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PITCH LIKE A MAN: GENDER STEREOTYPES AND ENTREPRENEUR PITCH SUCCESS



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ABSTRACT

We explore the question of how gender and related stereotypes might influence investors' perceptions of early-stage ventures using a novel dataset of 185 videos of one-minute pitches in an elevator pitch competition. Drawing from social role theory we test the impact of perceived gender stereotypes, by examining the entrepreneur's sex, gendered behaviors (masculine vs. feminine), and gender consistency of these behaviors on the pitch evaluations made by investors. We find that sex alone does not prevent success in moving forward in the process. However, gendered expectations do make a difference as women entrepreneurs who present masculine behaviors are more likely to be evaluated positively than those who do not. Interestingly we find women entrepreneurs have stronger communication skills, but rates of women's entrepreneurial participation remain weaker than men's. Our findings raise new and important questions for the role of gender perceptions by investors in women's entrepreneurship and funding outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

“When a man gives his opinion, he’s a man. When a woman gives her opinion, she’s a bitch.”
Bette Davis

Do gender stereotypes create greater hurdles for women when they pitch their venture ideas to investors? We explore whether perceived gendered behaviors make a difference when investors evaluate entrepreneurial pitches. Understanding the role of gender differences in entrepreneurship is a unique and compelling subset of entrepreneurship research (de Bruin, Brush & Welter, 2007; Greene, Hart, Gatewood, Brush & Carter, 2003; Jennings & Brush, 2013), especially when it comes to the disparity in early-stage funding between men and women entrepreneurs. While women-owned businesses comprise nearly 40% of all firms in the United States, they receive only 5% of institutional venture capital (Greene, et al, 2003). This gap has been explained by network composition (Aldrich, 1989), composition of the venture capital industry (Brush, Carter, Greene, Gatewood & Hart, 2001), choice of business sector and lower growth expectations (Cliff 1998; Coleman & Robb, 2009), and choice to seek equity financing (Hughes, 2006; Manolova, Edelman & Brush, 2008). While there is an emerging literature in female entrepreneurship that examines disparities in funding between men and women entrepreneurs, there is little research that examines the differences in the abilities of men and women to attract external financing, when they do in fact “ask” and seek capital (Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2007).

Received literature shows that the ability to articulate ideas about opportunities to secure early resources, such as prospective financiers, customers, employees or other stakeholders, is critical

for an entrepreneur to develop a mere idea into a viable business (Mason & Harrison, 1996; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). The most common way to secure such resources is through the delivery of a pitch. An entrepreneur's ability to interact effectively with others is based on discrete social skills, referred to as "social competence" (Baron & Markman, 2003). Social competence comprises persuasion, social adaptability, impression management and social perception (Baron & Markman, 2003; Hoehn-Weiss, Brush & Baron, 2004) and captures the effects of social skills such as the ability to perceive others accurately, make a good first impression and persuade others to change their views or behavior (Wayne and Kacmar, 1991). Social competence is critical in the "pitch" situation. An entrepreneur's pitch generally includes information about the opportunity and his/her capabilities to successfully develop and manage the new venture (Mason and Harrison, 1996). Creating a negative impression during these social interactions can result in failure to sell the business opportunity to investors, and limit investment potential (Mason and Harrison, 1996; Hoehn-Weiss, et al, 2004). In some cases, these impressions may be influenced by differences in gender and related stereotypes of behavior.

Entrepreneurial behavior is a long-studied topic for academic researchers (e.g. Kruegel & Brazeal, 1994; Herron & Robinson, 1993; Collins, Hanges & Locke, 2004; Gartner, 1988; Herron & Sapienza, 1992). Even though entrepreneurial behaviors leading to successful start-up and success are prescribed generically for both men and women, gender stereotypes suggest that entrepreneurship is seen as a masculine behavior (Ahl, 2006; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Bird & Brush, 2002). Gender stereotypes are widely-shared beliefs about characteristics attributed to men and women, are fairly common in our society, and can exert a powerful influence on the way people think and behave as well as the perceived appropriateness of behavior (Fiske, 2000; Heilman, 2001). In the pitch setting specifically, research suggests that women are typically more socially skilled than men (Deaux, 1984; Riggio, Tucker & Coffaro, 1989) however, research examining potential differences between male and female entrepreneurs in the pitch setting is lacking.

