



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

What to Expect as a Female Entrepreneur in a Male-dominated Field

A Case Study on Gender Equality in a Swedish incubator

Authors: Erica Damsten & Lee Hasselgren

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Supervisor: Zsuzsanna Vincze

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ABSTRACT

The Swedish entrepreneurial environment is a heavily male-dominated field characterized by unequal conditions, a significant gender gap, and discriminatory practices. Research is filled with contradictory arguments discussing how gender is not an issue in the world of entrepreneurship, when in fact this conceals gender equality issues that are still prevalent today. This study aimed to describe and explain, from an incubator perspective, the challenges and opportunities that arise from working with gender equality in entrepreneurship. The purpose was also to study the effects these efforts have on the ventures partaking in the incubator's program, as well as their perceptions of it. Based on a literature review of gender equality in entrepreneurship, a qualitative approach deemed necessary to explain the complexity of this issue. This research performed a case study on one Swedish incubator consisting of two samples. Data was collected through in-depth interviews held with the incubator team and online questionnaires were distributed to some ventures currently partaking in the incubator program, as well as to some alumni.

The results indicated that there were more challenges than opportunities involved in working with gender equality in entrepreneurship. The most frequently addressed challenges for female entrepreneurs related to contexts of receiving financial aid from investors, the unequal opportunities given by supporting actors such as advisors, banks, lawyers etc., and the effect of gender stereotypes. In the analysis it was identified that women's unequal opportunities consisted of, among others, women receiving different questions than men, having to defend their ideas to a larger extent, and consistently being viewed in a traditional manner concerning family-care constraints. However, many of the identified challenges for female entrepreneurs could be used in favor of the incubator. Meaning that the incubator could turn the challenges into opportunities for helping female entrepreneurs in their incubator program. For instance, the incubator can help reduce the barriers for entrepreneurs who want to pursue industries typically dominated by the opposite gender, this in turn would create a larger diversity across industries. The incubator had a positive influence on the ventures and their perceptions indicate that equal conditions are provided between the genders. The relationship was difficult to fully describe and explain as the incubator's gender equality work was novel. Future research could investigate more in-depth the underlying reasons why gender inequality issues still pertain, but also more about what actions could be done to address the issues.

Key words: Gender Equality, Entrepreneurship, Female Entrepreneurs, Incubator

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Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics

Umeå University

Erica Damsten

Lee Hasselgren

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1. INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter will begin by discussing why the research subject at hand has been chosen. Thereafter the topic background is presented, followed by the problem background. After that, the purpose of the study as well as the research questions are highlighted. Next, the expected results are touched upon. Following this, is a discussion regarding the study's delimitations. The chapter ends by presenting key definitions relevant to the topic.

1.1 Choice of Subject

We have chosen to write about female entrepreneurship in Sweden as we have found that even though investments towards this have been made (Berglund et al. 2018, p. 531), there are still barriers making it more difficult for women to enter the world of entrepreneurship (Hechavarria et al., 2019, p. 131). This thesis was written on commission for a Swedish incubator who is working towards increasing the number of women starting and running a business, as the current situation indicates that there are more men involved in entrepreneurship than women (Holmquist & Sundin, 2017, p. 381). We find passion in this subject as we are two young women aspiring to become successful entrepreneurs in the future. We feel that the inequality experienced between us women and our male peers should be addressed. Another interest of ours is to further understand the challenges we are facing as females in a male-dominated field.

1.2 Topic Background

“Conditions for entrepreneurship are not equal for women and men who want to start, run, lead, and develop a business.” (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2019). A gender gap is still prevalent and gender equality is far from present at the global labor market (Swedish Institute, 2019). Several studies have concluded facts that contribute to this gender gap, such as women being perceived as less competent than men and incompatible with a leadership role (Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 76). Other examples that support this are the preference for superiors to hire, mentor and promote those who are similar to them, women are exposed to discriminatory practices which entail being held to higher performance standards for raises and promotions compared to men, and lastly, accessing strategic networks is limited for women (Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 76). Even more interesting is that these gender inequalities persist after organizational changes are made towards reducing the gender gap (Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 76). A contrasting perspective provided by Ozkazanc-Pan and Muntean (2016, p. 379) states that organizations can reduce the gender gap by implementing gender-aware practices. One example of a gender-aware practice is that organizations should increase access to networks and resources, which otherwise could be inaccessible for women (Ozkazanc-Pan and Muntean, 2016, p. 379). Sweden is a country that has grown significantly with establishing gender equality and has never been ranked lower than fourth in the world when it comes to measuring the gender gap in a country (Swedish Institute, 2019). However, the business sector is still a *“heavily male-dominated field”* (Swedish Institute, 2019). Statistics show that one in three women are on the average board of a Swedish stock market company, but on the other hand, nine out of the ten people appointing the board members are male (Swedish Institute, 2019). Equal pay is also not the case and numbers indicate that women work for free when the clock

approximately strikes 16:09, based on an eight-hour workday that ends at 17:00 (Swedish Institute, 2019).

Stating that gender is no longer an issue in the world of entrepreneurship and neutralizing gendered experiences conceals the disadvantage experienced by women, which privilege the masculine (Lewis, 2006, p. 453). Traditionally, it is said that processes and practices of entrepreneurship are gender-neutral, but contemporary academic theories place a significant emphasis on gender when it comes to understanding entrepreneurship (Lewis, 2006, p. 455). “*The invisible (masculine) entrepreneur*” has received a lot of attention where the terms *entrepreneur* and *male* have turned into interchangeable terms due to the embeddedness of masculinity in entrepreneurial activities (Lewis, 2006, p. 455). Also, “[*masculinity*] never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (Lewis, 2006, p. 455). Besides, the invisible masculine norm also implies that female entrepreneurs are evaluated and defined according to this (Lewis, 2006, p. 456). Studies also highlight the fact that there are differences between male and female entrepreneurs and the difficulties they face (Balachandra et al. 2019; Hechavarria et al. 2019; Heilbrunn, 2004; Lewis, 2006). In the context of Sweden, the country is known for having a great reputation for working towards gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Investing in women’s entrepreneurship started in the early 1990s and this has today deeply changed the situation for women’s position in business and the goal of creating a more equal society (Berglund et al. 2018, p. 531). It is mentioned that female entrepreneurship has been on the political agenda for some decades (Holmquist & Sundin, 2017, p. 381), and women are encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship instead of working a wage labor job (Alkhaled & Berglund 2018, p. 878). However, despite this good reputation of addressing gender equality issues, there is still a question regarding why Swedish women are highly underrepresented in entrepreneurship (Voitkane et al. 2018, p. 107).

1.3 Problem Background

In Sweden, 95 percent of women perceive entrepreneurship as a favorable career choice, even though only 3.3 percent start a new venture (Elam et al., 2019, p. 11;60). Furthermore, the total entrepreneurial activity (TEA) in Sweden has one of the biggest gender gaps globally at 60 percent, and also the highest gender gap regarding early-stage activity (active involvement in the early stages of a startup) at 74 percent (Elam et al., 2019, p. 21;36). Sweden is a country where there is a close to equal participation of women and men in the labor market. However, women are currently dominating the roles in the public sector, which sometimes is seen as a problem due to it discouraging women from pursuing entrepreneurship (Sundin, 2016, p. 92). Addressing this problem is also difficult, considering that the self-employment rate for women is still around 25-30 percent, and has been for decades (Sundin, 2016, p. 92). This proves that despite new initiatives to overcome the issue, the understanding is still too fragmented and general. This implies the need for finding new paths towards describing and analyzing women’s entrepreneurship (Sundin, 2016, p. 92). Gender equality in connection to entrepreneurship is highly researched by authors such as Kroska and Cason (2019), Voitkane et al. (2018), Sundin (2016) Marlow (2020), and Balachandra et al. (2019), but research in this area applied to the context of incubators is not explored to the same extent (Lindholm-Dahlstrand & Politis, 2013, p. 78). The research applied to incubators is mostly case studies made in other countries (Agostinho et al., 2014; Caputo et al., 2016; Hendratmi & Sukmaningrum, 2018). Nonetheless, since incubators support new ventures in their entrepreneurial endeavors (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 20), the researchers believe that

the connection between current research on gender and entrepreneurship can still be applied to incubators. However, the lack of research prevails as a research gap regarding gender equality in connection to incubators.

More detailed research has investigated the relationship between gender and performance in entrepreneurship, and the concluding results have been equivocal and contradictory (Diaz-Garcia & Brush, 2012, p. 4). The results of a quantitative analysis found that gender has an effect on performance, even though it might be simple and also found to be less strong when other factors are incorporated into the relationship (Diaz-Garcia & Brush, 2012, p. 4). In comparison, Christopher Weber and Geneste (2014, p. 15) found no difference between male- and female-owned businesses in terms of extrinsic performance measures such as profit. However, compared to male-owned businesses, female-owned businesses were found to be significantly smaller (Christopher Weber & Geneste, 2014, p. 15). These contrasting results indicate a need for studies that strengthen the existing results or finding new ones that contribute to the area. Diaz-Garcia and Brush (2012, p. 4) argue that the results of the relationship between gender and performance are complex and in need of a complementary qualitative approach that researches potential sources and factors explaining possible differences. For instance, they mention using in-depth interviews as a way of interpreting the findings, while a quantitative approach helps to identify the essential topics (Diaz-Garcia & Brush, 2012, p. 17). A combination of these two leads to a better understanding of the relationship between gender and performance in entrepreneurship (Diaz-Garcia & Brush, 2012, p. 17). The research area is not neglected as there are many articles addressing gender equality today and what impact it has on business, however, it appears to be underdeveloped as some authors also argue (Marlow et al. 2009, p. 139). A reason provided is the lack of connecting other theoretical fields such as sociology, politics, and economics to feminist literature to create theories of the explanatory nature which address women's experiences of entrepreneurship. Also, not placing these experiences in relation to existing theoretical points of departure (Marlow et al. 2009, p. 139).

Based on a literature search, through accessing peer-reviewed scientific articles from databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Umeå University Library, the researchers found a significant amount of research contributing to this specific topic, especially from the early 2000s to early 2010s. However, there is still a large amount of research that has been made more recently, although most of it has mainly focused on genders' effect in business in relation to more specific contexts, such as family-owned businesses, gender diversity in boardrooms and integrating gender equality into education (Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017; Pagan, 2018; Samara et al. 2019; Saeed et al. 2016). Furthermore, Welter (2019, p. 1756) illustrates that the previous gender-based research has shifted from "*contextualizing gender, towards considering the gendering of contexts*". The meaning behind contextualizing gender implies that different contexts are gendered, for example stating that the sports industry has a gender-specific norm (Welter, 2019, p. 1759). In contrast, the gendering of contexts means placing *gender-as-lens perspective* on a certain context, inferring that nothing is typical female or male, i.e. gender is not given (Welter, 2019, p. 1759). In particular to the case of female entrepreneurship in Swedish incubators, Lindholm-Dahlstrand and Politis (2013, p. 78) states that there is a lack of research in this area.

1.4 Purpose

This thesis has a multi-purpose which revolves around gender equality in entrepreneurship. The main aim of this thesis was to study one Swedish incubator's effort towards increasing gender equality in their work and to see what possible opportunities and challenges that might surface with this gender equality-orientation. The purpose also involved studying what influence the incubator has on the ventures partaking in their program, as well as the incubatees perceptions of the incubators' work. The underlying context of the word *influence* refers to how a gender equality orientation unfolds in this setting. Answering these questions is necessary due to the lack of applied research in this area, which the researchers are addressing by investigating the gender equality orientation in one incubator. The first research question, referring to the challenges and opportunities faced by the incubator, constitutes the main purpose of this thesis. The underlying questions further elaborate upon the relationship between the incubator and its incubatees and what effect gender equality has in this context. Meaning, the internal circumstances within the incubator are thereafter translated to the influence it has on its incubatees, which creates a response from them. This highlights the interrelationship between the two, which can be seen in Figure 1. The researchers have decided to emphasize the first research question because of the incubators' recent implementation of their gender equality-orientation. Therefore, the effect it has on the relationship between them and their incubatees is likely to be novel and difficult to fully investigate. Nonetheless, researching the interrelationship between them with a gender equality focus is still interesting as it contributes to the early understanding of the orientations' effects and how it potentially will unfold.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the opportunities and challenges for the incubator working with gender equality?
 - a. How can the incubator's gender equality orientation influence their incubatees?
 - b. How is the work perceived by the incubatees?

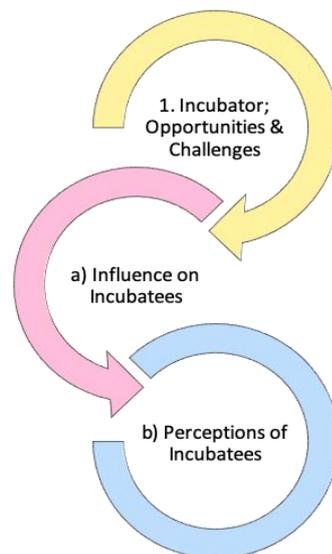


Figure 1. Relationship Between the Research Questions

1.6 Expected Results

This thesis expects to achieve results relative to the field of entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The potential theoretical contributions of this study include partially filling a literature gap found in the lack of applied research on gender equality in incubators, especially in the Swedish environment. The findings might support the challenges found in female entrepreneurship, however, applied in a new setting. Otherwise, the findings will contribute to possibly identifying new challenges and/or potential opportunities. On the other hand, there is potential for both occurrences, meaning both strengthening existing literature, as well as adding new findings to it. If challenges and potential opportunities, relative to working towards increasing gender equality, are found, it will provide a better understanding of what implications a gender equality-orientation has on an incubator and its incubatees. Also, if the findings contribute to grasping the perceptions of how a gender equality-orientation affects the incubatees, a more comprehensive picture could be given on the relationship between the incubatees and the incubator. More practically, the possible contributions of this study involve two aspects. First, by understanding what challenges and opportunities that may arise, it could help incubators with addressing how they can increase the number of women in entrepreneurship. Also, this will hopefully aid Swedish incubators on the path towards becoming more gender-equal. Second, the findings could help new ventures with female ownership on how to tackle the contemporary issues that women experience when starting, running, and leading a business.

1.7 Delimitations

The delimitations of this study explain the scope of the research and discuss why certain choices have actively been made. There are a few delimitations in this study. First, gender equality can be addressed from many different perspectives in the area of business, however, this research has chosen to address the topic in the context of entrepreneurship and more specifically incubators. The reason behind this is two-fold. The first aspect involves that the thesis was written on commission, which creates an instant scope true to the incubator the research is conducted upon. This could further entail that the results cannot be generalized to other countries, as the prevalent situation of how gender equality is perceived is true to Sweden. This leads to the second aspect involving the identified research gap regarding gender equality among Swedish incubators. Another delimitation involves the incubator and its incubatees. Further meaning that, due to a time and resource limit, not all of the ventures partaking in the incubator program will be interviewed.

1.8 Definitions

Gender equality - *“Gender equality means that women and men have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities in all areas of life.”* (Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2018)

Incubator - *“An organization designed to accelerate the growth and success of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services that could include physical space, capital, coaching, common services, and networking connections.”* (Entrepreneur, 2020)

Incubatee - *“Firms that have been registered under an incubator and had been in operation for a period of time.”* (IGI Global, 2020)

2. THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The theoretical frame of references begins with defining what an incubator is and how gender will be portrayed throughout this thesis. Thereafter, the Swedish incubator environment, as well as the connection between incubators and gender, are presented. Following this section includes a variety of theories discussing gender theory in entrepreneurship. The first part of that section introduces how female entrepreneurship is portrayed today, followed by a discussion of challenges, opportunities, and the entrepreneurial environment, with a continuous focus on gender equality. The theories used are connected to the research questions by addressing their overarching themes such as the incubator, challenges, opportunities, and perceptions. The chapter ends with establishing the research framework, serving as a guide for the following chapters, and in aiding the remainder of the research.

2.1 Incubator Definition

This part explains what an incubator is to aid the discussion of the following theoretical chapter. Hackett and Dilts (2004, p. 41) definition centers around that a business incubator is a facility with a shared office-space that aims to provide incubatees with a “*strategic, value-adding intervention system (i.e. business incubation) of monitoring and business assistance*”. They go on to state that supporting the incubatees or ventures’ development while also containing their cost of possible failure is part of an incubators’ business (Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41). In general, an incubator is described as helping new ventures to survive but also grow during the early phases (Kemp & Weber, 2012, p. 141). Hackett and Dilts (2004, p. 41) also address the importance of recognizing the network that commonly comes with an incubator. This network consists of not only the incubator’s employees and incubatee companies but also other actors such as universities, industry contacts, professional service providers, and venture capitalists (Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41). There are a few other definitions of what an incubator is but they all revolve around the same aspects. For instance, Bergek and Norrman (2008, p. 20) discuss how an incubator is a tool for encouraging new ventures towards achieving economic development and innovativeness. Also, they mention that, in general, “*a support environment for start-up and fledgling companies*” to be a good description of an incubator (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 21). These authors also address the fact that similar definitions have been put out there, whereas they also refer to Hackett and Dilts’s (2004) definition mentioned above. Nonetheless, Bergek and Norrman (2008, p. 21) identified four aspects that have received the most attention in previous research. These consist of (1) “*shared office space*”, (2) “*pool of shared support services to reduce overhead costs*”, (3) “*professional business support or advice*”, and (4) “*network provision*” (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 21). Another important aspect which the authors bring forward is which part of the ventures’ phase of development does an incubator consider. From a cohesive perspective consisting of most researchers, the authors conclude that an incubator is focused on the early phases of a venture’s life, meaning undeveloped business ideas where the aim is to help ventures turn them into viable companies (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 21).

Incubators are often confused with *accelerators* and a common misconception is that the two are interchangeable, which is not true (Sepulveda, 2012, p. 1). This creates a strong advocate for defining them both and their differences to avoid misconceptions. There are of course similarities between incubators and accelerators, such as their purpose of

preparing a venture for growth through guidance and mentorship (Sepulveda, 2012, p. 1). However, this is done in different ways and, most importantly, through different stages of the venture's life cycle (Madaleno, 2018, p. 6; Sepulveda, 2012, p. 1). The incubator provides support through the startup phase by "*offering office space, business skills training, and access to financing and professional networks*" (Sepulveda, 2012, p. 1). On the other hand, the accelerator helps advance the growth of the venture through, for instance, help with strategy and long-term planning. Another big difference between them is the duration of the program. The incubator can have varying durations where it provides support for the venture until it has gotten on its feet, which sometimes lasts for years, whereas an accelerator program usually lasts between three to six months (Madaleno, 2018, p. 6; Sepulveda, 2012, p. 2).

Swedish Incubators

In Sweden, there are about 40 incubators (Swedish Cleantech, 2019) and this diversity of incubators across the country amplifies the overall competitiveness and attractiveness of Sweden (Swedish Incubators & Science Parks, 2018, p. 4). Swedish incubators are closely connected to universities and research institutes which provide opportunities for utilizing and commercializing research that can transform into innovation (Swedish Incubators & Science Parks, 2018, p. 4). These incubators also often operate to strengthen the regional business development to a region or institution's specific area of development. As these incubators also cooperate they can provide high-quality incubation processes, and several of the Swedish incubators are on the lists of highest-ranking incubators in the world (Swedish Incubators & Science Parks, 2018, p. 4).

2.2 Gender Definition

Before discussing gender and gender equality in relation to business and entrepreneurship, a definition of how gender will be viewed throughout this thesis will be provided. The World Health Organization (2020) states that "*Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interactives with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex.*" We agree with this definition of gender as the purpose of the thesis is to distinguish females and males, and their normative characteristics, as well as how they are treated differently in the context of entrepreneurship. Gender fluidity is a concept that has been growing more recently over the past years, which is a term that describes the possibility to identify oneself with a gender beyond the binary *man* or *woman* (Parker, 2016, p. 166). However, this will not be taken into consideration due to the focus on gender equality between women and men. Therefore, a description of the typical normative characteristics of both genders will be included as this impact on how women and men are perceived and treated in a business context (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117; Lewis, 2006, p. 454). These norms can be divided into two categories; *descriptive norms* and *prescriptive norms* (Ferguson, 2018, p. 410). Kroska and Cason (2019, p. 77) define descriptive norms as something that explains how individuals behave, while prescriptive norms explain how individuals are supposed to behave. Moreover, Ferguson (2018, p. 410) explains that descriptive norms refer to the shared beliefs about what the genders do, whereas prescriptive norms imply that there are shared understandings of what the genders should do. Stereotypically, a woman is described as sympathetic and helpful, and should take on a nurturing role, whereas the man is independent and assertive (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117; Ferguson, 2018, p. 410).

