

Gendering of Entrepreneurship

A qualitative content analysis of challenges female entrepreneurs encounter in the
Swedish business landscape



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Linnéa Schor Radeborn

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

SUPERVISOR:

IAN MANNERS

Abstract

This thesis centers around the challenges that female entrepreneurs encounter in the Swedish business landscape. The aim is to find out what challenges female entrepreneurs encounter in order to find solutions and propose policy recommendations for the Swedish government.

Previous literature on female entrepreneurship has been riddled with challenges female entrepreneurs face but without providing practical applicable solutions, which leads to the research question: What challenges do female entrepreneurs in Sweden encounter during the establishment and growth phases of their businesses and what actions can the government take?

Conducting a single case study using primary data in the form of qualitative interviews and analyzing the findings using a qualitative content analysis and the theoretical concepts of social identity theory and gender theory; the study aspires to disconnect entrepreneurship and gender theories, envisioning a future where gender ceases to influence entrepreneurship discussions.

This thesis argues that female entrepreneurs face significant challenges such as a complex regulatory framework, stereotypes and public procurement and investment disparities. The proposed solutions include educating investors, reforming grant eligibility criteria to be more inclusive, and increasing the diversity of role models in entrepreneurship. The conclusion of the analysis in this thesis advocates for a qualitative goal to promote women's entrepreneurship, rather than a quantitative one. Such a policy should strive to create an environment where women's entrepreneurial endeavors are encouraged rather than hindered.

Key words: Female entrepreneurship, Policy measures, Challenges, Economic growth, Equality

Word count: 19967

Table of content

Table of content.....	3
1. Introduction: Unveiling the landscape of female entrepreneurship in Sweden.....	5
1.1 Background: Contextualizing gender disparities: The persistent challenges and slow progression of female entrepreneurship in Sweden.....	6
1.2 Purpose and research question.....	7
1.3 Delimitations.....	7
2. Previous research: Gender bias and investment disparities in entrepreneurship.....	10
2.1 Societies view on entrepreneurship.....	10
2.2 Investors and their treatment towards female entrepreneurs.....	10
2.3 Economic growth.....	11
2.4 How to increase female entrepreneurship in the EU.....	14
2.5 How to increase female entrepreneurship in Sweden.....	14
2.6 Criticism of previous research.....	17
3. Theorizing female entrepreneurship: Integrating social identity and gender constructs.....	19
3.1 Social Identity Theory: Understanding the dynamics of self-perception and group affiliations.....	19
3.2 Gender Theory: Deconstructing gender stereotypes and power structures in society.....	20
3.2.1 Power in gender relationships.....	23
3.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages with Hirdmans gender theory.....	23
3.3 A Constructivist and Interpretivist approach.....	24
4. Methodology: Navigating the complexities of female entrepreneurship challenges through a qualitative single case study.....	26
4.1 Case study and selection.....	26
4.2 Description of applied methods.....	27
4.3 Qualitative content analysis.....	27
4.4 Data collection.....	29
4.5 Interview.....	29
4.5.1 Semi-structured qualitative interview.....	29
4.5.2 Targeted selection and criteria.....	30
4.5.3 Sample size.....	32
4.5.4 Interview procedure and Implementation of the interviews.....	33
4.5.5 Management of collected data.....	34
4.5.6 Quality criteria.....	35
4.5.7 Ethical considerations.....	37
5. An analytical exploration of challenges, themes, contributing factors, proposed solutions, and policy implications.....	39
5.1 What specific challenges emerge in the interviews with female entrepreneurs?.....	40
Prejudices and stereotypes.....	40

Legal requirements.....	42
Knowledge, attitude and role models.....	44
Public procurement.....	46
Going from employee to entrepreneur and handling work- life balance.....	48
Venture capital/investments.....	50
5.2 Are there any specific factors, such as cultural, economic or social, that contribute to these challenges?.....	52
5.3 What solutions are proposed, and how are they justified?.....	54
5.4 How can the insights from the analysis be used to develop measures and promote equal entrepreneurship for women?.....	57
6. Discussion: Dealing with history while creating the future.....	61
7. Conclusion: Where do we go from here?.....	63
8. Appendix.....	65
Interview guide.....	65
9. References.....	66

1. Introduction: Unveiling the landscape of female entrepreneurship in Sweden

Ever since the mid 1990s, females make up just over a quarter of Sweden's entrepreneurs. This is lower than the EU average, which is 33%. The highest proportion of female entrepreneurs among the countries in the EU are in Luxembourg, Lithuania, and Latvia. Sweden ranks fifth worst in all of Europe, with only Romania, Malta, Ireland, and Slovakia having lower rates. Even in comparison to the proportion of women who run businesses in Scandinavia, Sweden is below average (Eurostat, 2022). Newly started businesses bring renewal to the business sector and provide additional strength to the economy. If female entrepreneurship were to continue increasing until it is as common among women as it is among men, it would mean approximately 75,000 new businesses and around 278,000 new job opportunities, according to Tillväxtverket (2012).

During the 1990s, there was a notable rise in interest surrounding female entrepreneurship, prompting the implementation of targeted initiatives such as the Women's Loan, designed to provide financial support specifically to women in business. Despite advancements in removing legal barriers, women still confront challenges that hinder their entrepreneurial pursuits when compared to men. Issues like discrimination and ingrained biases persist, indicating the ongoing need for concerted efforts to provide support, resources, and opportunities that empower female entrepreneurs to thrive in the business landscape (Danilda, 2001, 81-83).

Female entrepreneurship represents a significant driving force for Sweden's economy and society, and its importance extends far beyond the issue of gender equality. By supporting and promoting women as entrepreneurs and business leaders, we not only achieve a more equal and inclusive work environment, but we also open the doors to increased economic growth, higher employment, and more dynamic societal development. By promoting women's entrepreneurship and providing them with the resources and opportunities they need, we can create a stronger and more sustainable economy that benefits everyone (Sandberg, 2023).

1.1 Background: Contextualizing gender disparities: The persistent challenges and slow progression of female entrepreneurship in Sweden

The proportion of women in executive positions within the business sector has only increased by 3% in 16 years, from 26 to 29% between 2004 and 2020. Only 25% of all limited companies are operated by women, and in 2022, only 31% of all newly established businesses were started by women. It is concerning that the progress is so slow. The involvement of women in starting and running businesses is crucial for Sweden's competitiveness, innovation, and sustainable development. Increasing the percentage of women as entrepreneurs will ultimately benefit the entire society. To achieve this, we need long-term measures that develop and challenge the current system. The government has explicitly set a goal to improve the conditions for women to lead and develop businesses as a strategy to strengthen Sweden's economy and competitiveness. Active engagement and concrete actions are required to promote gender equality and create a more inclusive business environment (Tillväxtverket, 2023).

Both empirical research and theoretical studies have clearly highlighted the obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs in their businesses. These obstacles range from challenges in obtaining financing, access to relevant information, necessary services, and opportunities for skills development. Female entrepreneurs are often encouraged to use services and resources traditionally designed with male entrepreneurs in mind, further complicating their business endeavors. However this does not mean that all female entrepreneurs inevitably encounter the same obstacles, or even any obstacles at all, solely because of their gender (Danilda, 2001, 83-87).

According to a report from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, "Women's and Men's Entrepreneurship", only 22% of Sweden's small business owners are women, while a whopping 78% are men. A closer look at new entrepreneurs reveals a slightly more balanced gender distribution. Over 30% of new entrepreneurs are women, while over 60% are men. An interpretation of these figures is that the historical imbalance in gender distribution among entrepreneurs is gradually decreasing, signaling a more equal representation (Jeddeskog, 2009).

It is worth noting that service companies dominate in Sweden, and this dominance is evident regardless of whether the companies are owned by women or men (Jeddeskog, 2009).

Although both men and women start and operate businesses in all industries, entrepreneurship reflects the gender-specific pattern characteristic of the labor market in the choice of industry. Women tend to dominate in service sectors such as cleaning, healthcare, education and recreation and men are more often represented in industries such as construction, manufacturing, communication, and transportation. In sectors such as trade, hospitality, business services, and rental, the distribution between male and female entrepreneurs is more balanced. This differentiation highlights the complexity of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship and underscores the importance of analyzing and addressing structural inequalities in this context (Jeddeskog, 2009).

1.2 Purpose and research question

Having a variety of businesses and entrepreneurs across different industries is a prerequisite for strengthening Sweden's competitiveness on the European and global market and therefore the purpose of this thesis is to find out what challenges female entrepreneurs experience and what measures they believe would help them, in order to shed light on these and contribute to research and political measures to promote women's entrepreneurship.

The research question will therefore be: *“What challenges do female entrepreneurs in Sweden encounter during the establishment and growth phases of their businesses and what actions can the government take?”*

1.3 Delimitations

This research is limited to focus on the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs initiating new ventures and trying to expand their business in Sweden and the initiatives that politicians can undertake to support female entrepreneurship.

The methodology employed in this study is carefully tailored to encompass both a qualitative content analysis and empirical investigation. The empirical aspect of the study specifically involves interviews with five female entrepreneurs, facilitating a rich exploration of their experiences and perspectives. This methodological approach is designed to offer a holistic

understanding of the experiences and challenges encountered by female entrepreneurs in their business ventures.

The theoretical framework of this study is deliberately limited to focus on two main areas: social identity theory (SIT) and gender theory, within the context of entrepreneurship. In gender theory, theories are explored that illuminate the social construction of gender and its significance for entrepreneurial behavior. This includes concepts such as the gender contract, which influences how women experience and navigate within the business world, as well as the societal response to questions of gender and entrepreneurship.

SIT is applied to understand how gender and other social categories affect entrepreneurs' self-perception and their relationships with other actors in the business world. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the study aims to illuminate the complex relationships between gender, identity, and entrepreneurial practice. This understanding, in turn, can contribute to identifying and addressing the specific challenges and opportunities faced by female entrepreneurs in their businesses, thereby promoting a more inclusive environment for female entrepreneurs.

Considering geographical variations is essential to gauge the study's applicability (Esaiasson et al, 2007). This study specifically pertains to Sweden due to significant disparities in female entrepreneurship worldwide. Even neighboring countries like Norway exhibit differences in women's participation in business (Oxford research, 2020). Variances in societal perceptions of female entrepreneurs are notable between many countries in Europe, for example the Netherlands and Sweden, which you can see by analyzing how many new venture capitals for females have been founded (Oxford research, 2020). Unique challenges faced by female entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs in general, in countries in the middle east, further highlight the context-dependent nature of gender dynamics, making it inappropriate to generalize beyond Sweden.

This study adopts a national perspective due to diverse female entrepreneurs' distribution across Sweden (Sundin and Holmquist, 1989). Despite regional differences, a national view is relevant as key decisions, funding allocations, and entrepreneurship regulations are nationally governed. However, even though the study will be geographical focused on Sweden it will also be in a European perspective considering Sweden is a member of the European Union and is therefore also bound by European laws. A comprehensive approach to

relevant literature ensures a nuanced understanding, balancing the gender perspective. In the realm of gender theory, female authors dominate the references, creating an ethical concern that underscores gender disparities. Yet, it remains essential to persist in this research area to unravel societal intricacies. Ensuring replicability is vital (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005, 48 & 105). However, this qualitative study's outcomes are context-specific, contingent upon the respondents' diversity and the researcher's approach.

This thesis will find out what challenges female entrepreneurs encounter in the Swedish business landscape by conducting interviews and analyzing the findings in the context of gender and SIT, taking into account social, cultural and economic aspects, in order to find solutions that the government can implement. This thesis argues that female entrepreneurs face challenges in the fields of stereotypes, legal requirements, investment disparities, and public procurement and it argues for a qualitative goal rather than a quantitative one. Because this study aspires to disconnect entrepreneurship and gender theories, envisioning a future where gender ceases to influence entrepreneurship discussions, my thesis calls for an exploration of fresh perspectives within both research and society.

2. Previous research: Gender bias and investment disparities in entrepreneurship

The literature review for this study has been conducted in two parts - one theoretical review of entrepreneurship; how society views it, the inequality in entrepreneurship investments and its effect on economic growth; and one empirical review of the previous solutions proposed to promote female entrepreneurship both in Sweden and the EU. By applying a narrative review the aim of this section is to present an overview of previous research in the field, including a comprehensive assessment as well as a critical interpretation of the field.

2.1 Societies view on entrepreneurship

Within entrepreneurship, there is a distinct social injustice against women, known as gender bias. This means that women are placed at a disadvantage if they do not conform to masculine communication patterns. The masculine communication style shapes a normative entrepreneurship, making qualities outside this pattern not fit the entrepreneurial mold. Consequently, women find it difficult to fit in and be accepted within this context. The male discourse has defined entrepreneurship as normative, and traits falling outside the masculine communication patterns are seen as deviations. In this context, women are considered "the others," judged to have shortcomings and deemed unsuccessful (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, 3-5). Nadin (2007) discusses the stereotypical image of women as deviating from the "male model" within entrepreneurship. Women can either conform to or distance themselves from the norm. Therefore, female entrepreneurs are seen as "the others" within the entrepreneurial sphere (Nadin, 2007, 56-61).

