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Article

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The Effect of Entrepreneurs' Gender and Gendered Startup Fields on Organizational Attraction for Potential Applicants

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is growing, and thereby applicants are more often presented with the opportunity to work in a start-up. Simultaneously, a lack of gender diversity in start-up leadership has been reported, and gender stereotyping has manifested itself in the entrepreneurial world. These developments motivate further studies on how potential applicants are attracted to start-ups. In this study, I examine the effect that the entrepreneur's gender and gendered start-up field has on potential applicants' organizational attraction to the company. The present study investigates four fabricated start-ups: 1. Male founder of a technology start-up, 2. Male founder of a sustainable start-up, 3. Female founder of a technology start-up, and 4. Female founder of a sustainable start-up, where participants are randomly selected to reveal through an online experiment their intent to pursue the start-up. Data from 246 prospective graduates, graduates, and young professionals indicates that the start-up field is more valuable when considering one's organizational attraction to a company than the entrepreneur's gender. Unforeseeably, both the female and male participants preferred a sustainable context start-up, but with varying founder gender preferences.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Gender stereotypes; Applicant recruitment; Organizational attraction.

1. Introduction

The global growth of start-ups has rapidly increased over recent years. With the assistance of the pandemic, the entrepreneurship boom has escalated towards a start-up hysteria (Altun, 2021). This results in vastly different entrepreneurial endeavors across all industries with seemingly limitless potential. The appeal of becoming an entrepreneur or a future employee pursuing a career in a start-up remains a viable option for many professionals. Unfortunately, there persists a largely apparent lack of gender diversity in entrepreneurship as a whole, centered on the number of male founders versus female founders of start-ups (Marlow, 2020).

The lack of gender diversity in entrepreneurship can affect both the founders' and applicants' organizational attraction towards start-ups since this exposes how entrepreneurship can be an unequal career option to pursue, depending on one's gender. There is much discussion on where the lack of gender diversity originated in entrepreneurship. Research has suggested that the differing entrepreneurial activ-

ity between men and women could be analogous with gender characterization (Carter, Anderson, & Shaw, 2001; Greer & Greene, 2003; Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009; Marlow, 2002), meaning that the entrepreneurs prescribed gender role may be a hindering factor in the deficit of gender diversity. More specifically, this is referred as "gender stereotypes" which "are shared beliefs about the attributes, personality traits, and abilities of women and men" (Ellemers, 2018, p. 278).

Gender stereotypes are embedded in our everyday lives in many ways, but I would like to focus mostly on the ways gender stereotypes affect potential applicants' organizational attraction to a start-up, and how the founder's gender matched with a gendered start-up field can alter the applicants' intent to pursue. This Master's Thesis investigates if applicants favor a workplace they feel fits (or matches) them since individuals are attracted by similarity, and whether this similarity attraction resonates in their preferred founder gender (Byrne, 1971; Hentschel, Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2020). The lack of gender diversity extending across many fields of leadership, heavily due to gender stereotypes, negatively influences gen-

der equality and calls for change. Therefore, it is critical to understand that gender stereotypes are rooted in society's accepted gender ideology, defined as the regulations that outline the social fabric of the distinctions and dissimilarities that are a part of gender (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These gender beliefs have permeated not just in gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship, but also in the way start-up fields are affiliated with being more masculine or feminine based on the typical distribution of gender in the working sector which is more obvious in certain fields rather than in others (Rice & Barth, 2016). Hence, leading to a few of the hypotheses proposed in the study, which will investigate how potential applicants view certain fields established by the predefined masculinity or femininity of the start-up field.

Previous research has in detail expanded upon the factors in start-up fields that make them seem more masculine or feminine. Namely, these factors are credited to the start-up field practices of being perceived as more communal (stereotypically female, feminine behaviors) or agentic (stereotypically male, masculine behaviors), and depending on the start-up field, there can be adverse effects on the gender that is misaligned with the associated gender stereotype of the start-up field (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016).

This Master's Thesis focuses on the recruiter perspective in start-ups asking how applicants' organizational attraction changes amongst differing start-up founder genders and gendered start-up fields. More distinctively, I will investigate the applicant's "intent to pursue" to a given start-up which is one of the three constituents that describe organizational attraction, namely the other two being "general attractiveness" and "prestige" by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). (Highhouse et al., 2003). The intent to pursue component is highlighted throughout the Master's Thesis, more so than the remaining organizational attraction components since the key focal point of the study pertains to potential applicants' intentions to engage in the start-up. According to Highhouse et al. (2003), in theory intentions is more indicative of behavior than evaluating attitudes thus reinstating that intentions are a more suited measure as they invoke a live quest of employment in a company, instead of the more passive measure of company attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003).

The Master's Thesis overarching goal is to investigate the influence the founder's gender and gendered start-up field has on the potential applicants' organizational attraction.

This leads to the research question:

How do (male/female) potential applicants show a different organizational attraction to a start-up when founded by a male versus female in a (1) Tech versus (2) Sustainable field?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Start-ups

The start-up culture is continuously evolving and showcasing new forms on how to operate a successful business. Many business professionals are enticed by the start-up industry due to the fast-paced environment, high risk, and

endless bounds of innovation. In order to understand start-ups, there needs to be a familiarity with the fundamentals of creating an organization which is also known as the "three basic approaches". According to de Ven, Hudson, and Schroeder (1984), the entrepreneurial approach, organizational approach, and ecological approach are the three basic approaches for organizational creation (de Ven et al., 1984). The key difference between the three approaches is that "the entrepreneurial approach" focuses on the organizations founder and recruiter's traits, the "organizational approach" disputes the magnitude placed on the fundamental and beginning stages of arranging and planning operations has on the company's form and execution, and the "ecological approach" reviews the external conditions (e.g., politics, economics, etc.) that launch brand new erected organizations (de Ven et al., 1984). Moving forward, the entrepreneurial approach will be the main start-up approach discussed throughout the Master's Thesis with an emphasis on the start-up founders' characteristics.

Now, shifting more towards the theory of entrepreneurship, as defined by Johnson (2001) entrepreneurship entails of possessing information and ideas that are transformed into physical goods, commodities, or a system that is establishing a business to promote the physical good in the global marketplace (Johnson, 2001). Notable characteristic differences of a small business owner to an entrepreneur are that entrepreneurs are not fixated on securing an income to meet their needs, rather entrepreneurs have an increased ambition towards achievements and high stakes in profit with potential threats, and are likely to innovate and adapt (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984; Stewart, Watson, Carland, & Carland, 1999; Zhao, 2005). The craving to innovate and create change even with an inevitable side of risk has led many people to pursue entrepreneurship, but never without the first key defining step of obtaining an "entrepreneurial opportunity". As noted by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), in order to have entrepreneurship, individuals must possess entrepreneurial opportunities that appear in a mixture of forms yet differ from opportunities that optimize existing goods and services, and should much rather pioneer or invent new goods, services, information, and methods. (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). In other words, entrepreneurship involves creating something into existence that previously did not exist, therefore entrepreneurs scout for favorable prospects and innovations acquire the tool to potentially excel and thrive in an industry (Zhao, 2005).

When put simply, entrepreneurship is easily viewed as a continuously rewarding profession in innovation for anyone willing, but we cannot overlook the indisputable lack of gender diversity in entrepreneurship. Some researchers believe the archetypal entrepreneur is highly analogous to masculine attributes (e.g., driven, self-assured) and less so to feminine attributes (e.g., friendly, reasonable) thus leading to the formation of the "think entrepreneur-think male" paradigm (Hancock, Pérez-Quintana, & Hormiga, 2014; Laguía, García-Ael, Wach, & Moriano, 2018, p. 750). Subsequently, there is a growing abundance of research that

covers the topic of gender inequality in entrepreneurship and start-up fields. However, before addressing the lack of gender diversity in entrepreneurship (and start-ups) there is good reason to first examine why gender stereotypes exist, and how they are embedded in leadership.

2.2. Gender Stereotypes in Leadership

In everyday life, gender stereotypes are embedded in most circumstances that involve men and women. According to Eagly and Wood (2016), the social role theory is to blame since it uncovers the gender role beliefs instilled in society and how this affects the perception of certain genders (Eagly & Wood, 2016). More specifically, the social role theory explains how gender roles influence behaviors and people's gender identities or self-perception (Eagly & Wood, 2016). This coincides with the gender stereotype aspect of the research question and how social role theory plays an essential part in the extent of an applicant's organizational attraction to a founder's gender (or prescribed gender identity). Eagly and Wood (2016) introduced the idea that gender roles consist of three factors: biological processes, sociocultural factors, and stereotypic expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Each of these factors plays a part in how we believe a certain gender should behave in society and define what actions are considered acceptable which align with the defined gender role.

As stated by Eagly and Steffen (1984), these gender beliefs strongly align with communal and agentic personal traits so much so that society typically expects men to be more agentic (e.g., self-assertive, self-expansive, urge to master) and women to be more communal (e.g., selflessness, concern with others, desire to be at one with others) (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). The root cause in how agentic and communal gender beliefs originated, can be attributed to the differences in workforce positions, where men usually held higher-level positions that promote power, status, and authority, and women either held lower positions or no position at all (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). These qualities associated with holding a higher position have become rather problematic today in the efforts toward gender equality in leadership positions and has "disadvantaged" women leaders since there is a recognized incongruity between agentic traits ascribed to the classical leader, who occupies these higher positions (Heilman, 2001; Rosette & Tost, 2010).