2.3 Connecting Gender to Incubators

It is frequently stated that incubators and entrepreneurship, in general, is important for the economic development of a country (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017, p. 157; Kemp & Weber, 2012, p. 142), likewise for female entrepreneurship (Ferreira et al. 2017, p. 325; Niethammer, 2013, p. 10; Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 1). This raises a question as according to an examination made by Dagens Industri (Olsson Jeffery, 2019), businesses founded by women obtain only one percent of venture capital that has a total amount of 13.6 billion SEK. The analysis was made on 1083 investments and 815 companies and out of the invested venture capital, 84 percent went to companies with only male founders, 15 percent to mixed founding teams, and less than one percent to solo female-owned businesses (Olsson Jeffery, 2019). This examination also indicates that the development is not progressing as the distribution was about equally the same during the year 2017 (Olsson Jeffery, 2019). The European Startup Monitor (ESM) researched the gender distribution of ownership among startups in Europe and found that only 14.7 percent are female owners (Kollmann et al., 2015, p. 23). Out of the analyzed countries, Sweden had the smallest gender gap in regards to the distribution of gender and ownership, however, it was still only 33.3 percent which was female owners (Kollmann et al., 2015, p. 23). More recently, statistics from 2020 state that in regards to the gender distribution of CEOs in Sweden, only 13 percent are women (Almi, 2020, p. 4). Also, only 19 percent of board members are women, and to compare, seven years ago it was at 17 percent. This indicates that the increase is going slow, but also, between 2019 and 2020 the development stopped (Almi, 2020, p. 4). A study made by Lindholm-Dahlstrand and Politis (2013, p. 78) showed that only 15 percent of the new ventures who participated in the incubators program was run and started by female entrepreneurs. The study concluded that the Swedish incubators did not show any evidence of managing to reduce the gender gap (Lindholm-Dahlstrand & Politis, 2013, p. 78). However, more recently a movement known as *The Yes Way* consisting of four Swedish incubators has developed a program with new methods and tools to combat the gender equality issue. They are working towards increasing the number of female entrepreneurs (Vinnova, 2017).

As mentioned in the definition, an incubator's job is to assist startups by, for example, improving their business networks, which in turn leads to an increased chance of success (Bergek & Norrman, 2008, p. 20; Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 6). By connecting incubators with the gender issue in entrepreneurship, an incubator can help improve the situation for women in this particular field (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 6). This is because incubators have the opportunity to help female entrepreneurs with their startup (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 6). Generally, female and male entrepreneurs often have networks of people with the same gender. This is a disadvantage for women in the sense that the people who carry the position of helping small businesses are often men (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11). Women's access is further limited in informal networks, which include business contacts and advisors because this field is also dominated by men (Abraham, 2019, p. 172; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11). This issue creates barriers for female entrepreneurs and it significantly limits the reach of their networks (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11). A lack of gender diversity in the scene of social networks creates a disadvantage for women compared to men, because people who hold important information, such as lawyers, bankers, and accountants, are most often men (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11). Incubators provide important business advice for startups, as well as help them to grow their social networks (Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 12).

Considering this, incubators are beneficial for both female and male entrepreneurs, but the ones who would benefit the most from the support of an incubator is the women (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 12). The reason for this is the previously mentioned disadvantages that they face when trying to build a network (Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 12).

2.4 Gender Theory in Entrepreneurship

This section, as mentioned in the introduction to the theoretical frame of reference, includes a variety of theories connecting gender to entrepreneurship. The section will begin by presenting how female entrepreneurship is viewed today, followed by the challenges and opportunities women face in entrepreneurship. Thereafter, the section ends with highlighting the entrepreneurial environment, and different elements such as ecosystem, support, venture capitalists, and networks in connection to gender.

2.4.1 Female Entrepreneurship

Marlow (2020, p. 39) highlights how female entrepreneurship is portrayed today and stresses the importance of how feminist theory can be used to further understand the gendered critique of women's entrepreneurship, which still prevails today. There is evidence for the stagnation of women's access to positions of power and authority (Padavic et al., 2020, p. 62). Compared to the rise in the 1970s and 1980s, it decreased a lot during the 1990s and stalled in the last century. This stagnation shows evidence of the inequality in the workforce, but the understanding of it is still not persistent (Padavic et al., 2020, p. 62). Marlow (2020, p. 39) uses gender theory to explain how women are disadvantaged by the discriminatory discourse of entrepreneurship. The significance of including feminist theory and research about female entrepreneurship is because it aids analyses that explain the subordination of women, it also challenges the "*contemporary postfeminist ideas which fuel a false promise of entrepreneurship for women*" (Marlow, 2020, p. 39). As mentioned by many researchers, entrepreneurship is a male-dominated field (Balachandra et al. 2019; Gupta et al. 2019; Kroska & Cason 2019; Marlow 2020; Sperber & Linder 2019). It is this type of logic that also portrays women as the *problem* when it is debated about women's engagement in entrepreneurship (Marlow, 2020, p. 40). By *problem* it is referred to that women do not have the right competencies (Marlow, 2020, p. 39), meaning that the gendered stereotype of a woman does not match with what is characterized as an entrepreneur, due to its equivalence with *male* characteristics (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117). Apart from women being perceived to lack entrepreneurial competences, women are also said to not be fulfilling their entrepreneurial potential (Marlow, 2020, p. 42). However, Marlow (2020, p. 42) questions this assumption by stating how "*socially constructed forms of subordination*", meaning how women are stereotyped, actually impede women from achieving their supposed entrepreneurial potential. To solve these issues, several countries like the US and the UK, as well as countries across Europe, have implemented generic policy initiatives to encourage women into entrepreneurship (Marlow, 2020, p. 44). Nonetheless, as an example in the UK, combating the issue is done by stating that women need to become more confident, implying that women need makeovers to become more like men (Marlow, 2020, p. 44). Instead, Marlow (2020, p. 45) highlights that perhaps a new perspective is required, where we look at "*what entrepreneurship can do for women rather than vice versa*".

2.4.2 Challenges

Female Entrepreneurs in a Male-Dominated Field

Including how challenges and gender in entrepreneurship unfolds reveals its significance to the purpose of this study as a part of it is to outline the challenges with adopting a gender equality-orientation. Therefore, establishing the current conditions for female and male entrepreneurs becomes necessary. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the terms *entrepreneur* and *male* have become interchangeable and even more contemporary research proves the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in a heavily male-dominated field (Balachandra et al. 2019; Gupta et al. 2019; Kroska & Cason 2019; Marlow 2020; Sperber & Linder 2019). McAdam and Marlow (2008, p. 4) further highlight the challenging issues of gender in entrepreneurship by explaining that the words used to describe an entrepreneur are the same as the words used to describe manhood. As a result of this connection between *entrepreneur* and *male*, women are rendered invisible (McAdam & Marlow, 2008, p. 4). A current question brought up in entrepreneurship literature is why investors have strongly offered venture capital to startups led by men (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 116). For instance, a recently conducted study of 6,500 venture capital investments showed that only 3 % were secured by women CEOs (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 116). Additionally, looking at companies with a woman on the management team receiving venture capital, it is noticed that they are older and larger, which implies that females may go through a more stringent screening process (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 116). Also, venture capitalists consider preventions when women display entrepreneurial behavior, but when men display the same behavior, the venture capitalists consider promotion instead (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 1). Gender role theory explains that stereotypes based on gender role expectations suggest that there are differences between men and women regarding what is considered acceptable behaviors (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117). For example, men are supposed to display behaviors associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness and dominance, while women are expected to display behaviors associated with warmth and emotional expressiveness, which in turn are seen as more feminine traits (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117).

Connecting the theory mentioned above to entrepreneurship suggests that, because entrepreneurship is seen as a “*man’s world*”, both women and men should possess stereotypical masculine characteristics to receive more support and interest from resource providers, such as venture capitalists (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117). This relates to gender role congruity theory, which investigates how gender roles (i.e. female vs. male) and social roles (e.g. a leadership position) and their relationship is portrayed (Ferguson, 2018, p. 409). There can be congruity between the two roles, meaning that they are aligned. The roles are aligned when the norms of either gender match their social role, hence, if they do not match, role incongruity occurs (Ferguson, 2018, p. 410). Norms refer to the stereotyped gender role and how a woman or man should behave (Ferguson, 2018, p. 410), which is mentioned above in the definition of gender (see 2.2). Gender role congruity theory also highlights the fact that the display of masculine characteristics (from a female) may not solve the issue of sex-based biases against women. This theory broadens the gender role theory by clarifying how the mismatch of being a woman and occupying a typical masculine role leads to biases against women (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117). An example of this is found in research recognizing the male stereotype of leadership. This research shows that female leaders are seen as overly assertive, are viewed negatively and experience career backlash when they behave in a way that is considered masculine (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117; Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 77). Furthermore, McAdam and Marlow (2008, p. 4) stress this issue by stating that even if

women do possess the right “*qualifications and professional accreditation to enter high-status occupations, traditional masculinized career paths within gendered organizations combine to form so-called ‘glass ceilings’ constraining women’s progression*”.

To further stress the matter that male dominance is a fact in the context of business, Hechavarria et al. (2019, p. 131) argue that commercial high-growth entrepreneurship is very masculine, which in turn makes it problematic for women who want to start growth-oriented ventures. Moreover, entrepreneurship possesses a benign image in mass media and scholarship, because skills and competencies are classified as objective and do not involve any gender-based preconceptions and prejudices (Hechavarria et al. 2019, p. 132). However, even though this view of entrepreneurship may be appealing, it is far from the truth. Entrepreneurship Theory and practice are very gendered, so much that the terms *entrepreneurship* and *entrepreneur* have strong masculine implications (Hechavarria et al. 2019, p. 133). Lewis (2006, p. 453) also highlights this issue of entrepreneurship being gender-neutral when in fact it is characterized by male features. Social role theory implies that all types of behaviors are influenced by gender because “[gender] roles consist of the norms applicable to individuals based on their socially identified gender” (Fyall & Gazley, 2015, p. 293). These beliefs comprise gender stereotypes that both describe and prescribe behavior resulting in certain jobs being viewed as more suitable for men or women, which in turn creates occupational sex-role stereotypes (Hechavarria et al. 2019, p. 134).

Social Feminism & Liberal Feminism

The research mentioned above has focused on the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, but Heilbrunn (2004) further enlightens why differences between the genders occur. For instance, Heilbrunn (2004, p. 161) presents two theoretical perspectives; *social feminism* and *liberal feminism*, which explain why and how differences between male and female entrepreneurs occur. The characteristics of the before-mentioned (social feminism) include values and experiences that are identified by women (Black, 2019, p. 1). Social feminism addresses internal structural factors as the explanation for potential gender-based differences. This further means that how social structures are established will determine the motivation, socialization, and experiences (i.e. internal structural factors) between the genders, which can lead to said differences amidst men and women. This causes the adaptation of disparate approaches between the genders, which could lead to contrasts in their effectiveness (Heilbrunn, 2004, p. 161). On the other hand, liberal feminism implies rationality and equality between men and women (Heilbrunn, 2004, p. 161). Liberal feminism says that human nature is individualistic and equal space for both genders is crucial (Kumar & Gautam, 2019, p. 78). In contrast to social feminism, external structural factors are emphasized in this approach, these factors are grounded in the open discrimination and social structures that hinder women in the acquirement of essential resources (Heilbrunn, 2004, p. 161). The importance of including liberal feminism as a theoretical standpoint revolves around the fact that it underpins the gendered critiques that exist today (Marlow, 2020, p. 42). It further addresses the gender-based inequalities that add to stereotyping and inhibits women from accessing entrepreneurial resources (Marlow, 2020, p. 43), which is continuously highlighted above.

Venture Capitalists & Gender

To further get a more in-depth understanding of the topic of gender equality, a focus on ventures and venture capitalists (VC) is necessary due to the theme of this thesis being

incubators. Therefore, knowledge in this field is helpful as one of the purposes of incubators is to provide support, whereas financial knowledge is a part of this (see part 1.8 Definitions). Hence, understanding the connection between VC's and gender amplifies the incubators' comprehension of the challenges that a new venture might be faced with in terms of gender equality. The connection between VC's and gender is further explained by Malmström et al. (2017a, p. 835), which defines the masculine field of entrepreneurship as an environment with obstacles faced by women in gaining credibility. Adding to this, women and men's performance is evaluated based on different standards (Malmström et al., 2017a, p. 835). More evidence of this is shown in a study made by Malmström et al. (2017b, n.a.) on Swedish government VC's. The results show that even though women and men display the same characteristics, they are viewed differently by governmental VC's (Malmström et al., 2017b, n.a.). For instance, when a young male entrepreneur came to seek funding, he was viewed as promising, while his female counterparts were viewed as inexperienced. Furthermore, men were admired for being aggressive and arrogant, while women's excitement led to discussions about their emotional shortcomings (Malmström et al., 2017b, n.a.). For more detail on the differences in how male and female entrepreneurs were viewed by government VC's, see Appendix 1. Overall, the study showed that men were viewed as having entrepreneurial potential, while women with the same entrepreneurial potential were diminished (Malmström et al., 2017b, n.a.). This was further highlighted by the fact that the VC's denied funding for a higher percentage of women (53 %) than men (38 %). This is also strengthened according to numbers from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) who state that women are faced with significant barriers to the financing of both debt and equity (Elam et al., 2019, p. 40). Additionally, the VC funding results were extremely worrying because government VC's are required to follow both national and European equality criteria and standards when making financial decisions (Malmström et al., 2017b, n.a.). Niethammer (2013, p. 4) also addresses this issue by stating that companies owned by women are less likely to secure capital than companies run by men. This contributes to a significant difference in access to funding between women and men (Niethammer, 2013, p. 4). To again highlight the issue of female and male entrepreneurs being treated differently in the eyes of VC's, Malmström et al. (2020, p. 1) state that women have a disadvantage because they are not naturally linked to the features of an entrepreneur as men are. This situation contributes to different impressions of credibility, which in turn can create barriers for women to receive financial support (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 1).

In the context of Sweden, Malmström et al. (2018a, n.a.) have done additional research on how female and male entrepreneurs are perceived differently by VC's when evaluating whether or not to provide financial support. The results showed that even though no statistically significant differences between women and men were found, VC's still valued men above women (Malmström et al., 2018a, n.a.). An example of this is that when a male entrepreneur with poor financial status came looking for financial backup, the VC's were forgiving and saw him as having "*the capacity to carry out the investment*" (Malmström et al., 2018a, n.a.). While women with similar financial footing were seen as incapable and only out to get their hands on the money (Malmström et al., 2018a, n.a.). To prove that this belief is only based on gender biases and not backed by any concrete evidence, Malmström et al. (2018a, n.a.) compared the value of the real estate and machinery, dividendable capital, operating margin, etc. and these factors showed no significant difference between the female and male entrepreneurs. Additionally, as already stated, female and male entrepreneurs are assessed differently by VC's when they apply for venture capital (Malmström et al., 2017a; Malmström et al., 2017b; Malmström

et al., 2018a; Malmström et al., 2020). Moreover, implications for this issue show that when female and male entrepreneurs pitch their companies, that have similar degrees of promotion and prevention language, the men receive promotion questions, while the women receive prevention questions (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 5). The effect of this is that women secure significantly less venture capital when they display entrepreneurial behavior than their male peers (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 5). An even more disturbing consequence of this is that the female entrepreneurs who deserve the venture capital the most, actually face the most cognitive resistance from the VC's (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 5). In connection to the above-mentioned issue of women receiving less financial support from VC's than men, Malmström et al. (2018b, p. 38) found further evidence of the unjustified gender bias against women. This discrimination against female entrepreneurs is exhibited by the VC's who choose to deny these women of financial support and grant their male counterparts instead (Malmström et al., 2018b, p. 38). This groundless act is highlighted by the fact that when comparing female and male entrepreneurs' venture performance, no significant difference is found, but VC's still choose to support the men and discourage the women (Malmström et al., 2018b, p. 38).

2.4.3 Opportunities

As a part of this thesis' purpose is to outline potential opportunities for working with gender equality, establishing the current conditions is therefore necessary. Entrepreneurship is viewed as a way of increasing equality, contributing to the number of female entrepreneurs (Sullivan & Meek, 2012, p. 428). How an entrepreneur creates a new venture includes a four-stage process; (1) motivation, (2) opportunity recognition, (3) acquiring resources, and (4) entrepreneurial success/performance (Sullivan & Meek, 2012, p. 429). In the first stage, why people start a business can relate to several different motivational factors, and usually they are different between men and women (Nordström, 2017, p. 146). It is stated that men care more about economic success and innovation, whereas women aspire more to attain independence (Nordström, 2017, p. 146). Nordström (2017, p. 146) highlights four (Swedish) entrepreneurial women's perspectives on why they started a business. Several of them talk about the reason being self-fulfillment and other reasons amongst the women were working independently and developing oneself (Nordström, 2017, p. 146;147;149). Another aspect of why women start a business relates to attaining a balanced work- and home-life (Christopher Weber & Geneste, 2014, p. 24). Further along in the process, it is discussed that women organize their business differently from men, where it is argued that the traditional definition of success in entrepreneurship is challenged by women (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). The idea of success is hence portrayed as having a small and stable business where the focus is on achieving a good work-life balance (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). Christopher Weber and Geneste (2014, p. 15) also highlight that the perceptions of success are viewed differently between the genders. The authors continue by stating that value is found in incorporating a feminist perspective when analyzing what a business owner looks for to succeed, in terms of their goals and expectations (Christopher Weber & Geneste, 2014, p. 15).

In female entrepreneurship, it is discussed about the opportunities for women in terms of female solo self-employment (Bögenhold & Fachinger, 2016, p. 16). The current trends have shown that this is on the rise, but questions remain regarding what has caused these developments (Bögenhold & Fachinger, 2016, p. 17). It is questioned whether the increase is due to the obligation of partaking in the labor market, or if it is caused by

actions which increase the labor market integration, or if women are taking the risk, or if their attitudes towards entrepreneurship have changed? (Bögenhold & Fachinger, 2016, p. 17). Nonetheless, the opportunities with female solo self-employment could open possibilities which can be used to overcome the weaknesses and lessen the threats experienced by women, such as the family-care constraint placed on them (Bögenhold & Fachinger, 2016, p. 17). Women's contribution to entrepreneurship and economic development is yet dependent on gender blind support from institutions and the promotion of gender equality (Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 1). It is also mentioned that opportunities for women are dependent on a country's economic development, where developed countries compared to developing countries provide more equal opportunities for pursuing entrepreneurship (Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 2). In the context of Sweden, there is an investment company known as Asynjor Invest which is working towards creating a more gender-equal society with a better financing culture (Asynjor Invest, n.d.). As previously mentioned, about one percent of venture capital goes to women (see section 2.3), which presents itself as a challenge. However, Asynjor Invest is founded and run by women, who are working with other women to create a modern investment platform which enables women to take control of their own life and the opportunities for financing (Asynjor Invest, n.d.).

It is consistently mentioned that female entrepreneurship is important for the business environment, development, and, in general, a country's economy (Ferreira et al. 2017, p. 325; Niethammer, 2013, p. 10; Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 1). Still, many obstacles hinder women from succeeding in entrepreneurship (Niethammer, 2013, p. 10), which have been extensively discussed above. An interesting fact is that gender stereotypes create a *push*, serving as a motivational factor that causes women to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors (Adom & Anambane, 2019, p. 100). Be that as it may, the gender stereotypes shape "*necessity-driven*" female entrepreneurs rather than "*opportunity-driven*" ones (Adom & Anambane, 2019, p. 100). Caputo et al. (2016, p. 2) also agree with this by stating that more women than men start a venture out of *necessity*. This implies that women see it as a must to respond or escape the gender stereotype, instead of seizing an opportunity driven by *want* (Adom & Anambane, 2019, p. 118). Although these gender stereotypes *force* women into entrepreneurship, which is positive due to the increase of women in the field, it also overthrows the opportunities for women to succeed in entrepreneurship (Adom & Anambane, 2019, p. 119). As a way of increasing the number of opportunities for female entrepreneurs, there are supported approaches which are supposed to have this effect. These involve recommendations both to the public sector (government and policymakers) and the private sector (Niethammer, 2013, p. 10). Some of them involve legislation of equal opportunities between the genders, governments partnering with companies from the private sector to reinforce regulatory frameworks benefitting female entrepreneurs, and performing research aimed at identifying frameworks that encompass success factors for female entrepreneurship (Niethammer, 2013, p. 10). For a more comprehensive picture of what changes could favor female entrepreneurship opportunities, see Appendix 2 Table 3.

2.4.4 The Entrepreneurial Environment

Perceptions of Support - Gender Differences

Even though previous research has emphasized the entrepreneur's personal factors, the external environment, known as the venture ecosystem, also has a significant impact on entrepreneurial actions (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 533). Research has concluded that women and men have different access to entrepreneurial ecosystems and also acquire different benefits from them (Yang et al., 2018, p. 58). Women are also likely to possess a less supportive assessment of both the entrepreneurial environment and their entrepreneurial skills (Tonoyan et al., 2019, p. 182). It is also supported that depending on the gender, men and women will experience support from their entrepreneurial ecosystem differently, and will, in consequence, adopt different strategies to handle the situation (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 533). Moreover, even though women are increasing in number and contribution to the entrepreneurial setting, they are still not noticed and respected as a necessary part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Henry et al., 2017, p. 222). This strengthens the need for an entrepreneurial ecosystem that embraces and encompasses female entrepreneurs (Henry et al., 2017, p. 222). Another important aspect is that to better benefit the entrepreneur and the venture, providing support where the services are guided by their needs is better than providing standardized offerings (Scillitoe & Chakrabarti, 2010, p. 157).