2.2 Investors and their treatment towards female entrepreneurs

Research indicates that investors' masculine stereotypes play a role in who they chose to invest in. Identity plays a big role and if the investor identifies with the entrepreneur they are more likely to invest. And this can explain why women are not receiving venture capital to the same extent as men (Justo et al, 2018, 7-10). This implies that state venture capitalists'

socially constructed gender stereotypes affect the opportunities for female entrepreneurs. This impact arises as men with typical masculine stereotypes decrease investors' inclination to invest in female entrepreneurs since they prefer to invest in an entrepreneur they can identify with and relate to. Investors naturally tend to consider male attributes as more entrepreneurial than typical female attributes (Malmström et al, 2017, 19-21). This is significant, given the overrepresentation of men in the finance and venture capital industry in Sweden. Gorbatai & Nelson (2015) claim that some investors rather invest in male entrepreneurs than female entrepreneurs and that investors base their decisions on stereotypes and their perception. However, Coleman and Robb (2009) claims that this skewed distribution is a byproduct of female entrepreneurs expecting to receive lower funding, which in turn results in them receiving less capital. It has also been claimed that female entrepreneurs have lower investment needs and consequently receive less capital. However, studies show the opposite; women actually have higher capital needs than men (Coleman & Robb, 2009, 409-410). This phenomenon underscores the importance of questioning and reevaluating preconceived assumptions about the capital needs of female entrepreneurs to foster a more equitable and gender-neutral distribution of financial resources. Coleman & Robb (2009) also mentions that existing research affirms that women tend to have a preference for smaller enterprises that facilitate a work/family balance and an inclination to maintain control. These motivational factors may result in women initiating smaller businesses with reduced capital requirements, often met through personal rather than external funding channels. But regardless of the driving factors, the notable pattern of women utilizing significantly reduced start-up capital and depending on personal rather than external sources holds consequences for their capacity to innovate, expand their businesses, employ personnel, and navigate challenging periods (Coleman & Robb, 2009, 409-410).

2.3 Economic growth

In an article from 2016, Åsa Ljöfström highlights a potential economic opportunity for EU countries. According to her research, there is potential to increase GDP levels by 14-15% if a more equal labor market is created where women and men are equally distributed in terms of wages, part-time work, and entrepreneurship. Conducting an empirical study, Ljöfström primarily utilizes two measurements to assess gender equality in various EU countries: the

Gender Gap Index (GGI), which measures gender disparities across different sectors, and the Gender Development Index (GDI), the UN's measure of gender equality (Löfström, 2016, 13-24). The results of the study show a positive correlation between GDI and GDP in the observed countries. However, the relationship between GGI and GDP is more complex. An interesting observation is that gender equality initially decreases as countries begin to develop, but after reaching a certain level of income per capita, gender equality increases again (Löfström, 2016, 25-28).

Löfström argues that an imbalanced gender distribution in entrepreneurship and the labor market leads to underutilization of available human capital. By promoting gender equality in the labor market, where for example tasks are assigned to the most suitable individuals regardless of gender, efficiency and productivity can increase. This would result in improved outcomes compared to alternative gender distributions in the labor market (Löfström, 2016, 8-9).

Rodríguez (2017) examines how gender equality in the workforce affects economic growth in five Latin American OECD countries over seven years. The results show that an increase in the proportion of women in the workforce has a significant positive effect on GDP growth, as it improves women's living conditions and reduces production costs in the short term. However, Rodríguez notes that long-term economic growth requires increased wages overall (Rodríguez, 2017, 88-97).

A report by The World Bank analyzes how gender equality conditions affect economic growth. The researchers note that gender equality leads to more efficient resource allocation and increased productivity by providing equal work opportunities for all individuals. This is expected to result in increased economic growth (Morrison, Raju & Sinha, 2007, 1 & 31-37).

As showcased, previous research on gender equality and economic growth primarily focuses on gender equality in the labor market, both in terms of the proportion of women working and wages. All studies indicate that the economy generally benefits from increased gender equality. At the same time, both Löfström and The World Bank emphasize how the conditions for gender equality affect its economic effect and the importance of allocating human capital in the most effective way to have a positive impact on GDP. These factors are taken into account in the report to investigate whether equal conditions for both genders, even within entrepreneurship, generate greater growth than alternative distributions. This is

assumed to promote diversity among entrepreneurs and can lead to increased efficiency in the development of new innovations.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) is renowned in the research community for its work in measuring and analyzing entrepreneurship. GEM uses the metric Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), to quantify entrepreneurial activity across different countries and over time periods. TEA focuses on the proportion of the workforce that is either in the process of starting or has recently started a business (GEM, 2024).

Wong et al. (2005) have explored the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth by analyzing TEA data from 37 countries. Their research, based on Schumpeter's theories of economic growth, shows that entrepreneurship has a significant positive impact on economic growth, particularly when it comes to rapidly growing new ventures. These businesses play a crucial role in creating new jobs and thus contribute significantly to economic growth (Wong et al., 2005, 335-340).

In addition to the TEA metric, GEM has also introduced two other metrics:

"opportunity-driven TEA" and "necessity-driven TEA." These metrics aim to differentiate between different motivational factors behind entrepreneurship (GEM, 2024). Similarly, Zoltan Acs (2006) emphasizes the different motivational forces behind entrepreneurship. He identifies two main types: "necessity entrepreneurship," where individuals start businesses out of necessity, and "opportunity entrepreneurship," where businesses are started to exploit identified market opportunities. Acs' study of 32 countries shows that only the latter, opportunity entrepreneurship, has a positive effect on economic growth (Acs, 2006, 97-104).

Carree et al (2005) also utilize GEM's TEA metric in their study on entrepreneurship and economic growth. The study incorporates data from 36 countries in 2002 and examines whether TEA has a significant impact on economic growth. The results indicate that the effect of entrepreneurship on growth varies depending on countries' GDP per capita. In wealthier countries, there is a positive correlation between TEA and GDP, whereas in developing countries, there is a negative correlation. This may be because developing countries lack large firms that play a crucial role in growth through education and knowledge dissemination. The study also finds that only newly established firms have a positive impact on GDP growth, supporting previous research by Wong et al. (Carree et al., 2005, 311-317).

2.4 How to increase female entrepreneurship in the EU

A report by Eurochambers from 2023 states that female entrepreneurs in the European Union (EU) face significant challenges when initiating a business. The report mentions solutions on how to increase female led businesses. Among other things, bureaucracy, limited access to finance and the complexity of administrative procedures, particularly at the national level, are mentioned as significant challenges. By simplifying these processes we can allow female entrepreneurs to focus more on business growth rather than bureaucratic hurdles.

Eurochambres also emphasizes the need for equitable access to finance in order to level the playing field for female entrepreneurs, promoting role models in male-dominated sectors and implementing tailored education and training programs for female entrepreneurs (Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23).

2.5 How to increase female entrepreneurship in Sweden

In a report conducted by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket), they investigate the challenges encountered by female entrepreneurs and their findings serve as the cornerstone for the Agency's evaluation of effective strategies to advance women's entrepreneurship. It's important to mention that the suggested actions are not directly tied to the outcomes of previous endeavors but are instead a judgment drawn from existing insights (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 14).

The first challenge mentioned in the report is the lack of reliable and comprehensive statistics on entrepreneurship and ownership. To create effective measures to increase women's entrepreneurship, a better understanding of entrepreneurship and ownership is needed. The problem is that it is difficult to get a complete picture of women's entrepreneurship due to the lack of reliable statistics. Better figures and facts are needed to properly understand the situation (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 14).

Statistics on ownership are crucial for understanding entrepreneurship and its conditions. It also relates to equality and power. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of opportunities to use evidence-based facts in this area. To be able to see differences and opportunities, more detailed statistics on entrepreneurship and ownership, especially broken down by gender is

needed. The problem is that there is no standardized method for measuring ownership. The statistics that are available are based on small and not entirely representative samples. This makes it difficult to compare and analyze women's entrepreneurship reliably (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 14). To address this, Tillväxtverket suggests the need to develop a unified method for collecting reliable statistics. This would give better opportunities to analyze the role of ownership in the growth of Swedish companies, which in turn could lead to more effective efforts to support women's entrepreneurship (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 15).

The second challenge is that the implemented measures the past years have yielded short-term results, but it is uncertain whether their long-term effects will endure. Evaluations primarily focus on short-term changes, such as improved knowledge, rather than long-term effects such as increased employment and competitiveness. To ensure lasting changes, Tillväxtverket proposes a systematic measurement of effects over time based on clear goals (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 15).

The third obstacle is the short-term focus in promoting women's entrepreneurship, making it difficult to achieve lasting changes in the support system. Economic policy primarily aims to apply a general strategy for entrepreneurship without considering differences in industries, business sizes, or gender. This leads to temporary results rather than long-term effects. Overcoming this obstacle requires long-term measures that challenge stereotypes and create tailored policies and tools to promote women's entrepreneurship. The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth suggests a strategy focusing on lasting effects and value for the target group rather than short-term measures with temporary results (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 16).

The fourth challenge is the limited view of the role of politics. An isolated business policy cannot achieve the equal conditions required for women's entrepreneurship and therefore an integrated strategy across multiple policy areas is needed. The report emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach where different policy areas collaborate to remove obstacles and provide support that takes into account the diversity of challenges, needs, and opportunities facing women in different industries and stages of business. By integrating efforts from various policy areas, a more effective and comprehensive strategy can be developed to promote women's entrepreneurship (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 16-17).

The fifth challenge is that government measures have mainly focused on addressing the issue of women's underrepresentation in the business sector rather than actively supporting and encouraging women's entrepreneurship. This means that the measures have been more reactive than proactive. The report suggests that policies should include measures that directly promote women's participation. This involves integrating efforts to support women's entrepreneurship into broader policy initiatives, such as strategies for green transition and investment strategies. This way, business policy can become more inclusive and supportive of women in the business sector, benefiting the entire economy (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 17-18).

The sixth obstacle to promoting women's entrepreneurship is the perception that entrepreneurship is often seen as a secondary option to employment. To change this, entrepreneurship needs to be integrated into education starting from primary school. Although some professions have become more gender-balanced in terms of the number of women, there are still clear gender patterns within education, the workforce, and the business world. This prevents women from choosing entrepreneurship as a career option. Role models are crucial for inspiring entrepreneurship, but the stereotypical image of a successful entrepreneur primarily focuses on rapidly growing startups, which can discourage women from less scalable ventures (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 18). To address this, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth proposes measures focusing on strengthening the role of entrepreneurship in education, including professional development for career counselors and teachers. Additionally, efforts are suggested to increase interest in STEM subjects among young women, which would contribute to greater female representation in priority sectors and enhance opportunities for women to lead businesses in these areas in the future (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 18-19).

The seventh challenge is that the security system is designed based on employment being the norm, which does not fit well for entrepreneurs, especially solo-entrepreneurs. Although the formal barriers to starting and running businesses are small in Sweden, such as administrative difficulties and low start-up capital, there are challenges related to the strong focus on large scale operations. These hurdles particularly affect small businesses and industries where women are dominant (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19). The security system, including unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, and parental leave, is not tailored for entrepreneurs, which can create economic and administrative challenges. Tillväxtverket proposes a review of the regulations focusing on making them more suitable for

entrepreneurs, drawing inspiration from examples such as the American Small Business Administration. It is essential that security systems and benefits are designed to support both entrepreneurs and employees, and that policy measures take into account the conditions of small businesses to create a healthy balance between work and leisure (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19-20).

The eighth and final challenge identified by tillväxtverket is the clear disparities within the financing landscape for women's entrepreneurship. The percentage of venture capital investments in companies with female founders has consistently remained low since 2017, at around 1%. Although public venture capital has reached companies founded by women to a higher degree than the average, 7% compared to 1%, women seek this capital to a lesser extent than men. The majority of companies founded by women operate within industries characterized by low margins and high labor intensity, which are less attractive to venture capitalists. To create a more equitable business environment, a redistribution of public funding to women is needed, which currently does not reflect the actual proportion of female-owned and led companies. There is a lack of a unified method for collecting and reporting all public funding, complicating analyses of women's entrepreneurship (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 20).

Women's entrepreneurship also participates to a lesser extent in public procurement, partly due to regulations that make it difficult for small and micro-enterprises to participate. To counter these obstacles, Tillväxtverket proposes measures including reporting public funding with gender breakdowns to facilitate actions, a review of the use of public funds to ensure a more equitable distribution, and capacity-building initiatives for financiers focusing on sustainability and gender equality. Additionally, a review of the criteria for public procurement is suggested to increase the participation of small and women-owned businesses (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 21).

2.6 Criticism of previous research

Previous research on female entrepreneurship has often focused on identifying challenges that women face without exploring potential solutions to improve the situation. This has led to a lack of understanding of the real opportunities and resources available to promote female

entrepreneurship. It has also contributed to reproducing stereotypes within entrepreneurship without recognizing women's potential as entrepreneurs. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of female entrepreneurship, research also needs to focus on exploring effective policy measures, support structures, and incentives that promote equality and create a more favorable environment for female entrepreneurs. My hope with this thesis is to challenge conventional narratives and include a broader set of perspectives in order to contribute to informing and driving policies and initiatives that promote a more equal and inclusive entrepreneurship landscape.

3. Theorizing female entrepreneurship: Integrating social identity and gender constructs

Below I will outline the different concepts that lays the basis for the theoretical framework of SIT and Gender theory. Thereafter, I will move on to the advantages and disadvantages of the theoretical framework and explain how previous research on the subject is connected to the theoretical framework. After presenting and discussing the theoretical framework, I will discuss the epistemological and ontological assumptions and give the reader an understanding of the standpoint from which the framework emerges. In my analysis, I will use the theoretical concepts below as a basis to structure the findings.

3.1 Social Identity Theory: Understanding the dynamics of self-perception and group affiliations

SIT, introduced in the late 1970s, delves into how individuals construct their identity within social contexts. Rooted in one's affiliations with specific societal groups, this theory posits that one's self-perception is profoundly influenced. These groups are diverse, encompassing criteria such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and occupation, often interweaving multiple factors. Within these groups, there exists a common phenomenon known as in-group bias, where members tend to favor those similar to them, reinforcing a sense of unity. This bias can lead to out-group derogation, where individuals favor their group's traits and norms over those of other social groups (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4).

For many, these affiliations become a source of self-worth and social status, shaping their identity and sense of belonging. While advantageous for those in esteemed groups, it can be detrimental for individuals associated with groups of lower societal standing. Social identity theory thus elucidates the intricate dynamics through which people define themselves within the tapestry of society (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10).

Individuals may consciously recognize their affiliations with certain groups, leading to an awareness of their biases toward others. However, there are situations where biases operate unconsciously, influencing people's judgments unknowingly. This phenomenon is mirrored in

the venture capital (VC) industry, where decision-makers often have stronger social ties with individuals resembling their own social group. This poses a challenge, given the industry's historical male dominance. Consequently, women entering this sector encounter hurdles in accessing resources and positions, primarily occupied by men who, in accordance with SIT, tend to favor individuals resembling themselves (Balachandra, 2020, 262-264).