Leadership theory suggests that specific types of individuals more prone to succeed as leaders in organizations have certain traits of dominance, autonomy, assertion, extroversion, and motivation (McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; Mumford et al., 2000). Hence, reassuring previous studies claim that leaders are presumed to be agentic, attaching expectations outlined as male as being what is truly expected of a leader (Hentschel, Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2018). Which to some extent reinforces why there is an absence of women in leadership, especially in leadership roles, when the stereotypical traits that are associated with men are favored over those associated with women in successful leadership positions.

Unfortunately, there are not many ways to avoid the inherent stereotyping in leadership positions without enduring social penalties based on the social incongruity theory, but there is one theory that deems there is potential to benefit from disobeying stereotypes, this being the expectancy violation theory. Thus, progressing from the basics of gender roles (e.g., expected qualities or behavioral tendencies for men and women) and more towards the effects of social roles (e.g., social expectations that are shared and pertain to individuals who engage in a social position) these two theories expand upon many of the unforeseeable responses both men and women face when defying social roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Per Eagly and Karau's (2002) definition of social congruity theory, the "potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). The theory further explains where the prejudice towards female leaders who are incongruent with the characteristics of leader roles (predominantly masculine attributes) and the agency is derived. The social incongruity theory dilemma for women leaders is twofold. On top of the upfront difficulties of being incongruent with traditional female roles and leadership roles, there remains little access to any leadership roles that will not have preconceived biases. Further adding to the inequality amongst genders in leadership, as reported by Eagly and Carli (2003), men do not receive any form of punishment for communal actions, rather they benefit more from portraying acts of dominance and boldness, and male leaders have a broader assortment of leadership actions they can practice with less bias (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Thus, detailing how social congruity theory is more problematic for women leaders who practice agentic behaviors than male leaders who practice communal behaviors, and male leaders are not harmed in any way towards portraying communal behaviors.

Luckily, other forms of leadership are defined as having either more communal or agentic behaviors, as concluded by Eagly et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis, female leaders were more prone to transformational leadership (also known as "charismatic leadership"), which includes a few behaviors that align with roles ascribed to women pushing for more encouraging, mindful behaviors" (Eagly et al., 2003); On the contrary, male leaders were more prone to transactional leadership, which recognize and assist the supporting (lower level) members by building a relationship to trade insight and converse with them about their responsibilities and objectives (Burns, 1978; Eagly & Carli, 2004). By and large, female leaders can be described to a greater extent as transformational than male leaders. A few possible reasons as to why were noted in Eagly et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis findings interpretations, female leaders are either making an effort to try to resolve the existing dissonance between roles in leadership and female gender roles or the impact gender roles may have on leadership is such a way that women concern themselves more with the feminine facets of transformational leadership (Eagly et

al., 2003). When both leadership styles were evaluated with female and male leaders in a meta-analysis conducted by Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) it appears when compared with men, women received even more of a negative reaction when embracing an autocratic (or commanding) leadership style even when women acted in less of an autocratic style than the men (Eagly et al., 1992). Thus, raising the question, how can women leaders not be confined to only communal leadership practices that are viewed as matching their socially accepted female gender roles. Contrarily, in a further gender and leadership style study, when compared with women, men who exhibit transformational leadership (generally communal behaviors aligning with stereotypes about women) were more promotable and more effective than women, completely defying the social congruity theory and fulfilling the expectancy violation theory (Hentschel, Horvath, Peus, & Sczesny, 2018).

As stated by Hentschel, Braun, et al. (2018), expectancy violation theory states there is a possibility for those who show abnormal stereotypical behaviors but in a positive manner can be perceived more favorably than the persons showing typical stereotypical behaviors (Hentschel, Braun, et al., 2018). This theory reveals there is a small chance for both men and women leaders to attempt to flee from the prescribed stereotypes embedded in leadership, only by opposing stereotypical behaviors with a seemingly more positively viewed behavior. However, in this case, the expectancy violation theory uncovered a harsh truth for female leaders, that no matter the leadership form (communal or agentic), the male leaders' unexpected but favorable behaviors will solely benefit only male leaders and will not assist in career growth and promotion for female leaders to the same extent as it will for men (Hentschel, Braun, et al., 2018).

Consequently, bringing the discussion back to stereotypes in leadership. There is a strongly held phenomenon in gender and leadership research that demonstrates a lasting connection between stereotypes of successful managers to masculine traits, called the "think manager – think male" stereotype (Laguía et al., 2018, p. 750). Primarily the "think manager – think male" phenomenon highlights the immediate incongruity women face in managerial positions, leadership positions, or any position for that matter where women lack the expected stereotypical attributes in such a position. Fortunately, the times are changing and there are a few possibilities on how to evade gender stereotypes, or as the case in expectancy violation theory, how to benefit from gender stereotypes. Eagly and Wood (2016) insisted it is possible to alter predefined gender roles (sex-typical roles) for males and females, but is not an easy transition, especially in a gender-dominated field (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Wood, 2016). Another potential possibility in evading stereotypes is finding a niche in a "sex-typed" occupation, which is an occupation where a large portion of the people in an occupation are of one sex and when there is an expectation that this is the preferred norm (Schein, 1973). Based on the previously stated possibilities, firstly, the redefining gender roles option, which ultimately means redesigning the internal and external ca-

reer assignments and gender social scale for both men and women, is a good option but will take a considerable amount of time to accomplish. The more feasible possibility to further investigate is finding a niche in a sex-typed occupation where the communal traits and gender stereotypes for women, as well as agentic traits and gender stereotypes for men, are all perceived as acceptable to a varying degree. Having this in mind, the focus will now intertwine the start-ups, leadership, and gender stereotypes concepts into gender stereotypes in start-up fields with the aim to find a niche in entrepreneurship.

2.3. Gender Stereotypes in Start-up Fields

In parallel with the leadership stereotypes being stereotypically male, thus resulting in the "think manager – think male" phenomenon, entrepreneurship holds a similar gender stereotype of being associated with masculine traits, so the "think entrepreneurship – think male" phenomenon exists (Gupta et al., 2009; Laguía et al., 2018; Schein, 2007). Nowadays, the think entrepreneurship – think male phenomenon, seems nonsensical given the fact that globally women and men business owners are equally successful yet are still less likely to pursue being an entrepreneur (Hentschel, Braun, et al., 2018; Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991). In recent years, there has been a drastic rise in the number of women entrepreneurs, but women's entrepreneurial intentions, similarly to men, are greatly affected due to socially constructed gender stereotypes (Gagnon, Cukier, & Oliver, 2021; Gupta et al., 2009). Women's beliefs and goals can be influenced by societal norms further discouraging women from seeking a professional career in entrepreneurship (Gagnon et al., 2021). Arguably, the reasoning behind why women are hesitant to become entrepreneurs can be better understood in the "lack of fit" theory (Heilman, 1983). As defined by Hentschel et al. (2020) the "lack of fit theory suggests that when women compare their personal characteristics with the stereotypically masculine characteristics of career opportunities, the mismatch reduces their interest in pursuing such opportunities" (Heilman, 1983; Hentschel et al., 2020, p. 582). Moreover, Laguía et al. (2018) addressed how women tend to assess female entrepreneurs more favorably than male entrepreneurs, detailing that female entrepreneurs have more self-control and greater ambitions (de Pillis & Meilich, 2006; Laguía et al., 2018). Hence, affirming there is an interest in women wanting to pursue careers in entrepreneurship, despite the mismatch in stereotypical characteristics in the career opportunity.

Lately, there has been much debate between researchers if entrepreneurship is in fact as agentic as once believed, and to what extent can entrepreneurship be considered. The classical belief is entrepreneurship is stereotypically portrayed as an agentic (masculine attributes) occupation which is associated with being achievement and power-oriented (Heilman, 2001). While more recent studies by researchers advocate for the communal nature in entrepreneurship which includes cooperation, networking, and problem-solving (Jakob, Isidor, Steinmetz, Wehner, & Kabst, 2019). Thus, unearthing the

added argument, that the predominant agentic depiction of entrepreneurship fails to mention the communal piece of entrepreneurship that equivalently exists, being the cooperation in teams and networks, partner relations, and contributions to society (Jakob et al., 2019). Even with the ongoing debates, there is still a considerable amount of progress needed to fix the entrepreneurship gender inequality issue and shift the stereotypically male perception of entrepreneurship towards a more female accepting stereotype in entrepreneurship.