Therefore, the question of how gender might influence investors' perceptions and decisions about women-led ventures is not well understood. Understanding the impact that gender and its related stereotypes may confer on female entrepreneurs offers key insight into the observable differences in the discrepancies of funding between male versus female-led enterprises (Greene et al., 2003). In this study, we focus specifically on the "pitch" and explore the question of how the gender of the entrepreneur impacts pitch evaluations by observers. In particular, we seek to investigate if these impressions are positively or negatively influenced by perceived stereotypes. To consider possible differences in the pitch process, we draw from feminist theory. Liberal feminist theory (Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993) argues that if biases against women are removed, there would be no significant difference in the relative performances of male versus female-owned businesses (Anna, Chandler, Jansen, & Mero, 2000). However, after controlling for gender differences, the bulk of prior research has still found that women-led start-ups underperform relative to men-owned businesses (e.g. Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991; Cooper, Gimeno-Gascon, & Woo, 1994; Rosa, Carter, & Hamilton, 1996; Du Rietz & Henrekson, 2000). Following liberal feminism which assumes men and women are equal, we would expect that the differential performance between men and women in the pitching process for early-stage resources would be due to discrimination (e.g. by investors) or due to other systematic factors that deprive women of important abilities (e.g. business and technological education or experience).

On the other hand, studies using social feminism argue that the social development and role expectations of women cause them to behave differently (Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993). One study

found that distinctive experiences of men and women resulted in unique combinations of human capital which resulted in differential processes of identifying opportunities (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007). Another found that women had different educational and experiential backgrounds which influenced their venture start up experience (Carter & Williams, 2003). Following social feminist theory we might expect that any differential performance of men and women in the pitch process would be related to their experience and background in this setting.

Given that entrepreneurship research is not conclusive on which perspective explains differences (Jennings & Brush, 2013), we approach this research from both perspectives – social and liberal feminism. Male and female entrepreneurs may adopt different approaches, or behaviors, in their pitches as suggested by social feminist theory which would be due to moral development, experience and educational background. Additionally, we incorporate social role theory which asserts that gender stereotypes are pervasive cognitive shortcuts that influence the way observers process information about men and women due to prescriptive descriptions as to how they *should* be (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Deaux & Kite, 1985; Glick & Fiske, 1999; Heilman, 2001), and thus, there may be a negative impact or bias against women entrepreneurs as liberal feminist theory suggests. In particular, this bias may stem from the notion that women's social roles are not traditionally those of leader and entrepreneur. Finally, the pitch environment may also support gender stereotypes. That is, because pitches are primarily evaluated by men, as the majority of the venture capital and early-stage investment population is made up of men (Gatewood, et al, 2004), the display of masculine behaviors may be expected.

In order to adequately test our theoretical propositions we use a novel measure of performance – selection as a finalist in a one-minute elevator pitch competition that was evaluated by professional venture capital investors. We measure how female entrepreneurs perform relative to male entrepreneurs in the competition, as well as how the demonstration of gender stereotyped behaviors influenced evaluations with respect to their sex. The contributions of this work are twofold. First, we examine an important yet neglected phenomenon of entrepreneurship research – the role of gender in entrepreneurial pitch evaluations. In doing so, we begin to fill an important gap in the study of gender and entrepreneurial behaviors. We determine gender differences as well as the effects of gendered expectations in the way women present themselves and their ventures differently from men in the critical resource acquisition situations that early-stage entrepreneurs must navigate and that have remained thus far abstracted (Chen, Yao & Kotha, 2009; Clark, 2008).

The second contribution of this work is to advance gender role theory with regard to the analysis of the early-stage investors decision-making. Much of the research on early-stage investor decisions have focused on gender differences where the perspective is the entrepreneur who seeks resources (e.g. Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2001; Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene & Hart, 2004; Carter, Brush, Greene, Gatewood & Hart, 2003; Hisrich & O'Brien, 1982; Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2007). This approach, while widely insightful, enters the research question with the female entrepreneur as a starting point and surveys, or collects data, from the entrepreneur's perspective. Taking inspiration from negotiation theories of gendered effects in gender-neutral environments (e.g. Bowles, Babcock & McGinn, 2005; Bowles & Flynn, 2010), we propose a new theoretical frame for deepening the analysis of gender differences in early-stage funding decisions using both social feminism and liberal feminism to analyze the influence of gendered social roles from the evaluators' assessment of men and women who may have different behaviors but are being evaluated by predominately male judges of venture capital investors. Using social role theory, we tested different hypotheses related to behaviors and gender stereotypes with regards to pitch success.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Social Role Theory

