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SELF-EXPANSION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL WOMEN IN THE FAMILY INTERFACE

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Purpose**:** This study addresses the experiences of entrepreneurial women within the family interface, examining how gender roles influence their professional identity as self-expansion. It aims to deepen understanding of their marital challenges and propose insights to advance their professional and marital success.

Design/methodology/approach**:** The study is based on in-depth interviews with 38 middle-class women entrepreneurs (aged 35–36) managing business in Israel for over four years. data analysis follows a constructivist-qualitative approach.

Findings**:** three key themes emerged :(1) negotiations on norms and role identity – conflict between family roles and self-expansion creates personal and marital tension, sometimes leading to divorce; (2) reduction or elimination of roles – some women forgo marriage or parenthood to achieve self-expansion; (3) reversal or change of roles – an egalitarian or reversed division of roles fosters self-expansion and family enrichment.

Research limitations**:** This qualitative study relies on life stories, providing insights but challenging the process of recruitment and objectivity.

Implications: It is recommended to develop educational programs for the empowerment of the self-expansion and marital support for the change of traditional roles alongside the extension of the cultural discussion on self-expansion.

Keywords: Self-expansion, family interface, female entrepreneurship, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment

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Introduction

In the present era, many women turn to entrepreneurship as a way of professional fulfillment perceived as self-expansion, but their situation in their marriage may be a source of conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Agarwal & Lenka, 2015), which stem from the shattering of "gender role pattern" and traditional marriage contracts. Previous research indicated that women are required to balance between their roles at home and an entrepreneurial career, for reasons such as available resources, tensions created in every role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and gender differences in areas of home and work (Bender et al., 2005; Eagly & Karau, 1991). Others addressed strategies for management and improvement of conflicts (Shelton, 2006; Voydanoff, 2002). Conflict is perceived cognitively and negatively by the person as influencing wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984: 31; Lent et al., 2005) and may sabotage entrepreneurial activity (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009).

Despite the expansion of the research perception that the marital relationship is perceived as an interface that includes mutual influence of work on the family in both enrichment and conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Hsu et al., 2016), in-depth understanding of the women entrepreneurs' personal experiences on this topic remains limited (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Baron, 2004; Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Rogoff & Heck, 2003).

To the best of my knowledge, the existing research knowledge largely ignored referring to the identity need of self-expansion primarily among women entrepreneurs in a marital relationship. Self-expansion is defined as personal growth, which is driven by engagement in new and challenging activities or, alternatively, by incorporating others into one's cognitive identity, with the aim of realizing one's potential and fulfilling one's self-perception (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2003; Aron et al., 2013).

This autobiographic research seeks to broaden the existing knowledge through the unique integration of work-family interface theories (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Hsu et al., 2016) and self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2004; Aron et al., 2013), so as to examine the characteristics of self-expansion according to the woman entrepreneur's outlook and voice and the relationship and influence to the family interface. The findings of the research study emphasize the importance of the need for the women entrepreneurs' self-expansion as a part of their

identity, also in all types of romantic relationship marriage framework, and sometimes as a main factor of their success. The contribution of the research to the literature and applied knowledge will enable the development of focused training and empowerment programs for self-expansion and management of equal relationships, alongside workshops for support of couples who face the change of gender roles and their adjustment to the women's self-expansion needs.

Conceptual framework and literature review

Previous research on the work-family relationships among entrepreneurial women focused on assessment of the relationship and on strategies for management (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), assuming that women struggle to balance between being entrepreneurs and being wives and mothers and to hold both roles (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015; Gherardi, 2015; Sok, 2016), hoping to improve their quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Situations of conflict or family enrichment did not focus on in-depth understanding of experiences of entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Baron, 2004; Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Rogoff & Heck, 2003) and on the influence of the unique interactions between private and professional factors (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003) on the female entrepreneurs.

