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Entrepreneurship
Knowledge Hub

See It. Be It.

Women Entrepreneurs
Beyond the Stereotypes

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Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) is a national network and accessible digital platform for sharing research, resources, and leading strategies. With ten regional hubs and a network of more than 250 organizations, WEKH is designed to address the needs of diverse women entrepreneurs across regions and across sectors. In response to COVID-19, WEKH adopted an agitator role connecting women entrepreneurs and support organizations across the country and led network calls and training sessions. WEKH's advanced technology platform, powered by Magnet, will enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs and the organizations who serve them by linking them to resources and best practices from across the country.

With the support of the Government of Canada, WEKH will spread its expertise from coast to coast, enabling service providers, academics, government, and industry to enhance their support for women entrepreneurs. Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, in collaboration with Ryerson's Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship and the Ted Rogers School of Management, is leading a team of researchers, business support organizations, and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

Sponsors

Sponsors of this project include the Government of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.



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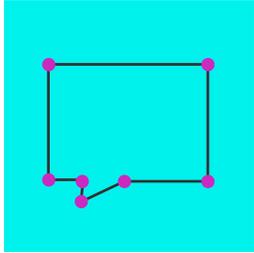
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Eva Wong
Co-founder & COO, Borrowell

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY EVA WONG.



Context

Framework conditions that support entrepreneurship:

- > **Culture** is one of the factors that supports or impedes entrepreneurship, along with government policies, financial markets, and infrastructure.^{1,2,3}
- > **Culture** refers to the values and assumptions that shape and reflect human behavior.
- > **Culture** emerges from the interplay of many factors: historical context, institutions, and political and economic systems.^{4,5}
- > **Cultural** and symbolic capital also shape legitimacy, access to capital, and customers.⁶

Culture emerges from the interplay of many factors: historical context, institutions, and political and economic systems.

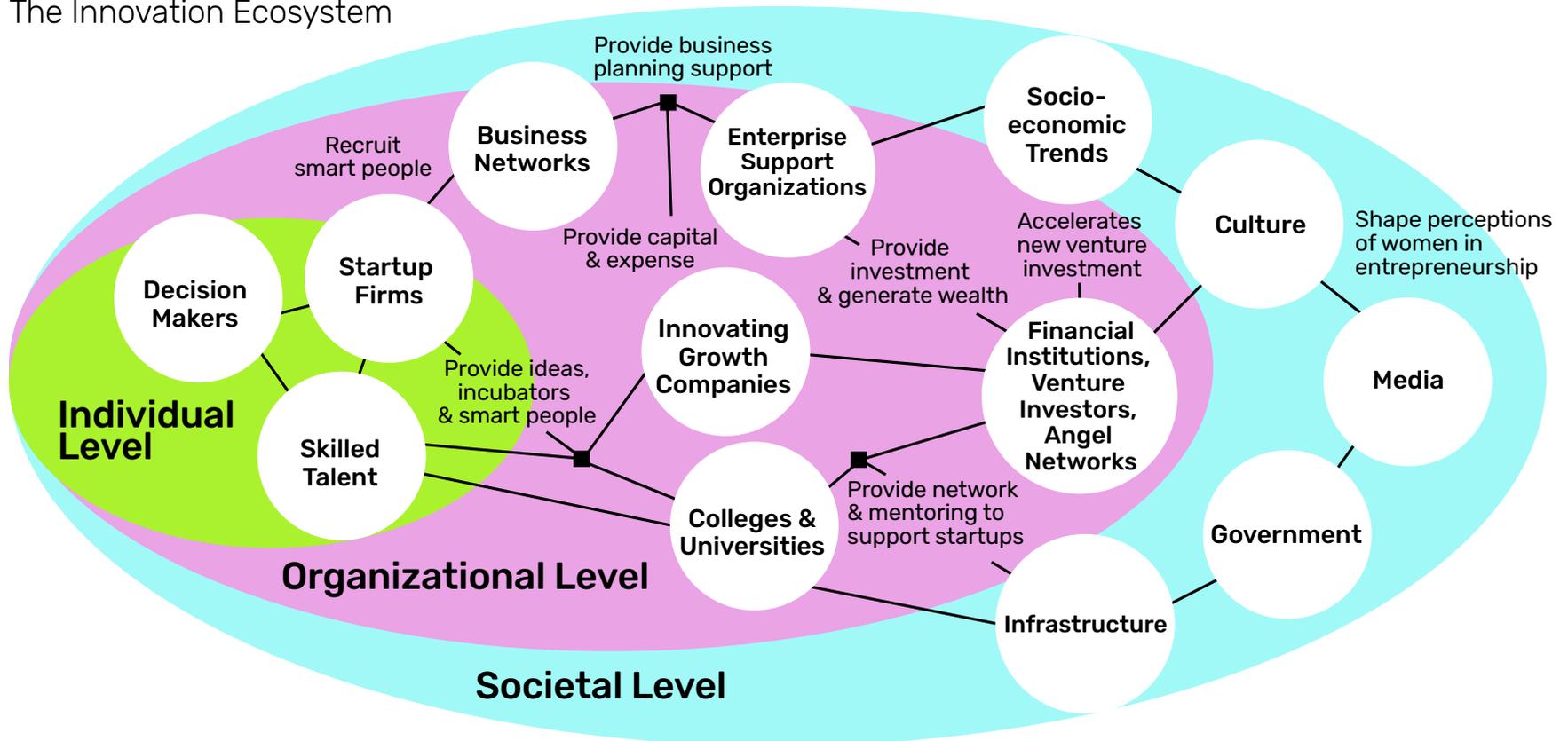
Culture and values are important enabling conditions for entrepreneurs.⁷

