

Challenging stereotypes in Mexico: Impact on university students' entrepreneurial intentions

Desafiando los Estereotipos en México: Impacto en las Intenciones Emprendedoras de Estudiantes Universitarios

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Abstract

This study examines how gender stereotypes influence the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Mexico. Through a survey of 399 students at the University of Guadalajara, the research reveals that traits traditionally viewed as masculine, such as leadership and risk-taking, are positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions, while feminine traits show a negative correlation. The findings highlight the need for policies that promote gender equity, challenging prevailing stereotypes to foster a more inclusive and diverse entrepreneurial environment.

Key words: higher education; gender stereotypes; entrepreneurial intentions

Resumen

Este estudio examina cómo los estereotipos de género influyen en las intenciones emprendedoras de estudiantes universitarios en México. A través de una encuesta a 399 estudiantes de la Universidad de Guadalajara, la investigación revela que los rasgos tradicionalmente considerados masculinos, como el liderazgo y la toma de riesgos, se asocian positivamente con las intenciones emprendedoras, mientras que los rasgos femeninos muestran una correlación negativa. Los hallazgos resaltan la necesidad de políticas que promuevan la equidad de género, desafiando los estereotipos existentes para fomentar un entorno emprendedor más inclusivo y diverso.

Palabras clave: educación superior; estereotipos de género; intención emprendedora

1. Introduction

1.1. Gender Stereotypes

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key driver of economic growth and innovation. However, gender differences in entrepreneurial intentions remain a concern in both academic research and educational

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environments. Gender stereotypes have long shaped perceptions of entrepreneurship, influencing decisions and behaviors of men and women (Hentschel *et al.*, 2019; Endendijk *et al.*, 2013). These stereotypes, embedded in societal beliefs, assign specific traits and roles to individuals based on their gender, which often results in shaping students' entrepreneurial aspirations (Ellemers, 2018).

According to social role theory, gender stereotypes both emerge from and reinforce traditional roles, often associating men with leadership and risk-taking while perceiving women as more nurturing (Eagly, 1987; Kollmayer *et al.*, 2016). This dynamic is particularly relevant in educational settings, where future entrepreneurs are shaped, and where these stereotypes can significantly influence career decisions and self-assessment of entrepreneurial capabilities (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022; Liñán *et al.*, 2022). Despite changing roles over time, these stereotypes remain stable and continue to impact attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

Gender orientation, reflecting how individuals internalize and act according to these stereotypes, plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial intentions (Ahl, 2006; Bem, 1974). Research suggests that men are more likely to identify with characteristics linked to leadership and competitiveness, while women face additional barriers, including limited access to resources and support networks (Mueller & Conway Dato-On, 2013; Laguía *et al.*, 2019). This underscores the need for educational institutions to implement gender-sensitive programs to promote a more equitable view of entrepreneurship.

This study explores how gender stereotypes and gender orientation influence the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Mexico. A quantitative approach was used to survey 399 students from the University of Guadalajara, focusing on their perceptions of gender stereotypes and their relationship with entrepreneurial aspirations. By highlighting these dynamics, this research aims to provide insights into how educational strategies can address gender disparities and foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial environment.

1.2. Gender Orientation

Individual socialization promotes internalizing characteristics and behaviors that align with conventional gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987; Powell & Eddleston, 2013). In this way, gender stereotypes can significantly influence people's thinking and actions (Gupta *et al.*, 2008; Zampetakis *et al.*, 2016). This process culminates in forming a Gender Orientation, which reflects how individuals perceive themselves based on attributes associated with gender (Bem, 1974).

Gender is a social construct, and gender expectations differ across cultures and can evolve (Kari, n.d.). Gender orientation is an individual characteristic that influences personal attitudes, social behavior, and professional choices that align with the prevailing gender stereotypes in society (Liñán *et al.*, 2022). In this context, men are expected to adopt a masculine way of thinking and behaving, while women are expected to behave femininely (Mueller & Conway Dato-On, 2013).

According to Livingston and Judge (2008), gender orientation can be used to discern an individual's attitudes toward gender roles, whether egalitarian or traditional. Those with a traditional orientation typically believe that men should be the primary breadwinners in the family and prioritize work over family life. At the same time, women should assume the role of caregivers and prioritize family over work. On the other hand, those with an egalitarian orientation believe that work and family responsibilities are equally important for both sexes (Zhao *et al.*, 2017).