The conflict was described as a situation in which performance of a number of roles causes stress and tension that do not enable these roles to be done in parallel (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and clash with one another in that participation in one role makes participation in the other role difficult (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Many studies focused on motives for the creation of conflict, such as available resources, tensions created in every role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and gender differences in areas of home and work (Bender et al., 2005; Eagly & Karau, 1991). Others addressed strategies for management and improvement of conflicts such as elimination of roles, adjustment, compensation, or segmentation, as auxiliary psychological processes (Shelton, 2006; Voydanoff, 2002). Conflict is perceived cognitively and negatively by the person as influencing wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984: 31; Lent et al., 2005) and may sabotage entrepreneurial activity (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009).

A process of enrichment describes a situation of synergy between work and family (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Enrichment boosts performances and

improves satisfaction with life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Lapierre et al., 2018; Sirgy et al., 2020). Positive experiences in one role improve the functioning and experience in other roles (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

This positive spillover occurs, when people use problem-focused and not emotion-focused coping strategies and there is environmental support channeling resources (Carlson et al., 2006) and improving objectives and goals (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003). Carlson et al. (2006) identified six dimensions for assessing enrichment, which describe how emotional, cognitive, and behavioral resources can be transferred between two domains, thereby enhancing performance in both. These dimensions include the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and perspectives from work that contribute to family functioning, and vice versa. They also encompass the creation of a positive emotional state in the work domain that improves family interactions, and conversely, the influence of positive emotional experiences from family on workplace performance. Additionally, the development of self-confidence, a sense of fulfillment, and achievement at work that benefits family life, as well as a heightened sense of focus and urgency derived from family involvement that enhances productivity at work, are also integral components of enrichment.

The present research is based on the leading approach that situations of conflict and enrichment are not necessarily contradictory and may include different outcomes (Frone et al., 1992; Witt & Carlson, 2006) or are combined together in different levels of influence (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). The marital system is perceived as an interface including mutual influence of work on the family in both enrichment and conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Hsu et al., 2016).

Self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2004) assumes people have motivation for development and growth, whether through engagement in new activities (Aron et al., 2013) and/or integration of others cognitively in themselves (Aron et al., 2013; Aron et al., 2003), as a need for improvement of potential effectiveness (Aron et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 2019) and self-perception (McIntyre et al., 2014), as reviewed in the research (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014).

To the best of my knowledge, the existing body of research on the self-expansion of female entrepreneurs has largely overlooked their perspective and the articulation of their voice regarding their own self-perspective and

its connection to the interface of family relationships. This unique research seeks to integrate the theory of work-family interface and the theory of self-expansion. To realize this objective, the main research question is: What is entrepreneurial self-expansion? In what ways does the self-expansion process experienced by entrepreneurial women in their intimate relationships influence their professional and personal domains? What are the specific effects of this process on the trajectory of their lives?

Expansion occurs through adoption of another's resources, viewpoints, and identity, which improves the ability to achieve goals. Material assets (property, funding, networks) and emotional assets (support) in another person overlap and are accessible to a person as part of the identity (Aron et al., 2004).

The following questions arise:
1. How do entrepreneurial women navigate and manage their identities and roles in their marital relationships, considering gender norms and expectations?
2. How does spousal support (or its absence) impact the personal and business growth of entrepreneurial women?

The need for expansion differs from person to person (Hughes et al., 2020). Certain actions intended to serve this goal will occur by choice (Aron et al., 2004), such as connection and maintaining systems of relationships (Aron et al., 2004).

The following questions are asked:
3. What strategies do entrepreneurial women use to fulfill their needs for self-expansion and business growth?
4. How do changes in economic roles and family responsibilities in the marriage shape the personal and business expansion of entrepreneurial women?

The goals of a person's relationships can also influence the way in which self-expansion influences them (Aron et al., 2022). Therefore, the research study of Aron et al. (2022) and its predecessors did not examine the influence of the self-expansion process among women entrepreneurs whose challenging occupation requires cognitive and behavioral effort (Aron et al., 2020; Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013) on the system of relationships.