This bias is exacerbated by the VC industry's heavy reliance on social networks for funding allocation, creating barriers for those divergent from the established norm. As a result, VCs tend to establish connections with individuals similar to them, impacting funding decisions and investments due to the inherent biases at play (Balachandra, 2020, 265-267).

3.2 Gender Theory: Deconstructing gender stereotypes and power structures in society

In contemporary Sweden, gender equality legislation ensures that both women and men have equal formal opportunities in various aspects of life (Elvin-Nowak, 2003). Formal opportunities refer to the absence of legal barriers preventing individuals from pursuing activities and careers, such as studying atomic physics, engaging in ballet, or holding positions like the prime minister, solely based on their gender. However, practical opportunities, the real-life possibilities people encounter, do not always align seamlessly with these formal ideals. Practical opportunities are shaped by the human need for validation, a process that unfolds differently for girls and boys. This inherent need for affirmation creates distinctions between an individual's biological sex and their social gender identity, commonly known as gender (Nationalencyklopedin- Genus, 2023).

As per the center for gender research at the University of Uppsala, gender revolves around the processes by which individuals develop into women and men, examining the intricacies of relationships and power dynamics. The center asserts that gender stands as society's essential framework for comprehending the formation of femininity and masculinity in individuals. Gender analysis delves into the influence of social, cultural, and historical factors on the construction of male and female identities. In contrast, the concept of sex concentrates on the biological distinctions that set us apart physically (Centrum för genusvetenskap, 2023).

Most of the differences between men and women are socially constructed by society and the contemporary context rather than being actual biological disparities. These social inequalities between genders began to be highlighted during the 1970s. Evertsson explains the distinction between sex (biologically determined) and gender (socially constructed based on society's expectations and perceptions of biological sexes). In this social construction, a social order is established where man is considered the norm, and woman is seen as deviating from this norm (Evertsson, 2016, 50).

Yvonne Hirdman discusses gender and the gender system based on this social construction. The gender system is a theory used to explain society's gender stereotypes and stratifications between them. As mentioned earlier, the man constitutes the norm within the gender system, and this position is based on two logics: segregation and hierarchy. Segregation, also known as the cornerstone of dichotomy, encompasses gender creation and gender contracts. It implies that male and female elements should not be mixed or confused (Hirdman, 1988, 52).

Segregation, as described by Hirdman, establishes a power dynamic between genders by assigning distinct roles, responsibilities, and traits to each gender, which are then stereotypically categorized. In this framework, the stereotypes associated with the male gender are deemed desirable, while those linked to the female gender are viewed negatively. Hirdman represents man as A and woman as B in this equation, portraying the genders as opposing entities. According to Hirdman, there cannot be an A without suppressing a B. Hierarchy, as defined by Hirdman, positions man as the norm, shaping the fundamental perception of how an individual should behave. Man becomes the defining factor of what is considered normal (Hirdman, 1988, 51-52).

Hirdman discusses three gender stereotypical relationships between men and women, where all stereotypes are based on a woman's relation to the norm, namely, the man, represented as A. In the first stereotype, A – Not a, the woman is considered nothing because she is not a man. In the second stereotype, A – a, the woman is described as an incomplete man who fades in comparison to the man. The third stereotype, which aligns most with the idea of separation, is represented as A – B. In this stereotype, women and men are opposites. In this stereotype, women are not only seen as incomplete but also possess qualities undesirable for men (Hirdman, 2001, 26-37).

In this gender stereotype division, the constant factor is that the man, represented as A, always stands above the woman. Despite this clear hierarchy where the man is on top, Hirdman argues that both genders are key to each other's opportunities and limitations, though never on equal footing. The man's social superiority in the hierarchy often results in a male power role. Hirdman explains that for the man to be the norm, the woman must be oppressed (Hirdman, 1988, 59-61). To maintain this order where A is at the top of the hierarchy, Hirdman describes a power struggle between the genders based on norms. This, in relation to the fact that according to gender contracts, it is the man who is the norm, means, according to Hirdman, that the separation is based on the man. This has been evident throughout history where women have been offered lighter types of jobs, as only men were believed to be capable of handling the heavier tasks (Hirdman, 1988, 53-55).

Hirdman describes the gender contract as an invisible agreement between women and men that regulates how both genders are expected to be and act, as well as who is expected to do what tasks. According to Hirdman, these invisible contracts have existed in all societies and adapt and evolve based on the prevailing norms. Even though men are the societal norm, both men and women are involved in creating the gender contract. Despite women being co-creators of the contract, they are assigned a lower status than men. The gender contract widens the gaps between the genders and establishes a hierarchical order where men are placed at the top (Hirdman, 1988, 49-63). The focus of the gender contract is the relationship between men and women, especially the aspect of the relationship that imposes limitations on women. By studying the gender contract, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the relationship between the genders is governed, as well as the male norm and how it is constructed. Women's subordination is based on the principles of separation and hierarchy, as these principles create gender and thereby the social perception of what is masculine and what is feminine. The gender contract shapes the perception of both genders and how they should behave, both individually and in relation to each other (Hirdman, 1988, 49-63).

The fact that women have a lower status in this contract also means that they are limited in societal life. Studies of the gender contract help us understand the hierarchies between the genders, the creation of man as the norm, but also how these differences have changed over time (Hirdman, 1988, 49-63). Hirdman describes the gender contract as having three levels: a cultural level, a social level, and an individual level. The cultural level concerns how the relationship between men and women should be according to societal ideals. It includes who

is expected to seduce whom in the relationship, how one should dress, and how one should speak. The social level pertains to social life, including the workplace, where the contract partially dictates which professions are considered masculine or feminine, and which tools are associated with each gender. The individual level refers to how individuals are expected to behave based on their socially assigned gender roles. For example, boys are taught not to cry or be sad, while girls are expected to be quiet (Hirdman, 1988, 57).

3.2.1 Power in gender relationships

A recurring theme in Hirdman's theory is the power dynamics that exist between men and women. Hirdman argues that there cannot be a group A without oppressing a group B, and this phenomenon is manifested in a complex power game rooted in societal norms. (Hirdman, 1988, 52-55). However, Hirdman does not delve deeply into what power between individuals actually means. She merely points out its existence without clearly defining the concept of power, except for the aspect of power dynamics aimed at reinforcing the male norm.

The concept of power and its meaning are explained by Mats Börjesson and Alf Rehn in their work *Power*. Börjesson and Rehn specifically discuss gender power and how it is expressed. They claim that power structures arise when differences are created between people, as "the other" becomes someone to relate to who is not like oneself. In this moment, it becomes possible to oppress and establish dominance over the other group. Making people unfamiliar or different legitimizes the exercise of power (Börjesson & Rehn, 2009, 16-17).

3.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages with Hirdmans gender theory

Using Hirdman's gender theory as the theoretical foundation of the study has both advantages and disadvantages. A significant advantage is that the theory is clear in its message, making it easy to discern when the theory is applicable to the studied material. However, the study becomes limited when gender and sex are examined solely through a theory that focuses only on the male and female, as those outside this framework may risk being excluded from the study.

3.3 A Constructivist and Interpretivist approach

This paper will be shaped by the researchers' understanding and view of the social world. This perspective on how society operates can be described using the concept of ontology. Ontology delves into the question of whether social phenomena should be considered separate from social actors. In this paper, constructivism will be used as the ontological assumption. Constructivism contends that social phenomena and their meanings undergo continuous influence, together with various actors. Bryman and Bell explain that this ongoing influence takes place through social interactions (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 20-22). As this thesis aims to explore the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs initiating new ventures in Sweden and construct potential solutions, it is imperative that the study encompasses aspects of a constructionist view of reality. Respondents largely determine the challenges they perceive, influenced by factors such as their prior networks and upbringing, and the challenges they choose to discuss. It is this constructionist view of reality that characterizes the study. The term "characterizes" is employed because the thesis does not solely perceive reality as constructed by individuals but incorporates elements that are not entirely subjective. For example, it assumes that certain behaviors, network structures, and relational bonds are more effective than others in achieving success in entrepreneurship.

Another factor that will impact how this paper is conducted is how knowledge is perceived. This can be addressed through the lens of epistemological assumptions. The epistemological assumption that will be used in this paper is interpretivism. The interpretivism perspective on knowledge emphasizes the need to understand or interpret social actors' beliefs, motives, and reasons in order to understand social reality. Since this thesis aims to map out the challenges female entrepreneurs face in their daily life, it's important to have an understanding of what counts as a challenge to different actors since they are the ones experiencing the social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 50). By focusing on the female entrepreneurs' own perspectives regarding their unique experiences, challenges, and success factors, the understanding of the study's phenomenon can increase. However, the research is also based on the assumption that certain gender structures can explain the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs. These assumptions have a more explanatory nature, which distinguishes this study from a purely interpretive investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2017, 49). It is worth emphasizing that a consequence of this approach is that the researcher's own values and assumptions may

influence the results, as the role of a researcher involves interpreting the experiences of women (Saunders et al., 2019, 148-149).

As stated above this paper ontologically rests on a constructivist foundation while epistemologically it rests on an interpretivism assumption. The thesis will therefore have an interpretivist approach to a constructivist world. This union between an interpretivist and constructivist approach means that we understand the social reality, but not independently of how reality is constituted.

4. Methodology: Navigating the complexities of female entrepreneurship challenges through a qualitative single case study

The aim of this thesis is to conduct a qualitative single case study on the challenges female entrepreneurs encounter in the Swedish business landscape in order to find solutions and thereby strengthen the Swedish competitiveness on the global market. By applying a constructivist and interpretivist approach, I hope that this study can provide an in depth examination of the unique features of my chosen case. The chosen design is based on a typical case, where a well developed theoretical framework and holistic approach is applied to the analysis. This, in order to understand the circumstances in which the theoretical basis could give additional knowledge on the challenges that female entrepreneurs face. The nature of the analysis will be solely based on primary data which will be collected through 5 personal interviews with respondents who are female entrepreneurs in Sweden. The goal of this study is to provide future analytical generalization and the hope is that this research can contribute to hypothesis refinement and generation. If successful, the result can provide inspiration and hopefully different solutions for which politicians can implement in order to promote female entrepreneurship and thereby strengthen Sweden's competitiveness.

4.1 Case study and selection

In order to answer the research question, I will conduct a single case study and conduct interviews as the methodological approach. George and Bennett define a case study as “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events” (Levy, 2008, 2).

As previously mentioned, this research will focus on the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in Sweden and the initiatives that politicians can undertake to support female entrepreneurship. This case study qualifies as a typical case because it encapsulates values typically associated with a specific phenomenon (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, 299). Over the past few decades, female-led businesses have been significantly underrepresented in Sweden, impacting the country's competitiveness on the global stage. Since the new government

assumed power in 2022, they have been actively working to promote female entrepreneurship. However, it's crucial to delve into the underlying reasons behind this underrepresentation. Selecting a typical case is particularly valuable for exploring the root causes of this phenomenon (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, 299 & 300). Since this case is typical and very close to the regression line, my hope for this paper is that this research can contribute to hypothesis refinement and generation.

4.2 Description of applied methods

In order to map out the challenges faced by aspiring female entrepreneurs in Sweden and answer the research question, process tracing will be used. Process tracing can be defined as the ambition to trace causal mechanisms. In this sense a causal mechanism is identified by “a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts” (Beach & Brun Pedersen, 2013, 1). Using process tracing is helpful when trying to figure out how the dependent variable and independent variables are connected in a cause-and-effect chain. It allows us to dig deeper into understanding this relationship and pinpoint the actual factors that have influenced the outcome resulting from a structural cause (Beach & Brun Pedersen, 2013, 1). There are three different approaches to process tracing; Theory testing PT, theory building PT and explaining outcome PT. This paper will solely focus on theory building process tracing.

4.3 Qualitative content analysis

The method can be regarded as both a theoretical framework and as the foundation for how the investigation will be conducted. Content analysis will be used to analyze the material from several transcribed interviews. This method is particularly suitable when one aims to discover patterns in various texts, compare texts created at different times, and seek a comprehensive understanding of the content in the texts. The central basis of content analysis lies in the interpretation of various messages, intentions, and structures within the texts (Boréus & Bergström, 2018, 49–55).

Qualitative research involves the active construction of what is to be studied, allowing for a wide range of interpretive possibilities. Qualitative content analysis will be complemented by reflective empirical research. Reflective empirical research focuses on exploring social, linguistic, political, and theoretical aspects when it comes to the construction and interpretation of empirical material. Within reflective empirical research, interpretation and reflection are fundamental components that underlie the results of the investigation. All references to empirical data in the study will be the outcomes of these interpretations. Reflection involves making interpretations in light of the researcher's prior experiences. This means that the researcher's societal, intellectual, and cultural background needs to be considered when interpreting the empirical data. To ensure high-quality research in the study, systematic reflection at various levels is required. Thus, the starting point for the research will be the researcher's own perceptions of the phenomenon under study, and the researcher's interpretations will take center stage. Awareness of the researcher's preconceptions is of paramount importance since they influence how reality is studied and interpreted (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 1994, 10–12).

Since only a limited selection of materials will be used in this study, a qualitative text analysis is the most appropriate method. The goal of using qualitative text analysis is to attempt to map the content within the materials and identify any potential relationships. To facilitate this, a series of questions will be compiled and refined, and these questions will then be posed to the materials. Depending on the content of the materials, these questions will either be answered or remain unanswered (Esaiaasson et al. 2017, 211–216). In this essay, the following questions will be posed to the material:

- What specific challenges emerge in the interviews with female entrepreneurs?
- Are there any specific factors, such as cultural, economic or social, that contribute to these challenges?
- What solutions are proposed, and how are they justified?
- How can the insights from the analysis be used to develop measures and promote equal entrepreneurship for women?