Bem (1974) argued that gender orientations establish social norms regarding appropriate behavior for men and women. However, this conception could limit the freedom of action for those who conform to masculine or feminine stereotypes. Bem noted that masculinity has been linked to an instrumental orientation focused on

task completion and work performance. At the same time, femininity has been associated with an expressive orientation characterized by an affective concern for the well-being of others (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, Bem suggests that individuals can also be "androgynous," meaning they may exhibit both masculine and feminine characteristics and adopt an instrumental or expressive orientation depending on the situation.

The relationship between a person's biological sex and their gender orientation is not always direct or exclusive. Accordingly, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) considers masculinity and femininity as separate and autonomous dimensions (Bem, 1974), where individuals with high scores in one dimension tend to display the stereotypical traits corresponding to that gender. Those who score high in both dimensions exhibit masculine and feminine traits (androgynous). In contrast, those with low scores in both dimensions do not identify with the typical traits of either gender (undifferentiated). Thus, only a portion of women identify with a stereotypical feminine orientation, while there is also the possibility of having a masculine, androgynous, or undifferentiated gender role. The same applies to men, offering a broad spectrum of gender identities beyond traditional classifications (Bem, 1974).

According to gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), people's identification with certain genders results from how they schematically process gender information, following cultural definitions of what is considered masculine and feminine.

The BSRI was proposed as a tool to classify individuals into different gender categories and assess their gender orientation, offering a critique of the traditional bipolar view of masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive. Bem argued against the idea that there is a direct correlation between a person's biological sex and their gender identity, instead proposing that individuals can possess varied combinations of masculine and feminine traits, resulting in the four gender categories: masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated (Perez-Quintana *et al.*, 2017).

1.3. Gender Orientation and Entrepreneurial Intentions

In recent years, various studies have demonstrated the interrelationship between entrepreneurial behavior and the identification of gender differences (Vamvaka *et al.*, 2020; Shirokova *et al.*, 2016). The importance of examining entrepreneurship and its relationship with factors such as personality traits or situational factors, including gender differences between men and women, has gained prominence (Zisser *et al.*, 2019). The effects of gender roles and cultural identity on the business growth intentions of men and women (Zampetakis *et al.*, 2016) and gender orientation in entrepreneurial intentions (Passah & Panda, 2022; Adamus *et al.*, 2021) have also been studied.

The relationship between gender orientation, specifically masculine and feminine characteristics, and entrepreneurship can be observed through identifying opportunities, given the cognitive styles of both genders (Li *et al.*, 2020). However, Liñan *et al.*, (2024) argue that entrepreneurship has been more closely associated with masculine stereotypes due to characteristics like leadership, competitiveness, risk-taking, ambition, and self-confidence (Laguía *et al.*, 2019), which negatively influence women's interest in starting a business (Drydakis *et al.*, 2018; Camelo-Ordaz *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, it has been observed that women face more significant challenges in accessing the resources and support networks necessary for successful entrepreneurship. This challenge is reflected in lower rates of financing and mentoring opportunities compared to their male counterparts, which also limits their chances of success in the entrepreneurial sphere (Laguía *et al.*, 2019).

Adom and Anambane (2020) studied the role of culture and gender stereotypes in female entrepreneurship in Ghana and found that culture, through gender stereotypes, acts as a "push" motivator, driving women into entrepreneurship primarily out of necessity rather than opportunity. Furthermore, gender stereotypes confine

women to low-value-added sectors and discourage them from venturing into unfamiliar, potentially more lucrative sectors. The psychological effects of these stereotypes can also demotivate female entrepreneurs, resulting in lower performance and reduced business growth.

These perspectives highlight the importance of considering gender stereotypes and structural inequalities in entrepreneurship research. Challenge these stereotypes and promote policies addressing women's barriers to entrepreneurship.

Li *et al.*, (2020) affirm that social norms drive attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Arshad *et al.*, (2021) observed that entrepreneurship among women is more closely associated with motivation by community expectations and aspirations, while male entrepreneurship is deemed more appropriate, as men are viewed as autonomous, independent, and oriented toward work outside the home (Eagly *et al.*, 2008).

Moreover, Gupta *et al.*, (2019) found that gender role stereotypes significantly influence the perception of different forms of entrepreneurship. Using social role theory, they found that commercial and high-growth entrepreneurs are commonly perceived as possessing more masculine characteristics and high agency, while low-growth entrepreneurs tend to be viewed with more feminine characteristics and high commonality. Interestingly, social entrepreneurs are perceived as a combination of both gender stereotypes, though they are attributed to higher agency than commonality. These findings suggest that perceptions of entrepreneurship are deeply rooted in gender stereotypes, which can influence the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals of different genders.