The female entrepreneurial identity that seeks to develop (Chasserio et al., 2014) is perceived as an inseparable part of the other roles of life (Biddle, 1979: 6), despite the challenges in the integration of other identities (Lewis, 2013).

Research methodology

Research philosophy and research questions

This research study addresses the entrepreneurial women's experiences. Its objective is to characterize how the need for self-expansion influences them in their marital relationships and how it shapes their life path.

The suitable research philosophy was adopted from the qualitative research called constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Henwood, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and from the interpretive constructivist approach (Hacking, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). These approaches aspire to understand people's actions from their viewpoint and culture (Znaniecki, 1927).

This inductive approach enables exposure of layers of thought and experiences understood by the women (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2014: 33, 44). A feminist/autobiographical approach aligned with the female experience (Gergen, 2017) and emphasizing the mutual influence of close social structures was incorporated, assuming the social context of relationships of inequality is what shapes their experiences (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2014: 9).

The feminist action of emancipation from power structures is a condition for understanding reality (Harding, 2007), emphasizes non-hegemonic perspectives, and is sensitive to contexts and circumstances (Krumer-Nevo et al., 2014: 35). Therefore, it connects to the research goals that seek to characterize how entrepreneurial women navigate the identities of their role in marital relationships, according to gender norms. How does the partner's support (or lack thereof) influence their personal and business growth? Which strategies do entrepreneurial women adopt to realize their needs for self-expansion and business growth? How do changes in the economic roles and family responsibility in the marriage shape their development?

Research design

This research study is based on auto/biographical stories that document women entrepreneurs' lives and actions and enable understanding of their experiences from their viewpoint while positioning their behavior in the social context (Freeman & Given, 2008: 48; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992: 51) This approach ensures that their voices provide important knowledge

while recognizing the biographer's reflexivity and subjectivity (Letherby, 2003: 83; Parson & Chapell, 2020: 6).

The autobiography in the ideographic approach emphasizes the values and norms shaping the person's viewpoint and learning (Maynes et al., 2008) and enabling the understanding of the social identity in a complex network of relationships (Lawler, 2008: 13). The story describes a continuum of causal relationships, creates a plot, and presents his consciousness (Bruner, 1992).

The in-depth interview was chosen as the instrument for data collection. The goal was to allow me as a researcher to hear their voice that reconstructs the details of their experiences while understanding the cultural and social contexts of their behavior. The participants expressed what happens in them and the connections between them and others. The personal stories enabled the awareness that guided them in their choices, including the understanding of the past and the anticipated future (Cohler, 1982: 208, in Josselson et al., 2015).The interview question focused on the characterization of the self-expansion process of women entrepreneurs in their intimate relationships and the impact of this process on their professional and personal life.

Research population and sample

The participants were part of the writing of my doctorate and were chosen in purposive sampling of entrepreneurial women who have experienced marital and family relationships in the past and present and manage their entrepreneurial ventures in Israel. They were identified through direct outreach to organizations promoting women entrepreneurs and social media, as well through "snowball sampling", where participants referred other women. All participants were informed about the significance of the research and their rights, including full confidentiality (Josselson et al., 2015: 51).

The research participants were 38 women aged 35   56, from all around Israel, who manage an independent business that has operated in Israel for at least four years in diverse areas, mainly the field of services, and from an intermediate socioeconomic status. As of 2023, according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data, there are about 332,500 entrepreneurial women in Israel.

Recruiting participants and encouraging cooperation

With my background in female entrepreneurship and participation in associations promoting it, I knew some participants. This situation necessitated

clarifying my role as researcher and maintaining research objectivity. I emphasized the contribution of their stories to academic knowledge, improvement of the associations' work, and promotion of women's status, while assuring complete confidentiality to encourage cooperation.