A few examples are illustrating how the perceived differences between the genders portray themselves in how the venture is managed. For instance, even though financial success is important for both genders, a woman experiencing less support from the ecosystem will only fund the business when she can by herself mobilize the necessary resources (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 541). Whereas men experiencing a lack of support consider themselves to be able to cope autonomously as they think team and social support to have a minor influence (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 542). The interesting aspect of this is that women believe they require larger investments to reach financial success compared to men (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). Support is something that can come from a third party, and what is interesting is that when concerned with what this third party thinks of your choices, people engage in higher-order processes that are expected to gain approval from this audience (Abraham, 2019, p. 152). This is where gender-bias enters the picture as males, in general, are perceived with higher status than women, leading to people favoring male candidates (Abraham, 2019, p. 152). People are also more likely to connect males with network contacts and resource providers (which can provide support) when the occupation is typically dominated by men (Abraham, 2019, p. 172), which already have been established in the field of entrepreneurship above.

Sperber and Linder (2019, p. 543) argue that “*males are more confident of their capability to overcome support constraints on their own*”, while women criticize their capabilities and are more likely to experience a negative impact from a perceived lack of capabilities. Because of this, expecting lower performance is common, which women try to compensate for by organizing supportive allies to remain successful (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). However, it is interesting to note that women usually operate smaller and different types of businesses compared to men (Halabisky, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, women appear to be less oriented towards attaining high growth (Halabisky, 2017, p. 1). Even though an environment may be characterized as supportive, men tend to put more effort into their work by aspiring larger financial success. On the other hand, women remain reliant on social support despite the perceived supportive environment they already have (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). However, it is stated that women rarely

take help from others as they want to manage themselves on their own (Nordström, 2017, p. 153). As everyone needs support to develop their venture, it is necessary to work towards changing the view and so that women can be less stubborn and take the help and support when needed (Nordström, 2017, p. 153).

An additional example of the perceived differences between men and women in a supportive environment indicates that, strategically, women do not make significant investments (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 542). The reason behind this originates from the female life circumstances (e.g. motherhood) which implies a need to be economic with a limited amount of resources (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 542). This relates to the motivational factors that determine why women and men become entrepreneurs. Albort-Morant and Oghazi (2016, p. 2126) argue that women become entrepreneurs for intrinsic reasons, such as independence and job-satisfaction, while men do it for extrinsic reasons like seeking economic success. Including this research on entrepreneurial ecosystems is necessary as a part of what makes up the ecosystem is the independent actors and factors which either enable or constrain entrepreneurship (Stam & van de Ven, 2019, p. 1). Therefore, incubators can be seen as a part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, strengthening the importance of including this research. Discussing the challenges regarding support and how it can differentiate between gender is also covered because providing support in different forms is a fundamental aspect of an incubator's work.

Expectancy Theory & Support

It has been studied that the entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly influences the founding decisions for an entrepreneur and influences from the environment can create a push for creating a new venture (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 534). On the other hand, it can also constrain entrepreneurial activities if support is not provided (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 534). As an entrepreneur creates a new venture they have not experienced the support from the environment and are unaware of what support they will be provided (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 534). Because of this, the entrepreneur's founding decisions are based upon the expectations it has on support. It is these expectations that also serve as the main driver of the entrepreneur's decision-making (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 534). This is where *expectancy theory* (originated from Vroom 1964) prevails, as to how a human behaves is a result of the expected outcomes they hold (Vroom et al., 2005, p. 98). Meaning, the amount of effort someone puts in is supposed to result in a particular level of performance (Vroom et al., 2005, p. 98). Connecting this to entrepreneurship, the expected outcome the entrepreneur has on creating her new venture will influence the founding decisions she makes (Gatewood et al., 2002, p. 189). The expectancy theory, which is comprised in a model below by Line (2017, Figure 2), also revealed in other studies that the founding motivation differentiates between the genders as a result of having different intentions in their pursuit of starting a new business (Manolova et al. 2007, p. 78; Renko et al., 2012, p. 667).

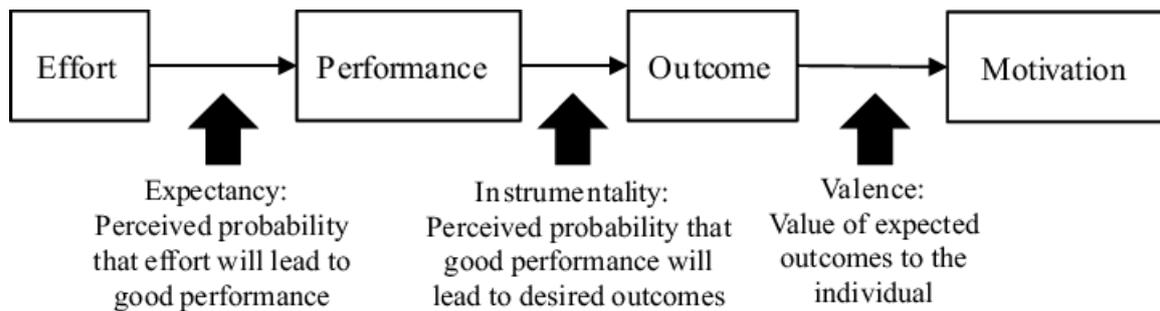


Figure 2. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory

Networking

As mentioned above, men and women perceive support differently and this influences their entrepreneurial activities. One form of support the entrepreneurial environment (more specifically incubators) provides is networking contacts. The importance of networking relies on their source of information which helps entrepreneurs to start a business and access significant resources (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335). However, the entrepreneurial environment is different for women and men, for instance, it contains barriers that men do not face (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 332). Therefore, the way that female and male entrepreneurs' network will look different (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 332; Watson, 2012, p. 537). In regards to social opportunities, they are not evenly distributed. This is because women are not as able as men to use their networks as social capital, which in turn narrows their access to resources that contribute to business growth (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 333). When looking at gender differences in regards to networking in developed countries, it is realized that female and male entrepreneurs have different compositions of their respective networks (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335). When comparing these networks, female entrepreneurs do not develop as high a level of social networks as male entrepreneurs, and their networks are also less diverse (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335). Female entrepreneurs also express more importance of personal networks such as partners, family members, and friends, and they rely on the support of them (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11; Watson, 2012, p. 553). Additionally, female entrepreneurs face more difficulties when trying to access these networks, and this harms them because networks are great tools for accessing needed resources to grow the business (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335). In the light of these issues, as previously mentioned (see 2.3), incubators can aid female entrepreneurs in overcoming these barriers since their job involves helping startups to expand their social networks (Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 12).

2.5 Research Framework

The previous sections in the theoretical frame of references have addressed gender equality in relation to entrepreneurship in several different areas. The first connection was made between gender and incubators, which focused on how the incubator can improve the situation of female entrepreneurs and the constraints they face. This section also included a presentation of the Swedish entrepreneurial environment and how gender is perceived. Furthermore, this area established the current situation of ownership and investments regarding gender differences. This theory will be used as a foundation for understanding the Swedish environment and its characteristics concerning the relationship between gender and entrepreneurship. Based on the incubator and incubatees

perceptions, comparisons can be made between how they perceive the conditions of the environment and its reality. Following this section, a presentation of gender theory in entrepreneurship was made. First, female entrepreneurship was introduced to gain an understanding of how it is portrayed today. Second, an array of challenges was identified to adhere to the purpose of the thesis as it involves outlining the challenges of adopting a gender equality orientation in entrepreneurship. Likewise, the opportunities for female entrepreneurs were presented in accordance with the purpose. These theories are used to compare the incubator and incubatees experiences and to identify if they perceive any other challenges or opportunities and how this affects them. Thereafter, the characteristics of the entrepreneurial environment were provided to apprehend the perceptions of gender differences in various contexts. This theory encircles different aspects of what an entrepreneur (the incubatee) experiences with creating a new venture, such as networking and support from the incubator. This will be used to help understand the incubatees perspective when gathering their viewpoints. These connections to gender equality are composed in a framework consisting of three dimensions which signify the pillars of the research questions and the theoretical implications of the study; Incubator, Challenges & Opportunities, and Perceptions. This can be seen below in Figure 3.

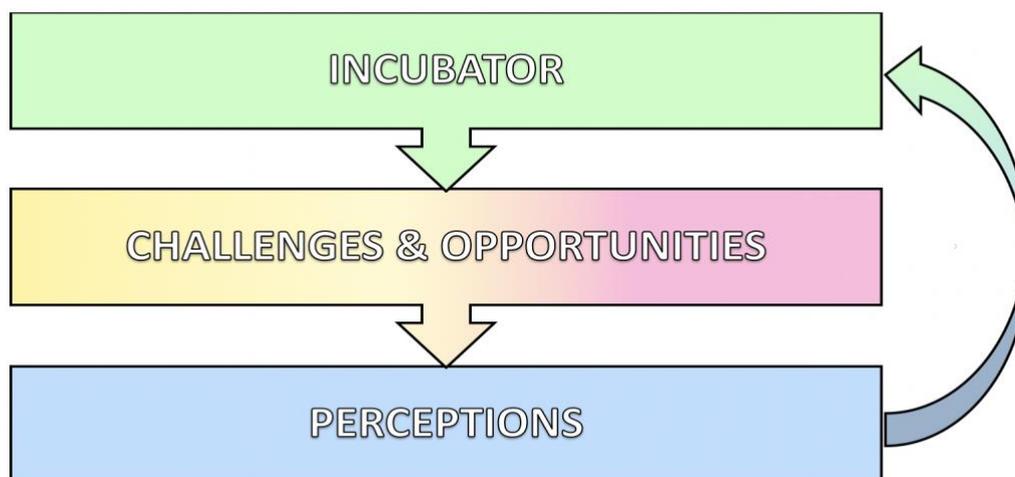


Figure 3. The Research Framework

The research framework builds upon the previously established relationship between the research questions which was highlighted in Figure 1. The framework is built as a process starting with the incubator which in turn shows what possible opportunities and challenges that arise with the incubator's gender equality-orientation. These later translate into the incubatees perceptions of how the gender perspective affects them. Their perceptions tell us how the interrelationship between the incubatees and incubator unfolds. Further meaning, how the perceived challenges and opportunities between the incubator and incubatee correspond to each other. Also, the arrow from the perceptions to the incubator signifies how the incubatees are influenced by the incubator with their gender equality work, and how this is reflected on the incubator. With this research framework and in connection with the research questions, the intention is to investigate the opportunities and challenges that follow with a gender equality-orientation. Further meaning, what can be expected by working towards becoming more gender-equal? Therefore, hopefully strengthening existing literature, adding new perspectives, or both. The focus is also on trying to explain the interrelationship between the incubator and incubatee in terms of the gender equality-orientation. The intention is to further see how the incubator influences the incubatees, and in turn how they perceive this.

A figure has been created below to further elaborate upon the research framework's dimensions and their meanings (see Figure 4). These include the most common themes found in the theoretical framework and will serve as a guiding tool to research how the incubator and incubatee pose to and approach them. This figure comprises four categories as challenges and opportunities have been separated into two parts from the research framework. The reason for this is because they entail different aspects that convey the negative and positive sides of the gender equality-orientation. The processual relationship is further highlighted below through explanatory boxes presented above each category. *Input* is placed above the **Incubator** to explain the context and actions of their gender equality-orientation. *Process* refers to the two middle categories (**Challenges** and **Opportunities**) which represent the issues the incubator has to deal with and is faced by in the context of gender equality in entrepreneurship. These translate into the last category known as **Perceptions**, which represent the *Output* of the processual model. This part shows how the previous steps of the process affect the incubatees and their perceptions. These outcomes also transform into the effect it has on the incubator and the relationship between the two. These four categories explain and include the recurring theories that are discussed in the theoretical framework. The research framework and the categories described below will be amended based upon what the results and analyses conclude. A new model or visual connection will be elaborated or developed in the analysis chapter based upon how the relationship between the incubator and incubatees unfolds or changes. Likewise, if new challenges and opportunities are uncovered, as well as if the incubator and incubatees do not agree with what has been found in the pre-existing theories, this will also be considered.

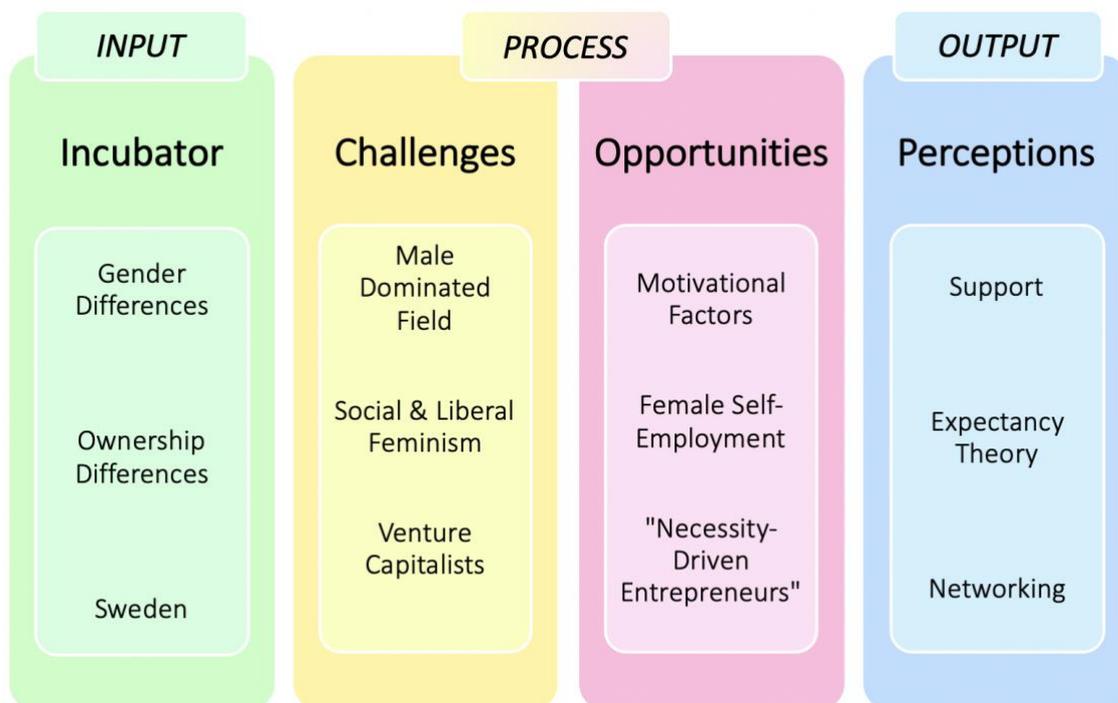


Figure 4. Categories of The Research Framework

The first category in the research framework, **Incubator**, consists of *Gender Differences*, *Ownership Differences*, and *Sweden*. This category consists of these parts as theories have established widespread statistics that conclude significant inequalities between men and

women. These statistics have been included in the category as they provide a basis for understanding the current conditions for entrepreneurs based on gender. One of these conditions is *Ownership Differences*, and its connection to incubators is established through them being able to help improve the situation for women in their underrepresentation of self-employment. To further explain these parts of what the category entails, *Gender Differences* signifies that women experience a disadvantage compared to men. For instance, they have limited access to networks, and contacts are usually dominated by men who favor themselves when establishing important contacts. However, incubators can improve the situation for women by providing important advice and also help them grow their networks. The last part of this category, *Sweden*, refers to understanding the environment in which this study is basing the research upon, which is why this part is included.

Challenges, the second category, contains three parts, *Male-Dominated Field*, *Social & Liberal Feminism*, and *Venture Capitalists*. The *Male-Dominated Field* conveys challenges relating to being a female entrepreneur in a business setting denoted by male characteristics. *Social & Liberal Feminism* explains gender-based differences due to factors that discriminate against women, creating inequalities and inhibits them from accessing entrepreneurial resources. The last part of this category, *Venture Capitalists*, demonstrates that VC's favor male entrepreneurs, which creates a huge gender gap and illustrates the challenges of being a woman entrepreneur in receiving funding. These parts of the category signify the main challenges found in theory, and they are included to see if they match the incubator and incubatees actual challenges.

The third category, **Opportunities**, includes *Motivational Factors*, *Female Self-Employment*, and "*Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurs*". *Motivational Factors* indicate that women and men are motivated to start a business based on different factors. Therefore, incorporating a feminist perspective is valuable when analyzing what a business owner looks for to succeed, in terms of their goals and expectations. The opportunities with the second part of the category, *Female Self-Employment*, can open possibilities used to overcome the weaknesses and threats experienced by women, such as family-care constraints placed on women. The last part, "*Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurs*", specify that women use gender stereotype as a motivational factor to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This further means that entrepreneurship is pursued more as a necessity rather than an actual opportunity. These three parts are included in the **Opportunities** for the same reason as the **Challenges**. They are the main opportunities found in theory, and they are covered in this category to see if they are aligned with the incubator and incubatees actual perceptions of opportunities.

The last category, **Perceptions**, touches upon three factors; *Support*, *Expectancy Theory*, and *Networking*. *Support* points out the differences that the genders experience in receiving support from their entrepreneurial environment. The perceived differences, regardless of the type of support, causes women and men to adopt different strategies to handle the situation. *Expectancy Theory* associated with entrepreneurship exemplifies that the expected outcome an entrepreneur has on creating her new venture will influence the founding decisions she makes. The last part of this category, *Networking*, entails that women and men network differently due to unequal opportunities. For example, women cannot use their networks as social capital like men do, which narrows their access to resources that would contribute to business growth. All of these categories support the analysis of what opportunities and challenges an incubator has when working with gender

equality, as well as how this is perceived by the incubatees. The *Perceptions* category revolves around examining the relationship between the incubator and incubatee. *Support* is included as it is a central part of what an incubator provides to the ventures partaking in their program. *Networking* is another essential part of growing the venture, and the incubator can help the incubatees in building networks. *Expectancy theory* shows its significance through the incubatees decisions being influenced by their expectations. This conveys the importance of including this aspect as it helps to understand the perceptions of the incubatees and the interrelationship between them and the incubator.

3. METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter begins by discussing ontological and epistemological standpoints, followed by addressing values and ethical considerations known as axiology. Thereafter, the authors' pre-understandings are introduced to explain any potential bias in the research. Following this is a presentation of the research approach. After that, the structure of the research design is made clear by explaining the research strategy, data collection method, sampling method, and how to process and analyze the data. This part also includes a presentation of the interview guide and questionnaire. Lastly, ethical considerations and source criticism are discussed.

3.1 Ontology

Ontology is a philosophical research dimension that views how reality is perceived (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 69). What constitutes reality are known as ontological assumptions (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). In ontology, reality can be perceived as objective or subjective (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 69). The first one states that reality is external and not dependent on social actors and their interpretations of reality. In contrast, a subjective standpoint states that reality depends on social actors and their interpretations contribute to the perceived reality (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 69). Two research paradigms of the ontological position are positivism and interpretivism (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). Positivism concerns objective reality and exists independently from the researcher (Scotland, 2012, p. 10). The knowledge of this reality is something humans aim to obtain, and it is assumed that the understanding of this knowledge is the same for all humans (Jonassen, 1991, p. 8). On the other hand, interpretivism adheres to the subjective reality, meaning it is individually constructed and is different from person to person (Scotland, 2012, p. 11). Furthermore, the backgrounds, experiences, and assumptions of individuals add to reality existing in a broader social context, and because of these human perspectives, reality can change and have several perspectives (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). A positivist ontological standpoint is associated with a quantitative research methodology, whereas the interpretivism is more qualitative (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70).

When conducting a study, the researchers must decide what position to take in regards to how they perceive things, i.e. how things work and how things are (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Referring to the purpose of this study, the aim was to understand what challenges and opportunities a gender equality-orientation may have on an incubator's work. The purpose also included studying the perceptions of the incubatees regarding gender equality in entrepreneurship. Because of this, choosing an interpretivist ontological standpoint for this research was essential. An objective viewpoint would have restricted our understanding in the sense that reality cannot be viewed independently from social actors and their interpretations. Therefore, studying the perceptions and the effects of a gender equality-orientation requires viewing reality as subjective. The reason behind this relates to the purpose of being able to understand different individuals and their interpretations of how gender equality affects their reality concerning entrepreneurship.

3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of the disposition of thought and knowledge (Jonassen, 1991, p. 8). Kilduff et al. (2011, p. 299) further state that how one to access knowledge and the relationship between this and truth is concerned by epistemology. One of the

biggest issues in this philosophical dimension involves whether or not, over time, scientific theories come closer and closer to the truth (Kilduff et al., 2011, p. 299). In epistemology, there are three types of philosophies; positivism, realism, and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 134). Also, interpretivism is intertwined in epistemology and ontology due to knowledge being fundamental in the ontological assumptions in the structure of reality (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 138). The research behind this thesis has, therefore, like the ontological standpoint, also been guided by interpretivism. This philosophy is described as important for researching social sciences as it gives the researcher the ability to understand the perceptions of the participants (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). Also, as mentioned above, interpretivism is often affiliated with qualitative research (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 135). Compared to interpretivism, positivism states that acceptable knowledge is only an observable phenomenon that can provide reliable data and facts (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). Positivism focuses on causality and law-like generalizations, whereas interpretivism focuses on details and the reality behind these in a certain situation, it has more subjective meanings (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). Goldkuhl (2012, p. 137) further states that understanding the subjective meanings of an individual is imperative to this paradigm. In interpretivism, another crucial aspect is to form a comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied, not just of its different parts (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 138). The interpretivist standpoints adhered to the purpose of this thesis in its aim of obtaining qualitative perceptions that describe how gender equality is portrayed in entrepreneurship. The positivist philosophy did not comply with this research because of its focus on objective data and facts, as well as its aim to provide law-like generalizations.