On a more optimistic note, research has found that not all start-up fields are associated with agentic masculine stereotypical expectations. There has been a noticeable link between greenness and stereotypical femininity in green behaviors and environmentally sustainable fields where women would be believed as a better fit (Brough et al., 2016). In fact, regarding stereotypes, consumers partaking in green practices are viewed as more feminine, and even regard themselves as seemingly more feminine, according to peoples' stereotypes (Brough et al., 2016). Especially nowadays with more of a societal environmental push, being perceived as green or environmentally conscious is in everyone's best interest, regardless of gender. Dietz et al.'s (2002) study highlight how women's inclination of being more altruistic and empathetic than men, which is closely linked to environmentalism, emphasizes the alignment with stereotypical roles of women, and their avoidance of any form of harm to people or species (Dietz et al., 2002). Thus, revealing a conflict men might face when taking part in sustainable behaviors that do not conform to the gender norm. Based on a study conducted by Brough et al. (2016) men were actively deterred from engaging in green behaviors due to gender identity threat and men endured a significantly higher need for gender identity maintenance (Brough et al., 2016). As follows, to put in simpler terms by Bosson and Michniewicz (2013), when men encounter undesirable anxieties regarding gender status, they abstain from femininity very strongly and revert to viewing femininity similarly to the level of the classical stereotypes. When the gender status, or the classical stereotype identity, of males is challenged this evokes a need to reduce the unpleasant reaction by elevating masculinity (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013). The reasoning behind these extreme reactions by men breaking gender norms and not so much for women is due to the greater psychological consequences that men experience more than women after "gender-norm transgressions" (Aubé & Koestner, 1992; Gal & Wilkie, 2010; O'Heron & Orlofsky, 1990). Thankfully, such psychological consequences can be avoided as confirmed in Dietz et al.'s (2002) study that by "affirming" men's masculinity this will lessen the need to take part in any gender identity maintenance, therefore increasing green and sustainable preferences in men (Dietz et al., 2002). Thus, confirming that the sustainable start-up field is, a matter of fact, a niche in entrepreneurship. Additionally, further findings suggested that the green-feminine stereotype was equally recognized amidst women and men, with this in mind make sure when promoting green products to men, use masculine branding as a strategy to better attract a male au-

dience.

Moving on from the sustainable start-up (predominantly feminine) gender gap to an equally opposing field that is viewed predominantly as masculine, is the technology field. As stated by Lie (1995), technology in countless instances is "created in the image of man" (Lie, 1995, p. 379). Even today with a steady rise in women pursuing careers in STEM fields the tech industry remains a male-dominated environment. Similarly, to how men reacted when confronted with a gender identity threat, women when coping with the lack of acceptance by men in STEM fields responded by appearing less feminine, purposefully became digressive to neutralize the gender difference, or departed work in such fields (Alfrey & Twine, 2017). There is even a common analogy for depicting the shortage of women in STEM careers, which is called the "leaky pipeline" (Blickenstaff, 2005). Against popular belief, even though technology is associated with masculinity, technology symbolically does not connect gender structures and identities, meaning men's technology usage understandably is not adequate enough to make technology merely a figure or symbol of masculinity (Lie, 1995). Likewise, men who master technology signify a concept that is acknowledged as masculine and establish the sense of masculinity in the technological concept, and men who do not master technology will most likely not affect the well-established image of stereotypical masculinity (Lie, 1995). Seemingly, this lack of negative affect towards men who do not master technology is why it has been suggested that females are easier to attract into male-dominated or technology fields rather than attracting males into female-dominated fields (Kindsiko & Türk, 2017).

2.4. Applicant Recruitment

Building off of the theoretical basis of gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship and start-up fields towards a more practical view, there is much to consider when recruiting applicants who want to pursue a career in a start-up, keeping in mind the stereotypical preconceptions for men and women. Currently, it is not fully known how much of an applicant's preconceived views on an organization may originate from the recruiter themselves, but there is enough evidence to prove that applicant's desire to apply and keenness of an organization can be influenced by recruitment (Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005). Start-ups, unlike organizations, have a unique vantage point with applicant recruitment since the founder (or entrepreneur) of the start-up is both the leader and recruiter for the start-up, especially during the beginning stages of building the start-up, if not throughout all the stages. This puts additional pressure on the founder to appeal even more so to the potential applicants during recruitment.

As strongly advised, the recruiter needs to prioritize establishing a sense of fit among the potential applicants to both the organization and supervisor. There are a few underlying hurdles that need to be overcome before achieving a potential applicant's sense of fit; Firstly, the obstacles regarding applicant-organization fit will be addressed, and shortly

after the obstacles regarding applicant-supervisor fit will be named, both bringing the recruiter up to speed on how to better establish a sense of fit among potential applicants.

Largely for women, the lack of fit theory by Heilman (1983) has a huge impact since women who feel their personal characteristics are mismatched with the stereotypically masculine characteristics in a certain career opportunity or field, tend to have reduced interest in striving for such careers, as in the technology field (Heilman, 1983; Hentschel et al., 2020). The same 'lack of fit theory' effect was observed in men who feel their personal characteristics are mismatched with the stereotypically feminine characteristics in the sustainable field, resulting in either a similar tendency to reduce interest in the field or as noted by Brough et al. (2016), "affirming masculinity" helped men avoid from having to endure gender identity maintenance and increase interest in the field (Brough et al., 2016, p. 28). Accordingly, the following is hypothesized, in which the corresponding Hypothesis 1a and 2a will be later introduced in the theory:

Hypothesis 1(b): *Female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up versus a technology context start-up.*

Hypothesis 2(b): *Male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a technology context start-up versus a sustainable context start-up.*

Notably, this is where the threat of gender stereotypes comes into play for applicants', thus heightening the applicants perceived lack of fit in a start-up. According to Hentschel et al. (2020) fit assessments have quite an expansive reach of influence, notably in one's degree of expected sense of belonging in an organization, predicted outcome of an approach, and performance assumptions (Hentschel et al., 2020).

This guides to the signaling theory which suggests that anything revealed to potential applicants during the recruitment process can be inferred by the applicant as an essential characteristic for the job opportunity (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Hentschel et al., 2020) In this case, taken from the recruiter (or start-up founder) perspective, the "signaler" (e.g., recruiter) is revealing to the "receiver" (e.g., potential applicant) during the recruitment process essential characteristics for the job opportunity (Connelly et al., 2011). In fact, Busenitz, Fiet, and Moesel (2005) mentioned how the entrepreneur or startup founder can be a paramount signal of the start-up's quality for potential applicants, due to the founder, likely having more information than anybody else about the start-up's quality (Busenitz et al., 2005; Hentschel et al., 2020). Therefore, spotlighting how start-up recruiters (founders) can have an upper hand during the applicant recruitment process if able to effectively signal the start-ups quality to the potential applicants.

Now, factoring in a key defining trait that recruiters promote, and potential applicants look for when gauging their fit to a start-up, leads the way for the introduction of self-efficacy. As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a per-

son's acceptance in their capabilities to do well in an area or field (Bandura, 1977). Tellhed, Bäckström, and Björklund (2016) further report women to have more of a likelihood than men, to have a lower self-efficacy in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) jobs, meaning they feel less competent and will actively try to avoid such jobs in these fields (Tellhed et al., 2016). Interestingly, previous studies have supported the claim that careers dominated by women give females a feeling of obtainable success, especially in the health care, domestic sphere, and elementary education fields, yet females are still hesitant about their potential in STEM career where males are the known majority (Tellhed et al., 2016); Conversely, men view their obtainable success equally whether in a field or career that is female or male dominated (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Bridges, 1988; Matsui, Ikeda, & Ohnishi, 1989; Tellhed et al., 2016), portraying fewer self-efficacy concerns all around.

When engaging in the recruitment process, the potential applicants' perceived fit to the supervisor, in this respect, the supervisor being the "recruiter or start-up founder", is just as imperative as the potential applicants' perceived fit to the organization. In repositioning the potential applicants fit towards the supervisor (recruiter or start-up founder) a crucial mechanism that should not go unnoticed when evaluating person-supervisor fit, is the homophily theory. The homophily theory, in general principle, is the "similarity of members characteristics" in a group composition either referring "to social identities that are attached externally to individuals (e.g., ascribed characteristics such as gender, race, or age,) or to internal states concerning values, beliefs, or norms" (Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003, p. 197). This general theory is very much applicable when men or women applicants are trying to foresee their fit to the organization by noticing what characteristics in the business are similar to their own, such as gender stereotypical characteristics depending on the field. Which according to Hentschel et al. (2020) the belief individuals have about possessing identical qualities of other employees in the company, means there is a higher chance they will be enticed to, recognize with, and join that career (Devendorf & Highhouse, 2008; Hentschel et al., 2020; Peters, Ryan, Haslam, & Fernandes, 2012). Adversely, this theory can deter an applicant from a company for they foresee or sense a lack of fit. This brings the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1(c): *Female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by females with a sustainable context.*

Hypothesis 2(c): *Male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by males with a technology context.*

Moreover, entrepreneurship literature has viewed the homophily theory as a way entrepreneurs and others involved are intrinsically tied and drawn to one another, invoking the axiom "birds of a feather flock together" (Phillips, Tracey, & Karra, 2013). Therefore, applicants can foresee their fit to