Data collection

The data for this research study was taken from the database for the doctoral research and included interviews held between November 2020 and March 2022. Initially the interviews were in-person, but following the coronavirus pandemic, the interviews moved to the Zoom platform, maintaining interviewee requests. Interviews on Zoom have advantages, such as convenience and access, alongside technological challenges (Gray et al., 2020; Oliffe et al., 2021). With appropriate preparation, they reflected the characteristics of traditional interviews (Gray et al., 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic, which started during the data collection, created challenges in the transition to Zoom interviews and influenced the emotional state of myself and the participants (Laufer et al., 2020). The lockdowns led to anxieties and stress in families (Hason et al., 2021; Laron & Goldweg, 2020). However, preliminary conversations helped examine emotional availability, and sometimes the lockdown encouraged openness and in-depth conversation, as described by participants who were surprised with the interview experience in this period.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed (Josselson et al., 2015: 170), and uploaded to MAXQDA, a software programs recognized as a useful tool in data analysis (Seale, 2012: 440). The transcription of the interviews was performed meticulously to accurately reflect the speakers' words and meaning in written form (Shlasky & Alpert, 2007). The texts reflected the participants' personal interpretation, since the life stories are both speech and text (Corradi, 1991).

Analysis of finding

The analysis of the findings was based on the constructivist approach that sees the data as a product of the experiences of the participants and the researcher in their cultural and social contexts (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) note that the data are influenced by the researcher's social and epistemological position and therefore prior

assumptions influence the analysis, as does prior knowledge that guides during investigation and analysis (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Shkedi, 2003). Hence, the researcher must be reflexive about the constructs, including presuppositions that direct the investigation (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012: 354).

The professional literature was used to interpret the findings in certain theoretical frameworks and as a source for focusing the conceptual perspective (Shkedi, 2003, 2014).

In the preliminary process, the data was divided into primary codes, which highlight the meanings that arise from the participants' words (Shkedi, 2014). Then focused coding was conducted, combining initial codes that reflect recurring themes (Charmaz, 2015). This approach creates categories from these codes and develops analytical frameworks through the adjustment of the theories to reality (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

Ethical considerations

Maintaining ethics in qualitative research is a reflexive and emergent process (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; LaRossa et al., 1981). Throughout the research study, measures were adopted to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and their families. All participants provided their informed consent, after every participant received an explanation about the research aims, manner of use of the data, and way of dissemination of the results (Tolich, 2010). Furthermore, I ensured a faithful representation of the women's voices, while being aware of my interpretation, to avoid distortions and biases. Steps were taken to avoid harm to personal and professional relationships and prevent social labeling that might impact their status. The research was presented as a tool for the participants' empowerment and promotion of social understanding, emphasizing their contribution to the research knowledge.

Reliability

In qualitative research, the building of reality is created through the names and the distinctions we give to phenomena (Tobin & Lavie-Ajayi, 2021). Reliability and validity do not depend on absolute objectivity, since this reflects partial knowledge and certain viewpoints (Charmaz, 2008). Research reliability is achieved through proper disclosure, "thick description" (Alpert & Shlasky, 2007; Geertz, 1960), and the relationship between the interpretation and the researcher's previous knowledge and moral position (Guba & Lincoln, 1983).

Limitations

A social phenomenon should be seen through the researched individual's awareness and understanding (Oakes, 1997). The women's stories enabled the exposure of layers not reflected in other research instruments and presented the following unique challenges.

Results and discussion: presentaion and analysis of themes

The analysis of the women's narratives revealed three main key themes:
1. Negotiation of norms and role identities within the marital relationship.
2. Reduction or elimination of roles within the marital relationship.
3. Reversal or transformation of roles within the marital relationship.