Feminist epistemology is the study of what ways gender influence our understanding of knowledge, the subject, and practices of justification and inquiry (Anderson, 2000, p. 1). Feminist epistemology establishes ways that dominant understandings and practices of knowledge acquisition, justification, and attribution systematically disadvantage females and other subordinated groups of people (Anderson, 2000, p. 1; Hidayat, 2018, p. 143). The aim is to change these conceptions and practices in a way that aids the interest of these particular groups (Anderson, 2000, p. 1). Several specialists of feminist epistemology seek to understand the relationship between gender and knowledge and how power structure affects the possibility to gain and exercise this knowledge (Grasswick, 2011, p. 15). It is explained that “*dominant knowledge practices disadvantage women by (1) excluding them from inquiry, (2) denying them epistemic authority, (3) denigrating their ‘feminine’ cognitive styles and modes of knowledge, (4) producing theories of women that represent them as inferior, deviant, or significant only in the ways they serve male interests, (5) producing theories of social phenomena that render women’s activities and interests, or gendered power relations, invisible, and (6) producing knowledge (science and technology) that is not useful for people in subordinate positions, or that reinforces gender and other social hierarchies*” (Anderson, 2000, p. 1). By including feminist epistemology in this study, it will aid the understanding of the incubator’s gender equality work, as well as the perceptions of its incubatees. Moreover, feminist epistemology contributed to this study’s focus on gender inequality and its negative impact on women in today’s society.

3.3 Axiology

The term axiology stems from the Greek word *Axios*, which means value (Hart, 1971, p. 29; Killam, 2013, p. 6). Axiology is referred to what the researcher considers to be

valuable and ethical (Killan, 2013, p. 6). The philosophical dimension revolves around ethics, including how values are encompassed in the research as well as the researcher's relationship to the topic of the study (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 69). The researcher is guided by its decision-making through basic beliefs on what is ethical, which is embedded in a research paradigm (Killan, 2013, p. 6). Moreover, when conducting research, the purpose must be aligned with the values and other ethical considerations the researcher has (Killan, 2013, p. 6). Interpretivist researchers in axiology take an insider-perspective standpoint, which is referred to as studying reality in terms of how people themselves perceive it (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). Because of this, data collection and analysis are influenced by the research participants' and researchers' experiences and values (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). Axiology investigates issues that have been occurring since people started to reflect upon conditions of their lives, how reality is structured, nature's order, and how people fit into this picture (Hart, 1971, p. 29). Axiological studies have been limited to the following issues: "*What is the common nature of values? What is the status of values? Are they mere responses of man to a value-neutral nature or are they results of an ongoing interaction of reality and man? Is the scientific method of inquiry applicable to value judgment? ...*" (Hart, 1971, p. 30). Due to these issues of axiology, it has been crucial to consider the participants of the study, but also us, the researcher's, values and perspectives, and its potential influence on the findings. Our values and ethics have been cautiously dealt with as it may affect the interpretation of the study's results. Therefore, our pre-understandings have been outlined in the following section as a way of addressing issues that might influence the research.

3.4 Pre-understandings

As the previous section stated, it is important as researchers to stay objective. Considering the purpose of the thesis is to study gender equality in entrepreneurship, more specifically incubators in a Swedish setting, it is fundamental to be conscious about any potential bias from the researchers' pre-understandings of the topic. Our interest in this subject has developed from our interest in knowing what we, as women, would be facing when entering the world of business, especially towards entrepreneurship since we aspire to work within this field in the near future. First, we possess a basic knowledge of entrepreneurship as we have studied several courses regarding this topic. Incubators and theories regarding this composed only a small amount of the course syllabus. Between us, there is also no direct experience concerning working with incubators. This means that we have a limited understanding of the specific area, both theoretically and practically. Second, both of us have also partaken in courses relevant to business development, which means we understand the potential challenges and opportunities that arise with starting a new venture. Although, the connection to gender equality is something we have not studied. However, our understanding might influence the interpretation of the findings, but the lack of knowledge in terms of gender's effect on the area limits our potential bias. Nonetheless, as we are both women, this could impact our results. The reason being that our values have the possibility of creating a bias due to the gender equality orientation of the study. Furthermore, discrimination generally found against women in business could impact our analysis in being less objective because of our gender. Contrariwise, we would like to highlight that we have remained objective throughout the thesis. Although the findings in the theoretical literature could indicate to be weighted in one direction, i.e. more negatively, the majority of previous research shows the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs. Less research emphasizes the opportunities, i.e. the positive aspects, involving women in entrepreneurship. In

conclusion, the theoretical framework is not based upon our personal opinions, but upon what previous research about gender and entrepreneurship has found. In the analysis, it was also important to remain objective to avoid angling the research in favor of personal bias. Therefore, to our best efforts, we have carefully analyzed the respondents' viewpoints and connected it to theoretical perspectives without signifying our own involvement.

3.5 Research Approach

A research approach to theory can take two paths; an inductive or deductive approach (Bell et al., 2018, p. 20). Inductive and deductive research are each other's opposites (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). Inductive research has its focus on producing new theory by using data, while deductive research is based upon using data to test and build upon already existing theories (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). A deductive approach is considered most common in the relationship between research and theory and is also often associated with positivism (Bell et al., 2018, 2011, p. 20). This further means that a deductive approach is commonly affiliated with a quantitative approach (Bell et al., 2018, 2011, p. 164). On the other hand, inductive and qualitative research are correlated with each other (Bell et al., 2018, 2011, p. 23). As with both a deductive and an inductive approach, it is important to know that, even though some researchers do develop theories, most actually end up with somewhat more than empirical generalizations (Bell et al., 2018, 2011, p. 23). The chosen research approach for this study was an induction. Moreover, according to Thomas (2006, p. 238) inductive research is very common to use when researching and evaluating data in social sciences. Furthermore, an inductive research approach is developed to identify patterns and relationships across and within cases as well as their fundamental logical arguments (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). As previously mentioned in the Theoretical Frame of Reference, the topic of gender equality in Swedish incubators is not highly researched upon. Therefore, an inductive approach assisted this research in fulfilling the purpose of the thesis. A deductive approach would not have been a sufficient research approach for this study. Considering that there was an insignificant amount of theories that could have resulted in creating hypotheses to test the relationship between a gender equality-orientation of an incubator and its incubatees.

3.6 Research Design

3.6.1 Research Strategy

Qualitative & Quantitative Strategies

Researchers decide what type of research to employ based on the research question they want to answer (Rutberg, & Bouikidis, 2018, p. 209). There are two types of approaches to choose from, quantitative and qualitative study (Rutberg, & Bouikidis, 2018, p. 209). Quantitative studies are described by its controlled and strict design and usage of precise measurements to analyze different phenomena (Rutberg, & Bouikidis, 2018, p. 209). On the contrary, qualitative studies analyze phenomena by adopting a flexible research design and an in-depth, holistic approach that generates rich, telling narratives (Rutberg, & Bouikidis, 2018, p. 209). Moreover, qualitative research is grounded in words, text, and talk, while quantitative research counts, codes, and quantifies phenomena (Rynes, & Gephart, 2004, p. 455). Based on this knowledge, the research method that was most suitable for this thesis was a qualitative approach. The reason for this is that a qualitative

method is used to understand and describe actual interactions between people, the meaning of them, and the processes that real-life organizational scenes are composed of (Rynes, & Gephart, 2004, p. 455). Moreover, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015, p. 3) highlight the importance of using a qualitative approach when researching the field of business. It contributes to the possibility to critically examine the business world and its core processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 3). Considering this, a qualitative approach to the thesis is strengthened due to the focus on wanting to understand the incubator's work as well as the incubatees' perceptions. To answer those questions, a qualitative approach is necessary because it aids the understanding of people's opinions and perceptions by using words, text, and talk (Rynes, & Gephart, 2004, p. 455). It is difficult to use quantitative research to provide insights into this matter because it explains scientific meanings (Rynes, & Gephart, 2004, p. 455). While a qualitative approach is used to get detailed descriptions of the participants' actual perceptions of the particular actions and settings (Rynes, & Gephart, 2004, p. 455). In conclusion, a qualitative method has been chosen for this study due to the above-mentioned reasons, as it is the most suitable approach to answer the research questions. Furthermore, Diaz-Garcia and Brush (2012, p. 5) also argue that a qualitative approach is most suitable when researching the field of female entrepreneurship.

Explanatory, Exploratory & Descriptive Research

The first step of the research process usually begins by forming a question or problem that needs to be answered or solved (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 1). The purpose of these in social research generates answers which can be organized into three types of categories; explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive research (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 1). Explanatory research illustrates why a certain phenomenon occurs and also predicts future circumstances (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). This type of research is also characterized by creating hypotheses aimed at defining the nature and direction of specific variables or a relationship that is being studied (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140; Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). Explanatory research produces quantitative data and most likely needs to use statistical tests to ensure the validity of relationships (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). Exploratory research involves clarifying concepts, creating hypotheses, and formulating problems (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). It is about researching new insights and assessing a phenomenon from a new perspective (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 139). Also, it is most common that exploratory research forms hypotheses rather than to test them. This type of research does not adhere to the purpose of this study as it does not aspire to create hypotheses nor to clarify concepts. Exploratory research can also start with a literature search, case study, or a discussion from a focus group (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140; Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). This type of research is considered to produce qualitative data (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). The last research type, descriptive, has more guidelines, meaning that there are generally one or more research questions that guide the research (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2).

Descriptive research intends to describe characteristics of what is being studied and the data can be of either qualitative or quantitative nature (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 2). In management and business, descriptive research has a clear place (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). It is argued that the researcher should go further and make conclusions, evaluate the data, and synthesize the results rather than just describing the findings (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). The research should be seen as "*means to an end rather than an end in itself*" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). Meaning, if the study applies descriptive research it is likely to be a precursor to explanatory research, which is known as a *descripto-explanatory study* (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 140). This study was also characterized by

being of the descripto-explanatory nature, namely because the purpose of the thesis was two-fold. The first part involved describing what challenges and opportunities an incubator is faced with due to their gender equality-orientation of trying to increase the number of women in entrepreneurship. This aspect highlighted the descriptive attributes of the purpose in aiming towards defining the characteristics of the study object. Second, the interrelationship between the incubator and its incubatees was also a part of the purpose, which refers to elaborating upon what effect gender equality has in this context. Hence, the explanatory part of the research revealed its character by studying the nature of the relationship between the variables.

Research Strategies: Case study, Experiment, Survey & Grounded theory

Saunders et al. (2012, p. 173) state that to correctly answer the research question and fulfill the purpose of the study, it is important to choose the right research strategy. There are several different research strategies to select from, experiment, case study, grounded theory, and survey (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 173). An experiment is often described in the scene of a laboratory. However, it can also be classified as an experiment outside of the laboratory (Singer, 1977, p. 2). For example, an experiment can be conducted outside on the field observing different events and conditions (Singer, 1977, p. 2). This research strategy was not chosen since the purpose of the study was to study perceptions, opinions, and influences of people rather than observing them from afar. A survey is another research strategy used to gather information (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 3). Conducting a survey involves several steps, from defining objects, making a questionnaire, analyzing the data, and reporting the results (Sue & Ritter, 2012, p. 3). This strategy was not chosen since it is most commonly associated with a deductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 181), and induction was chosen for this research. However, surveys are a good option for descriptive research (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 181), which is what this thesis is based upon. Grounded theory is used to conduct a study through a practical manner with a focus on interpretive processes by which “*the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings*” is analyzed (Suddaby, 2006, p. 633). Grounded theory is suited for qualitative research that takes an inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 193), which does suit this study. Nonetheless, grounded theory is a highly time-consuming and intense research strategy that requires a strong commitment (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 197). This method also involves constantly comparing and writing self-memos that lead to the conceptualization and building a theory (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 197). Because of this reason and as time was limited to conduct this study, this research strategy was not chosen.

Case studies are used to build theory by utilizing one or more cases to establish theoretical constructs, midrange theory and/or propositions from case-based, empirical evidence (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). This research strategy is often based on several different data sources, and it is a rich, empirical description of specific situations of a phenomenon (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). The chosen research strategy for this thesis was a case study, and there were several reasons for this. Firstly, a case study is relevant to use when wanting to acquire a rich understanding of the research context and the enacted processes (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 146). Referring back to the theoretical framework and its explanations in Figures 3 and 4, the context of gender equality is emphasized through a processual relationship. The choice of using a case study is to underline two important contexts that relate to the research questions of the study. The process part of the model (see Figure 4) is a highly important context as this points to the main research question of answering what challenges and opportunities the incubator is

faced with by working with gender equality in entrepreneurship. The second important context a case study will help explain relates to the research questions aimed at describing the interrelationship between the incubator and its incubatees. This part of the model is specified as the outcomes of the process and intends to explain how gender equality unfolds in their relationship and the impact of the external conditions from the previous context. Secondly, using a case study as a research strategy is suitable when wanting to answer questions of *why? what? and how?* (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 146), which are the elements of this study's research questions. Lastly, case studies are most common in qualitative research (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291), and it is also most often used in explanatory research (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 146). These are both paths that were chosen for this study, which makes choosing a case study even more relevant. In this thesis, the case study refers to the incubator in which the research is based upon.

3.6.2 Data Collection Method

Multiple Data Sources

This study collected data through two methods; interviews and questionnaires. Interviews were held with the incubator, whilst the incubatees were distributed a questionnaire. In business and management research it is common to combine qualitative and quantitative elements (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 165). However, it is important to distinguish between research that utilizes *“two types of data without serious integration and studies that “mix” the data sets effectively”* (Harrison, 2013, p. 2153). This study was merely using two types of data sources and was not, in a highly integrative way, mixing methods from both qualitative and quantitative data. The purpose of this study remained qualitative. Nonetheless, the choice behind using interviews and questionnaires rests on a few factors. As previously mentioned in the introduction, the main research question of this study revolved around the incubator and their thoughts and experiences regarding the research topic. Therefore, it was necessary to use interviews to obtain in-depth, qualitative answers from the incubator. The second part of the research questions are sub-questions to the main one and they aim to describe and explain the relationship between the incubator and incubatees. Questionnaires were thereby used with the incubatees to further investigate their relationship with the incubator. It was also most convenient to use questionnaires as conducting interviews with every respondent would take too much time. This is because there were several companies in the incubator program and they are also geographically distributed.

Interviews

There are several different methods for collecting data in qualitative research (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Three data collection methods are observations, interviews, and questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 362), where interviews represent one of the most common ones in qualitative research (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013, p. 188). In regards to research interviews, there are three types; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 390). Semi-structured interviews have been used in this study due to its flexibility in not being required to ask a specific set of questions. Instead, it has a few overarching themes and questions which serve as a guide throughout the interviews (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 391). These interview types also allow more in-depth answers because the flexibility in this approach grants the option to discover and elaborate upon important information that surfaces during the interview (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Semi-structured interviews adhered to the purpose of the study as the aim was to attain a deeper understanding of what challenges and opportunities the incubator experiences and sees with gender equality in entrepreneurship. For this reason, structured interviews were not

applicable. Namely, because structured interviews are described as “*verbally administered questionnaires*”, consisting of predetermined questions that do not allow follow-up questions, and only a little or no variation of them (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Because of the limited response from participants, they are not useful for gaining in-depth answers (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). The last interview type, unstructured interview, is good for obtaining in-depth answers due to the participant being able to talk freely, as there are no predetermined questions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 321). Nonetheless, the little guidance provided was not suited for the study as it addressed certain themes regarding gender equality in entrepreneurship, and a free discussion could result in not achieving the desired answers.

Telephone Interviews

The participants of this study were not geographically close to the researchers, which is one of the reasons why the interviews were held via telephone or Skype. Also, due to current conditions at the time of writing, the COVID-19 virus affected the collection of data. It was not recommended to travel within the country (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020) which restrained the possibilities of having the interviews held face-to-face. Besides, the incubator in which the study is writing on commission for had decided that every employee should work from home due to the present circumstances. Because of these conditions, it was decided that the interviews were best held via telephone or Skype rather than face-to-face. Nonetheless, there are positive aspects of telephone interviews. According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 421), telephone interviews have better access, speed, and a lower cost. The authors further mention that impracticalities such as distance and time could restrict the possibility of interviewing certain participants, which is why telephone interviews are of advantage in these circumstances (Rowley, 2012, p. 265; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 421). These aspects cohere with what has been mentioned above. However, some of the rapport and the richness of the communication might be missing due to this (Rowley, 2012, p. 265). Semi-structured interviews held over the telephone have had successful outcomes as by not meeting the participants, the researchers are better able to produce open and full responses (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). The reason for this rests on the anonymity of the participants by them only listening and using their voice, which reduces their inhibitions of giving personal details. Because of this, researching sensitive issues may be more advantageous over the telephone (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). Therefore, as this study revolves around gender issues that could be sensitive to talk about, conducting telephone interviews was a good option. Telephone interviews also facilitate participation in terms of the respondents being able to choose a suitable time for them, the option to stop if necessary and rearrange another time to continue, likewise the option to choose an appropriate environment (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). However, there are some issues with conducting telephone interviews. For instance, it can be more demanding to record the answers, control the pace of the interview and it can be difficult to take notes (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). Moreover, as visual cues are lost over the telephone, it is harder to manage the flow of the data that the participants share. Likewise, the researchers cannot observe any non-verbal behavior, which can affect the interpretation of how far to go with asking a certain line of questions (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). In comparison to face-to-face interviews, participants may not be as likely to give the same amount of time to talk to the researchers in telephone interviews (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 422). However, it is stated that telephone and face-to-face interviews produce a comparable quality of data (Rogers, 1976, p. 53). All of the interviews were held over the telephone or Skype in this study. They were all led by one

interviewer, whilst the other one listened, took notes, and managed the recordings.

Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires is common for descriptive and explanatory research (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 439), therefore adhering to this study's purpose. The questionnaire was used to obtain the incubatees attitudes and opinions regarding the topic, but also investigate the relationship between them and the incubator. Questionnaires can be used as the only data collection method, however, it may be better if they are complemented by, for example, in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 439). This reasoning strengthens the choice of having multiple data collection methods. Five types of questionnaires can be used and the choice is influenced by a variety of factors (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 440). These are internet questionnaires, postal questionnaires, delivery and collection questionnaires, telephone questionnaires, and face-to-face questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 440). Postal or delivery and collection questionnaires were not chosen in this study because they require the researchers to send out physical paper questionnaires via mail (Brace, 2018, p. 36). Telephone questionnaires did not seem suitable either because they limit the possibility to show any material to the respondent that could have been viewed on the questionnaire (Brace, 2018, p. 34). This type of questionnaire requires a complicated process of first starting the questionnaire, then asking the respondent if they agree to be sent the material to look it over, and then agree on a new time to complete the telephone questionnaire (Brace, 2018, p. 35). Lastly, face-to-face questionnaires were not chosen due to the circumstances of COVID-19 and the regulations regarding the virus. This type of questionnaire was also not suitable because of the geographical distribution of the respondents. Internet questionnaires have been used in this study, which is a self-completed questionnaire that is accessed through a web browser (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 440). The choice behind this rests on a few factors. First, the characteristics of the population were suitable for this type of questionnaire as they had access to the internet and were contacted by email. Second, there is high confidence with internet questionnaires in that the right person has responded (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 441). Also, the likelihood of the respondent's answers to be contaminated or distorted is low. Third, as the respondents were geographically distributed, the internet questionnaire was suitable to use (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 441).

Primary & Secondary Data

Research can be collected in the form of primary and secondary data (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 256). Data collected explicitly for the purpose of the study is known as primary data, whereas data collected for other purposes is referred to as secondary data (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 256). Two types of primary data were collected in this research, these consisted of semi-structured interviews with the incubator and questionnaires with the incubatees, as mentioned above. Documentary secondary data is commonly used when a study is collecting primary data (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 258). This use of different sources of data is referred to as triangulation, which, in a positivist study, bolsters the reality of the data (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 207). However, in an interpretivist study, like this one, it is challenged whether it is a necessity to include secondary data. The reason behind this is because *reality* from an interpretivist standpoint is socially constructed, referring to people's interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 207). Because of this and due to the purpose of this study revolving around collecting people's interpretations and perceptions about gender equality, secondary data was not included. Also, as previously mentioned, not much research has been made in this specific area

regarding Swedish incubators and gender equality. This implies a lack of secondary data that could have been used to compare our findings.

3.6.3 Sampling Method

Heterogeneous Purposeful Sampling

When conducting a study, it is of high importance to carefully select your interviewees (Rowley, 2012, p. 264). It is also common to present a basic profile of the interviewees, containing, for instance, their job role, experience, qualifications, gender, and other criteria that might be relevant to the study (Rowley, 2012, p. 264). Furthermore, it is practically impossible to access the entire targeted population (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 144). Therefore, a carefully selected sample is important to get results that are as closely reflected by the whole population as possible (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 144). Considering this, the sampling method of the research process is a very crucial part, because it can assure that the results are aligned with the population if you have used an appropriate sampling technique (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 144). The chosen sampling method for this study was purposeful sampling, as it is often used in qualitative research to effectively use limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). Purposeful sampling is defined as selecting and identifying groups or individuals that possess the knowledge about or have experience with the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). In this study, the purposeful sample refers to the incubator and incubatees that were chosen. Additionally, there are different types of purposeful sampling methods that can be used, and the chosen method for this study was heterogeneous sampling. The reason is that it involves two non-alike participants, the incubator and the incubatees. Heterogeneous sampling involves using participants with sufficiently various characteristics to get as huge variation as possible in the collected data (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 301). This sampling method is relevant to use to explain and describe the main themes that can be observed (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 301). Any patterns that do appear are presumably of interest and value because it will most likely represent useful information about the main theme (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 301). Additionally, the collected data should allow you to document uniqueness (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 301).

