). According to (Gupta et al., 2009), more focus should be on prescriptive stereotypes, characteristics that should be adopted by an entrepreneur, so it will become clear how women, as well as men, can profile them as an entrepreneur. Due to the current way of research women are being marginalized (Marlow & McAdam, 2012) This oppression expresses in the fact that the high-profile entrepreneur is considered to be male, but also due to evidence that venture investment companies prefer male entrepreneurs over women entrepreneurs.

Moreover, male entrepreneurs outnumber the women entrepreneurs, especially in sectors like technology which most of the time are more noticeable in the media and by public (Marlow, 2002). Since the majority of women entrepreneurs work in low-growth and low-skilled sectors

such as retail and service (Gupta et al., 2009), it is necessary to search what competencies are valuable for a woman entrepreneur to adopt in a work field mostly dominated by men.

2.3 Legitimacy of women entrepreneurs

Gaining legitimacy is often experienced difficult for women entrepreneurs who must cope with the role of 'being a woman' and 'being an entrepreneur' (McAdam et al, 2018). Especially in cultures with a steep gender hierarchy, being a woman entrepreneur can even be seen as illegitimate (Marlow & McAdam, 2012). Liu et al. (2019) refer to legitimacy as a woman's appropriateness in her position in the role of entrepreneur. Experiencing a feeling of legitimacy is necessary to feel competent as an entrepreneur, feeling satisfied about the job and feel committed to task of being an entrepreneur (Liu et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurs experience legitimacy, among other resources, from two different kind of spheres: the private sphere which include family and friends, and the business sphere which refers to the public area with business-related persons (Jensen & Schøtt, 2017). People from both spheres have influence on the entrepreneurs' aspirations and the direction to which the company is heading (Schøtt & Cheraghi, 2015). The perceived legitimacy may vary between both spheres. According to Fischer et al. (2017) people in the private sphere are generally looking to women entrepreneurs as just 'a woman' and people in the business sphere relate to women entrepreneurs as 'an entrepreneur', so more on a professional level. The consequences of legitimacy from both spheres differs. Legitimacy from the business sphere is necessary to feel competent and legitimacy from the private sphere is needed to feel related.

Fischer et al. (2016) found that distinctive audiences differ in terms of norms, beliefs, and rules for assessing an entrepreneurs' legitimacy. Later research added that women entrepreneurs use different sorts of mechanisms to benefit their legitimacy (Fischer et al., 2017). A distinguishment is made between identity mechanisms that refer to the creation and exploitation of the ventures' identity as well as the personal entrepreneurial identity. Hereby, the identities are formed through storytelling, impression management and collective framing. Secondly, there are associative mechanisms. These point out the relations of the organization and entrepreneur and are therefore split into organizational ties and individual ties. Finally, there are organizational mechanisms. Those specify particular milestones and accomplishments of a company resulting in more legitimacy.

The importance of different spheres and different techniques is emphasized by the fact that technology-based entrepreneurial ventures depend on support from different groups. This

means that the entrepreneur uses a variety of tools to achieve the highest possible legitimacy (Fischer et al., 2017). The maximum amount of legitimacy is, however, constrained by the stereotypes surrounding women entrepreneurs and the fact that women entrepreneurs are often compared to male entrepreneurs as became evident in section 2.2 (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Thus, women entrepreneurs use the concept of identity work, which will be elaborated on in section 2.5, to frame themselves as legitimate and also be recognized by others (Marlow & McAdam, 2015).

Within the process of gaining legitimacy one uses a fitting in while standing out principle which states that entrepreneurs should bring an added value while also fulfilling the normative expectations (De Clerq & Voronov, 2009). As Fischer et al. (2016) described, legitimacy is a malleable resource which is not static but can be changed over time. It can be reformed via identity work to meet changing needs of the company or the entrepreneur.

2.4 The entrepreneurial ecosystem

The aim of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem is to create an environment which enables entrepreneurs to strengthen their social network and gain beneficial resources from this network (Lee et al., 2011). Strong relationships formalized through social ecosystems provide a form of legitimacy and recognition. Due to gender discrimination, gaining legitimacy and recognition is often experienced as difficult for women entrepreneurs and, therefore, they indeed benefit from an ecosystem (Xie & Lv, 2016; McAdam et al., 2018), since it opens paths to acquiring legitimacy. The former mentioned entrepreneurial alertness plays a role in identifying an important ecosystem. Women entrepreneurs with a high entrepreneurial alertness can quickly identify valuable ecosystems and access all kinds of resources (Xie & Lv, 2016). However, gaining access is sometimes difficult due to gender discrimination. Women are sometimes not included or not even accepted in important social ecosystems (Ahl, 2006), and even if they are included, they still have to cope with stereotypes and prejudices (Lent, 2013).