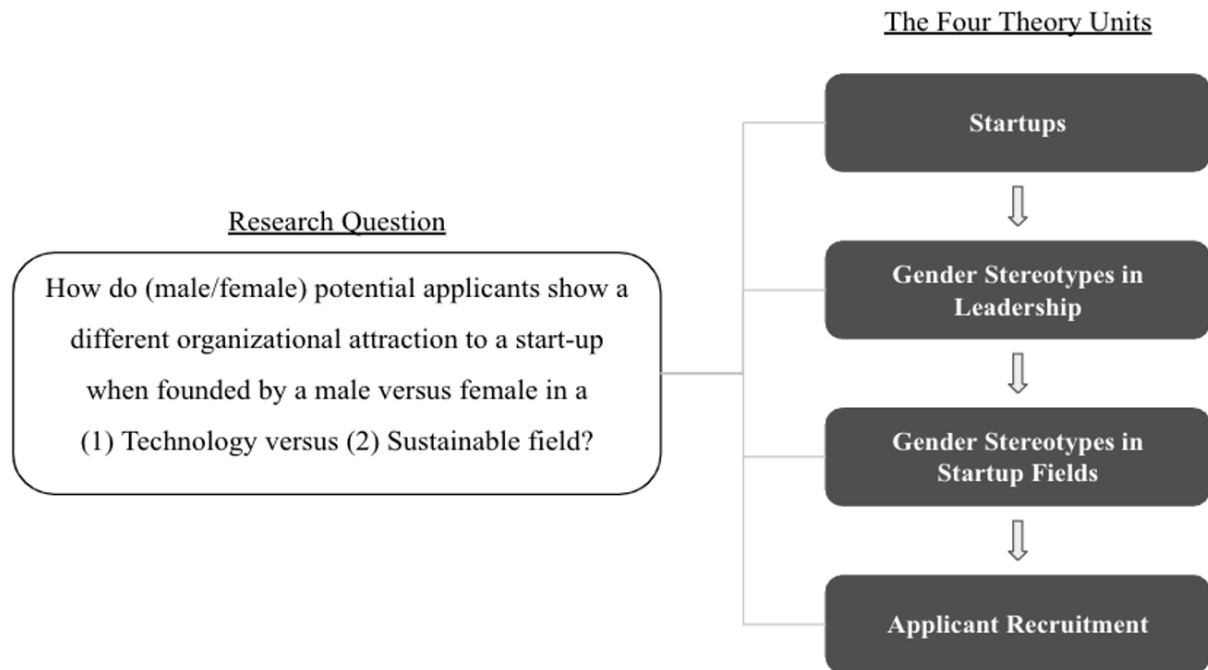


Figure 1: The Research Question and Four Theory Units (Own illustration)

the supervisor or start-up founder on the individual level, by using the homophily theory.

Similarly, to Martins and Parson's (2007) report, that validated, in women there is a rise in desirability towards an organization which happens when there are larger amounts of women in senior leadership positions (Hentschel, Braun, et al., 2018; Martins & Parsons, 2007). The same was reported about men by Rice and Barth (2016), that men hold stronger "stereotypical views in the workplace", especially when it comes to leadership roles where men "often selected the male applicants over similarly qualified female applicants" (Rice & Barth, 2016, p. 4). As a last remark on homophily theory, according to Greenberg and Mollick (2017), genders relation to homophily, as shown in a number of studies, is as an accepted ground for homophily (Greenberg & Mollick, 2017), thus insinuating potential applicants' heightened attraction to companies and supervisors that fit their gender. To that end, the following were hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1(a): *Female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to female-founded start-ups than male-founded start-ups.*

Hypothesis 2(a): *Male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to male-founded start-ups than female-founded start-ups.*

Hypothesis 3: *Female applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the sustainable context start-up is male as compared to female.*

Hypothesis 4: *Male applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the technology*

context start-up is female as compared to male.

With all this in mind, there is still much in question from the recruiter's point of view, regarding the effect entrepreneurs' gender and gendered start-up fields have on organizational attraction for potential applicants, and whether the theory holds for how gender stereotypes in leadership, entrepreneurship, and start-up fields are perceived. As a summary of this theory review, the following four hypotheses were postulated from the four main theory units covered, as illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Method

In further investigating the research question, I conducted a quantitative study that examined participants' organizational attraction towards start-ups with differing founder genders (male or female) in either technology or sustainable fields. The experiment is with a 2x4x2 between-subjects design with applicant gender (male versus female) interested in a start-up field (stereotypically male tech industry versus stereotypically female sustainable industry versus non-stereotypically male sustainable industry versus non-stereotypically female tech industry) and founder gender (male versus female) as the independent variables. Each participant in the experiment was shown a randomized vignette that either displayed a male founder of a technology start-up, a female founder of a technology start-up, a male founder of a sustainable start-up, or a female founder of a sustainable start-up (e.g., Figure 2, p. 17). Based on the pre-chosen vignette scenario administered to the survey participants, the participants were expected to answer the

survey questions as if they would or would not be attracted to such an organization.

3.1. Sample

The study sample consisted of 246 participants selected by convenience sampling since I approached individuals in my network who would fit the research participant criteria.¹ The individuals in my network who were selected to take part in the experiment pertained more towards young professionals and graduates, young professionals working in start-ups, and either graduate or soon-to-be graduates interested in start-ups. The participants' study background did not prove to be a major focus since there is a wide variety of start-ups with differing education credentials.

In the final sample, I removed all participants who did not pass the manipulation checks, lacked adequate English language skills, and failed the attention check. All participants needed sufficient knowledge in English to complete the online questionnaire since the survey questions were conducted in English. Since the hypotheses address both men and women, I recruit participants who identify as either male, female, or other in the study and further investigate for potential gender differences. Additionally, I decided to keep all the participants, not regarding their interest in start-up employment because the Pearson correlation between the dependent variable ("Intent to Pursue") and the "start-up employment interest" variable is low (Pearson correlation = .144) and therefore independent. Overall, the final sample consisted of 197 participants (59% female; 41% male; $M_{age} = 30.83$, $SD_{age} = 10.361$), Table 1 depicts the randomly selected vignettes per female versus male participants. The final sample had a vast range of 26 different nationalities. The final sample had 90 Americans (46%), 58 Germans (29%), and 49 participants from other nationalities (25%). 97% of the sample have already obtained a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree. The majority of the sample are already employed (121 participants, 61%) and (62 participants, 32%) are students, and of the currently employed sample, (21%) are currently working at a start-up, (12%) previously worked at a start-up, and when asked if interested in working for a start-up, the majority (73%) chose options neutral to the highest option ("very interested"). Similarly, when the participants, who are currently students, were asked if they are interested in working for a start-up, the majority (75%) chose options neutral to the highest option ("very interested").

3.2. Study design

The study design included an experimental online survey that investigated participants' interest in randomly assigned tech or sustainable start-ups and whether the start-up founders' gender, which was also randomly assigned as either a male or female founder, is even a consideration when reviewing one's organizational attraction

towards a start-up. I used an online survey program, Questback *Unipark* (Version EFS Fall 2021), to develop the survey² and used it as the key program for participants to access the survey through the Questback *Unipark* link (<https://ww3.unipark.de/uc/StartupRecruitment/>). The survey was completed on multiple devices such as on a mobile device, computer, or tablet. Firstly, the study sample was recruited via email, social media, and word of mouth. The survey was active for a total of 45 days with an average survey completion time of 8 minutes and 51 seconds with a total of 43 questions from start to finish. The data gathering was also conducted through Questback *Unipark*.

3.3. Procedure

At the beginning of the online experiment, every participant was randomly assigned one of four vignettes of a start-up advertisement (Vignette 1: Male founder and technology start-up; Vignette 2: Male founder and sustainable start-up; Vignette 3: Female founder and technology start-up; Vignette 4: Female founder and sustainable start-up, examples of the experimental manipulation are shown in Figure 2) where they were advised to form a first impression of the start-up and then would answer the following questions which would relate to the presented start-up advertisement. Every participant was given a minimum of 35 seconds to review the start-up advertisement before they could continue the survey and were informed that there would be no possibility to look at the start-up advertisement description again. In order to ensure consistency throughout the vignettes, the start-up advertisement scenarios for technology start-ups are worded the same, with the only differences being the male or female names assigned. The same applies to the start-up advertisement scenarios for sustainable start-ups. It was imperative that the names chosen for the founders in the start-up advertisements were viewed similarly as both attractive names for a female and male. According to Erwin's (1993) previous study on first names and perceptions of physical attractiveness where he compiled a list of 160 names and deduced through experimentation the most attractive names. The most attractive female name was Danielle, and the most attractive name for a male is Alexander, both with similar attractiveness scores (Erwin, 1993). I decided to provide vague and faceless images for the founders in the start-up advertisement since this is not a key factor being investigated in the study, therefore did not want to draw any further attention to this factor. Lastly, regarding the start-up advertisements, the technology start-up scenario is similarly worded to the sustainable start-up scenario, yet the key difference is that the technology start-up is "aiming to further technological advancements" in the mobility industry by producing an invention "to take the industry to a new technological level" while the sustainable start-up is "aiming to improve environmental

¹The data was collected as part of a larger research project of the Chair of Research and Science Management of the Technical University of Munich.

²The survey was developed as part of a larger research project of the Chair of Research and Science Management of the Technical University of Munich.

Table 1: Experiment Vignette Distribution for Female/Male Participants

Vignette (Founder Gender + Field Context)	Male Participants (n = 81)	Female Participants (n = 116)
1. Male + Technology	15	37
2. Male + Sustainable	17	30
3. Female + Technology	20	23
4. Female + Sustainable	29	26

Note. $N = 197$. The sample size used after filtering the participants. Only filtered for the participants that passed the manipulation, attention, and English language proficiency checks.

sustainability” in the mobility industry by producing an invention “to actively combat climate change”.³ These key differences in the start-up advertisement scenarios were essential for the study since I am investigating the effect founder gender and start-up fields have on potential applicants’ organizational attraction and based on the participants’ reactions to the start-up advertisement scenarios the data collection could further reveal groundbreaking insight.