These questions are pertinent to the research as they will guide the examination of the experiences of female entrepreneurs. These questions will serve as the framework for my study, enabling a comprehensive examination of the challenges and potential solutions for female entrepreneurs.

4.4 Data collection

In this study, only primary data will be used exclusively. Primary data in this study will be collected through 5 personal interviews with respondents who are female entrepreneurs in Sweden. According to Bryman and Bell (2017), primary data is defined as information collected directly by the researcher solely for the purpose of the study. This can include qualitative interviews, observations, and quantitative surveys.

4.5 Interview

To achieve the purpose of this study, qualitative interviews will be conducted since it's the method that best aligns with the selected qualitative research strategy. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2019, 46-47), qualitative research interviews aim to describe and understand the meaning of the respondent's social reality by interpreting what is said. Given that the aim of this thesis is to uncover the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, in order to find solutions and contribute to research and initiatives promoting gender equality in entrepreneurship, qualitative interviews are considered to be a suitable method for data collection.

4.5.1 Semi-structured qualitative interview

A semi-structured qualitative interview study is considered the most suitable method for achieving the specified objectives and, consequently, the goals of the study. When using semi-structured interviews, the researcher follows a guide with predetermined themes to be addressed, while interviewees are given the freedom to shape their responses because the questions asked are open-ended (Patel & Davidson, 2019, 105). This data collection method also allows flexibility to explore unexpected and interesting topics if respondents bring them up during the interviews (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011, 46-47). Additionally, the researcher can ask enough follow-up questions to direct the focus on the subject if respondents provide insufficient answers.

However, one disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is the risk that researchers can influence respondents, both in how questions are formulated and through their reactions to different responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, 214-216), which potentially could compromise the credibility of the qualitative interview study (Olsson & Sørensen, 2021, 136). To address this concern, I will strive to be mindful of my own reactions during the interviews and to formulate questions in a way that minimizes influence.

This data collection method is still considered the best fit for the thesis's objectives, as it allows respondents to freely discuss the challenges and obstacles they experience as female entrepreneurs. At the same time, it provides a structured foundation by asking similar questions to all respondents. Specifically, semi-structuring enables the interviewer to guide respondents toward certain themes without affecting their opinions on these themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, 48). Since the goal is to capture the perspectives of female entrepreneurs in their own words about the issues and their realities, this is considered crucial. However, it's important that I ensure that respondents remain within the relevant topics so that the empirical data can be used to illuminate and understand the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to research and initiatives promoting more gender-equal entrepreneurship.

The interviews will primarily be conducted through video calls. This is considered advantageous compared to phone calls or email communication because the interviewer has the opportunity to observe the respondent's facial expressions (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 218, 471). During video calls, respondents have indicated that they are accustomed to working digitally, thus avoiding technical shortcomings. Although the opportunity to study respondents in their natural work environment is lost in video calls, this is offset by the fact that respondents are familiar with the format and therefore feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

4.5.2 Targeted selection and criteria

In total, five interviews will be conducted with female entrepreneurs from different industries. It is important to have a variety of different female entrepreneurs represented, for example older/younger, lifestyle/ tech entrepreneurs, multiple/no exits, since the aim of this

research is to try and map out obstacles that female entrepreneurs encounter in their journey in general and not in a specific industry, in order to find potential solutions.

Because the research question specifically targets female entrepreneurs initiating new ventures in Sweden, a purposeful selection method to identify suitable participants was employed. By using this type of selection, interviewees are chosen based on criteria that are believed to be essential for addressing the thesis's research problem and objectives, a concept supported by Bryman and Bell (2017, 407). The authors (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 406) further suggest that purposeful selection is considered strategic as it aligns the sampling process with the study's research question. An alternative approach in qualitative research is probability sampling, which is suitable when specific groups are not crucial to responding to interview questions or when the results are intended for generalization (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 405). Given that this study aims to gain deeper insights into the experiences of female entrepreneurs, the choice of participants becomes pivotal, thus making the use of purposeful selection a natural fit. The criteria for potential interviewees include being a woman, an entrepreneur and having founded a company.

The utilization of primary sources can enhance the quality of a study (Thurén & Strachal, 2011, 17). This is why female entrepreneurs are interviewed for this research. Female entrepreneurs are likely to possess firsthand experiences that may differ for women and men. The second criterion stems from the thesis's definition of an entrepreneur, which entails founding the company (Elam et al., 2021, 88; Koellinger et al., 2013, 216).

Interviews have been scheduled using both email and phone communication. Some contact information was acquired from my network, while some were actively sought out online on LinkedIn. The strategy was adapted to involve the direct pursuit of potential respondents via LinkedIn. Employing strategic keywords including "founder," "co-founder," and "female," a more extensive cohort of female entrepreneurs was identified and subsequently contacted through the platform. When establishing contact with the desired interview subjects, the purpose and research questions were outlined and it was explained why they hold particular significance for the study. For those who request it, a set of overarching interview questions prior to the actual interview was provided.

The decision to pursue respondents meeting the previous mentioned criteria necessitates the utilization of a convenience sampling approach. This selection method is dictated by practical

constraints, since there is not enough time or resources to sample randomly. As Bryman and Bell (2017, 410-411) contend, convenience sampling is commonly adopted under circumstances characterized by inherent limitations, a characterization which finds resonance in the current context.

4.5.3 Sample size

Determining the requisite number of interviews for qualitative studies can pose challenges (Troost, 2010, 143). However, it is crucial to emphasize that the focus should be on the quality of the interviews. Consequently, a limited number of interviews of high quality hold greater value than a larger quantity of lower quality interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, 156-157). Solicitations were extended to 24 female entrepreneurs, ultimately resulting in interviews with 5 individuals. The 19 individuals who were contacted but did not respond/ were over sampled constitute the attrition in this study, and it is imperative, in accordance with Bryman and Bell (2017, 191), to be cognizant of potential disparities between these individuals and the entrepreneurs I actually interviewed.

Given that the entire sample was approached via LinkedIn, a common factor could be their lack of activity on the platform. Another potential explanation is that the 19 entrepreneurs may represent those facing the most significant challenges, hence their inability to respond. If this were the case, this thesis would feature a non-representative sample, as it fails to capture the individuals of greatest interest for investigation. Nonetheless, discerning significant differences between the respondents and the attrition, particularly concerning attitudes or behavior, remains a complex endeavor, as supported by Bryman and Bell (2017, 191).

All five interviews exhibit distinct characteristics, with respondents' experiences typically diverging from one another. Consequently, following the interviews, the achievement of complete empirical saturation remains elusive but a sufficient degree of recurring information exists within the respondents' narratives. The data collected offers a suitable foundation for addressing the research question. Given the individualized experiences and circumstances of each female entrepreneur, achieving saturation is a near-impossible endeavor. It is worth noting that the aim is not to construct an exact representation of reality, given the inclination

towards an interpretivist epistemological stance. Instead, the interviews suffice to provide an indicative glimpse into potential realities.

The rationale aligns with the perspectives presented by Bryman and Bell (2017, 413 & 416), who assert that there are essentially no predefined criteria for assessing whether a qualitative interview study has attained empirical saturation. This standpoint is further reinforced by Trost (2010, 144), who argues that interviews can be conducted until researchers perceive that sufficiency has been reached.

4.5.4 Interview procedure and Implementation of the interviews

In semi-structured interviews, it can be helpful to use an interview guide as a tool to ensure that the respondent stays within the relevant subject areas (Holme & Solvang, 1997, 100-101). This guide can include a number of prepared main and sub-questions because semi-structured interviews exist somewhere between an open conversation and a closed questionnaire (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019, 45).

In the interviews conducted for this thesis, it is of utmost importance to avoid leading questions, such as questions that might suggest that parenthood could negatively affect the respondent's business development. Most of the questions are open-ended, meaning they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. The goal is to allow the individual to develop their own perspective on the topic being discussed. This approach is supported by Bryman and Bell (2017, 456), who emphasize the importance of allowing the respondent in semi-structured interviews the freedom to interpret and articulate what they consider relevant and real. Even though the questions are open-ended, they are formulated in a way that clearly indicates the subject being addressed to avoid misunderstandings on the part of the respondent.

The interview guide for this thesis has been crafted with a foundation in the theoretical framework, aiming to align with the purpose of the thesis. The interview guide follows a structured approach where it commences with general questions about the respondent and her business. This serves a twofold purpose – to gather necessary information and to establish a relaxed atmosphere at the beginning of the interview, ensuring the respondent's comfort. The interview then delves into questions pertaining to various challenges. Particular attention is

paid to the phrasing of questions to ensure that respondents do not experience discomfort during the interview, especially in relation to sensitive topics such as the family puzzle.

A total of 5 interviews have been conducted, utilizing video calls via Zoom. The interview durations ranged from 25 to 40 minutes. The majority of these interviews took place in March and April 2024. The interviews commenced with an introductory phase where respondents were informed about Lund University's GDPR policy. It was explicitly stated that respondents had the right to maintain their anonymity, and their participation was entirely voluntary, aligning with the ethical considerations outlined in section 4.5.7.

Once the introductory phase was completed, the actual interviews began. Particular emphasis was placed on clarifying respondents' answers as comprehensively as possible, following the guidance of Kvale and Brinkmann (2019, 206). This approach is crucial for enhancing the overall quality of qualitative interviews. To ensure the well-being of respondents following the conversation, the recordings will be turned off after the interview, and respondents will be asked about their experience afterward. Notably, none of the respondents expressed any negative sentiments; quite the contrary, many indicated that the experience had been enlightening.

4.5.5 Management of collected data

Qualitative researchers often choose to record their interviews because this approach is considered convenient, as indicated by Bryman and Bell (2017, 460). Relying solely on notes can negatively impact the results, as important nuances in respondents' own words are often lost since these are rarely transcribed precisely. In the case of semi-structured interviews, it is also challenging to capture everything in notes, given that the interviewer does not strictly follow a set sequence but adapts to respondents' answers to ask follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 460).

The aim is to collect rich data regarding women's experiences and perspectives, which justifies the decision to record respondents. This method involves researchers transcribing the raw data collected, which is time-consuming but also offers an additional opportunity to ensure the accurate interpretation of various statements and perspectives within the material (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 465).

4.5.6 Quality criteria

To evaluate the quality of a study, important criteria include reliability and validity. In the context of this qualitative thesis, an adapted version of these criteria is applied, in accordance with the methodology outlined by Bryman and Bell (2017, 378 & 379).

Reliability refers to the extent to which a study's results are influenced by temporary or random factors. Higher reliability signifies more dependable research outcomes (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 68). In this thesis, the interviewed individuals exhibit diverse experiences and perceptions regarding challenges in female entrepreneurship. Consequently, if the same study were replicated with new respondents, especially within a different context, it is highly likely that the results would differ. This variance diminishes the external reliability of the study, implying that its findings cannot be confidently generalized to other groups or situations (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 32).

The reason for the study's compromised external reliability lies in the fact that each female entrepreneur operates within her unique social and business context. Therefore, a replicated study with different female entrepreneurs would probably yield distinct responses and perspectives based on their specific experiences and surroundings. Despite the detailed description of the methodology in the methods chapter, allowing for a similar replication, there exists inherent complexity when attempting to replicate precisely similar conditions, especially given the anonymity of the interview subjects.

To enhance the study's reliability and bolster its overall credibility, future research could consider conducting similar studies in different industries or geographical regions. This diversification would capture various viewpoints and experiences, thereby strengthening the study's validity and reliability.

This essay does not need to consider internal reliability considering there is only one researcher. Otherwise internal reliability is of good quality when the collaborating researchers agree on how to interpret what they see and hear (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 41).

The validity of a research result is crucial and is measured by how well the conclusions of a study represent reality (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 32). External validity is high when

research findings can be generalized to situations beyond the specific context of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 69). In this thesis, external validity is questioned since the results cannot be directly generalized to other female entrepreneurs. This is due to the thesis's perspective on reality and knowledge. Each respondent has unique experiences related to entrepreneurship and challenges that are context-dependent. Instead of generalizing across all female entrepreneurs' experiences, the conclusions aim to increase understanding of the various ways challenges can be experienced by female entrepreneurs in Sweden. The results in the thesis can evoke recognition and offer additional perspectives for other female entrepreneurs, rather than establishing exact correlations.

On the other hand, internal validity pertains to whether a conclusion reflects a sustainable causal relationship between two or more variables (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 69). When the results of a study authentically describe reality, the internal validity is considered high (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 32). By exploring how female entrepreneurs perceive challenges, the primary objective of the thesis is to enhance understanding of the phenomenon rather than providing a definitive explanation. In cases where the impact of different factors is discussed, the term "may" is used because the thesis does not establish any statistically causal relationships but rather speculates and explores various possibilities.

The respondents serve as a vital source of information, demanding careful consideration regarding their reliability. There have been no signs that the respondents have intentionally misled or provided false accounts. This aligns with the authenticity principle (Thurén & Strachal, 2011, 13-14). Female entrepreneurs who have experienced challenges were deliberately interviewed to accurately capture the phenomenon in the study. Thus, the criterion of contemporaneity is satisfied (Thurén & Strachal, 2011, 14-15).

Additionally, there is no reason to suspect that the respondents might distort reality due to economic, political, or personal motives, following the absence of bias principle (Thurén & Strachal, 2011, 18-19). While there is always a degree of uncertainty, especially given that these women run profit-oriented businesses and might want to present themselves positively, the assumption is that this is not the case, particularly since the entrepreneurs remain anonymous in the thesis.

Sources should be independent of other accounts (Thurén & Strachal, 2011, 17), a characteristic which has been aimed to maintain by focusing on the respondents' personal

experiences and perspectives during the interviews. This approach ensures that the collected information remains as impartial and autonomous as possible.