McAdam et al. (2018) also states that women are generally under-represented in successful entrepreneurial ecosystems which contain a lot of valuable capital such as network-capital and knowledge-capital. As a result, more 'women-only' ecosystems are created. The benefit of these women-only ecosystems is that women naturally feel more comfortable in expressing themselves, since the legitimacy is naturally higher in a group of fellow woman-entrepreneurs (Van Merrienboer et al., 2023). However, rather than generating a surplus of

capital, the isolation in a women-only ecosystem does not contribute to a more equal representation (McAdam et al., 2018) and is not beneficial for access to social capital such as information or knowledge (Xie & Lv, 2016). A women-only ecosystem does not help by overcoming the obstacles women entrepreneurs face when trying to access social resources (Carter et al., 2003). In addition, another disadvantage for women entrepreneurs is that their network tend to be smaller compared to male counterparts (Constantinidis, 2021).

So, in general, people see ‘doing business’ as a male task and entrepreneurship is still seen as masculine (Meyer, 2017), women who occupy positions at the top of a company have, according to society, uncommon abilities that deviate from cultural norms and these abilities are often devalued by other people (Liu et al., 2019). In conclusion, a successful ecosystem, with both genders, can contribute to a more equal treatment and gives women entrepreneurs an opportunity to gain legitimacy and recognition in the male dominated field of entrepreneurship. It also helps to accumulate all kinds of capital (e.g. financial and social) (Shaw et al., 2009).

2.5 Identity & identity work

Generally, social aspects of human life are not taken into account when looking at an entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). According to several authors, the traditional view of an entrepreneur is static with no relation to social life (Ahl, 2006; De Bruin et al., 2007), therefore looking only at an ‘entrepreneurial identity’. Identity, however, is a more complex and multidimensional concept (Alvesson & Billing, 2009) where distinctions can be made between, for example, social identities (e.g. gender, nationality), personal identities (e.g. height, hair color), and specific role identities (e.g. entrepreneur, mother) (Brown, 2015). Identity is a persons constructed understanding and belief about who they are and what they want to become. Forming an identity happens through identity work. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) suggest that “*identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness*”. The concept of identity work empowers us to see how different identities are constructed and how women entrepreneurs legitimize their identity to the outside world (Essers et al., 2013).

An individual has multiple identities at the same time. Thus, specifically regarding women entrepreneurs, two known identities are ‘woman’ and ‘entrepreneur’. Other identities could include mother, aunt or niece. Several studies highlight the experiences of women

entrepreneurs in coping with these different identities (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers et al., 2021). Managing different identities can result in conflicts. Women entrepreneurs sometimes become entangled in the fact that they have their own identity, but also want to live up to the perfect entrepreneurial identity which is stereotyped as masculine (Chasserio et al., 2014). Forming identity is a process of construction and an individual has the ability to form his/her unique identity, which can result in deviations from the standard social norm. Gupta & Etzkowitz (2021) highlight for example that women entrepreneurs in the tech-sector modify the traditional gender norms, which has arisen in this field, by navigating challenges and opportunities within a gendered socio-cultural context and showcasing new innovative approaches. This is an example where women benefit from constructing a different identity, as opposed to male entrepreneurs, by showing unique approaches via a distinctive formed identity.

As the process of gaining legitimacy is heavily gendered (McAdam et al., 2018), women entrepreneurs use identity work to fit into the masculinized tech sector, but also stand out at the same time with a novel or unique offering (De Clerq & Voronov, 2009). This makes identity work a complex heterogeneous concept which is necessary for gaining legitimacy and credibility. Certainly, one part of the legitimacy comes from company performance but the forming, and re-forming, of an entrepreneurial identity plays also a major role in an entrepreneurs' credibility (Marlow & McAdam, 2015). Constructing an identity happens through interaction between one's inner self and encounters within the external spheres. The constructed identity ensures that an entrepreneur is seen as legitimate (Swail & Marlow, 2018).

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology of this study. First, the research design is explained. After that, more elaboration on the research sample is provided. Furthermore, the data collection is given and also description of how the analysis is conducted. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations

3.1 Research design

This research utilizes a qualitative approach to data collection which is most applicable for gathering in-depth information on a particular subject. A qualitative approach is the most appropriate as this study identifies how women entrepreneurs in the tech sector cope with stereotypes especially by using their own identity. Therefore, in-depth information from women entrepreneurs is needed. Identity is a complex phenomenon. Fortunately, a qualitative approach has the ability to deal with complex situations (Vennix, 2019). ‘Qualitative’ implies that the focus is on quality of things as meanings and beliefs. Constructs as identity and experiences cannot be encompassed in quantitative terms, since the problem of ‘more or less than a high-profile entrepreneur’ will arise (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) which is discussed in the theoretical framework.

A qualitative approach indicates interpretative research which refers to the basic principle that people ‘construct their reality’ (Vennix, 2019). This research adopts a social constructivist approach. In this philosophy emphasis is indeed placed on the interactions and social processes that influence the interpretation of one’s environment (Keaton & Bodie, 2011). This approach also acknowledges the impact of social contexts, such as prevalent stereotypes in the field of entrepreneurship. In addition, this study uses an inductive and deductive approach. Different constructs are analyzed beforehand in the theoretical framework, but conclusions are made on the information provided by the respondents seeking to find new information.