Selection Criteria

Even though the study was written on commission, a few selection criteria were made regarding the sample to ensure that the research was targeting the right participants. These criteria were separated into two categories, the first one involved the incubator, and the second one involved the incubatees. The first selection criterion for the incubator was that the respondents are working at the specific incubator that this study is made upon. Second, the people had to have relevant work positions at the incubator, for instance, a business coach. The reason for this is that they have to be actively working and involved with the incubatees for the information to be relevant and adhere to the purpose. For this reason, interviewing the CFO would not be necessary in the sense that he or she does not have the same active involvement with the incubatees as, for example, a business coach would. Lastly, the selection needed to include both women and men. In regards to the second category, the incubatees, some other selection criteria were made. First of all, the incubatee had to be currently participating in the incubators program or have previously completed the program. The desired information is connected to the incubator's gender equality work, which makes it interesting to gather the perceptions of both current incubatees and also previous ones to get a broader perspective. The last criterion regarding the incubatees was that it had to be a selection of both women and men, to get the perceptions of both genders and to see if there are any differences. Also, to avoid

skewed results, the sample chosen had an equal distribution of women, men, and mixed ownership.

Access to Respondents and Possible Errors

As previously mentioned, this research was written on commission for a Swedish incubator. Therefore, our sample was already established to some degree (see Selection Criteria above for further information about the sample). Even though the study was executed through a collaborative effort, the researchers were still considered *external researchers* (Saunders, 2016, p. 225), since only a small amount of contact was previously established with the organization. Because of this, external researchers are likely to face some issues with accessing data. For instance, negotiating access to physical, continuing, and cognitive data is a necessity (Saunders, 2016, p. 225). Goodwill is something that external researchers have to rely on, meaning the kindness of the organization and its members (Saunders, 2016, p. 225). Participants of a study are usually willing to accept external researchers if they show integrity and competence, but also because they are seen as an objective without an organizational agenda (Saunders, 2016, p. 225). Before gaining access to any data from the organization, the researchers had to sign a form of non-disclosure agreement where no sensitive or confidential data can be revealed. The access to relevant participants from the incubator was made in direct contact with them through the president of the company. Accessing the incubated ventures was made through gaining contact information from the incubator, which informed them beforehand about the study and that the researchers will contact them after. The ventures were contacted personally by the researchers via email.

From the sample regarding the incubator, seven people were contacted and six of them responded. The gender distribution was 50/50, meaning an even spread of the participants. This sample is a good representative for the incubator as only one of the people who were contacted did not respond. This was one of the business coaches and was not considered a huge loss since responses from three other business coaches were received. To further get an understanding of the representation of the incubator, only one of their totals of eight employees were not contacted as their position was irrelevant to research for the study. Overall, this implies that 75 percent of the entire incubator was represented. The even distribution of the genders also strengthens the sample as it was important for the study to include both female and male perspectives on this subject. Otherwise, important information could have been lost if, for instance, only males were included. This would have also defeated the purpose as the focus is more directed towards women and equality in entrepreneurship. However, only including women might have limited the nuances of the collected data and perhaps be skewed in one direction.

The researchers contacted 11 incubatees and 8 of them responded, out of the respondents there were six women and two men. Compared to the sample for the incubator, this has a bigger loss since three people did not respond. However, as the number of responses exceeds half of the sample, this is viewed as acceptable. In perspective, this sample deems representative as the population was limited to choose from. The reason behind this is that the respondents had to fulfill certain criteria, which is mentioned above in the paragraph about the selection criteria. To shortly summarize, the respondents had to be currently partaking in the incubator program or have completed it. At the same time, it was important to include several owners who were women, while also including mixed ownership and solely male owners. This caused a careful and limited selection of the sample, which is why eight responses were still good when comparing the limited access

to the possible respondents. The distribution of respondents between the genders was not as equal among the incubatees as it was in the incubator. This was viewed more negatively but, as mentioned above, with the sample including women and mixed ownership, it meant that more women were contacted, which automatically implies that more women would have responded. Also, as the purpose of this thesis was more focused on the female perspective, this uneven distribution was not considered to vastly affect the results. Of course, more male points of view would have made a more nuanced result. However, relating to the thesis purpose, the point was to further understand female entrepreneurship and their challenges and opportunities, which is why the dominance of women in the sample is less considered as an issue.

Lastly, as the research strategy of the study was qualitative and characterized as descripto-explanatory, as well as written on commission, being able to generalize the results to an entire population was not the purpose. The research was aimed at explaining and describing the challenges and opportunities of gender equality in entrepreneurship and was not classified by numerical data like in a quantitative study, where the ability to generalize may be more important (Saunders, 2016, p. 166).

3.6.4 The Interview Guide

Preparations

The data collection method chosen for this thesis was interviews (see 3.6.2). An interview guide has been developed to guarantee that the researcher stays focused and that certain topics are covered (Guion et al., 2001, p. 2). To ensure the effectiveness of conducting qualitative, in-depth interviews, there are a few preparations that can aid the interview process, as well as ways to create useful interview questions (Turner, 2010, p. 757). This study has followed eight principles in regards to the interview preparations, these are; “(1) choose a setting with little distraction; (2) explain the purpose of the interview; (3) address terms of confidentiality; (4) explain the format of the interview; (5) indicate how long the interview usually takes; (6) tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to; (7) ask them if they have any questions before you both get started with the interview; and (8) don't count on your memory to recall their answers” (Turner, 2010, p. 757).

Having interviews audio recorded is favorable due to the impossibility of recollecting the whole interview by heart (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). There are several benefits to recording an interview, first of all, it makes it easier for the interviewer to concentrate on asking questions to the interviewee and listening to their answers (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). Another advantage is that the questions asked are accurately recorded and formulated, making it possible to use them in other interviews where appropriate (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). Further, recording the interview is beneficial during the data analysis because of the possibility to re-listen to it. The recording also makes the interview as accurate as it possibly can be as well as removing any bias (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). Additionally, the recording makes it possible to use direct quotes and it is available for others to use in the future (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). Even though these are all beneficial reasons for recording an interview, there are still some disadvantages that occur as well. For instance, there will always be a possibility for technical problems, and the interviewee will likely detain some of their answers, which will reduce the reliability (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 413). However, the advantages of recording an interview outweigh the disadvantages.

All of the interviews were held via telephone and skype. This indicated that both the interviewers and the interviewee needed to find a suitable setting to be in when the interview took place. The interviewers held all of the interviews in a quiet room with no distractions from the outside world, and the interviewees chose a quiet area as well. Before the interview started, an explanation of the purpose was given to the interviewee. Also, it was made clear to the interviewees that if they had any questions about the interview they were free to ask them beforehand, for them to feel prepared and avoid any misunderstandings. Furthermore, the interviewee was asked to give consent to audio recording the interview as this is recommended to ease the process of transcribing the interviews. The interviewees were also informed of how their personal information will be handled. This was addressed before the interview during e-mail contact with them, and again at the occasion of the interview. The participants were notified that their confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured throughout the study, and no information they gave out would be traceable back to them. The interviews were based upon the research framework established in the study and contains two out of the three dimensions, due to the last one, perceptions, revolving around the incubatees. This dimension was irrelevant to include in the interviews since they were conducted with the incubator and not the incubatees. The interview began with a few background questions and was followed by three parts that contained a set of questions relating to the dimensions of the research framework. After the interview was finished, any questions from both parties were addressed. The participants were informed about the duration of the interview beforehand when initial contact was made. It was estimated that one interview would take around 30 to 45 minutes. After conducting the interview, the interviewees were informed about how to contact the researchers if they wanted to get in touch after the interview.

Construction of Interview Questions

Apart from the eight principles discussed above, pilot testing is another preparation that has been performed before conducting the interviews. Pilot testing refers to testing if there are any limitations, flaws, and/or other weaknesses with the interview guide and it will allow the researchers to make any necessary revisions prior to the interviews (Turner, 2010, p. 757). It is recommended that a pilot interview is held with participants that share similar interests with those that consist of the real sample of the study (Turner, 2010, p. 757). A preliminary pilot can also be conducted with friends or colleagues to check if the interview questions make sense (Rowley, 2012, p. 265). Therefore, this study chose to conduct a preliminary pilot interview with our peers to ensure that the interview guide was understandable. A few alterations were thereafter made to the questions. The pilot interview was carried out with a respondent who had experience within the area of the research and provided some recommendations to help formulate the questions better.

To construct effective questions for the interview guide there are a few recommendations that aid the researcher to gain deep and qualitative answers from the participants (Turner, 2010, p. 757). For instance, the questions should be worded to allow open-ended answers where the respondent can answer the questions in their terms (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 415; Turner, 2010, p. 758). They should also be neutral, which implies not using wording that could influence the participants' answers. Besides, they should also be clear in the sense that wording and terms should be relevant to the nature of the participants' work or culture (Turner, 2010, p. 758). Lastly, posing the questions one at a time is important (Turner, 2010, p. 758). Follow-up questions are another important aspect of conducting interviews. The interviewees may not answer the question at hand but instead answer another question from later on in the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 170). Because

of this, follow-up questions may arise to ensure that researchers obtain the optimal answers from the interviewees. Therefore, the researchers have to be flexible when asking the questions (Turner, 2010, p. 758). When constructing the interview questions, the researchers have considered the above-mentioned factors and to their best efforts tried to pose open questions that allow free answers. Wording that could imply placing words or experiences in the respondent's mouth has been avoided to obtain answers that are true to their thoughts, interpretations, and experiences.

Structure of Interview Guide

The interviews were held in Swedish since it is the native language for both the researchers and the interviewees. Since the thesis was written in English, a translated version of the interview guide can be found in Appendix 3, and the Swedish version in Appendix 4. The interview guide was structured around the research framework (see Figure 3), however, it only consists of two out of the three dimensions; *Incubator*, and *Challenges & Opportunities*. The reason behind this relates to the two samples of the study, meaning the incubator and incubatees. The questions to the samples differentiated and did not contain all dimensions of the research framework as the last dimension, *Perceptions*, refers to collecting the perspectives from the incubatees. Likewise, the incubatees were not asked questions directly aimed at the incubator from that specific dimension. Nonetheless, two elements from the *Perceptions* dimension, support, and networking, were integrated into the interview with the incubator. The questions were however formulated differently compared to when asking the incubatees regarding these aspects. The first section of the interview guide contained a few background questions to determine the demographic of the respondent. This was followed by the two dimensions from the research framework, which was divided into three sections that, on average, included around five questions. The interview guide split up the challenges and opportunities dimension which is why there were a total of four sections. The first dimension, *Incubator*, included questions that were centered around establishing the incubator's role in gender equality in entrepreneurship and their interpretations of the topic. The second dimension, *Challenges & Opportunities*, revolved around what potential challenges the incubator sees in certain areas when it comes to gender equality in entrepreneurship and if conditions are different between men and women. It also focused on what opportunities women have in business. The full interview guide can be found in Appendix 3 and the Swedish version in Appendix 4.

3.6.5 Questionnaire

Designing the Questions

How to design the questions of the questionnaire is determined by the type of data that is going to be collected (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452). Researchers can do one of three things when designing individual questions. They can either adopt or adapt questions used in other questionnaires, or develop their own questions (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452). In this questionnaire, the questions were developed by the researchers. Adopting and adapting questions can be necessary when comparing or replicating findings from other studies (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452). As previously mentioned, not many studies have been made in this specific context concerning Swedish incubators and gender equality, it was therefore not suitable to adopt or adapt questions from other studies. A questionnaire usually consists of both open and closed questions (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452). In this study, both types of questions have been used, however, with a greater emphasis on open questions (see Appendix 5 to view questionnaire). The reason for this is that they allow the respondents to answer freely in their way (Rattray & Jones, 2007, p. 237; Saunders et

al., 2016, p. 452). An open question does not suggest a range of multiple answers, instead, the respondent is expected to answer using their own words (Brace, 2018, p. 55). These types of questions are used to start a conversation about a topic (Brace, 2018, p. 55). As the purpose was to attain the incubatees perceptions, it was important to ensure that they can provide answers that openly describe their thoughts and experiences. Therefore, open questions were used frequently. However, closed questions were also used as they allow easier comparisons (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452). These types of questions were used when establishing the gender of the respondents as it was important for the purpose to see any potential differences between men and women. Closed questions were also used when determining the length of the venture as well as if the incubatees had been affected by the incubator's gender equality work. This was however elaborated upon in an open question if they answered yes. The closed questions were mainly in the form of list questions, which gives the respondent the option to choose one or more answers (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 453). A common response category is yes/no (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 452), which was used in this questionnaire.

In designing the questionnaire, it is important that the respondents understand the questions and that they do not feel challenged, intimidated, or threatened by the questions (Brace, 2018, p. 113). The questions should be clear and the respondent should not feel challenged by the wording, tone, and phrases that are used (Brace, 2018, p. 113). If the respondents do not understand the questions they would put little effort into trying to respond accurately. Also, they might fail to complete the questions due to fatigue caused by not understanding the questions (Brace, 2018, p. 113). The wording of a question is also essential to ensure that they measure what they are supposed to do, meaning to make sure that the responses are valid (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 462). There are several points to help avoid problems with the wording of a question, a few examples are; (1) Have the respondents the necessary knowledge to answer the question? (2) Are they familiar with the words used? (3) Can the question be shortened? (4) Are there any words that can cause offense? (5) Is it implied that a certain answer is correct? (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 463). To the researchers' best efforts, these have been considered when designing the questions.

Constructing the Questionnaire

Not only is the wording of the questions important, but also the order and flow in which the questions are asked (Krosnick, 2018, p. 291; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 466). The questions should be in a logical order and flow coherently, known as the semantic of question order (Krosnick, 2018, p. 292). This usually requires that the questionnaire is grouped by items or related topics (Krosnick, 2018, p. 292). This questionnaire has followed these recommendations by grouping the questions following the dimensions of the research framework. This means that the questions are categorized into asking questions about challenges, opportunities, and lastly the incubatees perceptions. It is recommended that the initial items of a questionnaire have a strong connection to the purpose and topic of the study to engage interest from the respondent (Krosnick, 2018, p. 291). Therefore, one of the first questions posed is directly aimed at addressing the inequalities between men and women in entrepreneurship. Including filter questions may be necessary to assist the flow of the questionnaire (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 466). This means that respondents with whom the following questions do not apply to are asked to skip certain questions (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 466). Two filter questions have been used in the questionnaire and it is recommended to not use more than two or three (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 466).

A cover letter is required when the questionnaire is completed under no supervision (Brace, 2018, p. 157). The covering letter explains the purpose of the study (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 468). As this questionnaire was completed online, a welcome screen presenting the purpose was first introduced to the respondent. The introduction is essential to secure the cooperation of the respondents and it should from an ethical standpoint include the following; *“the name of the organization conducting the study; the broad subject area; whether the subject area is particularly sensitive; whether the data collected will be held confidentially or used at a personally identifiable level for other purposes such as database building or direct marketing, and if so by whom; the likely length of the interview; any cost to the respondent”* (Brace, 2018, p. 174). By doing this, the respondents can make an informed decision about whether or not they are prepared to partake in the study (Brace, 2018, p. 174). Saunders et al. (2016, p. 469) also highlight that the introduction to the questionnaire should have an unbiased title that interestingly conveys the topic. In the welcome screen of the questionnaire (see Appendix 5) a title has been presented, followed by an introduction to the subject area. Information about confidentiality and anonymity were also made clear to the respondent, as well as their voluntary participation. The time it would take to complete the questionnaire was presented, followed by how their answers would be used in the study. Before the questionnaire, the respondents were contacted via email where it was described why they had been chosen and what the study was about. Before this, they had also been informed by the incubator that they were collaborating with two students on their thesis and what it entailed. This was done to make initial contact with the respondents through someone they were familiar with. The respondents were informed in the email of what they are supposed to do with the completed questionnaire. They were also asked to contact the researchers if any questions arose before, during, or after the completion of the questionnaire. In which they were provided with contact information to both researchers. Then they were thanked for their participation. These steps are recommended by Saunders et al. (2016, p. 473) when closing the questionnaire.

Pilot Testing

Even though following all recommendations for how to construct a questionnaire, it is recommended to conduct pilot testing (Krosnick, 2018, p. 294). This could be done on a small sample who are similar to the actual respondents, the size of the sample should be sufficient to estimate the performance (Rattray & Jones, 2007, p. 237; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 473). The reason for pretesting is to make sure that the respondents will not face any difficulties in answering the questions and to avoid problems involving the recording of data (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 473). In addition, the recommended practices contribute with little guidance about distinct wording or order of questions (Krosnick, 2018, p. 294). Specific populations may also display exceptions to the rules. This makes pilot testing important since it can provide beneficial assistance in the construction of the questionnaire (Krosnick, 2018, p. 294). Another advantage of pilot testing is that it will allow you with an understanding of the questions' validity and the reliability of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 473). Taking all of the above-mentioned recommendations into consideration, a pilot test was made before sending out the questionnaires to the respondents. First, a pilot test was made with our peers to make sure that the questions were understandable. After this, a few alterations were made to improve the questions. A pilot test was then carried out with a respondent who had experience within the area of the research. The respondent then provided some recommendations to improve the quality of the questions.

Delivering and Collecting the Questionnaire

After the questionnaire is designed, pilot tested and you have selected your sample, it can be used for data collection (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 474). For the respondents to not feel compelled to answer the questionnaire, it is important to state that it is voluntary by using words that signify non-compulsion (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 474). During the data collection, it is also crucial to follow your university's code of ethics. Also, it is important to remember that even though the respondent gives their consent by answering and returning the questionnaire, they still have rights that need to be considered like all participants of the study (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 474). In this study, internet questionnaires will be used to collect data. Web-based questionnaires and paper self-completion questionnaires are equivalent to each other when it comes to the strength of the questionnaire (Brace, 2018, p. 38). The reason being that the respondents have no time limit when answering the questions, they can pause the process in case of interruptions and return to it later (Brace, 2018, p. 38). One disadvantage that applies to all self-completion media is the absence of an interviewer that could clarify questions and fix any misunderstandings (Brace, 2018, p. 41). To receive good answers, the respondents must be motivated to fill in the questionnaire (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 476). Even though the covering email and visual appearance help to assure a greater level of response, unlike physical questionnaires, the respondent might have different images being displayed on their screen in comparison to the designer (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 476). This can be due to different operating systems or internet browsers, making it crucial to control that the design of the questionnaire is not compromised by any digital factors (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 476). All of these recommendations regarding internet questionnaires were thoroughly considered throughout the making of the questionnaire. The questionnaire distributed to the respondents was written in Swedish as it was the native language for all of the participants and both of the researchers. As the thesis was written in English, a translated version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5. The Swedish version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 6.

3.6.6 Summary of Methodological Standpoints

To ease the reader, a summary of the methodological standpoints made through section 3.1 to 3.6.5 is presented in Table 1, which can be seen below.

Table 1. Summarizing Table of Methodological Choices

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Ontology | Interpretivism |
| Epistemology | Interpretivism |
| Research Approach | Inductive |
| Research Strategy | Qualitative Descripto-explanatory Case study |
| Data Collection Method | Semi-structured interview (incubator) Questionnaire (incubatee) |
| Sampling Method | Heterogeneous purposeful sampling |

3.6.7 Processing and Analyzing the Data

Translation

When the participants and the researchers are speaking the same language there are no language differences (van Nes et al., 2010, p. 314). This is the main reason why both the interviews and questionnaires were held in Swedish, to avoid loss of meaning and not being able to fully express oneself. However, as the thesis was written in English, it was important to include a translated version of the interview guide and questionnaire so that the reader (who is not Swedish-speaking) can understand the questions posed. With translations, it is important that they are accurate and performed sensitively to not lose meaning and nuances (Brace, 2018, p. 203). There can be difficulties regarding the translation of words from one language to another as sometimes there are no equivalent words (Brace, 2018, p. 203). Being too literal can affect the translation process negatively. Instead, the translations must capture the sentiment over the literal translation (Brace, 2018, p. 203). To achieve a good translation, it is important that the translation process is carried out by a native speaker who understands the nuances of the language, as well as the research process of the study (Brace, 2018, p. 204).

Transcribing & Cleaning the Data

According to Wahyuni (2012, p. 75), there are three important aspects to consider regarding data management in qualitative research; transcribing audio sources, data storage, and cleaning the data. Ethically, hard copies, and electronic versions of collected data should be stored under protection from a lock or password (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 75). The data should also be categorized by steps of the analysis in a relevant manner (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 75). As there were no hard copies of the collected data, the ethically appropriate way of storing these was not relevant. However, as all data was electronic it became important to store these appropriately and ethically. The collected data was stored under password-protected computers as well as under a password-protected cloud-based storing service, meaning the data was protected under two separate passwords. The data was first categorized by the source of data, meaning if it was derived from the interviews or questionnaires. Secondly, the interviews were categorized by each respondent, including a textual and audio version of the data. The data collected from the questionnaire were categorized by questions, including all of the respondents' answers to this specific question for easy comparison in the analysis.