Negotiations on norms and role identity in the marital relationship

This theme investigates how entrepreneurial women conduct negotiations on norms and role identity in the marital relationship. Research indicates that the pressures deriving from the traditional gender roles in the marital relationship may lead to conflicts when women attempt to broaden their professional role while the family role remains significant (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Hsu et al., 2016; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). The requirements that are assessed for every role clash (Voydanoff, 2005) or are not commensurate and challenge the ability to participate in them (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

For example, the husband's pressure to realize the mother's "r e l a t i v e a d v a n t a g e" in family caregiving (Gronau, 1977).

> *He demanded more attention … and always complained: 'You have little children, it's not that we need money, you need to be home more.' From his pressure I reduced activity. He would do everything with the children. The management of a business is not simple, but this is the life I want, this is my activity and creation. Also, my difficulties.* (Lottie)

The spouse's argument they do not need money expresses power and desire for control over the family decisions, while he holds the main economic resource (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Meler, 2020). Despite his involvement in the children's care, his support was accompanied by pressure considered behavior that harms the feeling of her parenting success (Minnotte, 2016) and

the ability to extend her self-perception (Hughes et al., 2019). In her opinion, the great difficulty came from her husband, not work. Entrepreneurship is a central part of her identity; her spouse is perceived as a factor frustrating the achievement of her personal goals and leading to dissatisfaction with her relationship over time (Overall et al., 2010).

The phenomenon of the absence of role distribution in the family (Shelton, 2006) described as:

> *The period of parenting was very difficult, he continued to advance his career, he was not interested in anything, and when we were in couple therapy he said "I don't understand why you need to succeed so much."*

> *One night when I came home at night exhausted from work, he asked for food. I brought him a sandwich. He said: 'She (his lover) makes a bigger sandwich.* (Nova)

entrepreneurial success supposedly challenged gender role pattern and was perceived as a violation of the expectations and obligations of their marriage contract (Nikina et al., 2015; Sager et al., 1971). Her spouse believed her entrepreneurship came at his expense and was a negative disruption (Poggesi et al., 2019). Nava describes how she felt his disregard to expand his family role and lack of understanding of her self-expansion. His statements "I don't understand why she needs to succeed" and "she (his lover) makes a bigger sandwich" reflect a contemptuous attitude that contributed to the conflict between career and family (Nikina et al., 2015) and the weakening of the commitment to the relationship, which led to divorce (Joel et al., 2017; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006).

Her second relationship portrays a partner who is neither threatened by her success nor seeks to undermine her.

> *I felt that the man with me is found in a good enough and high status to leave me alone and not to see and look for me in the part of the sandwich, which I am not good at."* (Nova)

The spouse's status and sense of satisfaction with his achievements allow him to support her without feeling threatened. For her, he is a model of identity that she seeks to expand in, according to the perception of the "inclusion of the other", in which his resources are available for her as a part of her growth process (Graham & Harf, 2015).

The extent of the harm caused by the restriction of self-expansion is reflected in the following description:

I felt I'm blocked. My entrepreneurship is my essence. It's true that at this time I got married and I had a child. But how is this connected? I felt extinguished. A woman, mother, entrepreneur – depressed. I understood that I am losing myself, I forgot who I am, where my entrepreneurship is. I asked myself – what price am I paying for freedom? (Helena)

The word "blocked" illustrates the restriction on identity. Her situation illustrates the potential for confusion in the self-definition (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As an entrepreneur, "growth beliefs" were changed for "fate beliefs" (Mattingly et al., 2018) and caused a sense of being extinguished and depressed. The sentence "I lost myself, I forgot who I am" expresses feelings of loss of aspiration for personal goals (Kernis et al., 2000). It can be understood from her saying "Where am I the entrepreneur?" the extent to which the need for her entrepreneurial self-expansion and family management are not separate (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Powell & Eddleston, 2013) and stand in their own right

Reduction or elimination of roles in the marital relationship

This theme addresses the entrepreneurial women's choice to reduce or forego their traditional roles so they can achieve self-expansion, which influences directly her subjective wellness (Lent et al., 2005). Behavior called 'problem-focused coping' occurs when people feel they can handle effectively the source of the stress factor (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) to improve the performance of roles and achieve higher developmental outcomes, when dealing with conflicts created by the limitation of resources (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003).