Martiarena (2022) expands on this discussion by showing how masculine stereotypes of entrepreneurs affect female entrepreneurs' growth expectations. Women who identify with feminine traits and attribute masculine characteristics to entrepreneurs expect their businesses to grow at a slower pace. Stereotype threat theory suggests that members of a negatively stereotyped social group may perceive a threat of being judged by those stereotypes, which reduces their self-efficacy and growth expectations. Additionally, the influence of stereotypes is particularly relevant in industries where the representation of female entrepreneurs is low, increasing gender salience and triggering stereotype threats.

Finally, BarNir (2021) shows that the experience of gender stereotypes is not only negatively associated with women's entrepreneurial aspirations but also interferes with the positive influence of self-efficacy and previous exposure to entrepreneurship on these aspirations. Furthermore, gender stereotypes affect the types of ventures women prefer to start, steering them away from growth-oriented entrepreneurship and towards communal entrepreneurship.

Since entrepreneurial intention refers to the decision a person makes regarding whether to become an entrepreneur (Liñan *et al.*, 2011) and based on stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1997), when individuals perceive a discrepancy between their characteristics and those associated with a stereotyped task, their intentions to undertake that task are reduced. This concept can be applied to entrepreneurial intention. If, as discussed earlier, positive traits of entrepreneurs are associated with men and negative traits with women, women's entrepreneurial intentions will be affected by stereotype threat. This threat is only activated when the person feels vulnerable and identifies as a group member with negative characteristics. On the other hand, androgynous individuals are those who score high in both masculinity and femininity. The concept of psychological androgyny suggests that a person can be both compassionate and assertive, both expressive and instrumental, and both feminine and masculine, depending on the situation (Pérez-Quintana *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the literature review and the theoretical framework presented, the following hypotheses are proposed to guide the present study: • Hypothesis 1 (H1): Gender stereotypes associated with masculine characteristics

are positively related to entrepreneurial intention. • Hypothesis 2 (H2): Men have higher entrepreneurial intentions compared to women due to the influence of gender stereotypes.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative approach, surveying 399 undergraduate students from the economic-administrative fields at the University of Guadalajara in Mexico. The data was collected through one-on-one questionnaires, in which gender stereotypes and their relationship with entrepreneurial intentions were identified.

For the design of the gender stereotypes questionnaire, the 31 items from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) proposed by Bem (1981) were used based on the methodology of Ahl (2006) and applied by Pérez-Quintana *et al.*, (2017). Pérez-Quintana examined various foundational texts in the literature on business management focused on sex and gender roles and subsequently proposed the items listed in Table 1 as synonyms and antonyms to describe entrepreneurs.

Table 1
31 synonyms and antonyms of the entrepreneurial person

Synonymous	Opposites
Self-confident	Kind and attentive
Prone to taking risk	Gullible
Prone to position	Flexible
Individualistic	Loyal
Determined, steady and temperamental	Sensitive to the needs of others
Innovative	No systematic
Creative	Unpredictable
Analytical	Obedient
Assertive	Yielding
Self-sufficient	Submissive
Active, energetic and capable of sustained effort	Humble
Optimistic	Shy and discreet
Vehement in opinions	
Leadership capacity	
Independent	
Make decisions easily	
Ambitious	
Dominant and aggressive	
Competitive	

Source: Adapted from Pérez-Quintana *et al.*, (2017)

A Likert scale from 1 to 7 was used, where one represented "not socially desirable" and seven represented "completely socially desirable." Respondents were asked for their opinions on how desirable it is for society that women and men possess these 31 items to determine gender stereotypes. Questions included: "In your opinion, to what extent is it desirable for society that a woman is individualistic?" and "In your opinion, to what extent is it desirable for society that a man is flexible?" This initial survey aimed to assess the perception of the social desirability of these items in women and men. Since gender is a social construct and can vary depending on the time and place, this section aimed to identify which items are considered masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated according to the current conception of gender stereotypes (Abele, 2003).

For the variable of Entrepreneurial Intention, the scale proposed by Liñan and Chen (2009) was used, which has been utilized in studies for predictive analysis of the intention to start a business (e.g., Barba-Sánchez, *et al.*, 2022; Batista-Canino, *et al.*, 2024). The six items are:

1. I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur;
2. My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur;
3. I will make every effort to start and run my own business;
4. I am determined to create a firm in the future;
5. I have very seriously thoughts of starting a firm;
6. I have a firm intention to start a firm some day.