The scope of this research is limited, which is also a characteristic of qualitative research. Only women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech-sector are interviewed making it difficult to generalize over male-dominated businesses in general or the whole field of entrepreneurship (Bleijenbergh, 2016). However, the advantage is that in-depth insights from one specific sector, in this case tech, can be used to compare with other sectors. Besides, the framework of this study can be used for different fields as well.

3.2 Research sample

As this study is about women entrepreneurs in the tech-sector, the main criterion of a respondent is that she is the owner of a company operating in the Dutch tech field. It is not necessary that she established the company herself, but she must be the owner, or one of the owners, of the company today.

Within quantitative research, there are various methods to determine the sample size (N) needed for a reliable result (Verhoeven, 2018). As regard to this study, which has a qualitative approach, no specific comparable size standards are provided. For this research, 12 interviews were conducted. This is beyond the point where saturation may occur. This means that no completely new information emerges from additional interviews. Generally speaking, this will be the case after 10 to 12 interviews and therefore, 12 interviews will be enough to conduct reliable research (Miles et al., 2018). The sample of 12 interviews is the only way this study ensures the reliability. Other methods such as triangulation for example are not used in this study.

The interviewees were approached via online social media platforms, in particular LinkedIn. The persons who agreed to participate received a personal message and an email. This email provided a description of the subject together with the aim of this research. It also provided information regarding ethics in advance such as the question if was allowed to record the audio. The communication, and interview itself, were written and conducted in either Dutch or English depending on the preference of the respondent.

3.3 Data collection

This study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, providing the researcher with the opportunity to cover all relevant topics while leaving room for the interviewee's own input, as well as the possibility to ask further questions. Multiple questions were prepared in advance based on the theoretical framework from chapter 2. The interview guideline with questions can be found in the appendix C.

The interviews followed a structure based on the theoretical framework and the tree-structure in appendix A. All constructs are operationalized and showed in appendix B. Some examples of questions are: (I) To what extent do you have the impression that there are certain expectations and/or assumptions regarding women entrepreneurs, (II) how do you experience stereotypes during your work as an entrepreneur, (III) how do stereotypes affect your entrepreneurial identity, and (IV) how do you ensure your legitimacy as an entrepreneur?

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online according to the preferences of the entrepreneur. The answers were recorded and transcribed afterwards. The output was used for the data analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

The data from the interviews has been analyzed to answer the research question. To establish well-founded insights, the interviews were transcribed first. The process after transcribing is known as 'coding'. This method is an iterative process where the data will be interpreted based on the theoretical framework. The interpretation is extended to other information from the respondents and led to new insights (Vennix, 2019) about how women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech-field cope with stereotypes.

The coding of the transcripts was done openly, seeking to find patterns and themes within the experiences of the entrepreneurs. With this approach, labels were assigned to specific pieces of text from the transcriptions. Based on these labels, different codes/sub-themes were created to give meaning to specific information. This led to a clear overview for answering the research question and sub questions. The coding process was done with the help of Atlas.ti software. This tool helps to make a clear overview and distinguish different patterns and themes from each other.

3.5 Research ethics

Ethics are important when conducting any form of research. Several choices were made by the researcher to maintain the research ethics. The following issues were taken into consideration: prior-information, privacy, informed consent, and sensitive questions.

The respondent received a priori an email with information about the subject and the topics. During the interviews, there is no deviation from the subject to topics which are not relevant for this study. While making the interview appointment, the interviewee was free to choose for either an online meeting or face-to-face.

Privacy is an essential aspect for the respondents as well as the researcher. If participants' privacy is respected within the study, she will more likely provide honest answers and not tend towards socially desirable answers. Therefore, in this thesis, no identities will be used, and all names are fictional using pseudonyms. Transcripts were only made available for the researcher, the first and second supervisor of the researcher, and the

interviewee herself if she would like to have printout of the interview. Final discoveries are supplied to participants who were interested, but confidential information is removed.

Prior to the interview, the participant received a consent form with information about the interview and the fact that the audio will be recorded. All respondents had the right to not answer particular question or even withdraw from the whole research at any time.

This research might address some sensitive topics. For example, it might occur that being stereotyped is not seen as favorable or discriminatory to a participant. The researcher will formulate questions to an open manner, so the respondent doesn't feel harmed or personally attacked. Of course, the participant had still all rights to not answer questions if she does not feel comfortable talking about a topic.

It is important to mention the background of the researcher because of the reflexivity and validity. This study is conducted by a male-student from the Radboud University who is specialized in innovation and entrepreneurship. Since this is a topic where women entrepreneurs could experience hinder from stereotypes, which is mostly caused by male counterparts, it may seem strange for them that a man is conducting this study. The researcher explained his position before the start of the interview, and also why he is conducting this study. During this study, the researcher had an objective and critical perspective by developing this research. The researcher has no advantage for any possible outcome or answer from the respondents and therefore used an open perspective to interpret the data.