In terms of transcribing audio recordings, this is executed by verbatim reproducing the audio to textual form (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 572). Apart from the importance of listening to what the participants said, it is also emphasized that the interviewers should have an interest in how they said it, meaning tone and non-verbal communication (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 572). In this study, both of the researchers participated in the transcription of the audio recordings as this is considered a time-consuming process (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 572). The recordings were carefully listened to and it was made sure that there were no distractions that could inhibit hearing and typing. It was also made sure between the researchers that the audio was correctly interpreted when it was difficult to hear and understand certain words or sentences. As the interviews were held over the telephone the non-verbal communication could not be considered. Therefore, it was important to listen to the tone of the participants' voices and notes were made to capture these. The transcriptions were also reviewed and any errors were corrected to ensure its accuracy, this process is known as data cleaning (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 572). To further ensure factual accuracy some researchers send a copy of the transcript back to the participant (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 572). This study followed this recommendation and

it was especially important to do so since the transcriptions were translated (as mentioned above). Another part of cleaning the data is considering ethics regarding anonymity and confidentiality (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 75). This refers to the identification of both the case organization and the participants, in which it is recommended that the data is coded (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 75). In this case, the data was coded by Interview 1, Interview 2, etc. and the case organization was made anonymous. In regards to the respondents of the questionnaire, they always remained anonymous as the collected answers were not traceable to the individual, not even for the researchers.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is seen as a way to analyze qualitative data with a generic approach (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). The main purpose of this is to seek patterns or themes that appear across a set of data (i.e. a series of observations, interviews, documents, or websites) (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). When conducting a thematic analysis, it involves coding qualitative data to classify themes or patterns for additional analysis in relation to the research question (Rowley, 2012, p. 268; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). This type of analysis provides a systematic, but also accessible and flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data. A thematic analysis offers a logical and orderly way to analyze data, therefore it is systematic (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). Due to this reason, thematic analysis can be used for both large sets of qualitative data and smaller ones. This leads to rich explanations, definitions, and theorizing (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). Thematic analyses are used to help you *“1 comprehend often large and disparate amounts of qualitative data; 2 integrate related data drawn from different transcripts and notes; 3 identify key themes or patterns from a data set for further exploration; 4 produce a thematic description of these data; and/or 5 develop and test explanations and theories based on apparent thematic patterns or relationships; 6 draw and verify conclusions.”* (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). In this study, overall themes were identified before conducting the interviews and questionnaires that connected to the research questions and framework. This was done to make sure that all aspects were covered. After the data from the interviews and questionnaires were collected, different themes and codes were identified. For example, communication was a frequently used word in the interviews as well as images and awareness, a common theme that also occurred was challenges relating to financing.

An important aspect of this type of analysis is the interpretation of the data (Rowley, 2012, p. 269). The main purpose of the researcher is to make sense of the data, which involves interpretation. Therefore, it is recommended to have other researchers to examine the coding and classification to minimize potential bias in the interpretation (Rowley, 2012, p. 269). This reduction of bias was fulfilled in this study by sending back the transcribed and translated data to the respondent for inspection to edit any potential misinterpretations and verify that the researchers have interpreted their answers correctly. To further reduce bias, the researcher should also continuously reflect upon their assumptions and bias that might surface (Rowley, 2012, p. 269). The researchers made sure to reduce their bias by not changing the wording or formulation of the text when presenting the data. Everything presented is the respondents' opinions and feelings, and not the researchers. Lastly, most researchers within qualitative data see their findings as perspectives, insights, and questions for additional investigation rather than facts (Rowley, 2012, p. 269). This was also something that the researchers considered, the findings are based upon one Swedish incubator and cannot be seen as absolute.

Interviews

All of the interviews were conducted similarly as they were all held over the telephone or Skype. Both of the researchers participated in all of the interviews. One asked the questions while the other one took notes and made sure that the audio recording was working, as well as making sure that all of the questions were answered. Due to the interviews being semi-structured, some of the questions were answered without asking them as they spontaneously surfaced in other discussions. This resulted in a small difference regarding the length of the interviews. All of the participants permitted the interviews to be audio recorded and the characteristics of each interview can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Overview of Interviews

| Interviewee | Duration | Form | Demographic | Role |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Interviewee 1 | 33 min | Skype | Female | Communication Manager |
| Interviewee 2 | 42 min | Skype | Female | CEO |
| Interviewee 3 | 27 min | Telephone | Male | Project Manager |
| Interviewee 4 | 30 min | Telephone | Female | Business Coach |
| Interviewee 5 | 37 min | Telephone | Male | Business Coach |
| Interviewee 6 | 30 min | Telephone | Male | Business Coach |

3.7 Ethical Considerations

When conducting a study, there are several ethical issues to consider (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 242). After doing some research on what ethical considerations to include in this thesis, it was found that several authors frequently used the same considerations. This later led to the same ethical considerations being used in this thesis due to the repeated usage of them. The ethical issues that were considered throughout this study are informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and avoidance of harm. The first ethical issue that was brought up in this study was informed consent. Informed consent means that the researchers will provide the participants with sufficient information and assure them what their involvement in the study implicates (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 87; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). This will allow the participant to freely choose if they want to be a part of the study based on being given the right information that they need (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). Informed consent also involves the researchers informing the participant if they want to do any alterations to the study, for example extending the duration of an interview, giving the participant the right to accept the decision or not (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). The second ethical issue that was considered throughout this study was confidentiality. Confidentiality revolves around the personal information of the participants and how to handle it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 74; Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 97; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). The confidentiality and anonymity of the participant must be maintained throughout the study (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 97). This involves not naming the participant or in any way revealing any information that might

make it possible to identify the participant (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 97). This is only acceptable if an explicit agreement has been made (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). By ensuring the participants' confidentiality, the reliability of the data is likely to be enhanced (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). Any threats to the participants' confidentiality should be anticipated, this involves storing the information in such a way that makes unauthorized access impossible (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 74).

The third ethical issue that was considered in this study was voluntary participation. The meaning of voluntary participation is mainly that the participant has the right to not participate in the study (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 92; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). This is fulfilled by the researchers by not harassing the participant into being a part of the study (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). It is not okay to try and extend the scope of participation above the freely given (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). The participants have the right to choose how they want to take part in the process of data collection (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). This includes the right to: modify the characteristics of their consent, not answer unwanted questions, not hand out requested data, withdraw from the study, and to take back any data they have provided the researchers with (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 244). The last ethical issue that was considered throughout this thesis was the avoidance of harm. This part might be more common in medical or psychological research than in business research, however, any type of potential harm to the participants should be avoided (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 73). In some cases, even when the researchers have the best intentions, negative and harmful consequences might occur (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 73). Therefore, anticipating these possibilities is important to protect the participants from any form of direct or indirect harm (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 73). There are different types of harm that could affect the participant, this includes their emotional well-being, social or group cohesion, and physical or mental health (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 243). These types of harms can take different forms, such as discomfort, stress, pain, embarrassment, or conflict (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 243). This is caused by applying social pressure on the participants which leads to stress or anxiety. This can further be caused by violating the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as by discrimination and harassment (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 243).

The ethical issues discussed above have been considered throughout this thesis. The participants of the study were informed about what the purpose of the thesis entailed before they agreed to take part in the study. The information regarding this was initially sent out through email but was again brought up before any data collection occurred, meaning through the interviews and questionnaires. The participants have also been notified that the researchers signed a confidentiality agreement. They were further notified about their confidentiality in the information they chose to disclose. None of their personal information would be published, nor would any information incur the association of a specific individual. All participants have been made anonymous in this study and they have also been notified that the final thesis will be published. The participants have been informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. This information was likewise distributed beforehand, as well as at the start of every interview and questionnaire. The completed results were also sent to each participant for approval to avoid any misinterpretation that might have occurred during the transcribing and translating process. Changes were made if necessary to avoid deception. Any harm to the participants has been carefully avoided by adhering to these ethical considerations.

3.8 Source Criticism

To ensure that the sources used in this study are credible and of relevance to the purpose, a few techniques have been applied. First of all, the theoretical frame of reference and the methodological chapter is based upon journals, articles, and books, with a greater emphasis on the first two. Accessing the literature was made through an extensive database search using Google Scholar, EBSCO (Business Source Premier), and JSTOR among other databases. It was important that the articles and journals used were peer-reviewed, as these have a higher status and credibility since they have been reviewed by experts in respective fields (Umeå Universitet, n.d.). As Google Scholar did not provide the option to search only among peer-reviewed articles, the number of citations was used as one of the first indications to determine its relevance and credibility in the field. The greater number of citations indicate that the article is of importance in the area it is writing, however, it can also mean it is criticized by others (Umeå Universitet, n.d.). Because of this, these articles were scrutinized through examining the journals they were published in and the reason behind the citations to further ensure their credibility. The majority of journals used in this thesis are related to entrepreneurship, but also gender and a combination of the two. This indicates that the literature is based on relevant articles from journals related to the field of research. A frequently used source is provided by Malmström, Johansson, Wincent, and Voitkane who have conducted several recent studies regarding gender and entrepreneurship. Therefore, their research has been repeatedly included due to their great knowledge about the topic.

Using a systematic search approach is an adequate technique to obtain literature relevant to the purpose of a study (Umeå Universitet, n.d.). Therefore, to access related literature to this study, keywords were used as a search method. Examples of keywords included in the search were *gender*, *gender equality*, *gender theory*, *female entrepreneurship*, *challenges*, *opportunities*, and *incubator*. They were searched independently but also in combination with each other. Chain searching was another method that was used to find previous research and literature. Chain searching refers to when you find a relevant source that refers to another one and so on, which leads to finding more material (Umeå Universitet, n.d.). The references and citations that the articles referred to was the strategy in this chain searching. To the researchers best efforts, the texts from original sources were found and read to avoid risk of misinterpretation.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA

This section presents the empirical data collected during this study. Information through two types of data was collected; interviews and questionnaires. The chapter begins by introducing the information collected through the interviews and how the structure of the data will be presented. In the same manner, the information from the questionnaires is presented.

4.1 Interviews

The interviews below are presented individually in the order of which they were held. The gathered data from the interviews are presented individually as, compared to the questionnaires, they contain much more data and constitutes the case study. Also, the interviews mainly contribute to answering the main research question of this thesis, which is why they represent a larger contribution of the collected data. Furthermore, a more summarized and collected presentation containing all of the interviewees' responses would have been very long and difficult to disentangle. A separation of the interviews also aids the reader's ability to follow along with each individual's view of the subject. The interviews will be presented according to the structure of the interview guide which follows the research framework. Meaning that the interviews begin with presenting questions revolving around the incubator and the topic at hand. Thereafter questions centered around challenges regarding gender in entrepreneurship are introduced. Lastly, the opportunities are likewise discussed concerning entrepreneurship and gender. The information presented below is carefully selected to align with the research questions and purpose of the study.

4.1.1 Interview I

Incubator

The first interview was held with a woman whose role in the incubator is the communication manager. This interview lasted 33 minutes and was held via Skype, no interruptions occurred as the setting was held in a quiet location on both ends. In the theoretical chapter, a significant gender gap was found between how many men and women who start and run a business. This led to asking the interviewees why they think this gender gap exists. Interviewee one responded with thinking that it relates to patriarchal structures. She highlighted that traditionally men have been encouraged to work while women are supposed to support the family by staying home and taking care of the children. She also mentions that this view has historically been around for a long time and that people have only recently started to question this viewpoint. The incubator has stated that they are trying to increase the number of women in business and they were asked to reflect on how they can reduce this gender gap. Interviewee one said that they can contribute to decreasing the gender gap, but as an individual actor, they cannot change it. She views that an important part of her task as a communication manager is to make female entrepreneurs visible. To use pictures that are critical to the norm to not continue cultivating and growing this traditional picture of entrepreneurship but try to turn it instead. Other changes she highlighted that the incubator has made were that in the early stages of implementing their gender equality-orientation they looked over the way they talk and communicate. She pinpoints that incubators in Sweden have started to realize that the earlier language that was used was very excluding and deterrent, where the majority of the population could not relate to the words they were using. Another thing

the interviewee highlights is what type of questions they use when talking to their entrepreneurs. She also states that the communication efforts and the work they have done internally has paid off. She exemplifies this by mentioning that in their inflow to the incubator program they have seen a greater number of women who are reaching out to them compared to a couple of years ago. The interviewee also expressed that their team often works with their values and how they want to be perceived. She believes that all of them were recruited for different reasons because they possess this type of mindset, meaning towards gender equality.

The interviewee was asked to reflect upon how she views the entrepreneurial environment in Sweden and also as a woman what opportunities and challenges that might follow in wanting to become an entrepreneur in this context. She responds by thinking that the Swedish environment probably affects women by there being a lot of prejudice present about women in entrepreneurship that people get stuck in, which turns into obstacles. The interviewee also talks about how we (the incubator) know that people are driven by different things. Entrepreneurship has traditionally been communicated to be about money and how much you earn, but she highlights that not all target groups are driven by this. Therefore, they highlight this difference and state that entrepreneurship can also be “[...] *rubber boots and a checkered shirt on a field in the countryside*”. This led to talking about what kind of support the incubator gives their entrepreneurs partaking in their program. They have a developing program called the Boost Chamber where they help people who have an idea that is in the very early stages. During this stage, it is a lot about research to see if there is a potential market for their idea, what are the target groups, pricing, and competitors. For more developed ideas, they offer their incubator program that lasts for 18 months where the incubator offers individualized and custom-made coaching for the companies. The interviewee was also asked about whether the support they give between men and women differentiate in any way. She responded by saying that they try to be as fair as possible and that the support is dependent on what stage the entrepreneur is in and what type of idea they have. In regards to the Boost Chamber, she states that “*You develop your idea in groups and the terms are equal for everyone who applies and the ones who get accepted have the same prerequisites*”. The interviewee also concludes by mentioning how looking at the number of hours the business coaches give, there is no difference whether it is a man or woman who runs the company.

In this part of the interview, the respondent was also asked to reflect upon if they have faced any challenges by implementing this gender equality orientation and also what opportunities they see with this. The interviewee said that she does not feel that they have experienced any challenges internally, but that everyone in the team understands that this is important for a continued healthy livelihood and a business world where everyone’s skills are utilized. She highlights challenges revolving around meeting people who do not share their view of how you should act and what is okay or not. This can cause difficulties when you are supposed to cooperate while not sharing the same values. Lastly, she states that there are fantastic opportunities for them, as an incubator, in being able to affect the image they want to communicate and what they consider important. With support from the team, she thinks that she has a chance to work for this cause.

Challenges

The second part of the interview started with a description of what was found in theory in regards to challenges that women face in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship has found to be associated with what is regarded as male characteristics. Research has also seen that

women who display these types of characteristics are considered negative by others and that they can experience career backlash if they possess these so-called masculine traits. This was later followed by a question of if and how the respondent thinks this affects women's careers in entrepreneurship. The interviewee strongly agreed with this statement and added that she had read many interviews about women in manager positions that have testified that while they are called challenging, men are called driven. The respondent was then asked if they have experienced or seen any gender discrimination in entrepreneurship. The interviewee expressed that she has been exposed to it several times.

“And when you put on these so-called equality-glasses, that is when you start looking at things in a different way than before and you react to things you did not react to before ... Women and men are questioned in different ways due to their gender.”

She then brought up an example from The Yes Way project where statistics showed that in a financing context when entrepreneurs are looking for money from venture capitalists, women have to defend their idea more often than men. Another question that was raised was if the respondents have seen any differences in how men and women network. The interviewee expressed that it is more difficult for women to participate in things outside working hours because they have responsibility for the house and kids. Traditionally, men and women have been taught to act in different ways from a very young age and this affects how we behave.

Opportunities

The last part of the interview touched upon opportunities in entrepreneurship, and the first question asked was what motivational factors the respondent think men and women have when starting a business. The interviewee said that she thinks men often start businesses to earn a lot of money, and this is something that has been associated with male entrepreneurs for a long time. While she felt that women are more associated with innovation, they are impact-driven and want to do good for society. She also expressed that these are only her prejudices. The interviewee was later asked what possibilities she sees for women being an entrepreneur. She thinks that women and men have the same possibilities, and it's about what possibilities you have to implement it. She highlights the importance of role models and traditional views of success.

“I know that there are a lot of women who do not identify themselves with the word entrepreneur. They think ‘what, me, an entrepreneur?’ ‘No, I just run a business’. There are also men who think this but I think statistically there are more women who have this opinion that they can't use this word about themselves.”

This section of the interview ended with a description that said: It is researched that gender stereotypes create a “push”, serving as a motivational factor that causes women to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Gender stereotypes shape “necessity-driven” female entrepreneurs rather than “opportunity-driven” ones. It is stated that more women than men start a venture out of “necessity”. This implies that women see it as a must to respond or escape the gender stereotype, instead of seizing an opportunity driven by “want”. The question regarding this was if the respondents think gender stereotypes affect men and women in entrepreneurship? The interviewee said that she thinks stereotypes matter regardless of what kind of stereotypes they are. She also expressed that it is tragic that research shows that women start businesses to prove something rather than because they

have a passion for something. She finishes by saying that this might be needed to see a difference. It is very good that there are women who are willing to make this sacrifice.

4.1.2 Interview II

Incubator

The second interview was also held with a woman who is the CEO of the incubator, it was held via skype and the interview lasted for 42 minutes and there were no interruptions. The interview started with the interviewee reflecting on why there is a large gender gap between men and women who start a business. She mentions that the low number of women who are role models contribute or is a part of the reason why there are fewer women who start and run a business. In regards to the Swedish entrepreneurial environment as a whole, she mentions that women's opportunity to access capital is frighteningly small. She exemplifies that in 2016 there was only 1 % of the venture capital invested in companies owned by women. She hopes that it has changed since then, but states that this indicates how big this problem is and how we must change working methods to enable all good ideas to get the funding required. However, she does mention that there are many misconceptions out there, which she previously believed to be based on facts but that research has proven to be untrue. The example she discusses revolved around how "*[...] women are not likely to take risks, they rather focus on their home or their children*". She goes on to state that of course there are women who prefer this, but there are also men who choose this option. She prefers to talk about individuals and not gender-wise, further saying that it is not desirable to generalize and say that men and women are in certain ways.

The interviewee was later asked to discuss how they, as an incubator, can contribute to decreasing the gender gap as they are working towards increasing the number of women in entrepreneurship. She starts by mentioning an obstacle which implies that the individual has not identified with being an entrepreneur, that they do not think it is a possible choice for the individual or the individual woman. Therefore, they (the incubator) are trying to lift role models. In their communication, they have also chosen to lift both women and men, but perhaps with the dominance of women. However, in their communication, they showcase those role models without signifying "*[...] look it is a woman who is starting a business*". Instead, they try to visualize it as obvious or normative. This is the first part she says, then there are several obstacles they have identified for when the entrepreneur has started a business. For instance, how some supporting actors treat and look at women as entrepreneurs. The interviewee exemplifies by mentioning that it could be everything from banks to other actors that they meet who asks certain types of questions to women and others to men. She goes on to mention that the actors might ask more questions of risk to women and more about opportunities to men. Therefore, she states that they (the incubator) are trying to work with strengthening women in that aspect that they should prepare answers that shift the focus from risk to opportunity. She states that they put efforts into everything from when the entrepreneur needs to borrow money from the bank, gain access to financing from investors, and the opportunity to be a part of different types of projects or networks. As the interviewee was talking about this, she was asked to explain what other changes they have practically made to implement this gender equality work. First, she mentions that they try to live up to the standards themselves, to live the way they learn by for instance having an equal organization and equal team.

“We talk a lot about diversity and equality and what it means and we try to be thorough with not placing blame because it is easy to fall down the rabbit hole yourself. Instead of putting each other down, we try to positively lift each other and make each other aware of what we have to think about. We don’t want to create a fear in us nor others that you are doing something wrong. Instead, we like to raise awareness that we need to think in new ways and find other ways to work and communicate. It is okay to do wrong as long as we learn, develop, and think ahead.”

Another aspect the interviewee brought up is that they are part of a partnership known as The Yes Way, which was mentioned in the theoretical chapter. From this, they obtain methods and working ways to use very concretely to work towards becoming more equal. She states that they have assisted with methods to use when recruiting that has worked very well, but also been of use elsewhere. Also, others from the partnership have tools to work with more equal investment networks that they also can access. This partnership is a way for them to share their methods and knowledge with others. The interviewee was also asked about why they chose to implement their gender equality orientation and what opportunities they see. She responded by saying that they had the opportunity to rebuild when the incubator did a reboot a few years back. When listening to stakeholders and companies that had been with the incubator before they noticed that there was a certain perception of the incubator. They saw that the ideas and companies involved with the incubator had a main focus which was “[...] preferably men with technical products... women and service companies were not target groups. Some potential clients mentioned they did not want or dared to approach the incubator because they felt that it was not for everyone”. Because of this, it became important to change that picture. Therefore, she mentions how they have been careful about the way they communicate by all means and goes on to state that *“Innovation can itself be a word that discourages people. We are trying to simplify, lower thresholds, and create images of people that allow a wider picture and more target groups to identify with. Having an offer that can be of interest and value, and that we are inviting for them”*. She also mentions how giving equal opportunities and distributing their resources as equally as possible is important due to the incubator being publicly owned and that the majority of their financing comes from public funding.