Social role theory suggests that men and women behave according to the stereotypes associated with the social roles they occupy. Women are seen as more communal (“friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive”), whereas men are more agentic (“independent, masterful, assertive, and instrumentally competent”; Eagly & Wood, 1991, p. 309). The social role perspective acknowledges that people occupy multiple roles and may change behaviors accordingly, in particular in managerial life. Eagly and Johnson (1990) argued that organizational roles should override gender roles. Regarding leadership, for example, they concluded that “male and female leaders *who occupy the same organizational role* should differ very little” (Eagly & Johnson, 1990, p. 234). Yet, agentic characteristics have been traditionally aligned with leadership roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). That leadership/managerial roles are equated with male social roles are attributed to the unequal distribution of men in certain occupations (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). This perception has been theorized across the business world in general (Heilman, 2001) where business is seen as male in practice and character (Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002).

This social role stereotyping of managers has extended directly into the perception of entrepreneurs, as entrepreneurship has been a traditionally male-dominated field (Ahl, 2006; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009; Bird & Brush, 2002). Entrepreneurship has been shown to be perceived as a male occupation and therefore, may impact entrepreneurial intentions of men versus women (Gupta, et al, 2009). While women appear more accepting of managers and entrepreneurs with female social role characteristics, men still hold onto masculine characteristics for such roles (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Gupta, et al, 2009).

It is this disparity that we investigate with regards to the evaluation of entrepreneurial pitches, an arena where female entrepreneurs may face bias due to the gendered expectations still held by *men*, who are typically the majority of the investment community and therefore often the ones who evaluate entrepreneurial pitches (Brush, et al, 2001; Greene, et al, 2003). We explore the impact of social roles, or perceived gender stereotypes, on the evaluation of entrepreneurs’ pitches to investors. We propose that women face gendered biases due to the male entrepreneurial stereotype that is expected by investors during a pitch. With this research, we investigate if gender stereotypes during the pitch stage create a potential limitation that damages women’s chances of moving forward in the early-stage investment process. We draw from research on gender stereotypes and managerial/entrepreneurial intentions (e.g. Gupta, et al 2009) to explore if gendered expectations have impact on evaluations at the pitch stage (Smith, Paul & Paul, 2007; Meeks, 2012).

The Entrepreneurial Stereotype

Stereotyped characteristics attributed to men and women in society influence classification of different occupations and jobs as masculine or feminine (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Gender stereotypes are comprised of shared beliefs about characteristics and attributes associated with each sex (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Powell & Graves, 2003). Entrepreneurship is traditionally seen as a male preserve (Ahl, 2006; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Bird & Brush, 2002). Collins and Moore first explained, “However we may feel about the entrepreneur, he emerges as essentially more masculine than feminine” (1964: 5). Research has recognized how most entrepreneurial role

models are men (Bird & Brush, 2002; Gupta et al., 2009) and how men tend to hold positions of higher power, authority and status than women (i.e. Barreto et al., 2009; Catalyst, 2012). Moreover, the stereotype of entrepreneurship as masculine is perpetuated in the media whereby male entrepreneurs tend to be more “celebrated” through greater visibility (Baker & Aldrich, 1997; Ahl, 2006). At the same time, there is evidence that business school cases less often represent female entrepreneurs, and that women are less likely to know an entrepreneur, both factors reinforcing the notion that men are more likely to be entrepreneurs.

Not only is the image of the entrepreneur more often male, but research also shows that men tend to own investor preferred businesses: larger, more profitable, and faster growing (Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene & Hart, 2006; Cliff, 1998; Kelley, Brush & Greene, 2011). Conversely, women tend to own businesses in low-growth, low-skilled sectors (Gupta et al., 2009) and are more likely to operate part-time or home-based businesses than men. As a result, male-owned businesses are often referred to as “gazelles,” and female-owned businesses tend to be pejoratively labeled “mice” (Lewis, 2006) and “lifestyle” businesses. Overall, such venture qualities are some of the explanations as to why men receive more venture capital funding than women (Greene, Brush, Hart & Saporito, 2001).