4. Findings

This chapter elaborates on the results that emerged from 12 interviews conducted with women tech entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. It first points out the view of the general entrepreneurial environment according to the women tech entrepreneurs. Secondly, their perception about stereotyping and how they deal with prejudices. Third, more information on the entrepreneurial ecosystem where the entrepreneurs operate and where they find their passion and legitimacy. After that, a deeper insight in legitimacy according to women tech entrepreneurs' self and to conclude their own identity and the construction of this identity via identity work.

4.1 The entrepreneurial discourse

The interviews with the tech entrepreneurs started with questions about their perception of the entrepreneurial environment. Firstly, in general and secondly the specific context they operate in, the tech-sector. The interviews revealed that the Dutch women tech entrepreneurs describe the general perception of an entrepreneur as someone who is a confident, creative, brave, but most important; willing to take risks. As Nina stated:

“I think if one thinks of an entrepreneur, one thinks of someone who has a great need for autonomy and freedom. Dares to take risks. And yeah, sees entrepreneurship as a way of life”

Nina explains here that entrepreneurship is not comparable with a day-to-day job. It is really something unique and ‘a way of life’. She later added that autonomy is also an important factor to her so that she can meet her personal and financial needs.

According to the respondents, a tech entrepreneur adds to these competencies the need for a passion, a willingness to make impact and (moral) ambition. The tech entrepreneur distinguish his/herself with a certain drive and operating by the ‘go big or go home’ principle and sees value in her network. Resilience is also an important part since there is very little glory in hard times. To conclude, the women tech entrepreneurs have a strong character which is necessary to be competitive in the field. Pleun summarizes the tech entrepreneur as follows:

“Perseverance. Definitely almost like tunnel vision and belief in your product. Be passionate. I think what makes a successful tech entrepreneur is ultimately being able to be adaptive with the environment. To bring the environment along to that vision.”

So, the tech entrepreneurs distinguishes him-/herself through various characteristics which all result in a deep passion and commitment to their product. It is most of the time considered to be a long horizon for the entrepreneur and, therefore, the adaptivity is necessary to work your way towards that goal.

According to Kiki, the field of entrepreneurship in general is not particularly masculine. However, stereotypes in the tech field arise due to the need of a strong character. That specific competence, having a strong character, might be more associated with masculinity she explains. There is, however, a shift in their view of the tech field. Although it is definitely still male-dominated, a growing number of women entrepreneurs has joined the tech field. According to Lynn, and several other women tech entrepreneurs, this is very good since she believes that diverse groups can achieve more and accomplish more than homogenous teams.

4.2 Coping with stereotypes

To this day, women tech entrepreneurs in the Netherlands still experience stereotypes, though they admit that there are changes in the perception. Stereotypes are considered to be negative in the first place and the main issue is that the entrepreneurs in this dataset feel that they need to prove themselves more. Interestingly, when they do prove themselves, they become more unique compared to male counterparts and actually ‘use’ the stereotypes in their favor. Pleun elaborated during the interview with the following statement.

“You are basically 2-0 behind when you come to the table. So your starting position is low, but your acceleration speed is actually faster, so to speak. So, if you can show that you have a plan and that you can ultimately stick to your point of view, and that you have a nice product, things can go quickly”

With this statement Pleun elaborates on the fact that women entrepreneurs are stereotyped during first encounters. She mentioned this after elaborating on one of her own experiences. Here she also shed a light on the fact that the acceleration speed is faster. By this Pleun explained that due to her unique identity she stands out of the crowd which makes her interesting to fellow entrepreneurs.

In the male dominated tech field, women entrepreneurs, of course, often deal with men. Some respondents feel that they are put more to the test and multiple entrepreneurs experienced the following situation when contributing to a conversation or meeting; when a male companion

verbalizes an idea or plan, the plan is actually adopted more quickly than when the woman entrepreneur verbalizes it. This is an example where women entrepreneurs feel for the need to prove themselves more.

A neglected stereotype according to some respondents is the overlap between mother and entrepreneur. Women entrepreneurs receive questions like ‘are you able to do it? What is your long-term vision with regards to family? Do you really want a family next to this?’ There is mutual recognition among women entrepreneurs for the situation in terms of maintaining a family and doing business. A male entrepreneur does not pay attention to this according to Veerle. The view on stereotypes is related to the fact that women generally see entrepreneurship as a big step in their career where the part of being a ‘mom-trepreneur’ also plays a big role.

According to the respondents, they believe that women entrepreneurs are more honest in conveying information than male colleagues. Men exaggerate just a little more in their accomplishments. Tara frames this as follows.