Subsequently, t-tests were conducted for all respondents and separately for men and women using the values obtained from the survey. The results of both groups and subgroups were aligned similarly to determine whether an item is masculine, feminine, or androgynous. An item is considered masculine if there are significant differences in "social desirability" between men and women, and the mean for men is higher than for women. Similarly, an item is classified as feminine if there are significant differences and the mean for women is higher than for men. An item is considered androgynous if there are no significant differences in "social desirability" between men and women. Finally, an item is classified as undifferentiated if there is no unanimous consensus on gender attributes across the three groups, with a significance level of $p < 0.1$.

Regarding the variable of Entrepreneurial Intention, the scores of each of the six items were averaged. The reliability was then determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, resulting in a score of .953, which indicates favorable consistency among the variables.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

Regarding the demographic data of the sample, 57% of the total respondents identified as women, and the average age was around 20 years. Additionally, nearly 80% reported that they do not have or have not established their own business, and only about half indicated that they are involved in a family business.

To evaluate gender stereotypes in the context of entrepreneurship, we conducted a t-test ($p < 0.01$) to identify which gender stereotypes persist. The analysis classified items as masculine, feminine, androgynous (equally desirable for both genders), or undifferentiated (no consensus on gender attributes). Table 2 provides a summary of these classifications.

The results obtained showed that thirteen items were associated with the masculine gender, only two with the feminine, one was considered androgynous, and fifteen were classified as undifferentiated. These findings indicate a predominant perception that behaviors associated with entrepreneurship are predominantly masculine, linked to instrumental-agentic traits such as decision-making, leadership ability, and dominance. In contrast, only a few items were associated with traditionally feminine characteristics, such as being discreet and submissive.

It is essential to highlight that optimism was the only item not associated with masculine or feminine traits, suggesting that this quality is perceived as gender neutral. Additionally, it is significant that traits directly related to entrepreneurship, such as creativity and innovation, were classified as undifferentiated. This result suggests that, while the importance of these attributes in the entrepreneurial field is recognized, they are not considered inherently masculine or feminine, which opens the door to a more inclusive perception of entrepreneurship.

Table 2
Summary of item classification

Masculine items	Femenine items	Androgynous items	Undifferentiated items
Self-confident	Discreet	Optimistic	Active
Assertive	Submissive		Gullible
Prone to taking risk			No Systematic
Self-sufficient			Creative
Prone to position			Flexible
Ambitious			Individualistic
Independent			Obedient
Leadership capacity			Analytical
Unpredictable			Loyal
Make decisión easily			Vehement in opinions
Determined, steady and temperamental			Sensitive
Dominant and aggressive			Protagonist
Competitive			Humble
			Innovative
			Kind and attentive

3.2. Entrepreneurial intention

The variable of entrepreneurial intention was analyzed using two complementary approaches. First, the means and standard deviations of each of the six items that make up this variable were calculated, allowing us to observe significant differences between men and women. The results indicate that men tend to have a higher average entrepreneurial intention than women, which may be influenced by the previously discussed gender stereotypes that associate entrepreneurship with masculine characteristics. These findings validate Hypothesis 2 (H2), which states that men have higher entrepreneurial intentions. This difference may be influenced by gender stereotypes that link entrepreneurship with masculine traits such as leadership and competitiveness.

The analysis of means and standard deviations shows that men have higher entrepreneurial intentions than women ($M_{men} = 5.59$, $SD = 1.45$; $M_{women} = 5.16$, $SD = 1.46$). The difference is statistically significant ($t(397) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$), which validates H2, confirming that men have higher entrepreneurial intentions. This difference may be influenced by gender stereotypes that associate entrepreneurship with masculine characteristics.

Second, a dimensional reduction was carried out through a KMO factor analysis with varimax rotation. This method allowed us to identify the underlying factors and group-related items, providing a clearer view of the dimensions that compose entrepreneurial intention. Table 3 presents the detailed results of these analyses.

Table 3
Results of entrepreneurial intention

Variable /Item	Mean for men (SD)	Mean for Women (SD)	Mean for all (SD)	Factor Loadings	% variance
Entrepreneurial Intention	5.59(1.45)	5.63(1.65)	5.73(1.57)		81.23
I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur.	5.59(1.50)	5.16(1.46)	5.33(1.49)	.751	
My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur.	5.83(1.44)	5.53(1.64)	5.65(1.57)	.889	
I will make every effort to start and run my own business.	6.03(1.32)	5.86(1.55)	5.92(1.46)	.925	
I am determined to create a firm in the future.	5.94(1.49)	5.82(1.63)	5.86(1.57)	.935	
I have very seriously thoughts of starting a firm.	6.00(1.45)	5.70(1.74)	5.82(1.63)	.940	
I have a firm intention to start a firm someday.	5.96(1.48)	5.70(1.78)	5.81(1.66)	.952	

Subsequently, after identifying the items corresponding to the masculine and feminine variables, a factor analysis using dimensional reduction was performed to create two variables: Masculinity and Femininity. This procedure aimed to establish a correlation between these two variables and Entrepreneurial Intention. The only androgynous item was excluded from this analysis as it was insignificant.