Such venture quality disparities has led to the perception of male entrepreneurs as more profitable and more successful than female entrepreneurs and has created an overall stereotype of successful entrepreneurship as male. In addition to expectations about the venture based on the gender of the entrepreneur, women are also often viewed as inferior to men in terms of the qualities and skills necessary to effectively run a business (Greene et al., 2001; Marlow, 2002). Given this, if venture capitalists believe men are best suited for entrepreneurship and if men possess more of these behaviors than women, they are more likely to evaluate the pitches of men higher than those of equally qualified women. This is in line with Schein’s work on occupational sex-typing (1973; 1975), when venture capitalists think entrepreneurship, they may think male and give particular preference to men especially if they exhibit more masculine behaviors. Research has shown that male entrepreneurs report possessing greater masculine traits, and female entrepreneurs report possessing greater feminine traits (Eddleston & Powell, 2008). This suggests that male entrepreneurs may receive higher evaluations than female entrepreneurs because of differences in their propensity to display masculine and feminine traits. Therefore, because of these assumptions about male versus female entrepreneurs and their respective ventures, venture capitalists will likely favor the pitches of male entrepreneurs over those of their female counterparts when evaluating entrepreneurial pitches.

Hypothesis 1: Men receive higher pitch evaluations than women.

The Masculine Advantage

While the previous hypothesis focuses on how women, as a whole, may be disadvantaged in entrepreneur pitch evaluations due to the masculine stereotype of entrepreneurs, social role theory suggests injunctive norms may also influence how men and women are evaluated. Specifically, venture capitalists may be influenced by particular stereotypes of gendered behaviors when evaluating pitches and may differentially value such behaviors in men versus women. Below, we articulate the masculine aspects of the institutional context of the pitch as an interactional situation that leads to advantages for men. Then, drawing from role congruity theory we explain why men may have a significant advantage over women due to the congruity of male, masculine, and entrepreneurship.

The institutional context of fundraising, and in particular raising equity capital is arguably masculine. We know that the composition of the VC industry is predominantly male (90%) that it is similarly geographically and socially networked (Bygrave, 1992; Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2004). With regard to angel investment, while relatively more female investors participate in this type of investment, roughly 90% of angels are male (Mason & Harrison, 2007; Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2011). Since the primary objective of investors is to diminish risk in the investment process, procedures are established to overcome information asymmetry on the part of the investor (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). To this end, the norms and procedures established are quantitative, and linear (business plan, due diligence, etc.) anchored in evidence based decision-making processes (Mason & Harrison, 1996; van Osnabrugge, 2000). Therefore, the evaluation process in the “pitch” is reliant on both quantitative and evidence based on male presentation norms which have evolved from an institutional context that is masculinized.

Applying the “lens of gender,” Marlow and Patton (2005) explained how gender shapes assumptions of how men and women should act, which, when applied to entrepreneurship, has disadvantaged women and has led to a normative male model of entrepreneurial achievement. Greene et al. (2001) applied a similar view to their research on venture capital funding arguing that because the rules, beliefs and practices created in the venture capital community are predominantly ‘male,’ women are often mismatched with venture capital preferences and seen as ill-suited to negotiate, compete and structure deals.

Gender differences are often a function of the different social roles and societal expectations for men and women (Eagly, 1987). Social role theory explains why men and women tend to behave according to the stereotypes associated with the social roles they occupy. The theory includes descriptive norms, which are consensual expectations about how men and women actually behave, and injunctive norms, which are the consensual expectations about how men and women ought to behave or ideally should behave (Eagly & Karau, 2002). While descriptive norms reflect stereotypes of men and women, injunctive norms add a prescriptive element. Therefore, according to social role theory, gender roles refer to both descriptive and injunctive expectations of men and women.

Men and women are commonly perceived as being fundamentally different due to their social roles (Ruble & Martin, 1998). By the time children reach elementary school they can discern which activities and roles are linked to men or women (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Traditional gender roles assign men the “breadwinner” role and emphasize leadership while women are assigned the “caretaker” role and emphasize family and relationships (Powell & Eddleston, 2013; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Although women’s rights and roles have evolved and progressed over the last decades, with an increasing number of women around the globe starting their own businesses (Powell, 2011), stereotypes of men and women have remained relatively stable across different cultures (Deaux & Kite, 1985; Wood & Eagly, 2002). In turn, many scholars have argued that gender stereotypes are a key impediment to women and entrepreneurial success (i.e. Gupta et al., 2009; Orser, Riding & Manley, 2006).