Culture and values shape every level of the innovation ecosystem:

- > the societal level,
- > the organizational level,
- > and the individual level.

FIGURE 1

The Innovation Ecosystem



What Are Stereotypes and Why Do They Matter?

Stereotypes are assumptions that associate certain characteristics with groups of people (positive and negative), which are often deeply embedded in our culture.

Stereotypes lead us to categorize people into general groups based on various attributes, such as sex or occupation, creating beliefs and thoughts about the characteristics and behavior of members of these groups: "A potential for prejudice exists when [people] hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success."⁸

Stereotypes and related assumptions shape every level of the ecosystem:

- > **Societal level:**
Stereotypes affect how people are represented in the media, how policies are framed, how infrastructure is developed, and how systems operate.
- > **Organizational level:**
Stereotypes affect organizational strategies and programs and are often reinforced in organizational culture.
- > **Individual level:**
Stereotypes shape individual beliefs, choices, and behaviour.



Milena Radakovic (right) and team
President, NEXUS Exhibits LTD.

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY MILENA RADAKOVIC.

Gendered and Cultural Stereotypes

Extensive research shows how gendered and culturally specific assumptions about leadership present barriers to women,^{9,10,11,12} as do stereotypes of entrepreneurship.^{13,14,15,16} Men are considered to be “agentic,” and are assumed to embody stereotypically masculine behaviours such as assertiveness, independence, aggressiveness, and confidence. Women are considered to be “communal,” and are assumed to embody stereotypically feminine behaviours such as empathy, kindness, sensitivity, and concern for others.^{17,18}

The social constructs (stereotypes) that are created within cultures associate women with household and familial roles and shape women from a young age to tailor their personal ambitions to fill their expected position in society. In contrast, men are often considered the standard or the norm: this is evident in the construction of terms such as “woman president,” “woman doctor,” and “woman lawyer.”¹⁹ Furthermore, it remains the case that media representations of women tend to focus on traditionally feminine activities and pursuits, such as those centered on domestic affairs.^{20,21}

Sharon Nyangweso
Founder & CEO, QuakeLab

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY SHARON NYANGWESO.

Questions

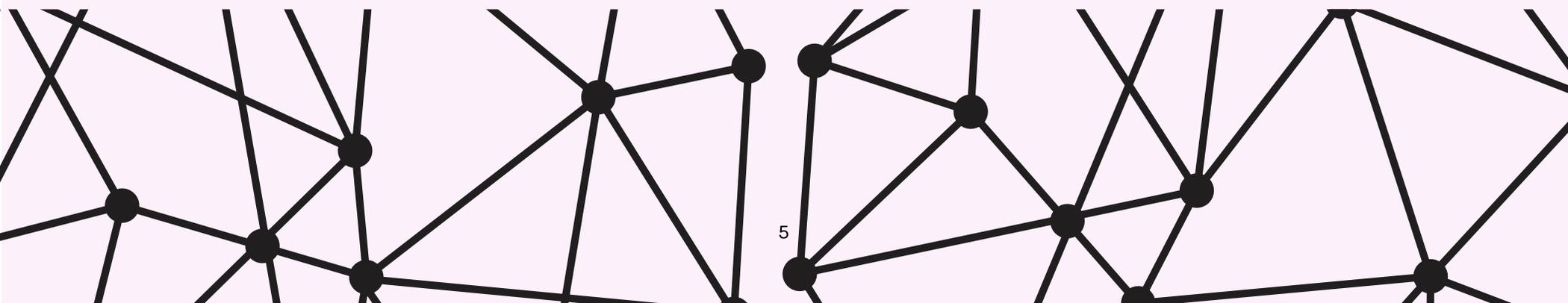
- > What are the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in Canada?
- > What images and stereotypes of entrepreneurs are presented and what are the dominant assumptions?
- > How is innovation defined?
- > How is entrepreneurship defined?
- > How is the impact of entrepreneurship assessed?
- > How are these definitions embedded in policies and practices, and what is their impact?
- > How do these definitions impact the prospects and self-identification of individual entrepreneurs?