“I think there’s more than that. A man will say ‘our product is already running, and we have a lot of customers’. A women will say ‘we have two pilot customers; it has been running for a month now, and we are very proud of it’. Yes, that first story comes across much stronger even though they are actually the same thing.”

So, according to Tara and multiple women entrepreneurs, male entrepreneurs amplify their story slightly which may result in a stronger story. Women entrepreneurs tell their story more factually without sugarcoating the story. Tara doesn’t believe this is something bad. She is convinced of her own story and way she conveys it.

There is currently a shift in the social environment where there is more awareness for the fact that women entrepreneurs are marginalized. The respondents mention that other people, including male entrepreneurs, become more conscious of the stereotypes and therefore probably adapt their behavior. The way in which women tech entrepreneurs deal with stereotypes is also changing because they gain more experience in the field. Lynn, for example, says that she no longer allows herself to be intimidated, which she used to do. She adds to this that she was one of the first persons to wear suit with a T-shirt and sneakers. Nowadays this is seen as normal, but it was definitely not in the 90s where you were expected to wear a skirt. She was criticized for that at the time, but not anymore.

Generally speaking, according to the interviews, women tech entrepreneurs do not experience many problems with stereotyping. They even use the stereotypes in their favor sometimes. Veerle mentions.

“No, I know I’m good for who I am. But if people link that characteristic to a woman, well, fine. Then we will exploit that. Yes. That is marketing.”

Here she says in a confident way that she is convinced of her own abilities. She gave the example that if people see women as strong communicator, and they need a communicative person, then she happily takes advantage of that by saying ‘hey, I am a woman, I can do the job’.

The women tech entrepreneurs also have their own opinion on stereotyping. They believe that the essence lies in the things we learn kids in their childhood. Currently the systems learns younger girls to be polite and behave well. How can you expect someone who learns that their whole life to be brave and take risks, Tara questions. Some entrepreneurs also question the steps that are made to a more equal treatment. Bo mentions that she explicitly not looking for female-centered investors because ‘she wants the money and not the policy’. Floor does make use of the female-centered investors but still questions this in the following statement.

“One thing I sometimes wonder is whether society is going too far. For example, I know that I have received subsidy because I am a woman. That women tech entrepreneurs almost have an advantage over men [...] And that is seen as if women need some extra stimulation. I don’t know if I agree with that. I always think that you should look at the content and at the person rather than whether it is a woman or men”

Floor questions the rise of the female-centered funding organizations. She thinks that this places the person at the center of the choice to invest, while according to her, the innovation or product should be the thing on which people base their choice whether or not to invest.

4.3 Entrepreneurial ecosystem

Legitimacy is very important for an entrepreneur to gain trust, gain access to resources and market acceptance in general. In section 4.4, there will be more elaboration on legitimacy. A major part of an entrepreneur’s legitimacy is gathered through formal and informal networks.

During the interview, the women entrepreneurs were asked about their experiences of gaining legitimacy via a network and their decision whether or not to participate in a formal network. Nina tells what she looks for in a formal network.

“Yes, whether it fits our strategy. The segments in which those companies are located, whether that suits us. So I always look at what does it bring us? Can we join forces to achieve certain developments?”

So, there must be a shared interest, but also an added value for her as an entrepreneur or the company. In additions to these aspects, many others are mentioned. For example, Amber thinks the calendar is very important and Veerle looks for potential clients in the network. For business-related purposes, the women entrepreneurs favor multigendered network due to the diversity. Interestingly, some entrepreneurs only justified their choice based on what is good for the company. Kiki, however, talked more about the social benefits of a network and she was in particular enthusiastic about women-only networks. Women-only networks are beneficial for social purposes according to the respondents as Kiki elaborates.

“In some entrepreneurial networks there is still little focus on the personal matters [...] Well, with a group of women entrepreneurs I agreed; okay, no business cards, no financial business challenges. Let’s just connect as people. Not as entrepreneurs specifically [...] Because the emotional and relational aspects are also sometimes difficult.”

Kiki therefore does not necessarily look at what is good for the company, but what benefits her on a personal and social level. A different approach to the first quote about formal networks. There are respondents who have had participated in women-only networks and decided to quit and only participate in multigendered networks. Nevertheless, some women entrepreneurs do actually see an added value in women only networks and particularly on the emotional and relational sides. This adds to the main benefits and reasons why the women entrepreneurs use their network. Namely, the support and knowledge sharing.

4.4 Legitimacy of women entrepreneurs

The women entrepreneurs in this master thesis have various ways of gaining legitimacy, but the main consensus is ‘to be seen’. The most important part of acquiring legitimacy is to show

that the quality of your work is at a high level. The women entrepreneurs know their customers and partners, and also know what they expect from them. They try to meet their expectations or exceed them. Veerle elaborates on this.

“Well, I obviously make sure that my quality is maintained and that it grows stronger. And my visibility. So with networking and making sure especially on social media that I’m highly visible. I make sure I end up in a magazine from time to time, that they read articles about me [...] Yeah, it’s mainly that visibility.”