When female entrepreneurs display greater masculine than feminine behaviors, however, problems may arise due to role incongruity. The injunctive norm aspect of social role theory adds a prescriptive element beyond gender stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and highlights how men and women should behave and what roles and responsibilities are most appropriate for each sex. According to social role theory, men are expected to occupy roles that call for more agentic or task-oriented attributes, which in turn, are labeled “masculine” traits. Examples of masculine traits are aggressive, dominant and independent. Conversely, women are expected to occupy roles

that call for more communal or relationship-oriented behaviors, which in turn, are referred to as “feminine” traits. Examples of feminine traits are helpful, nurturing and kind.

As a result of these differences in roles and expected behaviors, various occupations are classified as masculine or feminine (Gupta et al., 2009). Indeed, studies have shown that successful entrepreneurs (Gupta et al., 2009) and managers (Powell, et al, 2002) are perceived to be more masculine than feminine. For example, Gupta et al.’s study revealed that people associate masculinity with entrepreneurship and that the “shared masculine construction of entrepreneurship may be a roadblock for women” (2009: 409). Further, since most resource providers, like venture capitalists and lenders, are male and men have been shown to hold the strongest view that entrepreneurs should possess masculine, and not feminine, traits (Gupta et al., 2009) venture capitalists may show a strong preference for the display of masculine behaviors during entrepreneur pitches. In other words, those who display a high degree of masculine behaviors may be judged as more likely to succeed in the entrepreneurial role. Accordingly, entrepreneurs who fit the masculine norm of entrepreneurship by displaying more masculine than feminine behaviors may receive higher evaluations from venture capitalists.

Hypothesis 2a: The display of masculine behaviors is positively related to pitch evaluation.

Hypothesis 2b: The display of feminine behaviors is negatively related to pitch evaluation.

Role Congruity: Balancing the Female Gender Role with Entrepreneurship

Role congruity theory proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to (a) women being perceived less favorably than men as potential leaders and (b) leadership behaviors being evaluated less favorably when they are enacted by a woman (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When a stereotyped group member (i.e. a woman) and an incongruent social role (i.e. entrepreneurship) become joined in a perceiver’s mind, the inconsistency will lower the evaluation of the group member as an occupant of the role. Applying this logic to our study, a venture capitalist observing an entrepreneur’s pitch would place expectations based on gender in competition with expectations based on entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the theory proposes that female leaders who display strong masculine behaviors while failing to manifest feminine behaviors will be unfavorably evaluated due to the gender role violation. This is in line with research that shows that deviations from injunctive norms tend to elicit strong disapproval (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Heilman’s (1983) research on lack-of-fit supports these arguments; when an individual’s attributes are perceived as not fitting a work role, that individual is seen as less likely to succeed and meet performance expectations. As gender stereotyped behaviors have been institutionalized, women who do not behave in gender “appropriate” behavior or who violate gender stereotypes in their behavior are often punished as they are seen as violating gender-role norms (Eagley & Karau, 2002) and are generally given negative evaluations and even disliked (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). Therefore, women who behave with agentic, masculine characteristics, while successful in male gender-typed jobs, often still receive lower ratings and recommendations than their male counterparts (Heilman, et al, 2004).

Therefore, as suggested by Eagly and Karau (2002), role congruity theory presents a paradox for female entrepreneurs: if they conform to the female gender role they will fail to meet the masculine role requirements of entrepreneurship, but if they conform to the entrepreneurship role

by behaving predominantly masculine, they will fail to meet the requirements of the female gender role. As a result, because women are associated with feminine behaviors and entrepreneurship with masculine behaviors, role congruity theory suggests that women may need to find a balance by tempering the display of masculine characteristics with some feminine characteristics. Thus, women who completely conform to the norms of entrepreneurship by displaying strong masculine behaviors and weak feminine behaviors may be poorly evaluated by venture capitalists. In contrast, men are expected to have a double advantage over women in entrepreneurship; one increment from activating the male gender role and another increment from being categorized as an entrepreneur and thereby gaining the masculine behaviors associated with entrepreneurship.