Table 4
Results of dimensional reduction
for masculinity and femininity

Variable/Item	Factor Loadings	% Variance
Masculinity		42.85*
Self-confident	.792	
Assertive	.540	
Prone to taking risk	.665	
Prone to position	.701	
Ambitious	.607	
Independent	.620	
Leadership capacity	.602	
Make decision easily	.602	
Determined, steady and temperamental	.625	
Competitive	.689	
Femininity		55.63**
Discreet	.746	
Submissive	-.746	

Note. * Significance <0.00 ** Significance <0.05

The principal components analysis identified three main components. The first component explained a significant proportion of the total variance, grouping ten items with factor loadings higher than 0.5. These items are related

to desirable qualities in an entrepreneur, such as being self-confident, willing to take risks, and having leadership ability.

The remaining three items ("Self-sufficient," "Be unpredictable," and "Be dominant, aggressive") showed high factor loadings in a third component, suggesting that they represent a distinct dimension not aligned with the primary set of items. Additionally, an internal consistency analysis revealed strong cohesion among the items in the first component, while the three items from the third component exhibited different internal consistency.

Conceptually, these three items may capture more specific or extreme characteristics that are not essential to the model's main structure. Therefore, excluding these three items from the primary analysis was decided to maintain the model's coherence and parsimony without losing significant information.

As shown in Table 5, the correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between entrepreneurial intention, Femininity, and Masculinity. The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation (-0.202 , $p < 0.01$) between entrepreneurial intention and Femininity, suggesting that as Femininity increases, entrepreneurial intention tends to decrease. This indicates that characteristics associated with Femininity may act as a limiting factor for entrepreneurial intention.

Table 5
Correlation of femininity and masculinity
with entrepreneurial intention

	Intención Emprendedora	Femininity	Masculinity
Entrepreneurial Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.202**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	392	388
Feminidad	Pearson Correlation	-0.202**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	388	389
Masculinidad	Pearson Correlation	0.386**	-0.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	392	389

Note. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

In contrast, entrepreneurial intention showed a significant positive correlation (0.386 , $p < 0.01$) with Masculinity, which includes desirable qualities in an entrepreneur, such as being self-confident, willing to take risks, and having leadership ability. This positive relationship indicates that individuals with high scores in these Masculinity traits tend to have a higher intention to engage in entrepreneurship. This result supports Hypothesis 1 (H1), which states that masculine traits, such as decision-making, leadership ability, and dominance, are positively related to entrepreneurial intention. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that traditionally masculine characteristics are highly valued in the entrepreneurial context (Gupta et al., 2019; Laguía et al., 2019).

Additionally, Femininity showed a strong negative correlation (-0.532 , $p < 0.01$) with Masculinity. This implies that characteristics associated with Femininity are at odds with the qualities captured by Masculinity, reinforcing the idea that these traits may conflict with those typically associated with entrepreneurship.

4. Discussion

The results of this study reveal the persistent influence of gender stereotypes on the entrepreneurial intentions of university students in Mexico. The association of thirteen items with Masculinity and only two with Femininity suggests that behaviors linked to entrepreneurship are predominantly perceived as masculine. Although some traits, such as creativity and innovation, are considered neutral, gender stereotypes continue to shape entrepreneurial aspirations.

The negative correlation between entrepreneurial intention and Femininity (-0.202, $p < 0.01$) and the positive correlation with Masculinity (0.386, $p < 0.01$) highlight that traditionally masculine traits are still valued in the entrepreneurial context. This finding aligns with stereotype threat theory, indicating that negative perceptions of certain groups can diminish entrepreneurial intentions.

Addressing these stereotypes requires a multifaceted approach. Policymakers and educational institutions must work together to create programs that challenge gender norms, provide support networks, and promote female role models in entrepreneurship. Additionally, public policies should focus on fostering an equitable environment that facilitates work-life balance and offers mentorship opportunities.

Future research should explore how different cultural and social contexts affect gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship, as well as strategies to mitigate these effects. Understanding the intersections of gender with other inequalities, such as race and social class, will provide a more comprehensive foundation for designing inclusive interventions

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