So, for Veerle it is clear that visibility is the most important part for her gain legitimacy. Therefore, she put a lot of effort in maintaining and improving her visibility. She stated that a high visibility, in a positive manner, will lead to more legitimacy.

Legitimacy is most valuable from customers, colleagues, and other entrepreneurs in the sector. Most entrepreneurs find legitimacy from the private sphere not that important. Also by the fact that there is apparently a difference in conception of ‘an entrepreneur’ by men and women (i.e. non-entrepreneurs). Veerle added to her prior statement that women in general look up to her, because she ‘does something else than what they do’. Men, on the other hand, say that she *also* does a good job, so she is ‘one of them’. Within the entrepreneurial context, it is sometimes more difficult to gain a certain amount of legitimacy from men than women. Floor illustrates this.

“With men, you sometimes have to poke through. When you get there at a meeting, you have to show who you are. I also notice that I present myself differently”

Floor explains two things here. First an example where women entrepreneurs are stereotyped and therefore experience a lower level of legitimacy. Secondly, she is well aware of her identity and uses identity work to present herself differently towards male entrepreneur. She mentioned that she focusses more on company performance towards male entrepreneurs and less on herself as entrepreneur.

It is definitely important to sense a form of legitimacy from the environment. It is, however, also necessary to experience some kind of personal recognition. This happens, among other things, through a personal belief in the capability to be an entrepreneur. Although the majority of the interviewees claim they cannot do everything, they know where to find missing pieces and still handle complex situations and challenges. Jill explains more on this.

“But I think what one learns along the way is that there are certain things that you’re good at and there are those that you’re not good at. The most important part is to be aware of those. And get people to do that part.”

So, Jill explains in a confident manner that most entrepreneurs are well aware of the fact that they cannot do everything on their own. However, they know to find the right people to get the job done which still makes them competent as an entrepreneur.

The satisfaction and drive are also important elements to feel personal legitimacy. Satisfaction expresses itself by the accomplishments and successes of the company. Happiness and a satisfactory feeling by both employees and clients are also enhancing the entrepreneur’s own satisfaction. The entrepreneurial drive is closely related to satisfaction with overlapping answers from the interviewees. An additional aspect to stay driven as entrepreneur is the freedom and ability to do business on your own.

4.5 Identity & Identity work

Women entrepreneurs in this thesis adopt and develop multifaceted and dynamic identities. The development of identity is shaped by several factors such as backgrounds and experiences. Emma explains that she, like several other entrepreneurs, believes in the concept of ‘lifelong learning’. Therefore, the entrepreneurial identity develops and changes over time. Lynn elaborates her view on the process of learning.

“Well, I think you always want new competences and have to keep learning. I think that’s just the case anyway, especially in tech, but also in general. So much is changing, so there are always new competencies to learn.”

Lynn emphasized here the fact that the environment is constantly in motion and changing. She remains eager to learn and to stay on top of her game and to develop the company further. According to her, a tech entrepreneur should always be eager to learn, otherwise you are playing catch-up.

The basis of identity lies in some character traits according to the interviews such as confidence, creativity, ambition, and adaptivity. Perseverance and the will to take risks are also important. Most entrepreneurs express that entrepreneurship is really a part of them. It would be difficult to go back to the life of working for a boss, which some of the respondents

never have done. The freedom and eager to keep learning is great and Veerle explains how this played a role in her identity.

“I was kind of a pianist who couldn’t play notes. In essence I still am, but I knew how to do business, so I was sure about entrepreneurship but not about my profession. If you are sure about one of the two, then you can automatically learn the other and you can make it your own.”

Veerle explains something interesting here. Some people are simply ‘an entrepreneur’. This is not related to gender, but more to an inner self or a desire. She mentions that you do not have to be perfect in your profession. If you manage to connect all the ends, you will come very far. This is a general perception, not something specifically for tech.

The distinctive character of the woman entrepreneur in the tech sector lies firstly in the fact that they are a woman. The interviews show that women entrepreneurs see themselves as more social than male entrepreneurs in the same field and distinguish themselves in this way. Kiki explains that for her it is precisely the social component that is important for her to be an entrepreneur.

The interviewees were also asked if they thought that they adjusted their identity through certain stereotypes. Multiple respondents indicate that they had more difficulty with this in the beginning. They used to adapt, our doubt, their own identity based on prejudices from other people in their environment. As they gained more experience, they became better able to cope with this and form and adopt their own identity. Floor explained this with the following statement.

“Like I said, in the beginning you want to be taken very seriously. So you try that in your appearance and in who you are. This causes you to have some kind of identity-crisis. By now I have the feeling that I’m thinking ‘yes, this is me, this is okay’. [...] And besides, you won’t last long is you pretending to be someone you are not”

Floor explains that identity work is important to her. It can be considered difficult to form yourself in the highly masculinized environment, but if you are pretending to be someone you are not, you are definitely going to fail she mentions. Constructing a strong identity works in her favor, since she can be happy with herself as entrepreneur.