Hypothesis 3a: Sex moderates the relationship between masculinity and pitch evaluation such that while masculinity is expected to positively influence pitch evaluations, for women it is expected to negatively influence pitch evaluations.

Hypothesis 3b: Sex moderates the relationship between femininity and pitch evaluation such that while femininity is expected to negatively influence pitch evaluations, for women it is expected to positively influence pitch evaluations.

METHODS AND SAMPLE

We collected and developed a novel dataset of 185 early-stage entrepreneurial venture pitches from two years of the Massachusetts Institution of Technology 100K dollar Elevator Pitch Contest (or “EPC”). In the EPC, contestants deliver sixty second pitches for the opportunity to gain resources and skills (such as attention, teammates, and practice for the subsequent 100K dollar business plan competition) as well as the opportunity to win substantial cash prizes. The prizes include a cash prizes from 1,000 to 5,000 dollars. Contestants are divided by industry into six rooms where they are randomly called to deliver their pitches. There are three judges in each room who are all experienced investors in their respective industries. Of the eighteen judges, there were only three women; this is consistent with gender ratios of professional investors (e.g. Greene, et al, 2003; Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2011). Each room selects one or two finalists for a total of twelve finalists each year. These twelve finalists pitch again later in the evening to determine the winners of the cash prizes.

The contest was taped by professional technicians from MIT’s video services to ensure that the videos would have high quality sound and picture. Entrepreneurs were carefully monitored so that each pitch was only one-minute long. Entrepreneurs were not allowed any props or visual aids. Following each pitch, judges could use an additional thirty seconds to ask the entrepreneur follow-up questions, after which they immediately scored each pitch. The finalists were determined by the judging teams immediately following the last pitch in each industry.

We collected videos of 112 pitches from the 2008 EPC and 73 pitches from 2007 EPC, with 12 and 8 pitches being selected as finalists respectively. We had two independent raters code each pitch on a series of behavioral components (Baron & Markman, 2000; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Chen et al., 2009) and on the entrepreneurs’ appearance without sound so that the idea of the start-up venture presented would not impact the raters’ assessments of the entrepreneur. The raters also coded for an overall “presentation” score. Raters evaluated each pitch on a 1-5 likert scale, where a score of one indicated the contestant did not appear to have that behavior at all and a five indicated that the contestant strongly demonstrated that particular behavior. The coders

trained together on ten pitches and then individually coded twenty-three pitches to obtain an inter-coder reliability of .95. The coders then rated the remaining 152 pitches individually.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable was simply a binary variable indicating whether or not the entrepreneur was more likely to be successfully evaluated: if the entrepreneur was selected by the judges to be a finalist or not. We have 20 finalists and 165 non-finalists as our comparison group from which to analyze finalists to non-finalists by sex and by gender role behavior.

Independent Variables

Our independent variables were biological sex of the contestants and gendered behaviors (masculine and feminine). As we were interested in whether or not sex plays a role, we first used sex as our independent variable. We developed a coding scheme for gender stereotype behaviors displayed by the entrepreneurs and designated behaviors as “masculine” or “feminine.” Consistent with social role theory and Bem’s sex role inventory (1974) for stereotypical female behaviors, we coded all the pitches for communal qualities/behaviors of “emotionally expressive,” “shy” and “joviality” and for male stereotyped behaviors, we used agentic qualities of “bold,” “attentive,” “self-assurance,” “calm” and “confident” (Eagly & Wood, 1991).

Moderation Variables

To determine the effect of gender roles on the evaluation of an entrepreneur’s pitch, we examined if sex of the entrepreneur moderated masculine or feminine behaviors and pitch evaluations.

Controls

The pitches were rated with an “overall presentation” rating as communication skills have been shown to have an impact on pitch success with early-stage investors (Clark, 2008) and general appearance measures such as attractiveness, business dress, neatness, and height (Behr & Gilmore, 1982).

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. Notably, there are no significant differences in the dependent variables between men and women in terms of pitch evaluations. Men are taller as might be expected, but they also walk around more (not shown), smile less and had significantly lower overall presentation scores. There were no significant differences for the other control variables such as attractiveness, level of business dress, and neatness (not shown).