Keeping to the subject of the incubator, the interviewee was asked to describe what kind of support they give their incubatees and how. She was also asked to reflect on whether she sees any differences in how they give support between men and women. Apart from mentioning the 18-month long incubator program like interviewee one, she mentions that the support they give includes business coaching up to four hours per week, access to networks with specialist competencies, financing, marketing and communication, infrastructure for a sustainable business, and also access to the local startup community.

“We usually say that we are process leaders, or we hold the entrepreneur’s hand on the journey. The entrepreneur is in the front seat - the one who has to do the work. We make sure a tailored action plan is in place with actions this person and the company needs to do. We do not repeat things that they have already done or known, instead, we focus on the gaps and make sure steps are taken in that direction.”

In regards to whether the support they give differentiates between the genders, the interviewee responds by saying that they try not to do that. She states *“We can’t say with certainty that we give equal opportunities, but it is a question that we always and*

continuously have with us". To make sure that the support is equal she described that they have quarterly follow-ups and several people view the progress that the company has made. In this way, they can capture if there are any differences. In addition to this, they have weekly dialogues within the incubator at every Monday meeting. There is no time to discuss every company at each time, but the coaches can raise any challenges they have or any certain company they would like to discuss at the time. The interviewee ends by saying that they are working towards making sure that there are no differences and that this is a question they need to work with all of the time.

In the final part of this section of the interview, the interviewee talked about the challenges they have faced working with a gender equality orientation. She begins by stating that they have experienced challenges, whereby she mentions how themselves and others can at first glance think and believe that everything is equal. She also mentions that women themselves can think that they have no problems and that things are equal. Thereby, the interviewee describes how it often takes time and examples to penetrate and create a proper understanding of this topic. Further saying how it is a challenge to create this insight in people about what the problem means and why it is important to work with, so that everyone understands what the situation looks like. She builds on this by discussing how many people may not choose to prioritize this matter and that people might think along the lines of "*We recruit after skills and we do not intend to redistribute one gender after another, we simply pick men because we find no woman who has the skills*". Which she means often is to choose the easiest way and to ignore the facts. She talks about how people have either chosen to not see the problem or that they simply are very unaware of it. This can also be an obstacle and you are not always available to raise these issues. In their cooperation with the incubatees, they try to challenge these issues to make the entrepreneur reflect on different options.

Challenges

The second part of the interview focused more on challenges and the interviewee was first asked to reflect upon what previous research has found in regards to entrepreneurship being associated with male characteristics. The respondent was asked if and how she thinks this affects women's careers in entrepreneurship. She started by stating that she had some difficulties with seeing this to be true. The interviewee however continued with saying that it might be possible that it is stated that entrepreneurship is associated with male characteristics, but that this is a norm that has been created. She adds by mentioning how they (the incubator) are trying to broaden this norm, meaning that entrepreneurship is not automatically associated with male norms and behaviors. She highlights "*We describe the picture of an entrepreneur and the characteristics of an entrepreneur with a broader focus than the typical male entrepreneur being the norm*". Apart from this, the interviewee was asked if they think or have experienced any form of gender discrimination to occur within entrepreneurship. She states that it does and refers back to the example of when she talked about women and financing. She adds by saying that women pitching to investors receives completely different questions than men and they do not receive capital in the same amount. She refers to this as clear gender discrimination. The respondent also gives another example in a context that the incubator has arranged, where women who have pitched to certain actors received comments on their looks and how they cooperate. In contrast, men received comments focused on their product.

“I would like to say that gender discriminations occur regularly and those who make these types of comments or actions are not always aware of how they are perceived. This is where we have the opportunity to make a difference – without placing blame.”

Financing was more deeply discussed during the interview in which the interviewee talked about how to access funding and continued on the topic of gender differences in this area. In the area or province in which the incubator is located, there are two public funding checks the entrepreneur can receive, one amounts to SEK 50,000 and the other SEK 100,000. The incubator helps the incubatees prepare for these checks and helps them to contact these actors when it is time to apply for the funding. In this respect, the respondent does not believe there to be any differences regarding whether the company is run by a man or woman and who receives the check. Nonetheless, she also pinpoints that according to their statistics they have more companies with male owners, which automatically means that the funding is in a larger proportion distributed to men. She thinks the gender ownership composition is about 70/30 and the outside funding which, as she highlights, they cannot control, will be distributed to men to a greater extent until we change the composition. Apart from this type of funding, the interviewee states that companies can seek project money from other actors, which she says can be a little bit more difficult.

The last part of this section in the interview addressed networking and if there are any differences regarding how women and men network and how they gain access to contacts. The interviewee again addresses how women may not have as many entrepreneurial role models who also are women. She thinks that if you do not have access to that through, for instance, family or acquaintances, there is a great need to identify and share experiences with other women who are entrepreneurs. She goes on to discuss that women have other conditions and resistance to work with, which men do not have. However, she does not believe that she sees a difference in how the respective gender networks, she describes them both as alert and curious. The only difference she mentions is that women request deepened conversations with each other to exchange experiences.

Opportunities

In the last section, the respondent was first asked what motivational factors men and women have when starting a business. The interviewee responded that she tried to see what motivates the incubatees in their incubator and she said that she cannot see a clear difference based on gender. There are more individual driving forces than gender-based, from the cases in the incubator. She gave an example of a female incubatee who considered people in her innovation compared to a man whose focus was sustainable technology. But she thinks that the differences mainly are based on individuals rather than gender. The interviewee was then asked what opportunities she thinks women have in becoming entrepreneurs. She thinks that the opportunities are increasingly better than before, but there are still challenges for women in regards to the norm of them having to take care of the children and the household.

*“How can we contribute to changing the picture that it is OK for male **and** female entrepreneurs – simply all people regardless of gender - to combine business with having small children and family? The solution to this question needs to be handled by the whole community (including the business community): being aware of norms and obstacles and actively promoting ways of obtaining a more equal perspective on life and a balance in*

life so that everyone's opportunity is the same. This becomes an important discussion that needs a long-term focus.”

The interviewee also expressed the importance of lifting people in history as well as in our present life and what they have contributed with. She thinks this is important when creating bigger opportunities for women to a larger extent choosing to become entrepreneurs. Necessity-driven entrepreneurs were then brought up in the context of women trying to fight the gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship. The interviewee thought that this is something that needs to change both in male and female-dominated fields of entrepreneurship. To inspire men and women into sectors where they traditionally would not start a business to get a larger diversity within all sectors.

Also, the respondent talked about how they as an incubator can improve the opportunities for better financing options as well as for networking. She exemplifies by stating how they are trying to build a network of people who want to invest in companies located in the area. She also mentions how they helped to start an investment company who is run only by women, called Asynjor Gävleborg – which is part of a national investment group of women investing. The interviewee further says how they want to bring these groups together to have a very active network of both women and men who are ready to invest. She thinks this will give the companies better conditions for finding an investor that they need with the right skills and funding. In regards to networking, she points out that they always invite everyone to their activities. They have also made some activities just for women per request from them. To create better opportunities for networking the respondent states the following:

“I think we actively have to work on two strategies. Partly working on combining networks because I don't believe in completely separate male/female networks. At the same time, I think we need to acknowledge if there are needs, expectations or requests from female entrepreneurs to meet other female entrepreneurs, bridging a lack of role models in their close proximity.”

4.1.3 Interview III

Incubator

The third interview was held with a man who is a project manager at the incubator. The interview was held via telephone, it lasted 27 minutes and there were no interruptions throughout the interview. The interview started with questions regarding the incubator and the respondent was asked why he thinks there is such a big gender gap between men and women in entrepreneurship. The interviewee responded that he thinks this has something to do with how it has been historically. The woman stayed home with the children and took care of the house while the man ran a business. He also thinks that stereotypes play a huge role in this, men are expected to have typically male occupations, such as an entrepreneur, while women should have typical female occupations. The respondent was then asked how they, as an incubator, can increase the number of women in business. He answered that it is important for them as an incubator to act as an inspiration and motivation for women through their communication. To lift women on their channels, work with equality within the incubator, have both male and female business coaches, and with all of this try to attract more women to the incubator. The respondent also highlighted that the incubator is involved with The Yes Way project and that they actively work with getting more women into the Boost Chamber. The challenges with continuing to work with this gender equality orientation that the interviewee

mentioned were mainly connected to stereotypes and trying to fight them. One positive aspect of the gender equality-orientation that the interviewee highlighted was the greater variety of people in the incubator. This leads to greater knowledge exchange and more perspectives compared to before, when there were mainly men in the incubator. The next question was regarding the support that the incubator gives to the incubatees and if the respondent has seen any differences in how they give support to men and women. The interviewee had not experienced any differences in the support they give between men and women and he highlighted that the incubator is very aware of this and bases the support on the individual needs and not their gender.

Challenges

The second part of the interview revolved around challenges and the interviewee was asked to reflect upon how he thinks entrepreneurship connected to male characteristics can affect women's careers in entrepreneurship. He said that the image of an entrepreneur being a man is something he also has had for a long time and surely others have as well. However, since he started working at the incubator he has realized that the image of an entrepreneur is much broader than that. He thinks that this traditional view of an entrepreneur being mainly a man is something that makes it more difficult for women to deal with suppliers or other companies who are run by men because they think that the woman is incompetent. Hence, this stereotype affects women in a bad way, he says. The respondent was then asked how the incubatees get access to financing and if there are any differences between men and women in this aspect.

"I mean we have talked a bit about this here just because there are many men who are the financiers and capital providers, that this can make it more difficult ... and also, I think there are pretty good numbers on this that men in general also get more capital from financiers. I absolutely think that there is a big difference and that for a woman it might be more challenging."

The interviewee also brought up the issue of male investors choosing to support male entrepreneurs and their ideas rather than a woman who has a similar idea. The last question in regards to challenges was about networking and if the respondent has seen any differences there. He had tried to reflect upon this connected to the incubator's events and activities, but he had not seen any differences there. The only differences were between their personalities but he has not seen any obvious differences between men and women.

Opportunities

The last section of the interview revolves around opportunities and questions regarding this subject. The first question in this section was about the motivational factors for starting a business, and if there are any differences between men and women. The respondent said that he thinks both genders are motivated by the freedom of running their own business and getting to plan their days compared to being an employee. He also highlighted that he thinks men are more motivated by the power and money that comes with being an entrepreneur than women are. He thinks there might be other factors that are more important for women instead. When asked what opportunities the interviewee thinks women have by becoming an entrepreneur, he said that the freedom of planning your days are important. But he also expressed that it is very time demanding to be an entrepreneur and women also have to consider the family in this aspect.

4.1.4 Interview IV

Incubator

The fourth interview was with one of the female business coaches in the incubator, the interview was held via telephone, it lasted for 30 minutes and there was no disturbance on either part during the interview. The first question regarding the incubator was why the respondent thinks the huge gender gap between men and women in entrepreneurship exists. The interviewee answered that she thinks women, in general, feel the need to do things right, they have to know that it works before they embark on the journey of running a business. Women have that “*good girl syndrome*”, and that contributes to the gender gap. The next question was how the interviewee thinks the incubator can help decrease the gender gap. She highlights the importance of their communication through their social media channels. The interviewee further explains that it is crucial to not make it difficult or intimidating for women to take the step of becoming an entrepreneur. She also thinks that it is important to have a climate and culture that is more allowing, where it is okay to ask dumb questions. The respondent then lifts the communication manager’s work of publishing images of female entrepreneurs and hiring female speakers as an important aspect that the incubator team always keeps in mind. Some other things that the interviewee brought up about the incubator's work were that they set very clear goals of achievement and execution, and it is an important part both in the board and with all of their partners.

“We are very careful with treating everyone equally and that everyone is treated equally by everyone in our network. What I think we have done well when it comes to these kinds of situations is that when questions arise, we work a lot with feedback. We immediately deal with the problem when inappropriate comments have been made, we meet with the people and give feedback on the things that have not been good in regards to the tone of voice, comments, or other. It is always uncomfortable to give feedback on things that have not been good, but we handle these kinds of situations fearlessly and I think that is really great.”

Later, the interviewee was asked if she had experienced any challenges with the implementation of their gender equality work. She answered that they had not seen any challenges concerning understanding. This is an obvious thing for most people nowadays. The difficult part is that people also have to live this way and have this equality outlook on both genders in all situations. On a more positive note, the respondent was then asked what possibilities she sees with continuing their work in the future. She underlined the importance of not giving up, continue to be aware, and make these conscious choices because this will not just happen by itself. She said that they will continue hiring female speakers and business coaches as a part of this work. The respondent was later asked to reflect upon the Swedish entrepreneurial environment and how it affects women’s possibilities and challenges in entrepreneurship. The interviewee said that she thinks Sweden is one of the greatest countries for female entrepreneurs to be in. However, she also said that even though they have come a long way regarding gender equality in the country, they are not completely there yet. After this, the respondent told us about what kind of support the incubator gives to the companies in their programs. She mentioned that they stand out from other incubators because they offer custom-made journeys for every company. They also try to match each coach’s competencies with the companies to be as flexible and customized as possible. She also highlighted that the commitment the coaches have to the companies is valuable and one of the primary supports they offer. She finished by talking about the great number of competencies and experiences that the

companies can use via the incubator's networks as well as their partner's networks. Lastly, the respondent expressed that the incubator does not give different support for men and women, it is solely based on individual needs.

Challenges

This section of the interview started with a description of male characteristics in association with entrepreneurship and how it can negatively affect female entrepreneurs. This was then followed by a question of how the respondent thinks these male characteristics affect women's career in entrepreneurship. She did not agree with this statement, she thought that it had the opposite effect. Women who possess these masculine characteristics are the ones who succeed, she said. These are the women that manage to get things done and she admires these women. The interviewee was then asked if she had experienced or seen any gender discrimination. She expressed that she had seen different types of feedback given to women compared to men. She said that when they have had people to assess the companies' business ideas or presentations, she had seen differences in the feedback given to men versus women, and this is a catastrophe that needs to stop. The next part of the interview involved the respondent talking about how entrepreneurs access capital and if she had seen any differences between men and women. She said that in the incubator, they are not treated differently when applying for grants. However, she knows that there is a great imbalance both on the receiving end of finance and when it comes to the gender of the investors. The interviewee was then asked to reflect upon how men and women network. She expressed that she thinks it is easier for men to network with other men, there is some kind of brotherhood and friendship that is very difficult for a woman to get through and be a part of. Even when it is in a professional setting, it is not obvious that you as a woman will be included. This makes it harder for women because they need to be braver and act bigger and better than they are to be seen. At the end of this section, the interviewee told us about one last challenge of being a female entrepreneur that she wanted to bring up.

"I think that you need to be assertive and you will also have to answer questions that men do not have to answer, and questions that feel completely irrelevant and do not contribute to making things better. You have to explain things just because you are a woman."

Opportunities

The last section of the interview revolved around opportunities and the first question was what motivational factors women and men have when starting a business. The interviewee thought that, from what she had seen, women have the need to be creative and want to solve a problem. They get to express their creativity through starting a business and it gives them the opportunity to make a living out of their interests and this is a driving force for women. She felt that men tend to start businesses more because they want to take the chance, that it involves prestige and an opportunity to earn a lot of money. What possibilities women have in becoming entrepreneurs was the next question, and the respondent said that she thinks women, to a larger extent, become great employers for other women. The understanding of family, childbirth, equality, etc. contributes to being a great employer. The last question in this section was about the necessity-driven entrepreneur and how women use this to fight gender stereotypes. The interviewee expressed that if this is true, it is unfortunate because it is a weak reason to start a business.

4.1.5 Interview V

Incubator

The fifth interview was conducted over the telephone with one of the male business coaches and it lasted for 37 minutes. There were no interruptions or any disturbances during the interview. The first topic of discussion was asking the respondent to reflect upon why there is a significant gender gap between how many men and women who start a business. The interviewee starts by stating how this is a difficult question and that he does not know the answer. He continues by saying how they have discussed these questions within the incubator. That, historically, they have had few women in their incubator program, instead they have mostly attracted middle-aged white men, which they also have tried to analyze the reason behind. He describes how the incubator has tried twisting their offer and thinking about what language and pictures they communicate with. The respondent states how these efforts have shown results in their pre-incubator program (boost chamber) where more women than ever before have participated. The previous time they ran the program the majority of the participants were women, whereas currently, it has been more equal, a distribution about 40/60 (women/men). Lastly, he mentions how if you look at research discussing the topic about men being more risk-averse as a reason, it has shown not to be true he states. While discussing the gender gap the interviewee was asked how they, as an incubator, can help decrease the gap as they are working towards increasing the number of women in entrepreneurship. He begins by stating how it is a high priority for them to have a more equal distribution between men and women. Language, images, and communication were three things he mentioned that they have looked over. Also, the way they meet with entrepreneurs, what type of questions they ask them, and also trying to be including in every possible way are actions they have taken.

The interviewee was later asked to discuss if he had encountered any challenges by working with their gender equality orientation. He responded by saying the opposite and from his perspective, there are so many positive words around this, but perhaps that others might experience it differently. The respondent also talked about how this is a highly prioritized matter across incubators in Sweden and he wants to believe that Sweden is further ahead with these issues compared to other countries. Looking forward, the interviewee was asked to reflect upon what opportunities he sees by continuing to work with gender equality. He highlights how it is important to constantly analyze how we communicate and how we are acting. Regardless of whether you are striving for a gender-equal distribution in the inflow of entrepreneurs or if it is about inclusion in other ways, it is important to actively keep this matter in mind at all times.

In the last part of this section of the interview, the incubator at hand was discussed and the respondent was asked to describe what kind of support they give their entrepreneurs. The interviewee, like the other respondents, mentions their pre-incubator program (i.e. Boost Chamber) as well as the 18-month long incubator program. He also mentions how they work with the entrepreneurs in groups in their respective cases. Further mentioning how an important part of this is the group dynamic and learning from each other. Apart from this, he mentions how every entrepreneur receives a dedicated business coach that they work with 4 hours a week. They offer a custom-made program for every entrepreneur and they follow a template to make sure that all of the important points are touched upon when you go through the stages of building a company. Another important aspect that the interviewee describes is team building and he mentions how they have partners to help them in terms of building a sustainable team for the startups. The final question for this

section asked whether the respondent sees any differences in terms of how and what kind of support they give between men and women. He responds by stating how it is completely based on the individual and their idea. He describes that it is about the idea the entrepreneur has and what industry they are in, their journey will all be different and it is not about their gender. He continues by saying how they assess the entrepreneur based on who they are as a person and how driven they are. The interviewee concludes by saying “*It doesn't matter who it is, that has no significance*”.

Challenges

The second part of the interview that is called challenges started with a question regarding male characteristics and how they are associated with entrepreneurship, which can negatively affect female entrepreneurs. The respondent expressed that he knows this is present in today's society. Even though we are going in the right direction, there is a lot that still needs to change. The interviewee also said that he thinks it is important for them to be in the frontline in the development of these kinds of questions. The situation today is very unequal and we need to work together to eliminate it and everyone needs to take their responsibility, both men and women. A question regarding gender discrimination was later presented and the interviewee expressed that he is convinced that gender discrimination is present today. However, the incubator team is constantly working with this. He also mentioned an exercise they had performed about how blind people can be when they are privileged and therefore have difficulties with seeing an issue because of this. The exercise showed that if you are on one end of the spectrum, being a white, straight, educated man with a job, you will have a completely different answer to a person on the other end, a black, gay, uneducated, unemployed woman. He further expressed that if you talk about these kinds of things you become more aware and act differently to be more inclusive towards everyone. Another question that was asked in regards to challenges was how entrepreneurs get access to finance and if the respondents have seen any differences between men and women. He said that he knows that a huge part of the venture capital in Sweden and around the world goes to men and that is the unfortunate truth. He expresses the importance of choosing the right partners within venture capitalists who share the same values as the incubator. To carefully screen the partners to make sure that they look at the innovation itself and not the gender of the person presenting the idea. The next question was about networking and if the respondents have seen any differences between the genders. He answered that he does not know if there are any differences, but he had noticed among the incubatees that women are more proactive in looking for contacts than men. He said that women are very driven and quick at building contacts of all kinds and they are more thorough, which of course reflects the results. However, he cannot say if this applies to the entire country but it is something he has noticed in their incubator.

Opportunities

The third and last section of the interview revolved around opportunities and the first question was about men and women's motivational factors for starting a business. The respondent said that he had noticed that men tend to have innovations that involve tech, digital solutions, or engineering solutions. Many women tend to have social innovations connected to sustainability and HR. He expressed that this is only his generalization of what he has seen among the ventures in the incubator programs but he has seen differences between men and women especially in regards to what ideas they have. The next question was what possibilities women have in becoming an entrepreneur. The interviewee said that a woman will have greater possibilities in succeeding when she is

in an incubator program with contacts that are screened and secure, compared to going out on this journey by herself. Later, the interviewee was presented with a description of necessity-driven entrepreneurship and how women use it to overcome gender stereotypes instead of starting a business out of motivation or opportunity. The respondent was then asked how he thinks gender stereotypes affect men and women in entrepreneurship. He expressed that stereotypes have an impact regardless of if it is about gender or anything else because we all have preconceived images of things. Awareness is an important part of fighting these stereotypes.