5. Discussion

This chapter consists of a discussion on the findings in chapter four in relations to the theoretical framework. It starts with the interpretation on the results where the results are discussed based on the theoretical framework. After that, the practical implementations and theoretical contribution will be discussed. This chapter concludes with the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research.

5.1 Interpretation of the results

This thesis explored how women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech-sector cope with stereotypes. The results revealed their perception of 'the entrepreneur' and their particular view on stereotyping. Furthermore, there is elaborated on their perceived legitimacy and the environment where they should gain their legitimacy, but also could encounter forms of stereotyping.

The women entrepreneurs in this thesis argue with current literature and see a shift in the perception of entrepreneurship in general. Literature states that entrepreneurship in general and 'being an entrepreneur' are masculine themes (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Meyer, 2017), but the interviews showed that there is a shift due to the rise of women entrepreneurs. The stereotypes seem to occur from specific traits an entrepreneur should have such as ambition and self-confidence (Hancock et al., 2014). This study therefore supports the research from Gupta et al. (2009) which stated that the lens of gender is used wrong in prior research. Although the general perception is changing, it was agreed that specific characteristics were still considered to be more masculine than feminine according to the women entrepreneurs. The results from this study state that entrepreneurship in general is not perceived as solely masculine.

Despite the change of the general perception towards a more inclusive entrepreneurial society, the women entrepreneurs in this study reported that they often are put more to the test upon first acquaintance. The Stereotype Threat Theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995) claimed that this could feel as a threat and disadvantage. According to the interviews, this is a disadvantage indeed, but due to experience the women entrepreneurs created an identity which helped them to turn this disadvantage into an advantage. Therefore, the women entrepreneurs did not feel disengaged or less motivated (Davies et al., 2005), but used their

strong character to navigate through the stereotyping and distinguished themselves from other entrepreneurs.

Chasserio et al. (2014) claimed that women entrepreneurs experience difficulties with their own identity, since women entrepreneurs wanted to live up to a perfectly masculine entrepreneurial identity. This study refutes this claim. Although some respondents indicate that there might be some form of identity crisis in the beginning of your entrepreneurial career, all entrepreneurs created their own unique identity eventually and proudly use that. This is in line with recent findings from Gupta & Etzkowitz (2021) who stated that women entrepreneurs in the tech-sector have a certain ability to disprove traditional gender norms and show an opportunity-seeking behavior with innovative approaches.

According to Jensen & Schøtt (2015), people from both the business sphere as well as the private sphere have influence on an entrepreneurs' perceived legitimacy. The women entrepreneurs in this study state that legitimacy from the business sphere is indeed important for them, but legitimacy from the private sphere is not seen as necessary and therefore do not have an influence on the entrepreneur or the direction the company is heading. It is indeed sometimes more difficult from women entrepreneurs to gain legitimacy (McAdam, 2018). The entrepreneurs in this study confirm this, but they also told that as they became more experienced, it became easier to gain legitimacy. The results also support the findings from Liu et al. (2019) who claimed that legitimacy is necessary to feel competent and satisfied about the job. Although the women entrepreneurs mentioned they don't feel they have the ability to do everything alone, they have the capability to navigate through difficult situations and find the right people for a solution. The satisfactory part is closely related to the drive as an entrepreneur. This study also supports the results of Fischer et al. (2017) who mentioned that people in the private sphere have a different perception of the entrepreneur than people in the business sphere. In the results, it became evident that people in the business sphere see the women entrepreneur as 'just an entrepreneur' as more people in the sphere are. People in the private sphere tend to look up towards the women entrepreneurs, since they believe that she does something completely different.

To delve more into the business related spheres, in contrary to the results of this study, literature claims that there are no social benefits to women-only networks (Xie & Lv, 2016; Carter et al., 2003). Respondents in this dataset claimed that they prefer multigendered network for business related purposes, but definitely see an advantage in women-only networks from a social point of view, since here they can more easily discuss personal matters.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study revealed that women entrepreneurs in the male-dominated tech sector create their own identity to cope with stereotypes. All respondents gave a valuable insight in their own identity and how they developed that identity. These findings can play a role for policymakers and entrepreneurial organizations to take measures that promote gender equality and diversity in the Dutch tech sector.

Additionally, this study can contribute to practical recommendations for supporting women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector and create awareness to combat stereotypes and prejudices or encouraging mixed and women-only networks. These practical implications can also contribute to creating a more inclusive and supporting environment for women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector.

5.3 Theoretical contribution

This master thesis gains an insight to the recent literature about how women in the tech-sector use their unique entrepreneurial identity. The study focusses on the perception and understanding of stereotypes women entrepreneurs deal with during their career. With these aspects, this master thesis contributes to the literature about the role of identity work and intersectionality, e.g. the overlap between the identities.