4.5.7 Ethical considerations

The work on this thesis is characterized by a commitment to honesty and ethical correctness. The approach and methodology of the thesis are presented in as much detail as possible to enhance transparency and facilitate the reader's understanding of the ethical conduct of the thesis. The research is based on several key ethical principles, including the requirements for information, consent, confidentiality, and use as outlined by Bryman & Bell (2017, 141). These principles form the basis to ensure that the thesis can be considered ethically conducted. The information requirement means that the researcher must clearly inform the respondents about the purpose of the study, that their participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time, and how the research process will be conducted. A standardized form is sent out before each interview to ensure that respondents receive the necessary information to fulfill the information requirement. This also includes the consent form according to Lund University's GDPR policy, which is both verbally approved and signed by the respondent at the beginning of each interview. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the thesis ensures that it is conducted honestly and ethically. This is crucial to maintain the integrity of the research and to respect the rights of the respondents throughout the process.

To fulfill the requirement of consent, it is necessary to inform the interview subjects that their participation is voluntary (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 141). Additionally, individuals must be provided with adequate information to make an informed decision about their participation. This is achieved by clarifying the purpose of the study and its research process (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 150-151). During the initial contact with all respondents, they are clearly informed that this thesis is conducted at Lund University. They are also provided with information about the researcher's identity and the purpose of the contact. Other details, including the objectives of the study and the information that their participation is voluntary, are included in the standardized form sent to the respondent before the interview commences. According to Bryman and Bell (2017, 151), it is difficult to fully adhere to the principle of consent because minor violations sometimes occur unintentionally. Nevertheless, to the best

of my ability, I have endeavored to inform the respondents about the factors they are entitled to know.

The confidentiality requirement includes the respondents' right to remain anonymous (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 141& 146-147). At the beginning of the interviews, it is explicitly stated that respondents have the right to anonymity if they wish. Just like with the consent requirement, utmost efforts are made to ensure that the material in the thesis cannot be linked to a specific respondent. In the analysis, the interviewees will be given short nicknames in order to give the readers an understanding of their backgrounds but still keep their anonymity. Moreover, only the interviewer and the thesis supervisor have access to the recordings made during the interviews and their corresponding transcriptions, both of which are destroyed upon the thesis's approval. This aligns with the usage requirement, meaning that the data collected can only be used for research purposes (Bryman & Bell, 2017, 141), something that respondents are assured of from the outset.

5. An analytical exploration of challenges, themes, contributing factors, proposed solutions, and policy implications

To study the challenges of female entrepreneurs in the Swedish business landscape and the initiatives that politicians can undertake to support female entrepreneurship, I have opted to use theory building process tracing and a qualitative text analysis in order to analyze the findings from the interviews. This kind of structural approach is fitting since it allows us to dig deeper into understanding the challenges of female entrepreneurs and pinpoint the actual factors that have influenced the outcome of such a low percentage of female entrepreneurs in Sweden. The previous sections laid the grounds for a series of questions that will be posed and answered based on the materials.

5.1 What specific challenges emerge in the interviews with female entrepreneurs?

Prejudices and stereotypes

In the interviews, it became clear that female entrepreneurs face significant biases and stereotypes that hinder their success. A central theme highlighted was the challenge that women face when they try to establish themselves as competent actors within their industries. One respondent expressed frustration over the expectation for women to be less dominant and more accommodating to male colleagues, undermining their professional authority (Consultant woman, Interview 1). It also emerged that financial institutions and other business entities often exhibit skepticism towards female entrepreneurs, despite their profitable and growing ventures (Investment woman, Interview 5). One respondent shared her experience of facing a skeptical auditor who doubted her company's potential, despite her forecasts proving accurate. "The interesting thing here is that it turned out exactly as I had calculated. I generated a million with ten% at the bottom line. It was a lesson. I learned then that maybe I don't need to listen to everyone..." (Talent supply woman, Interview 3). This quote illustrates the subtle yet significant role biases and stereotypes play in the business environment.

Another respondent working in a male-dominated industry recounted meeting a man with a prominent societal position who commented, "Oh, you're still around." (Consultant woman, Interview 1). This implies both surprise and a condescending attitude towards her as a woman and her business achievements. This could be interpreted as an expectation or preconceived notion that female entrepreneurs lack the same perseverance or success as their male counterparts (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, 3-5). The respondent challenged this insinuation, emphasizing that her company is still operational after eleven years. Her response challenges the implicit bias that her business would have gone bankrupt or failed. By responding in this way, she asserted both her competence and determination, demonstrating that she does not let herself be influenced by prejudices or condescending attitudes. Overall, this quote illustrates how biases and stereotypes can manifest in everyday interactions and how women in the business world face the challenge of confronting and overcoming such preconceived notions.

Stereotypes and biases within women's entrepreneurship often stem from a deeply rooted perception of gender created and maintained by society. According to Hirdman's theory of the social construction of gender, women are considered deviant from the normative man, meaning they are not attributed the same potential or ability as their male counterparts. This perception of gender roles and abilities shapes expectations and norms that characterize the experience of female entrepreneurs in the business world (Hirdman, 1988, 51-52). Börjesson and Rehn's reasoning about power reinforces this viewpoint by demonstrating how power differentials arise when groups differ, legitimizing the exercise of power over the "other" group. In business contexts, female entrepreneurs may thus be regarded as the "other" and subjected to the exercise of power by those holding the normative position, further reinforcing stereotypes and biases within entrepreneurship (Börjesson & Rehn, 2009, 16-17).

According to SIT, an individual's identity and self-perception are strongly shaped by their affiliation with various social groups (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4). The interviews clearly reflect how women in the business world face expectations and preconceived notions that limit their opportunities to establish themselves as competent players, which can be seen as a manifestation of in-group bias within SIT (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4). The skepticism and condescending attitudes female entrepreneurs encounter from financial institutions and male colleagues can be interpreted through this theoretical framework. Balachandra (2020) points out that decision-makers in the business world tend to have stronger social ties with individuals similar to themselves, leading them to prefer investing in and providing resources to individuals belonging to the same social group (Balachandra, 2020, 262-267).

Further, the interviews demonstrate respondents' experiences of how biases and stereotypes about gender power and differences can affect female entrepreneurs' opportunities for success. By applying SIT, the complex dynamics behind these biases and how they shape both individuals' identities and their opportunities for success in the business world can be understood (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10). This underscores the importance of not only identifying but also actively counteracting such preconceived notions to create a more inclusive and equitable business environment.

Legal requirements

During the interviews, the complex regulatory framework in Sweden and the EU was mentioned as a significant challenge for female entrepreneurs and often constitute a hindrance to their success. One respondent emphasized that it is a societal issue and that "...there are far too many tangled rules. And there's far too much nonsense going on." She also expressed frustration by saying, "Especially here in Sweden, we can't just sit in our little corner and have overly strict regulations. Because then we won't be able to compete with the competition that can come from anywhere nowadays." (Talent supply woman, Interview 3).

This clearly shows that for female entrepreneurs, the administrative burden is not only annoying but also deeply time-consuming. Navigating through the complex legislation and meeting the various requirements takes significant time and resources. The extensive time investment required to deal with the complex regulatory framework also diverts focus from the actual business operations, hindering entrepreneurs from engaging in more crucial tasks such as growth and innovation. For many female entrepreneurs, regulatory hassle and the intricate regulatory framework become discouraging obstacles that lead them to reconsider even starting or expanding their businesses. The administrative burden and the time-consuming process of meeting requirements drain energy and motivation from entrepreneurs, potentially reducing their chances of success (Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23).

A central aspect of gender theory is that gender is not a biological given but rather a social construction, meaning that norms and expectations surrounding gender are created and maintained by society. Within this framework, regulatory hassle and administrative burdens can be seen as a result of structures that do not consider or take for granted the needs and experiences of female entrepreneurs. By interpreting these challenges through a gender perspective, it becomes clear that they are not only practical obstacles but also about how societal norms and expectations shape women's opportunities for success as entrepreneurs. In a patriarchal structure, there may be a tendency to value traditional masculine traits and behaviors higher than those associated with the feminine. The administrative burdens and regulatory hassles faced by female entrepreneurs can therefore be interpreted as an expression of the structural inequality that characterizes society. Women may be expected to take on greater responsibility for administration and compliance with regulations, while men may have more leeway to focus on business development and innovation. In a patriarchal society,

rules and norms are often shaped based on men's needs and perspectives, which can create a skewed situation where women's needs and experiences are not fully considered. Since the majority of decision-makers in politics and business are still men, regulations may reflect and reinforce these men's perspectives and priorities (Hirdman, 1988, 51-52).

In the business world, this can manifest through regulations that do not consider the challenges and obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs in their operations. For example, tax laws, financial regulations, and requirements for business registration may be designed based on a norm of "ideal" business leaders, which traditionally have been male. These regulations may be less tailored to the specific challenges women face when running businesses, such as balancing entrepreneurship with caregiving responsibilities or navigating through biases and stereotypes within the business world. Additionally, regulatory hassles and the complex regulatory framework can exacerbate the structural inequalities already present in the business sector. Women may have less access to resources and networks to navigate the administrative burden and meet the requirements, making it harder for them to compete on equal terms with male entrepreneurs. This creates a vicious cycle where female entrepreneurs encounter barriers to growth and success that are partly created and reinforced by the patriarchal regulatory framework (Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23).

In summary, gender theory sheds light on how regulatory hassles and the complex regulatory framework not only pose practical obstacles for female entrepreneurs but also reflect the structural inequalities and expectations that characterize society.

The described experience of regulatory hassles and the complex regulatory framework for female entrepreneurs can also be analyzed through SIT, which explores how individuals construct their identity within social contexts (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4). According to SIT, people's self-perception and identity are shaped by their affiliation with various social groups, significantly influencing their behavior and perceptions. In this context, regulations and their impact on female entrepreneurs can be seen as a factor influencing their social identity and self-perceptions. Regulatory hassles and complex processes can create a sense of isolation and powerlessness, which in turn can negatively affect their self-image (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10). Female entrepreneurs may perceive themselves as outside the established business norm and encounter obstacles that others, mainly men, do not have to face.

Regulatory hurdles and the complex regulatory framework can be seen as a mechanism that reinforces existing social hierarchies and norms within the business world, creating an environment where female entrepreneurs encounter specific challenges and obstacles due to their gender identity. This underscores the need to identify and address challenging regulations to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for female entrepreneurs to operate within.

Knowledge, attitude and role models

The lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship and business operations can be crucial for why women hesitate to take the step of starting their own businesses. Without sufficient understanding of the process and the requirements that come with running a business, the risk may be perceived as too high. The challenges that come with managing everything from finances to marketing and legal requirements can seem overwhelming and discouraging for those who lack adequate knowledge. This lack of understanding can lead women to not see business ownership as a realistic career path, as they do not perceive themselves as having the competence and capacity required to succeed (Investment woman, Interview 5 & Tillväxtverket, 2023, 18).

A negative attitude towards business and entrepreneurship can also play a significant role. If society generally holds preconceived notions about women's business ventures and views it as less suitable or successful than traditional career paths, this can undermine women's confidence and motivation. Women may feel discouraged from pursuing their entrepreneurial ambitions if they are not encouraged or supported by society at large (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 18-19). This is not improved by the fact that business and entrepreneurship have been perceived as a male domain for several decades, and women may feel excluded or not sufficiently welcomed in that sphere. The lack of female role models or successful female entrepreneurs to look up to can make it difficult for women to envision themselves succeeding in business. This lack of representation can reinforce stereotypes and doubts about women's ability to run businesses, thereby further reducing their motivation to pursue the entrepreneurial path. For the diversity of role models, one can point to the overwhelming majority of men in business and their greater ownership of business assets compared to women. Given this dominance of male actors, it is crucial to also include male role models in

the discussion about promoting women's business involvement. One respondent mentioned that "... get more men to be role models for women and for men, for girls and for boys. Because if they were, then we could really create a system shift..." (Talent supply woman, Interview 3). Having more male role models who support and encourage women and girls to strive for business leadership can create a more equitable and inclusive business climate. By male leaders taking on the role of role models for both women and men, they can contribute to a paradigm shift in how companies hire, promote, and support initiatives. By including men as role models, we can create a culture where everyone, regardless of gender, is encouraged to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions and where diversity and equality are promoted as a central part of business operations (Talent supply woman, Interview 3 & Coaching woman, Interview 4).

However, it is important to emphasize that role models alone cannot solve the problem of the lack of female entrepreneurs. Having more visible female role models is certainly positive and can inspire and motivate other women to follow in their footsteps. But it is important to remember that role models are more of a result than a solution to the problem. To create more female role models in the business world, a more comprehensive change in structures and attitudes that hinder women's participation and success in this area is required. Increasing the representation of role models is a consequence of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for female entrepreneurs to operate within. It is about addressing the structural and systematic barriers that women face. By creating a more gender-equal and supportive culture in the business world, it becomes possible for more women to succeed and thereby serve as role models for future generations. Therefore, role models are a manifestation of successful change in structures and attitudes, rather than a single solution to the problem of the lack of female entrepreneurs (Talent supply woman, Interview 3).

The lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship and business operations can be understood through Hirdman's theory of the gender system. According to Hirdman, society's norms and expectations create distinctions between genders, where men are often considered the norm and women are seen as deviating from this norm (Hirdman, 1988, 52-55). The historical perspective where business is traditionally viewed as a male domain reinforces this gender order and contributes to the exclusion of women and their insufficient representation in entrepreneurship. This inadequate representation of women in business is also reflected in negative attitudes toward women's participation, which reinforces the power relations

embedded in gender relations. Hirdman discusses this by highlighting how the reinforcement of stereotypes and doubts about women's ability to run businesses contributes to maintaining the social order where men are seen as the norm and women are viewed as deviant (Hirdman, 1988, 59-61). Börjesson and Rehn's analysis of power relations complements this understanding by highlighting how differences between groups, including gender, give rise to opportunities for oppression and dominance. This occurs by creating an "other" group to relate to, legitimizing the exercise of power (Börjesson & Rehn, 2009, 16-17). These power relations reinforce the hierarchical system where men occupy a superior position compared to women in business and entrepreneurship.