After reviewing the randomized vignette scenario, the participants were presented with a few pages of statements, where they were instructed to rate “to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the described start-up” or “to what extent do you agree with the following statements about the founder of the start-up” from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The statements provided were based on scales previously researched that measure Organization attractiveness (General attractiveness, Prestige, Intentions to pursue), Person organization fit, Person Supervisor fit, and Anticipated Belongingness. The survey statements were organized based on the scope of the scales used, meaning the broader scale statements were presented first and the more specific scale statements were later in the survey (1: Prestige scale, 2: Person organization fit scale, 3: Anticipated belongingness scale, 4: Person Supervisor fit scale, 5: General Attractiveness scale, 6: Intent to pursue scale), and are described in more detail below in the ‘Measures’ section. On the last survey page, demographic data was collected by asking participants to provide information on their gender, age, highest educational qualification, nationality, current activity, how long they have worked, interest in working for a start-up, experience working at a start-up, and if they understood the English presented in the study.

3.4. Manipulation and Attention checks

Towards the end of the survey, participants were asked to recall the founder’s gender and the field of the start-up in

the randomly selected vignette, which served as manipulation checks in the study. The additional supporting images in the start-up advertisement vignette below the founder’s gender profile served as an addition to the manipulations in the experiment to reimpose the vignette start-up field selection. If the start-up advertisement scenario was for a technology start-up field the supporting image was a lightbulb with the words “Inspiring technological advancements” below it, and for a sustainable start-up field the supporting image was a plant growing out of hand with the words “Ensuring a prosperous future”. In the last survey question, the participants were asked how attentively they filled out the survey, which was used as an attention check for the participants. An outline of the online experiment which was administered with Questback *Unipark* can be found in the Appendix.

3.5. Measures

In the study, all items were rated on a 7-point-Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). When necessary, items were rephrased to fit the vignette scenario the participants were given. An example of a rephrased item that was adapted to the vignette scenario was an item from Cable and DeRue’s (2002) scale on Person Supervisor Fit. The original item in the scale was phrased: “My personal values match my supervisor’s values and culture” (Cable & DeRue, 2002). The original item was then rephrased to the context of the vignette scenario presenting a start-up founder (“I think my personal values match the founder’s values and culture”) since the founder can interchangeably play the role of a supervisor in this context (Cable & DeRue, 2002). In addition, the words “I think” were added to the beginning of certain scales original items to emphasize that I am interested in the participant’s personal assessment and judgement (e.g., Original item: “I could fit in well at this company.”, Rephrased: “I think I could fit in well at this company.”) (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011). Besides these notable item rephrasing, the rest of the original scale items’ wording was not changed, therefore the item tenses and overall item meaning remain the same. A list of all the measures used in the survey is provided in the Appendix. There were a total of six scales used in the experiment, and each

³The experimental manipulation was developed within a larger scale research project at the Chair of Research and Science Management of the Technical University of Munich.

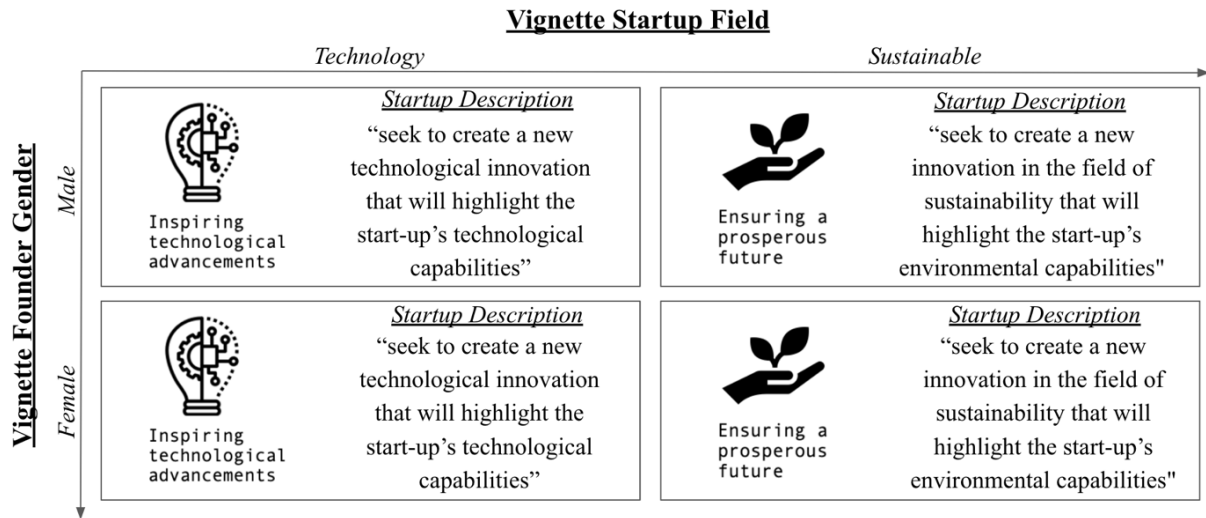


Figure 2: The Four Experiment Vignettes (Own illustration, Icon Sources: freepik (2021) (left) and Naive (n.d.) (right))

This figure is a depiction of the experimental manipulation examples of the four vignettes that were randomly assigned to each participant in the experiment.

Table 2: Summary of Scales Reliability Test

Scale	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)
1. Prestige	0.85*
2. Person Organization Fit	0.83*
3. Anticipated Belongingness	0.85*
4. Person Supervisor Fit	0.90*
5. General Attractiveness	0.91*
6. Intent to Pursue	0.85*

Note. $N = 197$. * $\alpha > 0.7$.

scale passed a reliability test which computes the Cronbach’s alpha for each scale that is displayed in Table 2.

3.5.1. Organization Attraction

Organization attraction was assessed with Highhouse et al. (2003) adapted scale which is comprised of three components (i.e. general attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and prestige) all with notably separate items (Highhouse et al., 2003). General attractiveness was assessed with five items on company attractiveness (e.g., “For me this company would be a good place to work.”), which yielded a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.91. Intentions to pursue served as the dependent variable and was assessed with five items on the behavioral intentions of the participants towards the company (e.g., “I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company.”) and yielded a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85. Prestige was assessed with five items on company prestige which focuses more on the company’s social influence (Highhouse et al., 2003; e.g., “Employees are probably proud to say they work at this company.”). The scale computed a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85.

3.5.2. Person Organization Fit

Participant’s perceptions of person organization fit were assessed with three items adapted from Lauver and Kristof-Brown (2001) (e.g., Original: “My values match or fit the values of this organization.”; Rephrased: “I think my values match or fit the values of this organization.”). This yielded a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.83.

3.5.3. Anticipated Belongingness

To measure the participants’ anticipated belongingness, Gaucher et al.’s (2011) validated four items measure (e.g., Original: “My values and this company’s values are similar.”; Rephrased: “I think my values and this company’s values are similar.”) was used (Gaucher et al., 2011). Which yielded a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85.

3.5.4. Person Supervisor Fit

Person supervisor fit was assessed with the three items adapted from Cable and DeRue (2002) (Original: “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my supervisor values.”; Adapted: “I think the things that I value in life are very similar to the things that the founder

of this start-up values.”). Which yielded a valid and reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed using the IBM statistical analysis tool SPSS (Property of IBM Corp., Version 27, 2020). After completing the survey on Questback *Unipark*, the finalized data from the experiment was downloaded to the IBM statistical analysis tool SPSS. In an effort to test for differences between hypotheses catered to either female applicants (Hypothesis 1A, 1B, 1C, and 3) versus male applicants (Hypothesis 2A, 2B, 2C, and 4) measuring the participant’s intent to pursue (dependent variable) based on either the founder’s gender or field context variables or both, the means being compared for each hypothesis were performed through a linear model for one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), or a general linear model for two-way ANOVA. I ran an ANCOVA analysis specifically for hypotheses 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B since all the hypotheses are either investigating the female or male participant’s intent to pursue to the specific ‘gender of the founder’ (male versus female) variable or ‘start-up field’ (technology versus sustainable) variable, so I decided to include the covariate (or control variable), which is the variable that is not present in the hypothesis since it has the potential to make a difference in the direction of the relationship between variables. Furthermore, an exploratory analysis was performed due to the high correlation between the Intent to Pursue, dependent variable, and General Attractiveness where the hypotheses were performed through the general linear model for multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), and general linear model for two-way MANOVA. In Table 3, the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study variables are exhibited.

5. Results

In advance of testing the hypotheses, the experiment’s initial sample ($N = 246$) was filtered strictly for the participants who passed both manipulation checks in the experiment, passed the attention check, and had sufficient English skills. The internal consistency of scales was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha to test the scales’ reliability. The final sample with the filtering was 197 participants. Frequency tables were computed for the founder gender, field context, and age variables to compare the number of observations, screen for any data errors, and analyze the filtered data.

5.1. Results of Analysis/Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1A predicted female applicants would have an increased intent to pursue to female-founded start-ups than male-founded start-ups. The results from the analysis of covariance did not support the assumption, therefore the hypothesis was not supported. In this case, the ‘founder gender’ was the independent variable, ‘the start-up field context’

was the covariate, and ‘intent to pursue’ remains throughout all the proposed hypotheses as the dependent variable. There were no significant differences in the female applicant’s intent to pursue ($F(1, 113) = .09, p = .76, \eta^2 = .001$) between female-founded start-ups and male-founded start-ups. Although the hypothesis was not supported, there were two key takeaways to note, (1) the covariate, the ‘start-up field context’, was found to be significant ($p = .02$), and (2) the mean is higher for female-founded start-ups ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.07$) than male founded start-ups ($M = 4.49, SD = 1.11$), but still lacked significance ($p = .76$). Thus, Hypothesis 1A was rejected. Refer to Table 4 for the means and standard deviations found for Hypothesis 1A, 1B, and 1C.