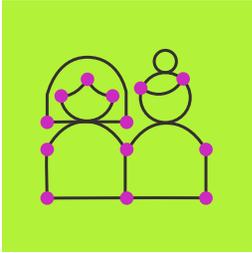


Maudeleine Myrthil (centre left) and colleagues
President, Iweartech

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY MAUDELEINE MYRTHIL.

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Women Entrepreneurs in Canada

37.4% of self-employed individuals in Canada are women

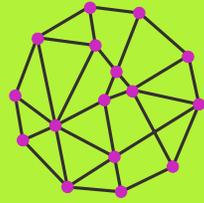


Women own a **growing percentage of new businesses**, but their companies are smaller



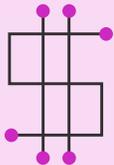
15.6% of SMEs are majority owned by women

13.3% of Canadian women are entrepreneurs



92.7% of women-owned businesses are micro firms with less than 20 employees

Closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship alone could add up to **\$81 billion to Canada's GDP**



78.4% of self-employed women have no paid help

Sources: Hughes, K. (2017). *GEM Canada 2015/16 Report on Women's Entrepreneurship*. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. <http://thecis.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/GEM-2015-16-Womens-Report-FINAL-Nov-14-2017.pdf>; Statistics Canada (2020). *Labour Force Survey (LFS)*. Public Use Microdata File. January 2019. Accessed via ODESI.

Women entrepreneurs are different

- > Many support programs focus only on SMEs. However, only 15.6% of SMEs with at least one employee were majority owned by women (114,000 in 2017), while women comprise 37.5% of self-employed Canadian (1,000,000+). The latter are often ignored by support programs.²²
- > Women entrepreneurs are less likely to be in technology.^{23,24,25} Entrepreneurship is strongly associated with technology in the media and in research, leaving other important sectors, such as services, health and beauty, retail, social, and culture under-appreciated and therefore lacking exposure.
- > Women are more likely to focus on social and community impacts, which are less culturally valued.^{26,27,28}
- > Women are more likely to prioritize stability over growth.²⁹

Dominant notions of entrepreneurs and systemic biases are among the most significant and challenging barriers women entrepreneurs face.

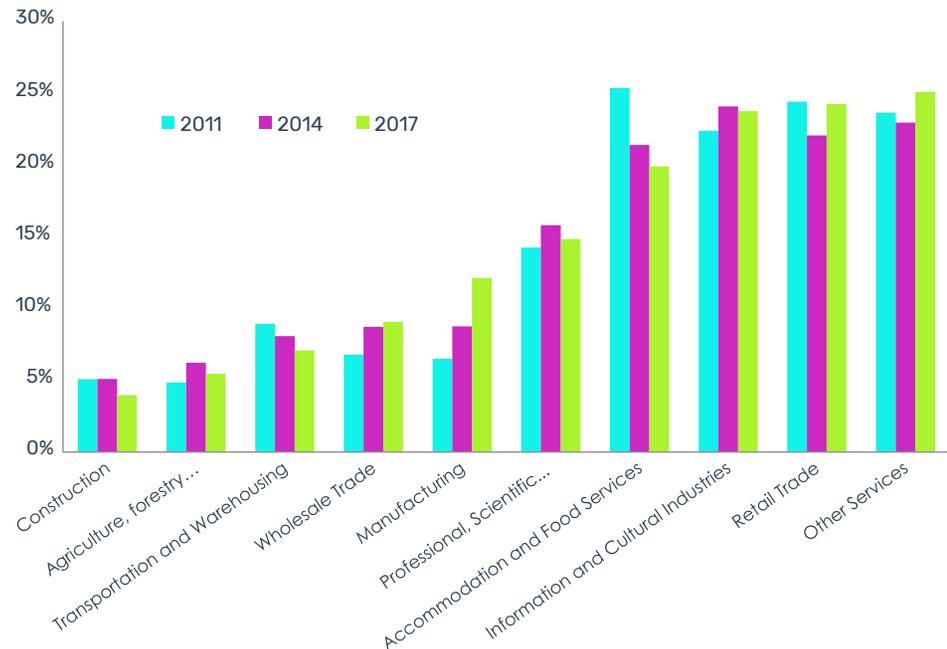
Women entrepreneurs face unique challenges to starting and scaling their businesses. This is a missed opportunity. We know that Ontario's economic recovery will largely be driven by entrepreneurs engaged in launching and scaling new enterprises.³⁰ The inclusion of women and other disadvantaged groups in the entrepreneurial ecosystem is necessary for both their own recovery and that of the entire province.³¹