According to SIT, people's self-image and behavior are strongly influenced by their membership in social groups. Women who do not belong to the social group of entrepreneurs and business leaders may therefore lack confidence and perception of their ability to succeed in this area. This can be seen as a result of women not identifying with the inner circle of business and entrepreneurship, which can create a sense of exclusion and uncertainty about their own abilities. Negative attitudes towards business and entrepreneurship can reinforce these feelings of exclusion and lack of confidence. According to social identity theory, people tend to favor members of their own social group and devalue members of other groups. If society generally looks down on women's business ventures compared to traditional career paths, this can undermine women's confidence and willingness to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4).

The lack of representation of female role models in the business world exacerbates the situation by reinforcing stereotypes and doubts about women's ability to run businesses. SIT explains how individuals tend to identify with and emulate members of their own social group. If there are few or no successful female role models in entrepreneurship, women may have difficulty envisioning themselves as successful business leaders (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10).

Public procurement

In the interviews, it emerged that a challenge for women-owned businesses to grow is public procurement. Many women run solo and micro-businesses, often within the lifestyle sector.

One of the main challenges with public procurement is the high requirements for participation. Many public procurements demand that companies have significant turnover or employees, which can be difficult for solo and micro-entrepreneurs to meet. For women running businesses in the lifestyle sector, where operations are often small-scale and creative, the requirements for turnover and employees can be particularly challenging. These women may be experts in their fields and run their businesses with passion and skill, but they may still be hindered from participating in public procurement due to strict criteria that do not consider the specific business model within the lifestyle sector (Coaching woman, Interview 4).

For many female entrepreneurs the lack of understanding of the procurement process and its requirements is also a significant obstacle. Coaching women mentioned that "...it's a lot to get into and it's not just, so to speak. And working in the public sector and with tenders and procurements...I really think it's a completely crazy world. And very square and a lot of work.". This shows that public procurement can be a complex process with many rules and procedures that can be difficult to navigate for those without experience. This can lead to many women refraining from attempting to participate in the procurement process, even though their businesses could offer valuable products or services to the public sector (Coaching woman, Interview 4).

Furthermore, it is common for public procurements to be based on the lowest price, which does not always correspond with the highest quality. This creates an additional challenge for female entrepreneurs, especially those in the lifestyle sector where quality and unique products or services are often more important than competing on price. Women who strive to offer products or services of high quality may therefore find themselves in an unsuitable position when attempting to participate in the procurement process. The focus on the lowest price in public procurement usually benefits large companies with resources to produce at low costs (Talent supply woman, Interview 3). This can disadvantage small-scale or solo entrepreneurs where the business may not be optimized to compete on price. As a result, many qualified female entrepreneurs may be deterred from participating in public procurement.

The emphasis on turnover and employment criteria can have a disproportionate impact on individual and micro-entrepreneurs, where the majority are women in these sectors. These

criteria reflect societal norms that prioritize masculine traits associated with larger businesses, thus reinforcing the gender norm where men are seen as the standard (Hirdman, 1988, p. 52). Furthermore, the focus on the lowest price in public procurement exacerbates the challenges for female businesses, especially in sectors where quality and uniqueness are valued more than price competition. This emphasis on cost-saving measures benefits larger companies with resources to produce at lower costs and disadvantages smaller businesses, many of which are owned by women (Hirdman, 1988, 53).

In public procurement, where masculine traits and traditional business models are favored, female entrepreneurs may find themselves in a marginalized and disadvantaged position due to deviation from the expectations within the male-dominated business sphere (Börjesson & Rehn, 2009, 16-17). The criteria for public procurement, even though they may seem neutral, reflect societal norms that prioritize traits associated with larger, more traditional companies and reinforce gender norms where men are seen as the standard (Hirdman, 1988, 52). Biases from decision-makers in public procurement can favor individuals similar to their own societal group, thereby reinforcing existing divides (Balachandra, 2020, 262-267).

Going from employee to entrepreneur and handling work- life balance

In the interviews, it emerged that many women experience the transition from being an employee to becoming an entrepreneur as a big uncertain step, especially when they have a family to take care of. Transitioning from being an employee to becoming an entrepreneur is a major and complex shift, and there are several factors that make the process more challenging when one has a family to consider.

Firstly, there are concerns regarding the security systems that come with employment. As an employee, you have benefits such as health insurance, parental leave, and pension plans, which provide a certain level of security. When becoming an entrepreneur, one must manage these security systems independently, which can be complicated and uncertain. If you resign to start your own business and become ill to the extent that you cannot work, you for example, do not have access to unemployment benefits (A-kassa). Investment woman mentioned that “For example, if you are a job seeker, you could start a company and create jobs instead. And then get access to the unemployment benefits. Today it is negative. If you

start a company, they have to see if you make money or not. If you earn money, you don't get social security and then you end up with no money. Then it might be too big a risk. I can't do that and so you continue to work.” This shows that there is a risk of losing the financial stability that employment can offer, and this becomes particularly challenging when one has a family to support (Investment woman, Interview 5 & Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19-20).

Secondly, entrepreneurship entails significant economic risk and uncertainty. Starting a business often involves investing a lot of time, energy, and money without any guarantees of success. For many, it's a considerable risk to take, especially when one has a family to care for and financial obligations to meet. There's always the risk that the business may not become profitable, and one may lose the investments made. Additionally, work life and family life can conflict when running a business. Finding a balance between work and family can be challenging because running a business requires a lot of time and commitment and isn't a typical 9-5 job. Many entrepreneurs experience significant workloads and struggle to prioritize between spending time with family and focusing on driving the business forward (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19-20).

The gender-based system is characterized by stereotypical expectations of women's and men's roles in society, which can lead to women feeling greater pressure to maintain both professional and familial obligations compared to men. This division of roles and expectations can make it difficult for women to find a balance between work life and family life when running a business. Women may struggle to manage the increased workload as entrepreneurs while trying to meet the needs and expectations of their families. This can affect their ability to succeed as entrepreneurs because they may feel they don't have enough time and energy to drive the business forward while taking care of the family. Therefore, it becomes important to recognize and address the gender-based norms and expectations that affect women's and men's opportunities to balance work and family life to promote equality and inclusion within the business world (Hirdman, 1988, 59-61).

A central part of SIT is the idea of group membership and how it affects an individual's self-image and behavior. When women consider becoming entrepreneurs, there is a change in their social identity. From being part of an employed group with associated security systems and benefits, such as health insurance and parental leave, they are now considering stepping outside of this security to become entrepreneurs. This change can be particularly challenging

for women who are accustomed to the stability and security that employment can offer, especially when they have families to consider. This uncertainty can be especially hard for women with families to take care of, as they not only need to consider their own financial situation but also the well-being of their families. As part of the social identity as a woman and a parent, the idea of risking the family's financial security can be a significant barrier to becoming an entrepreneur (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10).

Venture capital/investments

In the interviews, it became clear that access to capital and investments poses a significant obstacle for women looking to develop their businesses. The interpretation of the observations was that the majority of capital tends to go to male entrepreneurs. Investment woman shared her experience where she discovered that her investment of 25 million SEK was the first investment in a woman of over one billion SEK (Investment woman, Interview 5). This experience highlights the enormous gap in the allocation of capital between genders.

Many investors seem to perceive it as a greater risk to invest in women than men because they view being a woman as a weakness, an obstacle, and this may be because they believe that women will lose focus due to, among other things, potentially wanting to have children in the near future. Investment woman mentioned that she was told by an investor that it was too risky to invest in her company early on. However, she countered by stating that she was the one who had quit her job and was without a steady income. This means that she is taking the risk and the investor is only investing their extra money. She will work hard to survive, and the investor will make money from it (Investment woman, Interview 5). The stereotypical image of an entrepreneur is a man in a suit, which makes it difficult for many investors to envision a woman as a successful entrepreneur (Malmström et al., 2017, 19-21).

Men are overrepresented in the finance and capital industry, both public and private, and research shows that investors prefer to invest in people they identify with (Justo et al., 2018, 7-10). This imbalance results in women having less access to capital, thereby hindering them from growing and developing their businesses in the same way as men.

The unequal access to capital for women in the business world can be seen within the framework of gender stereotypes, power structures and SIT. By positioning men traditionally as the norm, where women's roles and attributes are perceived as deviant or subordinate, it becomes clear how investors, often identified as men, tend to favor their male counterparts. This disparity underscores the influence of social identity on resource allocation, wherein decision-makers may subconsciously favor individuals belonging to their own social group, perpetuating existing gender biases (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 2-4). The notion that women pose a greater risk for investments than men, partly due to expectations of family responsibilities and lack of focus, reinforces the hierarchical structures discussed by Hirdman. This can be seen as an expression of the power structure where the one considered as the norm, in this case men, holds the advantage and can thus subordinate the other group, in this case women. Hirdman describes this as an invisible agreement between men and women regulating their expected behaviors and roles, where women often receive a lower status than men (Hirdman, 1988, 52-55). This perception aligns with SIT's notion of in-group bias, where individuals tend to favor traits and norms associated with their own social group while derogating those of out-groups (Gaffney & Hogg, 2023, 7-10). The phenomenon of the overrepresentation of men in the finance and capital industry exemplifies how social identity influences decision-making processes, as individuals tend to establish connections and networks with those similar to them, further entrenching existing biases (Balachandra, 2020, 262-267).

5.2 Are there any specific factors, such as cultural, economic or social, that contribute to these challenges?

In Sweden, society is characterized by efforts towards gender equality and a strong emphasis on the balance between work and family life. Nevertheless, there are still cultural expectations and stereotypes regarding gender and entrepreneurship that can affect women's opportunities to start and run their own businesses. It is widely recognized today that work and family life influence each other (Allvin et al., 2011). This mutual influence can be beneficial but also lead to conflicts in balancing the two areas of life (Allvin et al., 2011). There may be a perception that women should prioritize family life over their careers, which can make it difficult for them to find support and resources to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions. Gender is an important component in explaining the relationship between balance and well-being. Even in gender-equal countries, women are expected to both work and be the primary caregivers in the family (Allvin et al., 2011). Just like in the Swedish population, it is a recurring pattern over time that women spend more hours than men on unpaid household work and childcare, even though women today participate in the labor force to almost the same extent as men (Statistiska centralbyrån [SCB], 2022). This cultural factor emphasizes the importance of continuing to educate and engage society to break stereotypes and create a more inclusive environment for female entrepreneurs to operate within.

There are also social factors that affect the challenges of starting a business. For example, the challenging workload for entrepreneurs compared to employees. Running your own business often requires significantly more work, especially when you alone or with a few partners are responsible for everything from paperwork to sales. To complement any lack of financial skills and ability to market oneself, it requires someone with a business-minded approach, who can network and sell the product. The industry knowledge and product expertise of the entrepreneur are crucial to meet the needs and desires of customers (Hult, 1985, 25-27). Another social factor that stops many from starting a business is the risk involved. Managing and reducing risk-taking requires good knowledge of production and demand. The entrepreneur risks their family life as business operations often require an intensive workload and can take time away from the family. This can also lead to psychological pressure as failures can reduce confidence and lead to mental health problems. The psychological pressure can also be exacerbated by the social stigmatization surrounding failures and lack of success in the business world. Many entrepreneurs feel pressured to present a facade of

success and competence, which can lead them to not dare to ask for help or support when they need it most (Hult, 1985, 25-27).

There are also economic factors that contribute to these challenges. For individuals considering transitioning from being employees to becoming entrepreneurs, access to sufficient capital is a central issue. Creating and running a business typically requires a significant investment, and the lack of financial resources can pose a major obstacle. The transition to entrepreneurship also entails increased risk and uncertainty regarding economic stability and income. Many employees are hesitant to leave their secure positions to start their own ventures due to the uncertainty associated with running a business.

To start or expand a business, external financing is often required, but accessing capital can be difficult for new entrepreneurs as mentioned in section “Venture capital/Investments”. Banks and investors are often unwilling to finance new ventures due to the high risk of failure. This lack of funding can, in turn, be a significant barrier for those looking to realize their business ideas (Coleman & Robb, 2009, 409-410). Another economic factor that can affect entrepreneurs is their ability to win public procurement contracts. For many entrepreneurs, public procurement represents a crucial market, but competing with established companies that already have experience and resources to handle the administrative and financial burden associated with public contracts can be challenging. The lack of prior experience and references can make it difficult for new entrepreneurs to win public procurement contracts and access this important market.

5.3 What solutions are proposed, and how are they justified?

In the interviews, it is mentioned that many women start sole proprietorships instead of limited companies, and that this entails a greater financial risk (Consultant woman, Interview 1). Since starting a limited company incurs costs unlike a sole proprietorship, it becomes a financial risk in the initial stage, but afterward, there is less financial risk associated with a limited company because the owner is not personally liable if something goes wrong. The solution to this is to educate women about the differences between various types of companies and encourage them to take the step of starting a limited company. A limited company offers clear separation between the company and its owner, providing the most comprehensive financial protection for the owner as an individual. Typically, the owner only risks the capital invested in the company. This corporate structure is particularly suitable when starting a business with significant financial risks or extensive operations. However, the owner may become personally liable for the company's taxes and fees (Skatteverket, 2024). Considering the legal protection that this type of company offers, it can be considered preferable if the company plans to hire employees (Företagande, 2024).

Another obstacle mentioned during the interviews was the absence of a "start your own business" grant for everyone. Consultant woman mentioned that she resigned from her job to start her own business but couldn't apply for the "start your own business" grant because she chose to resign rather than being laid off. The "start your own business" grant was only available to those who had been laid off or had been long-term unemployed/long-term sick leave. The respondent mentioned that this grant is great, but it may not have the greatest impact on those who have been unemployed or on sick leave for a long period as they may not have the energy or motivation to start their own business, unlike someone who actively chooses to resign to start their own business (Consultant woman, Interview 1). Today, there is a "start your own business" grant available through the Swedish Public Employment Service, but it applies only to those who are unemployed, with exceptions for residents in certain sparsely populated municipalities in Norrland and Central Sweden (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2024). One solution could be that anyone who wants to start a business should be able to apply for the grant regardless of whether they have been laid off or resigned voluntarily.