This study did not focus on the specific overlap (e.g. intersectionality) between different identities such as age, ethnicity, or social background. However, this thesis can be used as a starting point to gain more in-depth insight how such identities influence the way of dealing with stereotypes. It also addresses the way identity work is used over time and the way women entrepreneurs use their constructed identity to cope with prejudices

Additionally, the insights about how women entrepreneurs cope with stereotypes and prejudices in a male-dominated tech field can deliver valuable knowledge which then can be used to promote a more equal entrepreneurial society and diversity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and literature. It also wants to address the bias some papers have as they interpret the high-profile entrepreneur to be a man as Ahl and Marlow (2012) mentioned. Women entrepreneurs should not be held accountable for the fact that their identity does not match that of a typical entrepreneur according to society. It is rather more valuable to look into the differences and see how women entrepreneur distinguish themselves in the male dominated tech field.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the existing theory regarding women entrepreneurs and stereotyping by providing a current picture of how women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector deal with prejudices. This study provides recent insights into how identity is used and how legitimacy is obtained.

5.4 Limitations

This study has some limitations. To start, this master thesis has a qualitative approach where 12 interviews were conducted to gain in dept insight. Due to the small sample size, it is difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population. However, this approach led to the ability to provide more extensive and in-depth research.

Second, there is a geographical limitation since this study only focused on women tech entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. This makes that is it not possible to generalize the results to other countries or sectors. Besides, there is also within the sample a limitation with regards to diversity. This study focused on women entrepreneurs in de tech sectors, but does not take any other factors such as age, ethnicity or socio-economic background into consideration which also can be of influence on the entrepreneurs' experience.

Third, since the researcher is a man who studies a sensitive topic where women could experience hindrance due to actions of particular men. Therefore, it is possible that respondents were hesitant in providing fully open and honest answers. The researcher tried to make his position clear and mentioned that all answers were being delt with confidentially.

Finally, with regards to reflexivity, the researcher chose this topic because he has a personal interest in stereotypes in general. His prior research (i.e. theoretical framework, but also prior studies) could have influenced the researchers' perception on the topic. The researcher tried to disregard his personal opinion and attempted to ask only open non-directional question towards the women entrepreneurs.

5.5. Further research

Based on the results of this study, there are a couple of recommendations for further research. One possibility is to do comparative research examining women entrepreneurs in the tech sector alongside women entrepreneurs in other sectors such as construction or the financial sector, or to other countries. This may help to gain a better understating of the unique challenges women entrepreneurs face in the Dutch tech sector and could lead to insight how cultural differences play a role.

Future research can also look at the intersection of various identities. So not only women entrepreneur in tech, but also aspects as age, ethnicity and socio-economic background. This could lead to a better understanding of how multiple factors can influence the experience of women entrepreneurs.

Additionally, further research could add more focus on specific advantages and disadvantages for women-only ecosystems. The theory used in this study only focused on the business-aspect of women-only networks (Xie & LV, 2016), but social aspect are neglected. In contrast to prior research, this study states that there are definitely advantages to women-only networks.

Finally the sample in this study consist of entrepreneurs who only just started their company and entrepreneur who are doing this for multiple decades. A longitudinal study could help by gaining a better insight in how identity precisely develops overtime and is used in different phases to deal with stereotypes.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to provide an answer to following question:

How do women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech-sector cope with stereotypes concerning women entrepreneurs?

The findings of this study reveal how women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector use their entrepreneurial identity to cope with stereotypes and prejudices.

Women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech-sector cope with stereotypes by using their entrepreneurial identity which can be described as a strong character. With this strong character, they navigate through situations where they have to poke through the stereotyped perception of other entrepreneurs. After they do this, they use the stereotype in their advantage by implementing it in their own unique entrepreneurial identity. This study therefore support the findings from Gupta & Etzkowitz (2021) that state that women tech entrepreneurs are unique by itself since the construct of their identity deviates from traditional gender norms and these new approaches are visible in the sector. This may also be one of the reasons for their change in the perception of stereotypes.

Additionally, this study concludes that women entrepreneurs in the Dutch tech sector are aware of the stereotypes but at the same time they see a change in the perception of entrepreneurship in general. Prior literature stated than entrepreneurship is solely considered to be masculine (Ahl, 2006; Meyer, 2017; Laguia et al., 2018)), however, the interviews indicate that this is not the case anymore in the Dutch tech sector. Entrepreneurship in general is becoming more inclusive and particular stereotypes rise from the fact that specific traits are considered to be masculine such as ambition and self-confidence. These traits are however necessary to be successful in this environment.

Finally, this master thesis tries to highlight the importance of an open approach to research on topics as stereotypes and women entrepreneurs. A lot of research tend to describe the high-profile entrepreneur as a man. This assumption leads to the problem where women are a priori assumed to be deficient which is a prejudice in advance. A gendered approach, which looks into a particular identity, is more suitable than just looking at sexes (e.g. man/woman) and will lead to more valid insights.

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