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY: DOROTHY RHAU

As shown in Figure 2, an examination of women-owned SME's share by industry sector reveals that in 2017 women were more present in retail trade (24.3%), information and culture industries (23.5%), accommodation and food services (19.9%, on a downward trend), and other services (25.1%). They were least likely to be found in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting; mining and oil and gas extraction (5.5%), transportation and warehousing (7.1%), and wholesale trade (9.1%).³² Similarly, according to the Canadian Employer–Employee Dynamics Database (CEEDD), from 2005 to 2013, women-owned business activities were generally more concentrated in service sectors such as education services, healthcare, social assistance, arts, entertainment, and recreation.³³

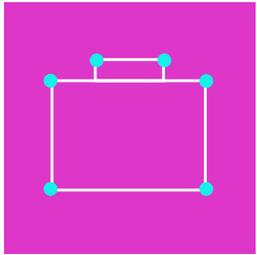
FIGURE 2

Share of Women-Owned SMEs by Industry



Source: Baur, A. A. B. (2019). *Women-owned exporting small and medium enterprises-Descriptive and comparative analysis*. Global Affairs Canada. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/economist-economiste/analysis-analyse/women_owed-export-entreprises_femmes.aspx?lang=eng.

Similarly, the share of total self-employed workers who are women, as of 2018, is substantial in health care and social assistance (69.7%), educational services (66.0%), and other services (55.2%). However they are considerable less present in construction (9%), agriculture (26.7%), professional, scientific and technical services (37.6%), and finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (38.6%).³⁴

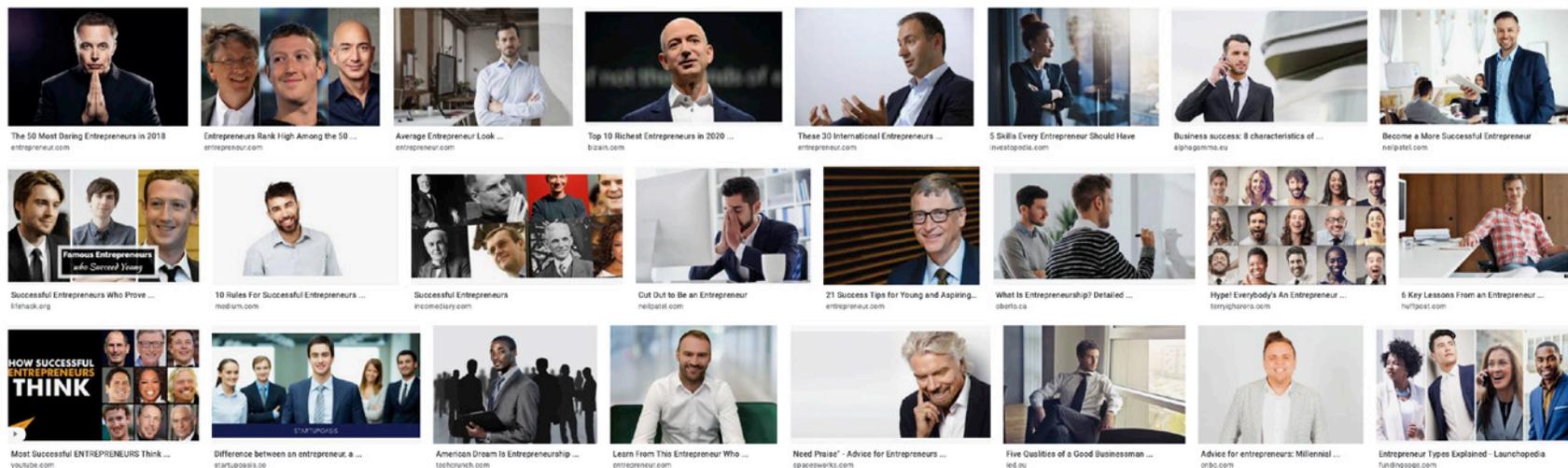


Stereotypes of Entrepreneurs

Similar to Schein's seminal work on leadership ("Think Manager. Think Male"),³⁵ we see a similar association of "Think Entrepreneur. Think Male." Empirical studies of media representation show limited attention to women entrepreneurs. Women are dramatically underrepresented in stories of entrepreneurship.^{36,37,38} This shapes women's entrepreneurial aspirations³⁹ and influences the expectations and perceptions of women entrepreneurs among financiers, clients, suppliers, business partners, and other individuals.⁴⁰ White men in technology are seen as the standard in entrepreneurship, implying that others need to "catch up."^{41,42,43}