The lack of role models is also mentioned as a challenge in the interviews. Therefore, to increase the number of women starting businesses, a diversity of role models is required, both

male and female. Having access to diverse role models, regardless of gender, is crucial to inspire and support young female entrepreneurs. By showcasing successful women and men across various industries and sectors, we can create a more inclusive and inspiring environment for aspiring entrepreneurs. The diversity in role models can help break down stereotypes and norms surrounding gender and entrepreneurship, while also increasing opportunities for women to identify with different business models and career paths. With a mix of male and female role models, a broader spectrum of inspiration and motivation for women to pursue their business ambitions and step into entrepreneurship can be created (Interview 1,2,3,4 and 5).

In all interviews, there was an understanding that the regulatory framework for entrepreneurship in Sweden needs to be reviewed and modernized to meet today's challenges and promote growth. An important aspect of this is the need for regulatory simplification to facilitate the establishment and growth of businesses. Simplifying regulations is crucial to make it easier for companies to navigate the complex administrative landscape. By reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and building more efficient and user-friendly processes, resources can be freed up, enabling businesses to focus on their core activities and innovation (Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23).

Another important aspect highlighted is the need to review the social insurance legislation to ensure that it not only benefits employment but also entrepreneurship. Currently, some rules and benefits may be more favorable for employees than for entrepreneurs, creating an imbalance in incentives and hindering entrepreneurship. By reviewing and adjusting the regulatory framework, a more favorable environment for entrepreneurship and business in Sweden can be created. This would not only benefit entrepreneurs and businesses but also contribute to increased employment, growth, and innovation in the economy as a whole (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19-20).

One of the solutions mentioned to address the problem of the unequal distribution of capital is to "share the pot" (Investment woman, Interview 5). This is to create incentives that make it easier to access capital. In practice, this means that the state funds investing in entrepreneurs today should be divided into two pots, one for innovation and one for other companies. Currently, almost all of the state investment capital is based on supporting innovative companies, and when applying for grants, it's the innovation aspect that is looked

at. However, there are many companies that are good and profitable but not innovation-focused. Women mostly run lifestyle businesses rather than innovative companies. The proposed solution is therefore that these two pots should also be dedicated 50% to men and 50% to women. This way, the best companies still receive capital, but everyone is compared on the same terms instead of men versus women and stereotypes therefore do not pose any obstacles (Investment woman, Interview 5).

5.4 How can the insights from the analysis be used to develop measures and promote equal entrepreneurship for women?

As mentioned in section 5.1 prejudices and stereotypes are obstacles to women's entrepreneurship. To change these stereotypes and promote a more fair and inclusive business culture, active combating of preconceived notions is required. The first step to do this should be to gather data. Research and data collection form the basis for well-informed decisions (Skolverket, 2024). By utilizing the data collected, politicians can implement specific measures to promote women's entrepreneurship and with a solid foundation, politicians can support their policy initiatives and argue why funding should be allocated from the budget to entrepreneurship.

Another step to change the stereotypes may be to initiate various educational programs to increase awareness of the biases entrenched in the business world. By actively educating about unconscious biases from a young age, more women will dare to start businesses, and more men will understand their preconceived notions and actively strive for a more inclusive workplace (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 18). For example, within the finance industry, decision-makers are mainly men and often give funding to other men who they can identify with. If they are equipped with tools to recognize their biases and overcome them when interacting with female entrepreneurs it would be easier for women to receive funding (Justo et al, 2018, 7-10). In the interviews, quotas for women in corporate boards and companies were also discussed (Consultant & Investment woman, Interview 1 & 5). It is absolutely necessary to increase the representation of women in leadership positions and to work towards women being appointed to key positions and board positions as this can ensure diverse perspectives in important decision-making processes (Lorenzo et al, 2018). Highlighting successful female entrepreneurs through various channels can also help challenge stereotypes and inspire others. Politicians therefore need to look over the possibilities to use quotas in order to promote female entrepreneurs.

As mentioned in section 5.1, the administrative burden and complexity of regulations pose a significant challenge for many female entrepreneurs. This is particularly evident among small business owners, where women often are overrepresented. Women running their own businesses must often navigate through a bureaucratic maze on their own. It takes them

longer to understand and comply with regulations because they often have to balance the administrative burden with running their core operations. The time spent to understand complex rules and filling out forms is time taken away from developing and expanding their businesses (Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23).

In order to create a more fair and inclusive business environment, politicians must therefore prioritize reducing the administrative burden faced by female entrepreneurs. This requires making regulations and guidelines even more accessible and understandable for everyone, regardless of gender or company size. By providing clear and user-friendly digital tools, as well as access to adequate support and guidance, politicians can facilitate female entrepreneurs' management of regulations in an efficient manner. By reducing the administrative burden for female entrepreneurs, not only will gender equality and equity in the business sector be promoted, but it will also stimulate growth and create more sustainable job opportunities. It is therefore of utmost importance that political efforts and regulatory measures prioritize easing the path for women to operate and develop their businesses without unnecessary administrative obstacles.

In section 5.1 it is mentioned that some challenges that female entrepreneurs often encounter when starting their business is the lack of knowledge and the attitude they receive. To counter this, politicians could invest in various educational programs such as "Ung Företagsamhet" to increase knowledge about entrepreneurship and business operations among women (Tech & Investment woman, Interview 2 & 5). Politicians can also invest in programs that conduct workshops, seminars, and training sessions focused on explaining the process of starting and running a business, as well as providing resources to handle various aspects of entrepreneurship, such as financing, marketing, and legal requirements. If investing in private companies is problematic, they could instead task various government agencies such as Tillväxtverket with conducting similar initiatives for entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. Politicians could also provide financial support to assist female entrepreneurs in starting and running their businesses. This could include access to startup capital, grants, and specific loans aimed at helping women overcome the financial challenges they face, such as those encountered with banks and investors.

Although there is no statistical evidence that role models contribute to more entrepreneurs, it is frequently mentioned in the interviews that it does have an impact. Therefore, politicians

could task a government agency to implement mentorship programs for female entrepreneurs. Mentorship programs create opportunities for women to connect with mentors and like-minded individuals who can offer guidance, support, and encouragement as they navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship. Through collaboration between established entrepreneurs and aspiring female business owners, knowledge and resources can be shared, further empowering women in the business world. It may also be a good idea to highlight established female entrepreneurs to show the public and specifically women that entrepreneurship is indeed a viable alternative to being employed (Interview 1,2,3,4 & 5).

In section 5.1, the analysis examines how public procurement acts as a challenge for female entrepreneurs. In order for politicians to promote a more inclusive environment for female entrepreneurs in public procurement, a reassessment of the entire procurement process is required. It is necessary to adopt a more balanced approach that considers not only price but also quality, diversity, and innovation within the public sector. A first step could be to raise awareness of these issues among those responsible for the procurement process. This could involve offering training and workshops to inform about the importance of diversity and inclusion in public procurement and how it can be promoted through appropriate strategies and methods. Politicians can also reform the procurement process itself by introducing guidelines and regulations that promote the participation of female entrepreneurs. This could involve introducing quotas or targets for SME participation in procurement (as women primarily run SMEs), or providing benefits or incentives to companies that promote diversity and gender equality in their operations. It is also important to ensure that the procurement process is transparent and accessible to all businesses. This may involve simplifying the application and documentation process, providing support and guidance for less experienced entrepreneurs, and ensuring that information about procurement and opportunities is clear and easily accessible (Talent supply & Coaching woman, Interview 3 & 4).

By taking these actions, politicians could create a more fair and inclusive procurement environment that opens up opportunities for more female entrepreneurs to participate and grow their businesses within the public sector. This not only promotes gender equality and diversity but can also lead to a more dynamic and competitive public sector through increased innovation and a broader range of suppliers.

In section 5.1 it is discussed how going from being an employee to an entrepreneur and handling work-life balance can be very challenging. Here, politicians can play a crucial role in facilitating the transition from being an employee to becoming a business owner, especially considering the additional challenges women often face due to family responsibilities. Politicians can improve the social security for entrepreneurs by creating support systems similar to those available to employees, such as health insurance, parental leave, and pension plans. By ensuring that entrepreneurs have access to these benefits, they can mitigate the risk of financial instability when transitioning from employment to entrepreneurship. They can also establish economic safety nets for individuals considering starting their own businesses, such as unemployment benefits or income protection systems. This can help reduce the fear of financial losses associated with starting and running a business, thereby making the transition less daunting (Tillväxtverket, 2023, 19-20).

Furthermore, it is important for politicians to actively work to break down gender-based norms and expectations that disproportionately pressure women to balance both professional and family obligations. By promoting gender equality and inclusion in the business world, they can create an environment where women feel capable of running businesses without feeling constrained by traditional gender roles. This may involve supporting initiatives that promote parental leave for both women and men and encouraging a corporate culture that values work-life balance and flexibility (Hirdman, 2001, 26-37).

In order for politicians to solve the unequal allocation of capital between men and women there are certain actions and policy measures to take. They can start by increasing the transparency and accountability in the allocation, this to ensure that the decisions are based on merit rather than gender. Politicians also need to challenge the stereotypes that contribute to the unequal distribution of capital. They can educate the investors about stereotypes and implement clear guidelines for how the allocation should be decided. They also need to show the investors that women can be successful entrepreneurs and this relates back to the important measure of promoting female entrepreneurs as role models ((Eurochambres, 2023, 22-23 & Coleman & Robb, 2009, 409-410).

6. Discussion: Dealing with history while creating the future

The analysis above sought to identify the challenges female entrepreneurs in Sweden encounter when trying to start and expand their company and find solutions for the government to implement that can help solve or at least ease these challenges. During the interviews many challenges were commonly mentioned, such as stereotypes, legal requirements, role models, public procurement and investment disparities, which all affect female entrepreneurship. The analysis identifies various specific factors, including cultural, economic, and social aspects. Despite Sweden's continuous efforts towards gender equality, cultural expectations and stereotypes persist. Socially, the demanding workload, risk aversion, and psychological pressures associated with entrepreneurship, compounded by social stigmatization, often hinder women from starting or wanting to expand their businesses. Economically, limited access to capital and public procurement contracts pose significant challenges for female entrepreneurs, exacerbating the gender disparity in entrepreneurship. To address these challenges several solutions are proposed such as educating investors, reforming grant eligibility criteria to be more inclusive, and increasing the diversity of role models in entrepreneurship. Regulatory frameworks also need to be looked over to simplify processes and ensure equal access to opportunities. Measures such as "sharing the pot" in funding allocations and promoting transparency in procurement processes aimed to address economic barriers are mentioned. And maybe most importantly long term are initiatives to combat stereotypes, provide educational support, and enhance social security for entrepreneurs.

The constructivist approach in the analysis allowed for the exploration of how cultural, economic, and social factors shape the experiences of female entrepreneurs, recognizing that reality is constructed through social interactions and interpretations. Similarly, the interpretivist perspective guided the study to understand the subjective experiences and meanings attributed to entrepreneurship by women, emphasizing qualitative goals and policy measures that address the nuanced challenges they face. Since this study adopts a qualitative research approach, the results have been generalized, which means that the findings are not "the truth" but rather illuminate multiple perspectives on the current situation. The obstacles experienced by the women interviewed in the entrepreneurial process were analyzed by

taking the entrepreneurial process and reconstructing it with the theories of gender theory and SIT, which are relevant for understanding the issues and finding solutions to the problem.

This thesis found that the central challenges are stereotypes, complex legal requirements, public procurement and investment disparities and therefore to effectively promote women's entrepreneurship, it is essential to define a goal that is both relevant and functional. This goal should not only consider the differences that exist between women and men when it comes to entrepreneurship but also how the conditions under which entrepreneurship is conducted can influence these obstacles and disparities. It is essential that we look at previous research and challenges that female entrepreneurs encounter in the light of finding solutions rather than just identifying what the problems are, so that we can finally deal with the history of gendering entrepreneurship as we create the future.

The problem is not necessarily that women, in general, start fewer businesses than men, but rather that it is political measures that hinder women from fully realizing their entrepreneurial potential. The conclusion of the analysis in this essay, therefore, advocates for a qualitative goal to promote women's entrepreneurship, rather than a quantitative one. The goal does not need to be that a certain percentage of the population should be entrepreneurs, but rather that those who want to start a business should be able to do so without worrying about the barriers that currently prevent many. Such a policy should strive to create an environment where women's entrepreneurial endeavors are encouraged rather than hindered. It is important to avoid measures that make entrepreneurship less attractive compared to being employed. The advantage of such a strategy is that it benefits not only women but also men interested in running businesses by reducing the level of risk. However, the effect of such a policy is expected to be greater for women, as they are more often negatively affected by risk factors than men (Svenskt näringsliv 2023, 38). The overarching goal is to create incentives for women who might otherwise refrain from starting businesses due to existing regulations to choose entrepreneurship. The regulations should also be designed not to inhibit decisions regarding hiring staff or expanding the business.

By having a qualitative goal that promotes women's entrepreneurship, we can create a more inclusive and favorable business environment for all stakeholders in the entrepreneurial arena. This goal is also more practically applicable when designing policy decisions and regulations, increasing its relevance and feasibility in practice.

7. Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

For future research, a deeper exploration is suggested within cultural and sociological domains, with a particular focus on gender and cultural background. Conducting international comparisons of female entrepreneurship to investigate cultural differences and potential barriers to entrepreneurship would be intriguing. One respondent highlighted significant differences in the business climate between other EU countries and Sweden, prompting interest in comparative studies across different geographic regions. Furthermore, studies could encompass various age groups, industries, and regional perspectives, such as comparisons between rural and urban environments. By exploring these variables, research can provide insights into how different factors influence women's entrepreneurial engagement and what measures can be taken to promote a more inclusive and favorable business environment for women worldwide.

Qualifying for parental leave benefits as a business owner compared to as an employee can pose a challenge, especially for women. This may result in women choosing to postpone the decision to become entrepreneurs in order to first build up a sufficient income basis for parental leave. This delay in transitioning to entrepreneurship can, in turn, lead to women either refraining from starting businesses altogether or to their business activities being more conservative and less expansive than they otherwise could be. Thus, it becomes clear that this issue deserves further investigation and in-depth studies to understand its full implications and potential solutions.