While we do not present full correlation tables, we find pitch evaluations are correlated with an important control, overall presentation (0.253). Other than overall presentation none of the control variables are significant. This is also true of most of the single score masculine and feminine behaviors.

Table 2 provides seven models of the effects of gender on pitch evaluations. Model 1 examines the role of biological sex on pitch evaluations. We find male sex is not significant and has no

explanatory power of pitch evaluations. This is consistent with results in Table 1 that women and men were equally likely to be successfully evaluated by investors. Model 2 extends Model 1 by controlling for overall presentation. While this makes the coefficient on men negative, it is not significant. Therefore, our results did not support Hypothesis 1, where we expected men to perform better in pitch evaluations than women.

Model 3 examines the effects of masculine behavior on pitch evaluations. We find partial support that masculine behavior has a slight positive effect on pitch evaluation, though this result does not add much explanatory power and is not robust once the control variable of overall presentation is included in Model 4. This result is counter to our hypothesis 2a that masculine behaviors will positively related to pitch evaluation. Therefore, our results partially support hypothesis 2a that masculine behavior is positively related to pitch evaluation. Model 5 examines the effects of feminine behavior on pitch evaluation. We find support for hypothesis 2b that feminine behavior has a strong negative effect on pitch evaluation.

Models 6 and 7 examine the moderation effects of biological sex of the entrepreneur and role congruity in relation to masculine or feminine behaviors on pitch evaluations. Model 7 examines hypothesis 3b, if women with role-congruent feminine behaviors will result in a positive effect on pitch evaluations, which similarly did not find support if women with role-incongruent masculine behaviors (model 6) will result in a negative effect on pitch evaluations, and does not find support.

DISCUSSION

Our study and findings contribute two important insights. First, our study shows that while female entrepreneurs are equally likely to have their pitches positively evaluated by investors, when women display masculine behaviors during the pitch, they are more likely to have positive pitch evaluations than when they act role-congruent and feminine. This finding is not consistent with role congruity theory which suggests that women are penalized when they act against their gender stereotype.

Finally, we show that displaying masculine or “agentic” behaviors moderates the pitch evaluations for women entrepreneurs, but not as we anticipated due to role congruity theory. We find that women who are more “masculine” are not penalized but instead received better pitch evaluations by investors and the converse was also not true. In contrast to our hypothesis, women who displayed more feminine behaviors were less successful in pitch evaluations. Pitch evaluations of men were not affected by gendered behaviors either masculine or feminine. Thus, our hypotheses regarding the moderation effects of male behaviors on women entrepreneur pitch evaluations were conversely related to our hypotheses: women were better off for acting role incongruent, or masculine, in their pitches.

At the same time, the context within which the pitch occurs is interactive, whereby the focus is not just the individual, rather the individual’s relationship with stakeholders, or in the case of the pitch, the entrepreneur and predominately male world of early stage investors. In our sample, the context also incorporates the interaction of the entrepreneur and the investors and manifests as a gender constructed relationship itself as the majority of the judges were as expected: men (Harrison & Mason, 2007; Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2011). This might offer insight on our finding that sex alone was not significant for pitch evaluations: the individual, in particular female entrepreneur behaviors and related gendered behaviors were more carefully scrutinized than just simply their sex.

The greater communication skills by female entrepreneurs we observed in our sample may be due to a selection effect: women entering a pitch competition may decide to enter because they are already strong presenters. Men may enter without consideration of their communication skills. This finding offers some new, promising entrepreneurship insight for women: though there were fewer women in our sample, they were more skilled in communicating their ideas to investors. This ability to communicate is an important and critical skill for entrepreneurs at all stages, so in line with social feminist theory and the various skills that men and women bring in different levels of ability, we show this skill is stronger in women.

Yet, the better “presenting” ability of women did not lead to better pitch outcomes as men were equally likely to become finalists as women, even though communication skills were correlated with successful pitch evaluations. This insight from our study suggests a liberal feminist perspective that men and women are evaluated differently. Women may be held to a higher standard by investors. While women have stronger communication skills than men, this ability does not lead to greater pitch success as investors may not see women’s ability in communication in line with the male stereotype of successful entrepreneur.