In testing whether the female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up versus a technology context start-up, Hypothesis 1B, I performed an analysis of covariance. The results did in fact support the assumption, leading to the hypothesis being supported. Once again, a covariance was included to test the hypothesis, notably the ‘founder gender’ variable, and the independent variable was the ‘start-up field context’. A significant main effect occurred with the female applicant’s intent to pursue to sustainable context start-ups, ($F(1, 113) = 5.71, p = .019, \eta^2 = .05$). Some of the results which led to the hypothesis being supported were primarily due to the female applicants having a significantly higher mean towards a sustainable context start-up ($M = 4.78, SD = 1.04$) versus the technology context start-up ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.09$). Hence, Hypothesis 1B was accepted.

Formulated from the previous hypotheses, Hypothesis 1C, predicted female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by females with a sustainable context. A two-way analysis of variance was performed, and the results did not support the assumption, thus the hypothesis was not supported. In contrast to prior notions, there were no significant differences in the female applicant’s intent to pursue ($F(1, 112) = 3.03, p = .08, \eta^2 = .03$) to start-ups founded by females with a sustainable context. Specifically, for this hypothesis, there were no covariates since both variables, Founder Gender and Start-up Field Context, that in previous hypotheses ran the risk of making a difference are independent variables. Unfortunately, female participants do in fact have a higher mean towards start-ups founded by females with a sustainable context ($M = 5.00, SD = 0.97$) versus a male founded sustainable start-up ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.08$). For the technology start-up field, the observation switches since females are preferring a male-founded technology start-up ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.14$) versus a female-founded technology start-up ($M = 4.12, SD = 1.00$), but the test remains not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1C was rejected.

In analyzing whether male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to male-founded start-ups than female-founded start-ups, in Hypothesis 2A, I performed an analysis of covariance. The results did not support the assumption, leading to the hypothesis not being supported. Similarly, to Hypothesis 1A, the covariance, independent variable, and de-

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Participant age ^a	30.17	13.87	–							
2. Participant gender ^b	1.59	0.49	-.07	–						
3. Prestige ^c	4.62	1.08	-.03	.03	–					
4. Person Organization Fit ^c	5.20	1.14	-.03	-.01	.36**	–				
5. Anticipated Belongingness ^c	4.66	1.19	.01	.03	.37**	.71**	–			
6 Person supervisor fit ^c	4.65	1.12	.02	.08	.44**	.57**	.66**	–		
7. General Attractiveness ^c	4.69	1.32	-.03	-.03	.55**	.63**	.78**	.65**	–	
8. Intent to pursue ^c	4.46	1.15	.01	.07	.56**	.49**	.60**	.54**	.76**	–

Note. *N* = 197. ^aAge in years (1-99). ^b1 = 'male', 2 = 'female'. ^cMeasured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree'). **p* < .05, ***p* < .01 (two-tailed).

pendent variable being the same, the main difference in Hypothesis 2A is the sample of male participants and the male start-up founder preference. There were no significant differences in the male applicants intent to pursue ($F(1, 78) = .08$, $p = .79$, $\eta^2 = .001$) to male-founded start-ups than female-founded start-ups. Validating this fact, the mean is higher for female-founded start-ups ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.31$) than male-founded start-ups ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.14$), which is the complete opposite assumption made in the hypothesis. Additionally, the covariate, the 'start-up field context', was found to be significant ($p = .02$). Consequently, Hypothesis 2A was rejected. Refer to Table 5 for the means and standard deviations found for Hypothesis 2A, 2B, and 2C.

Hypothesis 2B predicted male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a technology context start-up versus a sustainable context start-up. The results from the analysis of covariance did not support the assumption, ergo the hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 2B is notably the last hypothesis with a covariance included to test the hypothesis, more specifically the covariance being the 'founder gender' variable, and the independent variable was the 'start-up field context'. A significant difference did in fact occur with the male applicant's intent to pursue ($F(1, 78) = 5.64$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .07$) to a technology context start-up versus sustainable context start-up. In contrast to previous expectations, the technology context start-ups ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.20$) mean is lower than the sustainable context start-up ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.20$), but the hypothesis is still not supported. Hence, Hypothesis 2B is rejected.

Formulated from the previous hypotheses, Hypothesis 2C, predicted male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by males with a technology context. I performed a two-way analysis of variance, and the results did not support the assumption, hence the hypothesis was not supported. Unlike the last hypothesis, there were no significant differences in the male applicants' intent to pursue ($F(1, 77) = 1.96$, $p = .17$, $\eta^2 = .03$) to start-ups founded by males with a technology context. Much like the last two-way analysis of variance performed, there were no covariates since both variables, Founder Gender and Start-up Field

Context, are independent variables, and therefore no risk of making a difference. Male applicants have a lower mean towards start-ups founded by males with a technology context ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.90$) versus a male founded sustainable start-up ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.09$) which has the highest mean recorded, but the test remains not significant. The second-highest mean recorded is a female-founded technology start-up ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.37$), and a female-founded sustainable start-up ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.27$), still the test remains not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1C was rejected.

In testing whether the female applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the sustainable context start-up is male as compared to female, Hypothesis 3, I performed an analysis of variance. The results did not support the assumption, leading to the hypothesis not being supported. A significant main effect did not occur when investigating if female applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the sustainable context start-up is male ($F(1, 54) = 2.25$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2 = .04$) as compared to females. As expected, female applicants do have a lower mean ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.08$), decreased intent to pursue, when the founder of the sustainable context start-up is male as compared to female ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 0.97$), but the test remains not significant. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 was rejected. Refer to Table 6 for the means and standard deviations found for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Hypothesis 4 predicted male applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the technology context start-up is female as compared to male. The results from the analysis of variance did not support the assumption, ergo the hypothesis was not supported. A significant difference did not occur when investigating if male applicants have decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the technology context start-up is female ($F(1, 33) = 1.52$, $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .04$) as compared to males. In contrast to previous expectations, male applicants do have a higher mean, increased intent to pursue, when the founder of the technology context start-up is female ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.37$) as compared to male ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.90$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is rejected. The final results of the hypothesis testing for all hy-

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations for Female Participants in Hypothesis 1A, 1B, and 1C

Dependent variables	Hypothesis 1A		Hypothesis 1B		Hypothesis 1C												
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD											
Female founder (n = 49)	4.59	1.07	4.49	1.11	4.30	1.09	4.78	1.04	4.12	1.00	4.41	1.14	5.00	.97	4.59	1.08	
Male founder (n = 67)																	
Tech start-up (n = 60)																	
Sustainable start-up (n = 56)																	
Female/Tech start-up (n = 23)																	
Male/Tech start-up (n = 37)																	
Female/Sustainable start-up (n = 26)																	
Male/Sustainable start-up (n = 30)																	
Intent to Pursue	4.59	1.07	4.49	1.11	4.30	1.09	4.78	1.04	4.12	1.00	4.41	1.14	5.00	.97	4.59	1.08	

Note. N = 116. In a between-subjects experiment, participants were shown a start-up advertisement with either a female founder of a technology start-up, a male founder of a technology start-up, a female founder of a sustainable start-up, or a male founder of a sustainable start-up. Participants were then asked to answer questions pertaining to their personal organizational attraction towards the start-up advertisement shown. Answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations for Male Participants in Hypothesis 2A, 2B, and 2C

		Hypothesis 2A			Hypothesis 2B			Hypothesis 2C								
		Female founder (n = 49)	Male founder (n = 32)		Tech start-up (n = 35)	Sustainable start-up (n = 46)		Female/Tech start-up (n = 20)	Male/Tech start-up (n = 15)	Female/Sustainable start-up (n = 29)	Male/Sustainable start-up (n = 17)					
Dependent variables	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Intent to Pursue	4.41	1.31	4.29	1.14	3.99	1.20	4.64	1.20	4.21	1.37	3.71	.90	4.54	1.27	4.81	1.09

Note. N = 81. In a between-subjects experiment, participants were shown a start-up advertisement with either a female founder of a technology start-up, a male founder of a technology start-up, a female founder of a sustainable start-up, or a male founder of a sustainable start-up. Participants were then asked to answer questions pertaining to their personal organizational attraction towards the start-up advertisement shown. Answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

potheses are outlined in Table 7. Moreover, Table 8 reports the fixed sample and significance testing results for each variable used in the hypothesis testing.

5.2. Exploratory Analysis

After completing hypothesis testing that resulted in one significant result, I wanted to further explore whether the 'General Attractiveness' variable would directly impact either of the variables, founder gender or field context start-up, in the hypotheses. General attractiveness and intent to pursue were both very highly correlated after running a correlation analysis, for that reason they are the pronounced dependent variables. In response to the other five measures having either a considerably low or moderate correlation, an exploratory analysis was not further conducted on them. Table 9 summarizes the exploratory analysis hypothesis testing results after performing a mix of multivariate analysis of variance, multivariate analysis of covariance, and two-way multivariate analysis of variance. In parallel to the former hypothesis testing, the only hypotheses that include a covariate are Hypothesis 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B due to the similar reason that there is potential that the unused variable in the hypothesis will make a difference in the used variables relationships, and both Hypothesis 1C and 2C were tested by a two-way multivariate analysis of variance.