As mentioned in the analysis and conclusion one challenge for female entrepreneurs is the extensive legal requirements. While conducting this thesis the Swedish government launched a new simplification council as part of their offensive simplification agenda. The purpose of the council is to reduce companies regulatory burden and administrative costs. Among other things, the council is supposed to propose how existing Swedish regulations can be simplified and submit proposals for other simplification measures that will make it easier for companies to comply with the regulations. It would be beneficial to conduct future research to see if the efforts from the council will benefit female entrepreneurs both in the short term but also long term.

Finally, during one of the interviews, opinions were expressed regarding business support and a perceived imbalance where men tend to be favored over women. There was a sense that grants and support are more generously provided to industries dominated by men compared to those where women are more represented. These insights highlight an important aspect of gender equality issues in the business world and point to the need to examine and reassess existing support systems from a gender perspective or a broader societal perspective. An investigation that takes into account gender-specific and societal factors can contribute to a more equitable distribution of resources and support to different industries and businesses, thereby promoting a more gender-equal and inclusive business environment.

8. Appendix

Interview guide

Inledning:

- Berätta om ditt företag, hur startades det, när, hur ser företaget ut idag, anställda?
- Varför startade du ditt företag? Vad sysselsatte du dig med innan och vad var det som gjorde att du tog steget?
- Vad var din största drivkraft vid uppstarten?
- Vad är det som driver och motiverar dig idag?
- Tog du del av några stödprogram vid startandet av ditt företag? Om ja, hur upplevde du det?

Tema 1: Kapitalförsörjning

- Har du tagit in riskkapital eller ängelinvesteringar i ditt nuvarande företag?

Tema 2: Förebilder

- Hade du någon förebild som inspirerade dig att starta ditt första företag?
- Tycker du att förebilder spelar en viktig roll för att främja kvinnligt företagande?

Tema 3: Utmaningar

- Vilka utmaningar upplevde du när du startade företaget?
- Vilka utmaningar har du upplevt när du försökt utveckla och expandera företaget?
- Vilka attityder har du upplevt hos de intressenter ditt företag har? Har du upplevt att du blivit bemött på något särskilt sätt just för att du är kvinnlig företagare?
Intressenter kan vara kunder, bank, leverantörer och anställda.
- Hur ser din familjesituation ut?
- Hur fungerar familjepusslet för dig? Hur balanserar du familj och företagande?

Avslutande frågor

- Finns det några lagförslag du tror behöver ändras för att fler ska starta företag?
- Vilka satsningar på kvinnors företagande skulle du vilja se?
- Vad tror du skulle krävas för att fler kvinnor ska starta eget?

9. References

- Acs, Z., (2006). How is Entrepreneurship Good for Economic Growth? *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, vol. 1, pp. 98-107, Available Online: <https://watermark.silverchair.com/itgg.2006.1.1.97.pdf?token=A> (Retrieved: 08/01/2024).
- Ahl, H. & Marlow, S. (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, Vol. 19(5), pp. 543-562 (1-26).
- Alvesson, M & Sköldböck, K. (1994). *Tolkning & Reflektion*. Studentlitteratur: Lund.
- Allvin, M., Aronsson, G., Hagström, T., Johansson, G. and Lundberg, U. (2011). Work Life, Stress, and the New Ill Health. In *Work Without Boundaries* (eds M. Allvin, G. Aronsson, T. Hagström, G. Johansson and U. Lundberg).
<https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1002/9781119991236.ch5>
- Arbetsförmedlingen. (2024). Starta eget, stöd till start av näringsverksamhet. <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/for-arbetssookande/extra-stod/stod-a-o/starta-eget-stod-till-start-av-naringsverksamhet> (Retrieved: 28/04/2024).
- Balachandra, L. (2020). How gender biases drive venture capital decision-making: Exploring the gender funding gap. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
- Beach, D & Brun Pedersen, R. (2013). *Process-Tracing Methods. Foundations and Guidelines*. The University of Michigan Press: Michigan.
- Boréus, K & Kohl, S. (2018), "Innehållsanalys" in Bergström, Göran – Boréus, Kristina (red.). *Textens mening och makt. Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. s.49-89
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2017). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder*. 3:e uppl. Stockholm: Liber AB.
- Börjesson, M & Rehn, A. *Makt*. (2009). Malmö: Liber AB.
- Carree, M., Thurik, R. & van Stel, A. (2005). The Effect of Entrepreneurial Activity on National Economic Growth. *Small Business Economics*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 311-321, Available

Online:

<https://eds-p-ebshost-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=43eaf254-b24a-479c-8e1d-abacba43864d%40redis> (Retrieved: 23/01/2024).

Centrum för genusforskning. (2023). Genusvetenskap som ämne. Available online:

<https://www.gender.uu.se/om-oss/vad-ar-genusvetenskap-/> (Retrieved: 23/09/2023).

Coleman, S. & Robb, A. (2009). A comparison of new firm financing by gender: evidence from the Kauffman firm survey data. *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 33(4), pp. 397.

DOI:10.1007/s11187-009-9205-7

Danilda, I., 2001. Finns det ett speciellt företagsklimat för kvinnor som driver företag?, i Ekstedt, E. (Ed.), *Kunskap och Handling För Företagande Och Regional Utveckling, Arbetsliv i Omvandling*, 1404-8426; 2001:4. Arbetslivsinstitutet, Stockholm.

Elam, A., Hughes K., Guerrero, M., Hill, S., Nawangpalupi, C., del Mar Fuentes, M.. (2021). Women's entrepreneurship 2020/21: Thriving Through Crisis. *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*. <https://www.gemconsortium.org/file/open?fileId=50841>. (Retrieved 2024 -03-08).

Elvin-Nowak, Y. (2003). Barn och utveckling - om att lära sig att "göra kön", i Elvin-Nowak, Y., Thomsson, H. (Eds.), *Att göra kön: Om vårt våldsamma behov av att vara kvinnor och män*. Bonnier, Stockholm.

Esaiasson, P & Gilljam, M & Oscarsson, H & Towns, A & Wängnerud, L. (2017).

"Kvalitativ textanalys" i *Metodpraktikan. Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer. 2017, 5:e uppl. s. 211-234

Esaiasson- Peter, Gilljam-Mikael, Oscarsson- Henrik, Towns- Ann, Wängnerud- Lena. (2007). *Metodpraktikan: Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. 3rd ed. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik AB.

Eurochambres. (2023). Eurochambres Women Network Survey 2023: A Picture of Female Entrepreneurship. Available online:

<https://www.eurochambres.eu/publication/eurochambres-women-network-survey-2023-a-picture-of-female-entrepreneurship/> (Retrieved: 12/11/2023).

- Eurostat. (2022). Available online:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/search/-/search/estatsearchportlet> (Retrieved: 05/09/2023).
- Evertsson, M. (2016). *Kön i Christofer Edling och Fredrik Liljeros (Red.). Ett delat samhälle – makt, intersektionalitet och social skiktning*. Stockholm: Liber
- Företagande. (2024). *Starta aktiebolag steg-för-steg med checklista*.
<https://foretagande.se/starta-aktiebolag-allt-du-behover-kanna-till-och-gora> (Retrieved: 28/04/2024).
- Gaffney, A. M & Hogg, M. A. (2016). *Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory*.
- GEM. (2024). <https://www.gemconsortium.org> (Retrieved: 10/02/2024).
- Gorbatai, A. D., & Nelson, L. (2015). Gender and the language of crowdfunding. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Vol. 2015(1) pp. 15785.
DOI:10.5465/ambpp.2015.15785abstract
- Hirdman, Yvonne (2001). *Genus: om det stabila föränderliga former*. (2., [rev.] uppl.). Malmö: Liber
- Hirdman, Yvonne (1988). *Genussystemet – reflektioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning*. *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*. Vol. 3
- Holme, I., & Solvang, B. (1997). *Forskningsmetodik - Om kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder*. 2:a uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hult M, 1985, *Företag i starten, Faktaboken*, Liber Förlag, Stockholm
- Jedeskog, V. (2009). *Kvinnors och mäns företagande - fakta & statistik* (No. Info 0012 RevB). Tillväxtverket, Stockholm.
- Justesen, L., & Mik-Meyer, N. (2011). *Kvalitativa metoder - Från vetenskapsteori till praktik*. 1:a uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Justo, R., Cruz, C.D. & Castro, J. (2018). Perception of success in men and women entrepreneurs: a social identity approach, in Greene, P. and Brush, C. (Eds), *The ABC's of*

Women's Entrepreneurial Identity: Aspirations, Behaviors and Confidence, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, MA.

Koellinger, P., Minniti, M., & Schade, C. (2013). Gender Differences in Entrepreneurship Propensities. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 75(2), 213-234.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2019). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. 3:e uppl. Lund. Studentlitteratur.

LeCompte, M., & Goetz, J. (1982). Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(1), 31-60.

Leedy, P.D., Ormrod, J.E. (2005). *Practical research: planning and design*, 8. ed. ed. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Levy, Jack. S. (2008). Case studies: Types, designs, and logics of inference. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 25(1), 1-18.

Lorenzo, R., Voigt, N., Tsusaka, M., Krentz, M. & Abouzahr, K., (2018). How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation, Boston Consulting Group, January 23, Available Online: <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation> (Retrieved: 30/11/2023)

Löfström, Å. (2016). Gender equality, economic growth and employment, Swedish Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality. Available Online: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/data.epws.org/DOCUMENTS/WEBSITE2016/EUstudie_sidvis.pdf (Retrieved: 05/02/2024).

Malmström, M, Johansson, J., & Wincent, J. (2017) Gender Stereotypes and Venture Support Decisions: How Governmental Venture Capitalists Socially Construct Entrepreneurs' Potential. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*. Vol. 41(5), pp. 833-60.

Morrison, A & Raju, D & Sinha, N. (2007). Gender Equality, Poverty and Economic Growth. The World Bank, Gender and Development Group, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, 31-37.

Nadin, S. (2007) Entrepreneurial identity in the care sector: navigating the contradictions. *Women in management review*. Vol. 22(6), pp. 456-67.

- Nationalencyklopedin. (2023). Available Online:
<https://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/genus> (Retrieved: 23/10/2023).
- Olsson, H., & Sörensen, S. (2021). *Forskningsprocessen*. 4:e uppl. Stockholm: Liber.
- Oxford research. (2020). Liten andel kvinnliga företagare i Sverige. Available Online:
<https://oxfordresearch.se/2020/01/31/liten-andel-kvinnliga-foretagare-i-sverige/> (Retrieved: 12/09/2023).
- Patel, R., & Davidsson, B. (2019). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder - Att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning*. 5:e uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Rodríguez, A. (2017). Economic growth and gender inequality: an analysis of panel data for five Latin American countries. *CEPAL Review*, vol. 122, pp. 79-106. Available Online:
https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/42660/RV1122_Vasconez.pdf (Retrieved: 03/02/2024).
- Sandberg, C. (2023). Färre kvinnor företagare i Sverige än EU-snittet. Available online:
<https://fempers.se/2023/15-augusti-2023/farre-kvinnor-foretagare-i-sverige-an-eu-snittet/> (Retrieved: 23/02/2024).
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students*. 8:e uppl. New York: Pearson.
- Seawright, J & Gerring, J. (2008). *Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options*. *Political research quarterly*, 61(2), 294-308.
- Skatteverket. (2024). Betalningsansvar för juridiska personers obetalda skatter och avgifter.
<https://www.skatteverket.se/foretagorganisationer/skatter/betalafatillbaka/betalningsansvarfor-juridiskapersoner.4.6f9866931215a607a4f80003631.html> (Retrieved: 28/04/2024).
- Skolverket. (2024). Att använda sig av forskning.
<https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/forskning-och-utvarderingar/utbildning-pa-vetenskaplig-grund-och-beprovad-erfarenhet/att-kunna-anvanda-sig-av-forskning> (Retrieved: 25/04/2024).
- Statistiska centralbyrån [SCB]. (2022). En fråga om tid (TID2021) En studie av tidsanvändning bland kvinnor och män 2021.

https://www.scb.se/contentassets/4e98132b0b784a01b6e4762e909a6fa2/le0103_2021a01_br_lebr2202.pdf (Retrieved: 23/04/2024).

Sundin, E., Holmquist, C. (1989). Kvinnor som företagare - osynlighet, mångfald, anpassning - en studie. Liber AB, Malmö.

Svenskt näringsliv. (2023). Varför driver så få kvinnor företag i Sverige?. Available Online: https://www.svensknaringsliv.se/bilder_och_dokument/rapporter/966xaz_rapport_varfor_driver_sa_fa_kvinnor_foretag_webbpdf_1204220.html/Rapport_Varfor_driver_sa_fa_kvinnor_foretag_webb.pdf (Retrieved: 26/05/2024).

Thurén, T., & Strachal, G. (2011). Källa: internet - att bedöma information utifrån källkritiska principer. 1:a uppl. Malmö: Gleerups utbildning AB.

Tillväxtverket. (2023). Kvinnors företagande – en fråga om Sveriges konkurrenskraft. Available online: <https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/omtillvaxtverket/pressochnyheter/aktuelltfrantillvaxtverket/nyhetsarkiv/kvinnorsforetagandeenfragaomsverigeskonkurrenskraft.5822.html> (Retrieved: 02/11/2023)

Tillväxtverket. (2012). Fler och växande företag: Främja kvinnors företagande. Available online: <https://tillvaxtverket.se/huvudmeny/insatserfortillvaxt/flerochvaxandeforetag/framjakvinnorsforetaga> (Retrieved: 06/09/2023)

Trost, J. (2010). Kvalitativa intervjuer. 4:e uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Wong, P. K., Ho, Y. P. & Autio, E. (2005). Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Economic Growth: Evidence from GEM data. *Small Business Economics*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 335-350. Available Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5158284_Entrepreneurship_Innovation_and_Economic_Growth_Evidence_from_GEM_Data/link/00b7d52cee1a7f0b81000000/download?tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn9uIn19 (Retrieved: 06/01/2024).