Story illustrates this strategy described as follows:

I travel a lot with delegations and am not found at home for long periods… in our life this is not to look at one another, this is to look in the same direction, I have mine and he has his… He is an economist, he helps me with the budget of the business. He's very encouraging and understanding. The business is my oxygen, my wings. All that is conventional isn't right for me and isn't for me, because of this we also don't have children, I want a life of my own. (Viola)

The entrepreneur describes her spouse as supporting her entrepreneurship and lifestyle. She is focused on self-expansion even if at the expense of looking at each other (as a hint of physical and emotional closeness) or having children. Vera's choice of a strategy of optimization and compensation, which increases her resources for self-expansion, maintains high

functioning in coping with challenges and regulating losses of resources (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003). The elimination of the motherhood role (Shelton, 2006) enables her to "have a life of her own" – independence and geographic mobility necessitated by her lifestyle (Callan, 1986) and career (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008).

A different choice is presented in the following quote:

> *I have a daughter, but I didn't want to get married. I don't miss a man in the house to carry the bags from the supermarket. It is comfortable for me to decide myself about the education of my daughter or about my business.* (Isla)

The choice of the strategy of elimination of the role of the 'married woman' (Shelton, 2006; Voydanoff, 2002) enables her access to relative self-expansion (Mattingly et al., 2012) that does not depend on connection to relationships (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). Having dispositional autonomy about the raising of her daughter and the management of the business, she indicates a high sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Reversal or change in the roles in the marital relationship

This theme addresses entrepreneurial women who describe cooperation with their partners in the management of the roles of the family and work through mutual enrichment. Lapierre et al. (2018) summarize two main types of support resources in the family interface: the social context of the role and aspects of the self and personal psychological characteristics. A supportive relationship was recognized as enabling enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne et al., 2007) and may occur when the family recognizes the conflict and acts to handle it (Gareis et al., 2009).

Unlike previous stories, the following is an example of self-expansion resulting from the nullification of the partner's role.

> *Currently, my husband stays at home. I'm the sole breadwinner, the financial pressure at the moment is on me… I'm fine with it. It raises my self-worth. Why did you wait until now? You could have earned this money earlier. Today he learns and understands there is also a house and care of the children.* (Mira)

This quote illustrates how the shift in family roles paved the road to two-way enrichment (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Wayne et al., 2007), channeling of the allocation of the resources, and improvement of her objectives (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003). She indicates that this

situation empowered her feeling of self-efficacy and self-worth (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Some female entrepreneurs have demonstrated the relationship between the reversal of the "classic parent" role and the potential for expansion, as illustrated in the following quote.

> *I don't have obstacles, such as feelings of guilt. I am good at what I do since I have a different couple relationship. He is into motherhood. He is feminist like me. The rest of the world doesn't live like this really.*
> *I would not have chosen to become a single mother without a spousal relationship. This is to give up a lot, and I would not have been happy. This is one of the strong points of my female entrepreneurship, I have everything, and I can develop what is important to me.* (Karen)

The emotional and physical support from the partner serves as a "buffering effect", which moderates the stress from her adventurous work and feelings of guilt (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) from her maternal functioning (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999). She feels empowered and confident to develop things important to her for her self-expansion (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013) and perception of self-worth (Aron et al., 2022). Her marital relationship illustrates reversal of roles suited to their identity (March, 1994; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010) that benefits her and the marital relationship (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). According to her, this situation is possible because of his/their "feminist" outlook (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2011).

Conclusion

The findings show entrepreneurial women deal with the clash between the need for self-expansion and the expectations of the traditional gender roles in the marital system. The entrepreneurship and their need for self-expansion is perceived as an essential part of their identity and as necessary for them for self-fulfillment and the achievement of meaningful life goals. Hence, the marital system that adheres to the division of traditional roles and creates inequality in the distribution of resources may constitute a barrier to entrepreneurial expansion and cause harm to their personal wellbeing. Three main patterns of coping arose from the research study.