FIGURE 3

Google results of a search for "entrepreneur person"



The Role of the Media

Representations in the media reinforce the exclusion of women from entrepreneurship: an analysis of content in The Globe and Mail, a Canadian national newspaper, from April 2017 to March 2019, found that 60 out of 149 articles about entrepreneurship exclusively quoted men as entrepreneurs or subject matter experts. Only 24 articles exclusively referenced women, 19 of which were dealing with the subject of women entrepreneurship, and even then, most of those were about the barriers faced by women.⁴⁴

Media representation of entrepreneurship matters for women entrepreneurs for two reasons: it shapes and strengthens women's entrepreneurial aspirations,⁴⁵ and it influences expectations and perceptions of women entrepreneurs among financiers, clients, suppliers, business partners, and other individuals.⁴⁶ However, women's representation in media tends to focus on traditionally feminine activities and pursuits, such as those centered on domestic affairs.⁴⁷

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Mayaan Ziv
Founder & CEO, AccessNow

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY MAYAAN ZIV.

“Women” Entrepreneurs

The popular conceptualization of an entrepreneur has always been gendered and considered to be masculine (i.e., Entrepreneurship is masculine-coded, and feminine qualities are considered antithetical to entrepreneurship⁴⁸).⁴⁹

When people are asked to name three entrepreneurs, they are likely to name Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and/or Elon Musk, demonstrating strong associations of entrepreneurship with men and with the tech industry.⁵⁰

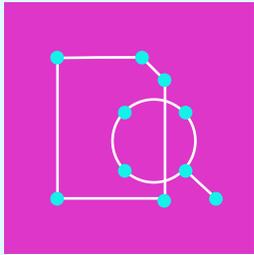
The startup ecosystem is mainly characterized by a “bro culture” of “alpha males,”^{51,52} in which behaviours and characteristics that are stereotypically masculine are the ones that are welcomed and rewarded.

Women are disadvantaged for expressing stereotypically feminine behaviours and characteristics, for example in competitions for financing, which attributes their lack of belonging to a mismatch between “women” and “entrepreneurship” as a whole.⁵³

The startup ecosystem is mainly characterized by a “bro culture” of “alpha males,” in which behaviours and characteristics that are stereotypically masculine are the ones that are welcomed and rewarded.

Definitions: Innovation = Technology

- > Innovation is not about making technology; it is about doing something differently. However, innovation (and entrepreneurship) are strongly associated with technology, which overlooks sectors filled with women.⁵⁴
- > Women are underrepresented in technology generally, including in technology sector enterprises.^{55,56}
- > Current approaches tend to separate (and marginalize) areas where women and diverse entrepreneurs are more likely to be present.^{57,58}



The Impact of Stereotypes

Because innovation and entrepreneurship are strongly associated with technology, these stereotypes and assumptions shape the policies and programs that are geared towards innovation and the advancement of entrepreneurship.⁵⁹ The focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) in policies and programs aimed at advancing entrepreneurship and innovation often has the unintended consequence of excluding women, who tend to be more concentrated in service businesses.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, sectors in which women entrepreneurs are prominent are often excluded or ignored.^{61,62}

The focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) in policies and programs aimed at advancing entrepreneurship and innovation often has the unintended consequence of excluding women, who tend to be more concentrated in services businesses.

Impact on Program Design

Canada's economic development, innovation and skills strategies are saturated with language privileging science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

While overarching goals may be more general, the focus of programming tends to reinforce disruptive technologies and tech intensive sectors—sectors where women are less present.

Even though the evidence suggests 1) that the adoption of technology drives innovation rather than the creation of the technology itself and 2) that innovation occurs across sectors and regions,⁶³ an association of the entrepreneur with tech is pervasive and reflected in program priorities.