The explorative analysis showed similar results to the initial hypothesis testing with all of the hypotheses' final results, significant main effects, or in most cases lack of significant main effects, being exactly the same. Only in one instance, Hypothesis H2A, did the means trend vary between the dependent variables, 'general attractiveness' found that male applicants have a higher mean, increased intent to pursue, to male founded start-ups ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.30$) than female ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.35$) founded start-ups, but the test remains not significant. Despite the fact that the results are almost identical to the original hypothesis testing, the exploratory analysis reinstated the strength of the results of the tests for each variable and how closely related the survey participants intent to pursue and general attractiveness towards a company are.

6. Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore how potential applicants show a different organizational attraction to a start-up when founded by a male versus female in a technology or sustainable field. There was a predominant assumption that both female and male applicants would have an increased intent to pursue start-ups with founders of the same gender and start-ups that match their gender-stereotyped fields. The same was assumed for how applicants would have a decreased intent to pursue start-ups that did not mirror founders with their same gender of the according gender-stereotyped field. These assumptions originated in the "birds of a feather flock together" axiom, detailing practices compatible in the homophily theory, that is ultimately, likeness

creates a bond or there is a prejudice which brings alike persons to one another (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

In pursuing these assumptions, I conducted an online experiment to test the hypotheses. Unforeseeably, the study shows that the majority of the stated assumptions show no significance regarding my proposed and tested hypotheses. Female applicants based on the results from Hypothesis 1A, 1B, 1C, and Hypothesis 3 generally care more about the start-up field (sustainable or technology) rather than the gender (male or female) of the start-up founder, respective to the means, female applicants preferred a female-founded start-up, a sustainable context start-up, and a female-founded sustainable context start-up. Hypothesis 2B was the one (and only) hypothesis that was accepted and showed significant differences among the variables. Thus, female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up versus a technology context start-up, which is true. Interestingly, for female applicants in Hypothesis 2C, the second-highest mean, for which female applicants had an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by males with a sustainable context. Hence, supporting the observation in the hypothesis testing that female applicants care more about the start-up field context, specifically the sustainable context since this was the preferred field context. The lowest mean recorded for female applicants in Hypothesis 2C based on the independent variables 'founder gender' and 'start-up field context' were start-ups founded by females with a technology start-up context. Assisting the previously held notion about the gendered start-up stereotypes in the sustainable fields being more attractive for females.

The male applicants in Hypothesis 2A, 2B, 2C, and Hypothesis 4 showed dissimilar intent to pursue start-ups with founders of the same gender and start-ups that match their gender-stereotyped fields than what was expected in the hypotheses. Male applicants, likewise, to the female applicants, cared more about the start-up field rather than the founder's gender, but contingent on the means, preferred a female-founded start-up, a sustainable context start-up, and a male founded sustainable context start-up. Hypothesis 2B had a significant difference between the male applicant's intent to pursue to a technology context start-up versus sustainable context start-up; Unexpectedly, the hypothesis proposed male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a technology context start-up when on the contrary, male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up. Comparably, male applicants in Hypothesis 2C had a similar preference, like the female applicants in Hypothesis 1C, with the highest mean indicating male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to start-ups founded by females with a sustainable context and following closely behind that mean, were start-ups founded by males with a sustainable context. The lowest mean recorded for the male applicants in Hypothesis 2C was the exact opposite of what was anticipated, contingent on the independent variables 'founder gender' and 'start-up field context', were start-ups founded by males with a technology context. In essence,

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations for Female Participants with a Sustainable Start-up Advertisement in Hypothesis 3 and Male Participants with a Technology Start-up Advertisement in Hypothesis 4

Variables	Hypothesis 3				Hypothesis 4			
	Female founder (n = 26)		Male founder (n = 30)		Female Founder (n = 20)		Male founder (n = 15)	
Dependent variables	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Intent to Pursue	5.00	.97	4.59	1.08	4.21	1.37	3.71	.90

Note. For Hypothesis 3, N = 56. For Hypothesis 4, N = 35. In a between-subjects experiment, participants were shown a start-up advertisement with either a female founder of a technology start-up, a male founder of a technology start-up, a female founder of a sustainable start-up, or a male founder of a sustainable start-up. Participants were then asked to answer questions pertaining to their personal organizational attraction towards the start-up advertisement shown. Answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

Table 7: Results of Hypothesis Testing

<i>Dependent Variable- Intent to Pursue (ITP)</i>					
Hypothesis	Statistical Method	DV	Covariate	Significance Test	Hypothesis Final Result
H1A	ANCOVA	ITP	Field_Context	.76	Rejected
H1B	ANCOVA	ITP	Founder_Gender	.02*	Accepted
H1C	Two-way ANOVA	ITP	–	.08	Rejected
H2A	ANCOVA	ITP	Field_Context	.79	Rejected
H2B	ANCOVA	ITP	Founder_Gender	.02*	Rejected
H2C	Two-way ANOVA	ITP	–	.17	Rejected
H3	ANOVA	ITP	–	.14	Rejected
H4	ANOVA	ITP	–	.23	Rejected

Note. N = 197. *p < .05.

Table 8: Significance Test for each Hypothesis (varying independent and dependent variables per hypothesis)

Hypothesis	Sample		Field_Context	Founder_Gender	Field_Context* Gender_Founder	Significant Result
	N	Gender				
1A	116	Female	.02*	.76	–	None
1B	116	Female	.02*	.76	–	Significant
1C	116	Female	.01*	.75	.08	None
2A	81	Male	.02*	.79	–	None
2B	81	Male	.02*	.79	–	Significant
2C	81	Male	.01*	.67	.17	None
3	56	Female	–	.14	–	None
4	35	Male	–	.23	–	None

Note. In a between-subjects experiment, participants were shown a start-up advertisement with either a female founder of a technology start-up, a male founder of a technology start-up, a female founder of a sustainable start-up, or a male founder of a sustainable start-up. Participants were then asked to answer questions pertaining to their personal organizational attraction towards the start-up advertisement shown. Answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). *p < .05. The independent variable’s p-value is bolded for each hypothesis.

the male applicants shattered the status quo regarding their lack of intent to pursue start-ups that align more with their gender-stereotyped fields and founders of the same gender.

Furthermore, the gender of the founder is not significant for the female applicants, nor the male applicants. Both the female and male applicants showed major interest in

Table 9: Hypothesis Testing and Exploratory Analysis

<i>Dependent Variable- Intent to Pursue (ITP) & General Attractiveness (GA)</i>						
Hypothesis	Statistical Method	DV	Covariate	Significance Test		Hypothesis Final Result
				ITP	GA	
H1A	MANCOVA	ITP + GA	Field_Context	.76	.73	Rejected
H1B	MANCOVA	ITP + GA	Founder_Gender	.02*	.04*	Accepted
H1C	Two-way MANOVA	ITP + GA	–	.08	.06	Rejected
H2A	MANCOVA	ITP + GA	Field_Context	.79	.63	Rejected
H2B	MANCOVA	ITP + GA	Founder_Gender	.02*	.01*	Rejected
H2C	Two-way MANOVA	ITP + GA	–	.17	.46	Rejected
H3	MANOVA	ITP + GA	–	.14	.12	Rejected
H4	MANOVA	ITP + GA	–	.23	.83	Rejected

Note. $N = 197$. * $p < .05$.

the start-up field contexts, primarily the sustainable context start-up. Female applicants aligned more with the expectations that were formed based on the “birds of a feather flock together” axiom expressed in the homophily theory. Male applicants completely diverged from the prior presumptions and produced confounding results in the hypothesis testing, which creates a lot of room for further exploration.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

Reflecting on this study, some contributions should be accounted for, in both research and in practice. In respect to theory, keep in mind the majority of the results did not appear to be significant, so one can only vaguely discuss the theoretical implication based on differences in means. For the most part, female applicants held more stereotypical congruence than male applicants. Firstly, female applicants confirmed Heilman’s (1983) lack of fit theory by having increased intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up versus a technology context start-up, which was proven to be significant; Thus, demonstrating the impact “when women compare their personal characteristics with the stereotypically masculine characteristics of career opportunities, the mismatch reduces their interest in pursuing such opportunities” (Heilman, 1983; Hentschel et al., 2020, p. 582). Male applicants display the exact opposite effect that is not in accordance with the theory because based on the theory a significant result in the opposite direction would be expected. In the study, the male applicants have an increased intent to pursue female-founded start-ups, and on top, they do not have a decreased intent to pursue when the founder of the technology context start-up is female, again this was shown to not be significant.

Secondly, Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory holds true as well for the female applicants in this case but not for the male applicants. The self-efficacy theory is true for the female applicants since it was previously proposed women have more of a likelihood than men, to have a lower self-efficacy in in technology jobs and will try to avoid such occu-

pations, and the female applicants accordingly had less of an intent to pursue to the technology context start-up (Tellhed et al., 2016). Again, male applicants did the reverse and had increased intent to pursue to sustainable context fields, but it was previously mentioned that men view their obtainable success equally whether in a field or career that is female or male dominated (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Bridges, 1988; Matsui et al., 1989; Tellhed et al., 2016). According to Tellhed et al. (2016), the reasoning behind the male applicant’s intent to pursue to a sustainable context start-up may be due to “men seldom suffer from gender-related stereotype threat, and their self-efficacy may be protected by the strong association between male gender and competence” (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Pillaud, Rigaud, & Clémence, 2015; Tellhed et al., 2016, p. 92).