1. Negotiation of Gender Roles in the Marital Relationship. The findings illustrate the tension between the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career – perceived by women as a form of self-expansion – and the entrenched "gender

role patterns" and traditional norms embedded in marital agreements. Negotiating roles within the relationship may serve as a source of conflict, hindering the achievement of personal and professional goals while undermining relationship satisfaction.

Empirical accounts from this study reveal diverse dynamics: in some cases, women's entrepreneurial success is perceived as a threat to their partner's identity, leading to escalating conflict and eventual separation. In contrast, in relationships where active spousal support is present, an approach characterized by the adoption of the partner as a role model and the "inclusion of the other" emerges.

Women report being expected to remain "more at home," despite the absence of financial necessity, in order to appease their partner's control and avoid conflict. Additional testimonies highlight that the restriction of professional and personal autonomy within marriage exacted a severe emotional toll, becoming a symbolic representation of the broader dilemma between personal freedom and self-expansion on the one hand and marital stability on the other.

2. Reduction or Elimination of Roles in the Marital Relationship. Findings from this study highlight how some women strategically optimize their roles within the marital system to facilitate their self-expansion. To mitigate the loss of resources within their relationship, certain women adopt role-reduction or role-elimination strategies, enabling them to prioritize their entrepreneurial pursuits.

One such approach involves deliberately reducing spousal commitments to preserve autonomy in decision-making, thus allowing for greater independence in both personal and professional spheres. In some cases, women proactively forgo the institutionalization of a romantic partnership, opting instead for exclusive control over their choices and direction in life. Others redefine traditional gender roles by relinquishing motherhood, a decision that grants them geographical mobility, enhanced professional focus, and an unencumbered entrepreneurial trajectory.

From their perspective, this "dispositional autonomy" – the ability to strategically channel, reduce, or eliminate conventional roles – serves as a mechanism for self-expansion. This approach fosters a heightened sense of agency, self-efficacy, and confidence, reinforcing their ability to navigate an entrepreneurial path on their own terms. These findings underscore the evolving negotiation of gender roles within intimate relationships, highlighting the ways in which entrepreneurial women reshape traditional expectations to align with their personal and professional aspirations.

3. Reversal or Change in Roles in the Marital Relationship. Findings from this study indicate that some women develop strategic action plans for self-expansion that align with their personal and professional identities within the marital system. In this context, their relationships are characterized by a supportive partnership that facilitates enrichment, even in the presence of conflict.

In certain cases, this support is achieved through an agreed-upon division of roles, challenging traditional patterns by reversing the distribution of responsibilities between partners in a way that enables the woman to advance her entrepreneurial career. In other instances, the partner's status or circumstances create favorable conditions for the woman's expansion within the entrepreneurial sphere.

Such a partnership allows women to pursue self-expansion without experiencing guilt or the need to compromise their entrepreneurial identity, ultimately fostering both personal and marital well-being.

The research study offers a new perspective of the needs of entrepreneurial women from the marital system, while emphasizing the importance of "self-expansion" as a part of women's personal and professional success.

It is recommended to develop training programs for both women and men, which empower entrepreneurial women to hold equal systems of relationships, alongside workshops for the support of couples who face the change of the gender roles, and to adjust them to the women's self-expansion needs.

The research limitations derive from a small and culturally limited sample, and therefore it is recommended to extend it and compare between different cultures, including those considered conservative versus those considered liberal. In addition, it is possible to examine the influence of women's self-expansion on their children, while examining how the parenting experiences of women entrepreneurs shape the children's self-perception and attitudes towards career, gender, and family. Another direction of inquiry can explore the contribution of the digital era as a lever for entrepreneurial self-expansion.

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