Impact on Financing

Around the world, women are thought to be risk averse, to fear failure, and to be untrustworthy. These stereotypes become barriers when women entrepreneurs seek financing. Because women do not fit with the stereotype of what a successful entrepreneur looks like, they are less likely to receive funding from venture capitalists, angel investors, and other financial actors:⁶⁴

- > A study of 306 applications for venture capital found that 53% of women's venture applications were dismissed, in comparison to 38% of men's venture applications.⁶⁵
- > Men are four times as likely to receive venture capital and angel investments compared to women (2.4% vs. 0.6%).⁶⁶
- > Q&A interactions between 140 prominent venture capitalists and 189 entrepreneurs revealed that 67% of the questions posed to men entrepreneurs were promotion-oriented questions (about gains, hopes, achievements, ideals, etc.), while 66% of the questions posed to women entrepreneurs were prevention-oriented questions (about losses, vigilance, safety, responsibility, etc.).⁶⁷



Impacts of Stereotypes on Women

Women entrepreneurs have not had the same access to professional role models who can help inspire them and lead them through their entrepreneurial experience.

Overall, stereotypes matter in entrepreneurship because they impact women in multiple ways:

- > They push women away from entrepreneurial activities.
- > Gender stereotyping affects entrepreneurial self-efficacy and high-growth entrepreneurial intention of women entrepreneurs.⁶⁸
- > Gender stereotyping affects women's self-confidence to start a business.⁶⁹
- > There is always a risk of stereotype threat.

This is reinforced by the perceived mismatch between "women" and "entrepreneurship" as a whole.

Stereotype Threat

- > Women and other underrepresented groups internalize negative stereotypes, which in turn shapes their behaviour.
- > Women are considered to be "discouraged borrowers." This means that they need finance, but they don't apply because they fear denial.⁷⁰
- > This is a manifestation of stereotype threat,⁷¹ women experience bias and expect to be stereotyped, which prevents them from pursuing opportunities in activities dominated by men.⁷² Similar phenomena have been observed among Black entrepreneurs.⁷³

Impact on Business Supports

- > Incubators and accelerators tend to be designed to support "white male technology entrepreneurs."⁷⁴
- > Incubators and accelerators lack programs designed for women.⁷⁵
- > Women have only a 5 to 10 percent share of accelerator programs.⁷⁶

Navigating Gender and Entrepreneur Roles

- > Women entrepreneurs face challenges negotiating gender norms and their business goals;
- > They often feel guilty about the way that they must balance the work for their business and their care work;
- > The pressures of balancing both roles can leave women feeling like failures in both domains, which can have implications for their mental health.^{77,78,79,80,81,82}

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this pattern:

"I worked...10-12 hours per day wearing all the hats of the business. I did not spend enough time helping my son with his educational requirements, my house wasn't clean and I did not get out workout clothes for months....Guilt and feeling not enough as a small business owner, mother, wife, daughter and friend."⁶⁵

Role Models for Women Entrepreneurs

Rather than being gender-neutral or meritocratic, discourses of entrepreneurship are saturated with gendered meanings, which impact entrepreneurs in potentially damaging ways. "Society legitimizes or restricts entrepreneurial actions, because culturally accepted role models have an influence on the recognition of entrepreneurship as a viable career option, as well as on the types of entrepreneurship."⁸³ Providing positive models can help in the development of an "entrepreneurial" identity among young women to help them deal with the stereotypes embedded in the individual and collective unconsciousness.⁸⁴ However, even when providing women role models, the emphasis is put on "individualized entrepreneurial femininity," which is usually not intersectional as it typically focuses on the "supremacy of the 'perfect' and 'successful' female heroine entrepreneur."⁸⁵

Véronique Loewen

Owner, Communicator & Translator, Verolingo Communications

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY VÉRONIQUE LOEWEN.





Jill Earthy (bottom, centre right) and colleagues
CEO, Women's Enterprise Centre

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY JILL EARTHY.

Program Evaluation and Assessments

- > Classic definitions of entrepreneurship are broad—“entrepreneurs create new combinations”⁸⁶—and are not associated only with profit making.
- > Generating wealth and job creation should be “placed within a broader context of reasons and values for why and how entrepreneurship emerges... a wider and non discriminatory perspective on what constitutes entrepreneurship will lead to better theory and more insights that are relevant to the phenomenon.”⁸⁷
- > Economic outcomes of entrepreneurship that focus on output, profitability, efficiency, and productivity are privileged, while other dimensions (social, cultural, ecological and individual) are often overlooked.⁸⁸