Lastly, the homophily theory, which can be applied on both the organizational and individual levels. The organizational level is based on “similarity of member characteristics” in a group composition (Ruef et al., 2003, p. 197), so based on how similar an applicant feels toward the members in the organization. The theory on the individual level is described in the axiom “birds of a feather flock together”, meaning people are attracted to similar people, thereby applicants should be attracted to similar individuals (Phillips et al., 2013). Based on the female and male applicants’ study results, this theory was proven to not be significant on either level or accepted. The founder’s gender was not held in the same regard as the startup context, in consequence rejecting the homophily theory in this study. A possible reason as to why there was no significance regarding gender should be further investigated, especially since the male applicants were showing more of an attraction to female founders versus male founders and sustainable startup fields versus technology fields, but when it came to joining both the founder’s gender and field context variables the male applicants seemed to prefer startups founded by males with a technology context. Even with the study mostly rejecting the homophily theory, there is an opportunity to explore these

opposing preferences in the male applicants. As previously mentioned by *Dietz et al. (2002)*, men can without a negative response pursue a career in sustainable start-ups, just as long as they reaffirm their masculinity, so they can avoid having to endure any gender identity maintenance (*Dietz et al., 2002*). This could be the main reason why men have an increased intent to pursue to a sustainable start-up context, and since men hold stronger “stereotypical views in the workplace”, especially when it comes to leadership roles where men prefer male applicants over female applicants, this could contribute to why male applicants had an increased intent to apply to start-ups founded by males with a sustainable context (*Rice & Barth, 2016*, p. 4). The female applicants were also more attracted to the sustainable context start-up, which is viewed as predominantly female-dominated, but there was still a lack of significance regarding the founder’s gender. With this being said, the study challenges the validity of the homophily theory and should be further scrutinized, some reasons for this are explored in the Limitations and Directions for Future Research section (p. 32).

6.2. Practical Implications

Bridging the gap from the theoretical to the practical side, the Master’s Thesis provides a basis for understanding what organizationally attracts potential applicants and how the startup recruitment process can be improved for all parties involved. As a start-up recruiter, finding a fit between the applicant and the organization should be prioritized, and this Master’s Thesis only offers a weak insight that gender matters for the applicant-supervisor fit, or applicant-startup founder fit. Surprisingly, as observed in the study, the factor that had the greatest effect on the applicant’s intent to pursue to the start-up was the start-up field, namely a sustainable or technology field, and depending on the applicant’s gender the start-up field would either be viewed as an accepted or unaccepted fit, thus leading to an increased intent to pursue to the start-up. In comparison to the field, the gender of the founder did not have a significant effect. Therefore, it would be advisable to emphasize the field of the start-up more so than the gender of the founder. Following this Master’s Thesis, companies would be well advised to appear more sustainable to applicants.

The burning question is, should a start-up recruiter try to find potential applicants who feel like they are a good fit (potentially re-establishing stereotypes), or should the start-up recruiter be more focused on appearing more in favor of attracting diverse applicants? If a start-up recruiter (or start-up founder) were to build their entire recruiting process based on trying to find potential applicants who feel like they are a good fit, they would most likely ensure that female applicants are only matched with a female founder of a sustainable context start-up, and male applicants are only matched with either a male founder of a sustainable context start-up or a female founder of a sustainable start-up; Notably, risking re-establishing stereotypes and continuing the gender inequality social phenomenon. The alternative course of action would be for the applicant recruiter to focus on appearing

more in favor of attracting diverse applicants, by fraternizing a diverse mix of genders in each gendered field with the hopes of shattering any gender association in a given start-up field. A few examples of this would be female applicants being matched with a male founder of a sustainable or technology context start-up and female applicants being matched with a female founder of a technology context start-up, or male applicants being matched with a female founder of a sustainable or technology startup and male applicants being matched with a male founder of a sustainable context start-up.

Nevertheless, there is an extensive amount of research emphasizing the amount of growth and change in start-ups and entrepreneurship, as well as efforts in obliterating the lack of gender diversity in start-ups. Even though research has repetitively shown the stronghold that social role theory places on such professions in entrepreneurship, predominantly viewed as male, there is a need to consider other factors that can assist towards gender equality. Moreover, applicant recruiters can guide and pave the way in future start-up recruitment and help find a desirable fit in a greater quantity of start-ups for potential applicants that are not solely dependent on stereotypical beliefs.

6.3. Limitations & Directions for Future Research

In spite of the fact, the Master’s Thesis at present was intending to produce worthy contributions concerning the applicants’ organizational attraction towards the entrepreneur’s gender and gendered start-up field, there is still room for improvement, further outlined as limitations, to better future research.

First of all, the main principle of stereotypes may have a considerable effect on my study, since stereotypes are bound to expectations by society, and my study investigates not one stereotypical phenomenon, yet a handful. Possibly, these strong stereotypes could influence the participants’ responses since their perception of societal norms may differ from their personal views, but their responses are more so a representation of their observed societal accepted norms rather than their personal views. In future research, there should be further interest in finding ways to better evaluate the participant’s personal views versus societal accepted views. I deliberately did not make this distinction in the study, for I was investigating how male and female applicants’ intent to pursue to a start-up varies based on these stereotypically held beliefs.

Secondly, regarding the online experiment, the sample size seemed like a shortcoming in some of the data analysis results, with a few hypotheses showing very close values in the significance test towards potentially being accepted if maybe a larger sample size was implemented. Certainly, the sample size used in the experiment at hand was guaranteed as sufficient with 246 total participants, nevertheless, there is no harm in having more experiment participants. Moreover, the experiment was not a perfect 50:50 ratio between male and female participants, thus potentially skewing the conclusions drawn since there were more female study partici-

pants than male study participants, so increased heterogeneity is advisable. Even with this in mind, the male participants were already indicating strong opposing results to the stated hypotheses. It would be very fascinating if a future similar research study with a bigger sample size was conducted, and the results would be compared to my previously held Master's Thesis data analysis results.

Thirdly, the predominant lack of women in start-ups may have affected the participants' consideration towards their intent to pursue to a female-founded start-up, in the case that the participant was not generally familiar or has not witnessed such representation in the start-up industry. Accordingly, an adverse effect can occur prior to the survey questioning, more explicitly during the vignette introduction of a female-founded start-up. Likewise, another such effect that can occur regarding the vignette profile is if the participants find a male-founded sustainable start-up too unconventional, prompting any form of genuine acceptance of the vignette as unrealistic. Future research should identify early in the study which participants can believe every detail of the vignette profile, by questioning each participant on whether they view the vignette as a realistic profile in society, or not. Further one could design vignettes that include more stereotypical wording, to measure stronger effects for the theories. Homophily theory says that people stick together like birds of a feather, but maybe for participants, it was too difficult to relate to the abstract founders in the vignettes because they were described with minimal gendered detail.

Fourthly, the mobility industry chosen as the gender-neutral industry in the vignettes could have posed as a controversial industry for participants. Besides the mobility industry being known for technological advancements and innovations and is recognized as a crucial player towards a globally sustainable future. Participants may either disapprove or lack interest in technology mobility start-ups, especially when the world is experiencing a global pandemic where people may not be actively considering mobility options, to the point that they have barely any attraction to the mobility industry nor working in a mobility start-up. For this reason, future research should consider other gender-neutral industry options that may be less contentious and align more with participants' interests in newer and compelling industries.

Fifthly, the sample was not an accurate representation of the diverse work backgrounds of most job applicants, this factor was drawn from 97% of the experiment's sample having received higher education (bachelor's degree or higher). This is an abnormally high number of participants with such an education level and has the potential to completely alter the survey results, if in this case, receiving higher education would be found to make a considerable difference towards how an applicant's intent to pursue towards a start-up changes. Besides, this would be a fascinating insight to dive deeper into for a future research study. All in all, I would advise maintaining a heterogenous education level in the sample size to better represent the general public, not just the highly educated individuals in society in future research.

Aside from the previously raised limitations and recommendations for future research, the Master's Thesis provides a valuable foundation for further exploration in applicant recruitment, gender stereotypes, and gendered fields.

7. Conclusion

In route to the end of my Master's Thesis, I sought to explicate the effect the founder's gender and gendered start-up fields has on potential applicants' motivational attraction to a start-up. Despite the main findings providing barely any significant results, noteworthy realizations were occurring in the data showing that (1) both female and male applicants valued the start-up field more than the founder's gender, (2) male applicants have an increased intent to pursue to female-founded start-ups, sustainable context start-up, and a male founded sustainable context startup, when (3) female applicants have an increased intent to pursue to female-founded start-ups, sustainable context start-up, and a female-founded sustainable context start-up. The exploratory analysis reaffirmed the strength and validity of the hypotheses results when measuring potential applicants 'intent to pursue', since the 'general attractiveness' measure presented very similar, almost identical, results, and only reported a higher mean in "general attractiveness" for male applicants preferring male founded start-ups than female-founded start-ups (H2A). Overall recapping, the founder's gender, and gendered start-ups fields are affecting the potential applicant's organizational attraction to the start-up and should be further investigated in future research.

In this Master's Thesis, I challenge several gender theories and propose a few practical tips on how to find better-fitting applicants. The experiment elicited both confounding and desirable insights about the varying organizational attraction among male and female applicants, in part, due to the differing start-up fields and founders, thus mainly, the influence gender stereotypes play. I hope to inspire future research to delve deeper into the connection between start-up applicant recruitment, gender stereotypes, and gendered fields.

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