CONCLUSION

In terms of gender stereotypes and entrepreneurial pitches, we find consistency with research that has suggested masculine social role stereotyping of managers has extended directly into the perception of entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006; Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009). Women should behave “like” men when pitching their ideas to investors, as indeed they improve their evaluations by investors when doing so. Research has shown that men continue to require masculine characteristics for entrepreneurs (Duehr & Bono, 2006; Gupta, et al, 2009) and given the environment of the investment community, where most investors remain male in gender, this social role aspect is important for female entrepreneurs to consider.

Consistent with liberal feminist theory, women do face bias in terms of the masculine stereotype held by the majority of the male dominated investment community: during the pitch, women should “act” like men and indicate masculine behaviors or they may be penalized by investor audiences to not have the qualities they believe to be consistent with entrepreneurship. This bias does present a limitation women face in considering how to present their pitches; in particular as the pitch is a critical component of the investment process. If women do not adhere to displaying male stereotypes during their pitches, they may face reduced chances of moving forward in the early-stage investment process overall. In our study, we highlight one important early-stage situation where gendered expectations or gender role incongruences could have major consequences for women entrepreneurs, unless they can “pitch like a man” to investor audiences.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics between Male and Female Entrepreneurs

	IRR (K's α) [§]	Mean Male (SD)	Mean Female (SD)	Prob > z
Pitch Evaluation		0.11 (0.31)	0.12 (0.33)	0.898
Masculinity				
Bold	0.86	2.54 (1.29)	2.79 (1.40)	0.421
Proud	0.61	3.23 (1.14)	3.53 (1.17)	0.210
Strong	0.68	2.46 (1.18)	2.88 (1.21)	0.091
Confident	0.79	3.44 (1.14)	3.81(1.05)	0.109
Attentive	0.65	3.11 (1.01)	3.53 (0.81)	0.039
Calm	0.84	2.97 (1.17)	3.03 (1.28)	0.777
Self-Assurance ¹	0.77	11.64 (4.07)	13.02 (4.37)	0.138
Masculine ²	0.79	14.75 (4.72)	16.56 (4.76)	0.068
Femininity				
Happy	0.89	2.41 (1.22)	2.92 (1.26)	0.047
Expressive	0.82	2.87 (1.23)	3.15 (1.16)	0.276
Shy	0.75	2.18 (1.11)	1.83 (0.99)	0.130
Joviality ³	0.89	8.27 (3.42)	9.92 (3.20)	0.023
Feminine ⁴	0.89	16.30 (3.81)	17.94 (3.35)	0.027
Controls				
Overall Presentation	0.81	3.23 (1.04)	3.77 (0.76)	0.011
Attractiveness	0.88	3.02 (1.05)	3.17 (1.14)	0.456
Height	0.84	3.29 (1.07)	2.44 (1.15)	0.001
Smiled	0.81	2.27 (1.08)	3.25 (1.39)	0.001
Eye Contact	0.71	3.69 (1.02)	3.98 (0.88)	0.210

¹ Self-Assurance is a partial PANAS-X Scale including proud, strong, confident and bold. ² Masculine is Self-Assurance plus Attentive and Calm. ³ Joviality is a partial PANAS-X Scale including happy, excited and enthusiastic. ⁴ Feminine is Joviality, Expressive, and Shy.

Table 2: Gender Components of Pitch Evaluation

Overall (n=185)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Male	-0.0857 (0.665)	0.247 (0.685)					
Masculine			0.092 (0.050)+	-0.062 (0.070)			
Feminine					-0.247 (0.085)**	-0.252 (0.086)**	-0.245 (0.086)**
Female x Masculine						-0.019 (0.033)	
Female x Feminine							-0.029 (0.052)
Overall Presentation		0.928 (0.282)**		1.144 (0.386)**	1.595 (0.401)**	1.630 (0.408)**	1.612 (0.404)**
CONSTANT	-2.037 (0.614)**	-5.709 (1.322)**	-3.837 (1.016)**	-5.128 (1.120)**	-4.634 (1.236)**	-4.653 (1.235)**	-4.672 (1.233)**
Log Likelihood	-63.362	-56.930	-61.630	-56.610	-52.415	-52.242	-52.2446
Pseudo R-Squared	0.000	0.102	0.028	0.107	0.173	0.176	0.176

Standard errors in parentheses; + significant at 10%, * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%.