Focus on Growth Rather than Sustainability

- > Many support programs focus on high growth (and high risk) start ups and scale ups in the tech sector. However, growth and expansion are not always the priorities for women entrepreneurs: they may have different priorities.^{89,90,91}
- > Increasingly, organizations like the Coalition for Inclusive Capitalism are renewing calls for fluidity in our understanding of the role of business, while SheEO has proposed that social entrepreneurs working on “the world’s to-do list” or sustainable development goals should be considered as important as those working to grow revenues and investments.⁹²
- > This reframes some of the claims about women entrepreneurs being less ambitious and growth-oriented than men.^{93,94}

Importance of an Intersectional Lens

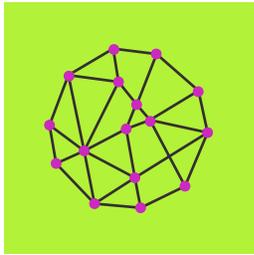
- > Diverse women entrepreneurs face multiple layers of stereotypes associated with race, religion, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and those with diverse genders and sexual orientations.^{95,96,97}
- > Challenging stereotypes of women entrepreneurs requires challenging other stereotypes, systemic discrimination, and anti-Black racism and understanding the different contexts in which women entrepreneurs operate.

“The banker seemed more interested in my new husband’s income and assets, than my business plan and projections. I built and ran my own business long before I married my husband, yet the bank seemed to believe my financial success was somehow related to my male partner. I decided to walk away and get funding elsewhere.”⁹⁸



Dorothy Rhau
CEO, Audace au Féminin

PHOTO SUPPLIED BY DOROTHY RHAU.



The Way Forward

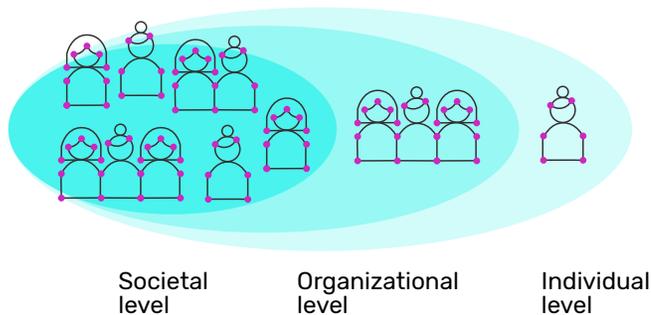
Integrated and intentional strategies are critical at all levels of the ecosystem.

At the societal level:

- > We need to **challenge stereotypes of entrepreneurship** in the media, in programming and policies
- > We should **celebrate women's success** and promote successful women entrepreneurs as role models

FIGURE 4

The Ecological Model



At the organizational level:

- > **Focus on the tone at the top:** Explicit communication is needed regarding the business case for diversity (especially in incubators, VC firms, and similar contexts)
- > **Prioritize benchmarking and target setting**
- > **Leverage the value chain:** Challenge assumptions and use levers like procurement, marketing and communications
- > **Build the pipeline:** Foster partnerships, government relations, and outreach to support and promote women

At the individual level:

- > **Entrepreneurship should be promoted** to women as a career option
- > **Gender-specific SME training** and development support services should be provided
- > Biases and privilege, stereotypes, and micro-aggressions should **continue to be challenged**

See It. Be It. Crushing Stereotypes.

Anti-Stereotyping Campaign. Our plans for 2021 and forward:

Research on gendered and cultural representation of entrepreneurship

Led by WEKH's Manitoba hub, nuanced research on stereotypes is nearing completion.

Public campaign design

Underway in consultation with industry and thought leaders from communities of practice and partners.

Database of 700+ diverse leading women entrepreneurs across sectors

Coordinating with partners to review and update the profiles and ensure they are representative. Will launch on WEKH website in 2021.

Public campaign implementation & evaluation

Will engage diverse corporate, government and media partners. Regional and sector specific complementary campaigns.

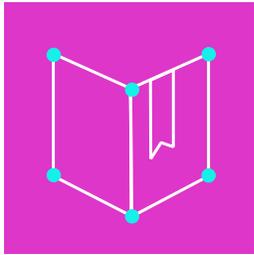
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#SeeltBelt



From left to right: **Teara Fraser**, LEO and Founder, Iskew Air (supplied photo); **Danièle Henkel**, President, Daniele Henkel Cosmetics (supplied photo); **Patrice Mousseau**, Founder & CEO, Satya Organic Skin Care (supplied photo); **Vicki Saunders**, Founder, SheEO (supplied photo); **Huda Idrees**, Founder & CEO, Dot Health (supplied photo); **Nadine Spencer**, CEO, BrandEq & President, Black Business Professional Association (supplied photo); **Elba Haid**, CEO & Founder, Realcare Inc (supplied photo); **Céline Dion**, Singer (photo source: celinedion.com); **Mandy Rennehan**, CEO & Founder, Freshco (photo source: mandyrennehan.com); **Cynthia Dorrington**, President, Vale & Associates Human Resource Management & Consulting Inc. (supplied photo); **Geeta Sankappanavar**, CEO, Akira Impact & Co-Founder & President, Grafton Asset Management (supplied photo).

To learn more about Canada's award-winning, successful woman entrepreneurs and to submit your own for consideration, visit wekh.ca/SeeltBelt.



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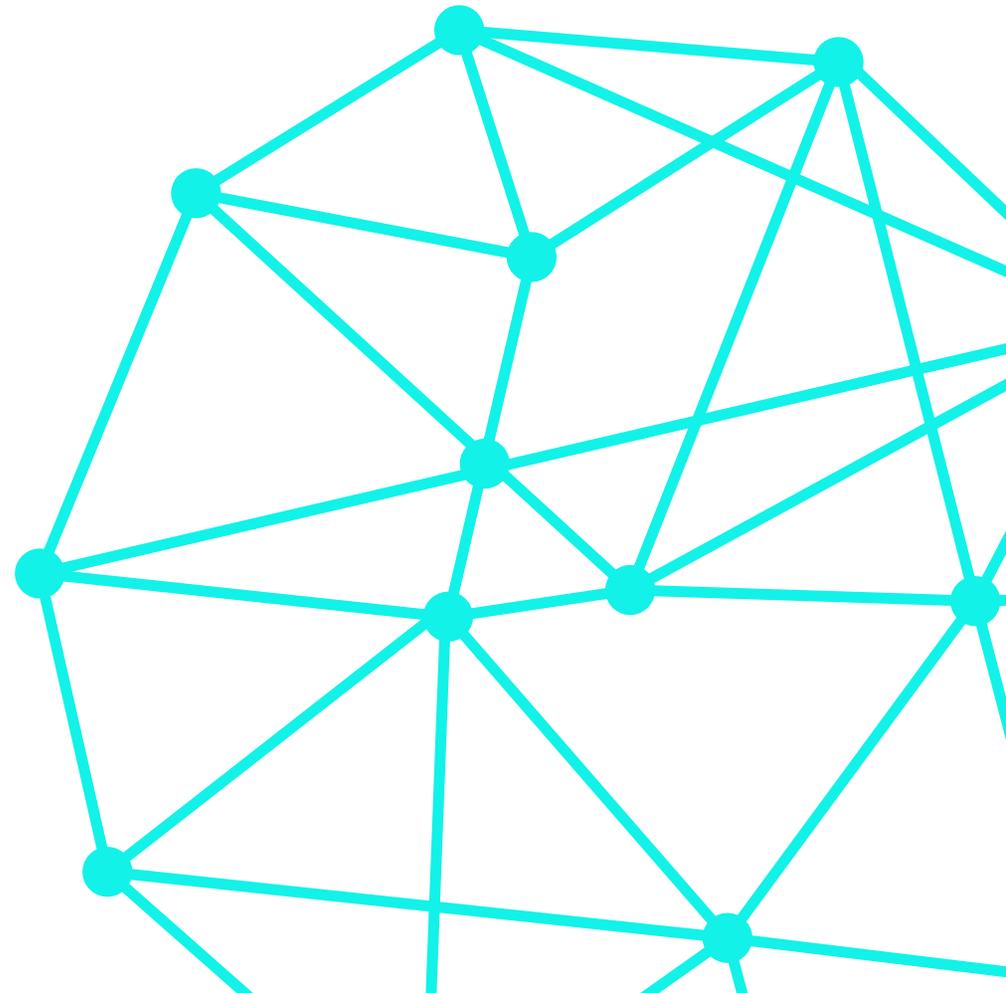
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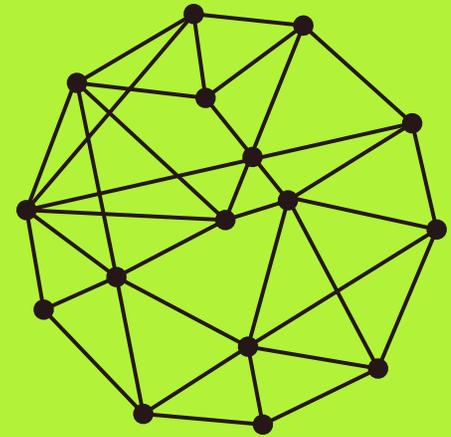
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