4.1.6 Interview VI

Incubator

The sixth interview was held with a male business coach over the telephone, it lasted for 30 minutes and the interview remained undisturbed throughout. As for the other interviews, it began by asking the interviewee why he thought there was a large gender gap between men and women who start a business. He responded by saying that this applies to the context of entrepreneurship as a whole, but as for newly formed companies in the area the incubator is located it is more equal. He continues by saying that there is some male dominance but thinks this has to do with being many foreign-born people in the area. The interviewee also mentions how this makes it hard to get a job and that men want to start their own business while women tend to be more careful. Lastly, he talks about how they do not notice this as much in the incubator, but that there are many tech ideas and similarities that traditionally come from men it seems. The respondent also reflected upon the Swedish entrepreneurial environment in which he stated to be fantastic and that the opportunities it has for starting small- and large-scale companies should be exposed more. He discusses how there are quite generous amounts of public financing, but still highlights the shame of that so few women receive investments.

The interview continued by asking the respondent on what changes they have made with implementing a gender equality-orientation and how they, as an incubator, can contribute to increasing the number of women in entrepreneurship. He responded by stating how their change in communication has been a great transformation in directing it towards women who have plans on pursuing a career in entrepreneurship. This change has also caused there to be an increase of women in their pre-incubator (Boost Chamber). The interviewee also talks about The Yes Way project they are in collaboration with where they have obtained experiences and tools. He continues to highlight that they have had a lot of communication, most of it internally in their organization. He also mentions that they have a female coach on equal conditions. This led to discussing the opportunities the respondent sees with continuing to work with gender equality. He stated how the possibilities are very big to attract more women, both as entrepreneurs and business coaches, and that this makes it a lot more complete in the ways they work. In this part of the interview, the respondent was also asked to describe what kind of support they give the companies in the incubator. The interviewee mentions how he thinks that the coaching they offer is the most important thing. This gives them a push and to be questioned gives them the ability to obtain information towards making the right decisions, gaining new insights, and also having someone to exchange ideas with. When asked if he sees any differences regarding how and what kind of support they give between the genders of their entrepreneurs he firmly responded with a no. He says that they do not give different support between men and women, instead, they look more at the individual and what they need.

Challenges

In the second part of the interview, the focus was on challenges and it started with discussing how entrepreneurship is often associated with male characteristics, and then the respondent was asked about their thoughts on how this affects women's careers in entrepreneurship. He responded with how he agreed that it can affect women negatively, but that it has become a lot better. He further discusses how masculine characteristics relate to the tech area and that innovations often come from there. The interviewee continues by saying that to gain more women in these types of jobs would create more female entrepreneurs within this sector. The topic of gender discrimination within entrepreneurship was then discussed and he explained that discrimination from the stateside is one aspect, but that no discrimination has occurred within the incubator that he has come across. The interview progressed to talk about the options for financing and how the relationship between men and women's access to capital looks like. He describes how they have different investors in different networks and that there also are public financiers available. However, he immediately addresses how it is interesting why so few women receive investment money, but that he does not know the reason why. He hopes that people do not look at whether they (women) are going to have children, start a family and such, and define those as very discriminatory reasons. The interviewee was also asked about whether or not he thought that men and women's approaches to networking are different and he said that they were a little bit. He exemplifies by discussing how women are often very good at networking and that it does not become a "*swordplay*", as it can become between men who start to compete. He refers to these as very traditional roles and that it may not be like this anymore. He gave another example where he described how two female entrepreneurs had approached him as they wanted to be a part of a CEO-network. He thought this was weird and reflected upon their reasons why. He discusses how maybe they had experienced things in the past that led them wanting to be a part of a network with a lot of men, which he described to have more business talk. Nonetheless, he ends by saying how there are a lot of variations to what and how people do things, and also how they are as persons.

Opportunities

The last part of the interview talked about opportunities and began with asking the interviewee with what he thinks are the biggest motivational factors for why someone starts a business, and if they are different between men and women. Money and if you do not have a job were the first thing the respondent thought of. He also described how he has experienced that women may not believe that they have an innovation when they actually do, that they are scared to come forward and present it, and that sometimes they have had the idea for years. He continues to say that he does not know why that is, but thinks that it probably has something to do with self-esteem. The interview continued with the respondent reflecting upon what he thinks are the biggest opportunities for becoming an entrepreneur and if they are different for women. He first mentions the feeling of freedom. Then he talks about how women often are very good at sticking with their original idea and that they have worked a bit more on it. The last question of this final section revolved around the "*necessity-driven entrepreneur*" and what effect gender stereotypes have on women's opportunities in entrepreneurship. The interviewee responded by saying that he does not think it has an effect. Whereby he continues by stating that you have to be brave and bring things forwards that you do not know everything about in the beginning. At the end of the interview, the respondent was asked if he had any other reflections about this topic and he brought up the concept of confirmation bias. In this regard, he talked about how women are more open to being

questioned and more willing to take in others' thoughts, while men tend to get annoyed and just move on.

4.2 Questionnaire

The information collected from the questionnaire will unlike the interviews not be presented by each respondent. The purpose was to capture and understand the female and male perspective as a whole and not the individual one. Therefore, it was deemed unnecessary to code each individualized response. Instead, the information will be presented following the structure of the questionnaire, meaning there will be three parts including summaries of all of the respondents' answers to the questions. These three parts include; Challenges, Opportunities, and Perceptions. Under each part, the information will be presented question by question to more easily follow along and also aid the analysis in making comparisons. The numbering of the questions is in accordance with the questionnaire which can be found in Appendix 5 (Swedish version in Appendix 6). The information collected from the questionnaire is based on eight respondents, six women, and two men, and the length of their current venture varies from 1 year to 10 years. The information presented from the questionnaires is thoroughly selected to not present any irrelevant information that does not adhere to the purpose of the study.

4.2.1 Challenges

Question 1

The first question in this section was about how the incubatees think entrepreneurship being connected to male characteristics affects women's careers as entrepreneurs. The women who answered this question often expressed that they have experienced the opposite, that they are viewed as brave instead. However, one of them expressed that the reason for them not experiencing any resistance could be because they are not viewed in that specific way with connection to dominance or determination. Instead, they are viewed as driven and creative. Another woman said that she does not experience this resistance to the same extent as she has done before. A female respondent expressed that women are treated differently in meetings with advisors, banks, venture capitalists, etc. and that their competencies, potential, and ambitions for growth are assessed according to their gender. A male respondent agreed that women who possess these male characteristics are viewed more negatively and are not seen as driven, instead they possess the "wrong" qualities. One of the female respondents said that it is more difficult for women to succeed as entrepreneurs since family is supposed to be a priority.

Question 2

The second question in this part asked if the incubatees had experienced any gender discrimination since they started their business. One of the men and two of the women said that they had not experienced any gender discrimination. Another man also said that he had not experienced any discrimination, but he also added that this is most likely the case since he is a man, and due to his physical appearance and background. A woman gave a few examples where she had been discriminated against due to her gender. One of the examples involved her being in an interview applying for a grant where the advisors turned to the man she had with her when they asked the questions. The man had to embarrassingly explain that she was the one applying and he was only a supplier for the project, even though it was clearly stated in the application that she was the one behind it. Another example of hers was that another male incubatee had been complimenting her

appearance on several occasions and greeted her with “*hi hottie*” to a much larger extent than giving her credit for her innovation. She expressed that this would not happen if she was a man. Another woman also expressed the same experience of people asking the questions to her male subordinates in meetings and she found that very weird since she is the one with all the knowledge. Even though she led the conversations, they always turned to the men when asking the questions as well. A female respondent said that she has been running businesses within so-called “soft” areas and that they have always been viewed as less interesting than businesses within, for example, technology. Another woman stated how her family-life has been questioned in situations regarding her receiving investments. She continues by describing how her company was valued too high because of the family aspect, but if a man had done the same he would have been seen as highly ambitious. Furthermore, she said that women who aspire to perform are questioned more and it is based on the male norm. If women were to put on the suit and be assertive and fearless, they are perceived as threatening to many she states.

Question 3

The third question in this section asked if the incubatees think men and women are treated differently in entrepreneurship. The men who answered said that women and men are treated differently due to society consisting of many 50-year-old men who still live by old mindsets. The other male respondent said that this depends on the industry that the male or female entrepreneur is in. One of the females expressed that male entrepreneurs are seen as having their ducks in a row and do not have to prove themselves to the same extent as women. Another woman said that men’s potential is higher valued no matter the industry, even though they operate in female-dominated fields and have lower education and fewer competencies. Some other women said that age and how you display yourself affects how you are treated and that women have to show more leadership qualities to be accepted in the male-dominated world. Another woman had the same opinion of men and women being treated differently. She brought up an example of her as the CEO who brought two male sellers to a meeting. Everyone asked the questions to the men instead of her even though it was clearly stated that she was the CEO and the men were only there to learn. On the other hand, one female respondent said that if the woman has the same competencies and shows them, there will be no differences.

Question 4

The last question in this part revolved around access to finance and if there are any differences between men and women. One of the male respondents said that he doubts that there are any differences at all, while another said that there are. He had the reasoning of a job position. If there are 10 criteria you need to fulfill to manage the position, a woman who possesses 9 out of the 10 criteria will not apply for the job, while a man with 1 out of the 10 will apply. One of the female respondents said that men often focus on profit, while women see the money as only one part of the reasons. Women want to contribute to society as well as focusing on personal growth and considering how they can manage family life while running a business. Some other women expressed that women need to be good at negotiating, men have an advantage in this, and women tend to not seek venture capital to the same extent as men. With the main issue being that men’s business ideas are also valued higher. Another woman said she does not think there are any differences, while another expressed hopes of there not being any differences. Lastly, a woman stated that there are big differences between the genders, partly because women are not allowed to make high valuations of their businesses without being questioned many times. She also expressed how male investors have asked questions that

focus on her as a woman and mother who brings children into the world and how that affects her business role. Moreover, she exemplifies by stating how she has met other women who have had the same experiences and that receiving bank loans are also different between the genders.

4.2.2 Opportunities

Question 5

The first question under this part asked what motivated the incubatees to start their venture and there was a variation to the answers, but several of them said it was due to pursuing their idea that they were passionate about. One man stated that he started his venture by believing that his (the ventures') technology would positively contribute to society and its development and that he also has the opportunity to actively affect the development. Two women described how they wanted to test their competences and reach self-fulfillment. One of the women further mentioned how her business idea stemmed from a problem related to her child's dyslexia and this is where she found a driving force. Another woman stated how she has always been an entrepreneur to the backbone and how she has always run companies for herself and others. One more woman talked about how she has a driving force for what she is doing and that she gets the ability to work with what she is good at and also loves. Likewise, another woman said how she has a genuine interest in her idea. One of the women highlighted the freedom and possibility to get direct feedback on your work, as well as the fact that if you are working hard you will be rewarded for it. Lastly, a man described his reason for starting a venture as an appropriate organizational form to pursue his ideas.

Question 6

In this question, the respondents were asked to describe what opportunities they see with pursuing entrepreneurship as a career choice and the answers were all quite different. Amongst the men, one of them said the opportunity of being able to work with what you consider fun and stimulating. The other man described the opportunities to be few, but that the risk and vulnerability can be outweighed by the personal development. A woman also pinpointed the fact that you can pursue what you are passionate about, while another one described entrepreneurship as a way of living, continuing to state that it is a rollercoaster with lots of ups and downs. A different woman said how hard work and good connections can lead to the opportunity to change careers. Two other women shared similar opinions. They mentioned how as a career choice, relating to income and positions of power within an organization, it often leads to disappointment. They both said how it is a lot of hard work and for little money. One of them continued with this perspective and described how there are endless opportunities if you like working twice as hard and initially with a small income, instead of the safe employment where you stick to scheduled hours and a steady income. Both of these women highlighted that the driving force may not just be related to the career, but, for instance, is motivated by problem-solving. Another woman mentioned freedom but also the huge responsibility that comes with it. She said that it never gets boring, you constantly learn and grow.

Question 7

This question asked whether or not the respondents think there are any differences between men and women regarding the opportunities they have for starting a business. Both of the men said no. One of them further explained that out of a legal perspective there is no difference. He continued by stating that according to him starting a business

is the easiest step, the challenge resides within running and developing a company. In contrast, almost all of the women, except one, believe that there are differences between the genders. One states how it is more common for women to start a business in industries where there is not much money to collect, instead they run businesses based on other values. She further mentions how she cannot claim that she has heard of a man that takes a step back to take care of the family. Another one also highlights the family aspect and describes how she thinks the opportunities for women who are single moms are small, while single men with children have different opportunities. One woman mentions how norms rule the environment's view of women's entrepreneurship. She further says how women's work is valued less than men's, which also controls women's view of their value. Another woman describes how she sometimes feels like a gender equality project just because she is a woman, but she also states how important this all is. One of the women mentioned that they often hear "*Are you really going to do it? Isn't it a bit risky?*" and continues by saying that people wonder how you are going to handle the family-life and having children at the same time. These are lines of questioning that men would never have to answer. The women who did not think that there are any differences between the genders said how it is up to both women and men to make something good out of the opportunities that exist.

Question 8 & Question 9

These two questions are summarized together as they correlate to each other (in Appendix 5 it is seen as a filter question). The questions revolve around whether the incubatees think gender stereotypes have an impact on why and how someone starts a business, and if they believe so, do they think gender stereotypes create different opportunities for men and women. Between the two men who responded there were contrasting opinions. One of them said how gender stereotypes undoubtedly have an effect, while the other one disagreed. The man who said yes further explained how there is this view in society that an ambitious woman is a "*mannish woman*". He also states how 50-year old men see women as a general threat due to their higher education level. Only one woman said that she does not believe that gender stereotypes have an impact, but that it is a difficult question to answer. All of the other women described in one way or another how this has an effect. One woman said how career choices are related to gender, that every choice is ruled by past occupations and education, meaning that every business idea is automatically controlled by the gender norm. Someone else stated how she experiences that many have a mindset that thinks that "*[...] typical male occupations are for men and not women*". A woman also described how many women often do not get further than dreaming about starting a business since they worry about everything that potentially can go wrong and also how it will affect their families. She also mentions how men, in general, have greater confidence, are less risk-averse, and do not consider their environment as much. Another woman said how it is more acceptable for men than women to start a business and because of that, there are more women in typical female industries. Lastly, a woman highlights how it is strenuous to break norms and that people then choose to adapt and act by what is expected from each gender. Women are often more realistic and responsible, which is sometimes perceived as being less risk-taking and implying a lower potential.

4.2.3 Perceptions

Question 10 & Question 11

To gain insights on whether the incubatees have been affected by the incubator's new gender equality work they were asked two questions about this. Only two of the eight

people who responded said they have been affected by this. One of them stated how they have been involved in the development of the gender equality work. The other one mentioned how she has responded to many surveys and that the incubator likes to put her in the “*spotlight*” and to talk about how it is to be a woman in business. She also talks about how men, in general, get asked questions about their business, while she receives questions like “*Since you are a woman...*”.

Question 12 & Question 13

Regarding the support that the incubatees have received from the incubator, a great majority of them mentioned coaching as the main support. One of the male respondents also brought up the opportunity to discuss ideas with the coaches, who he also mentioned have specialist competencies. The female respondents mentioned working tools of different kinds such as the business model canvas, and working on the customer offering. Another woman further explained that they get the opportunity to meet others in the same situation as them, and the coaches recommend different events and competitions to the incubatees that they might benefit from. The respondents were then asked how the support they were given corresponded with the support they expected to receive. Most of them just answered that it corresponded with their expectations or that it exceeded the expectations. Some others elaborated their answers by mentioning that they were given the support they needed through all the different phases, and more financial support and trips. One female respondent said that she had expected more concrete help regarding some questions, for example, getting help with the search for facts but she was instead told to “*look here*” or “*check there*”.

Question 14 & Question 15

During these questions, the incubatees were asked if and how they have received network contacts and if the incubator has helped them with gaining access to these. The responses varied but everyone mentioned how they have had access to network contacts. A man described how network contacts, roughly described, constitute their whole business. This man also said how he has used connections formed in the past and not with the help from the incubator. The other man stated how the incubator has provided network contacts through membership gatherings. There was also one woman who said she has found her contacts by herself but that she has been offered suggestions from the incubator. Another woman said that she has gained contacts to a limited extent from the incubator because she has not explicitly searched for this help. However, she mentions how there are many available networks to access. She highlights that there have been several projects and networks specifically for women, for instance, one regarding financing. The other women have mentioned that they have gained access to network contacts through the incubator’s partners, speed-dating events, lectures, educating classes, participants from other years, different programs like The Yes Way, and through the business coaches. One specifically stated how she has received a lot of help from the incubator with this matter.

Question 16 & Question 17

Continuing on the path of networking, the incubatees were asked if they have had any difficulties with getting access to different networks. All of them, except one woman who answered that she did not know, said no. One of the women continued to explain that she has been active in the business world for many years and therefore has a well-established network. She mentioned that she participates in activities that are favorable for her company and thinks it is important to be a part of networks with women only, but also to broaden your network it is important to combine both. The respondents were then asked

to answer a follow-up question regarding if they think or have experienced any differences between men and women in getting access to networks. Three women and one man said that there are not any differences. One of the women who said no mentioned that she thinks personality and other characteristics affect this more than the person's gender. Another woman continued by saying that her male contacts have been very supportive. There was one man and three women who said that there are differences between the genders. The man who said yes elaborated his answer by mentioning mentoring from a male perspective, and how there is a fear of being seen as a creep who has taken a young woman under his wings. One of the women who said that there are differences also mentioned that networks are controlled by previous working relationships. She also mentioned that networks are divided by gender. The respondent finished by giving an example of a CEO network in her city for local businesses where 25 out of 25 participants were men. Another female said that men have an advantage since they already have a lot of established networks through sports and careers. Lastly, a woman described that women who are active and search for contacts are oftentimes perceived as interested in the opposite gender rather than the networking itself. She mentions how men have difficulties with separating interest in knowledge and experience from an interest in private relations, which complicates women's opportunities to build networks.

5. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The analysis is divided into six parts, Explaining the Gender Gap, Analyzing the Swedish Environment, Challenges, Opportunities, Perceptions, and Developing the Categories of the Research Framework. Like the other chapters of the thesis, this follows a similar structure as the first five sections relate to the research framework. Each section covers different parts of the research framework with an analysis of the collected data in relation to the research covered in the theoretical chapter. The last section represents the new categories of the research framework that was established through the collection of data and analysis.

5.1 Explaining the Gender Gap

In the empirical findings, many similarities have been found between the respondents regarding what topics that have been discussed during certain questions and areas, these have also been well-connected to the theoretical implications established in the theoretical framework. These will further be discussed below and first about why there is a significant gender gap between men and women who start and run a business. A common theme found among the interviewees to be a reason for the gender gap was the patriarchal structures in society. This perception coheres with what has been found in the theoretical frame of reference. Balachandra et al. (2019, p. 117) support this by clarifying that a woman who has an occupation with a typical masculine role is met by biases. Other evidence for the patriarchal structures affecting women is that female leaders can experience career backlash when they behave in a typically masculine way (Balachandra et al., 2019, p. 117; Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 77). Continuing on this perspective is that the majority of the interviewees said how traditionally men have been encouraged to work, while women are supposed to support the family by staying home and taking care of the children. This discussion coincides with the fact that women have, according to Bögenhold and Fachinger (2016, p. 17), been placed with a family-care constraint on them. The interviewees also mentioned that stereotypes affect the gender gap because men and women are supposed to have occupations that match their gender. This is supported by occupational sex-role stereotypes that Hechavarria et al. (2019, p. 134) mean are created by the belief of certain jobs being suitable for men or women. Since this theme of stereotypes occurs both in theory and among the interviewees, it is affecting both men and women in their respective careers. In an interview, it was discussed how there is this conception that women are not likely to take risks and that they rather focus on their home and children. Women are stereotypically described as sympathetic and should take on a nurturing role, whereas the man is seen as independent and assertive (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117; Ferguson, 2018, p. 410). This does not have to be true but it could impact women's choices in choosing to pursue a career in entrepreneurship, as well as their opportunities for this, as they are constantly placed with norms they should adhere to. Lastly, a couple of the interviewees described how women display certain behaviors such as the need to do things right, they think long and could be scared to come forward and present their ideas, implying less confidence in their work. In theory, it was found that women are more likely to criticize their capabilities (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 543). This raises the question of whether some women display these behaviors as a result of the gender stereotypes that exist and that these potentially create barriers for women in entrepreneurship.

5.2 Analyzing the Swedish Entrepreneurial Environment

The interviewees were asked to reflect upon the Swedish entrepreneurial environment and a majority of them agreed that Sweden is a great country for women to start a business. However, they were also aware that the environment is not perfect and obstacles are still present, such as prejudice against women. Several of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of the frighteningly small percentage of venture capital that female entrepreneurs receive in Sweden. Many of them referred to the one percent share that was mentioned in the theoretical chapter (Olsson Jeffery, 2019). Some of the interviewees did not mention this issue when talking about Sweden, instead, they saw the country as a highly advantageous environment for female entrepreneurs. This indicates that not everyone working in the incubator is fully aware of what the Swedish situation looks like, showing a need for shedding more light on the subject. If people, in general, continue to think that there are not any issues with the Swedish environment, ignorance will pertain which is not favorable for women if changes are to occur improving the situation. Continuing on this perspective, the interviewees expressed how Sweden has come a long way regarding gender equality, but there is still work ahead. They want to believe that Sweden is further ahead than in other countries. In theory, it was found that women's opportunities are dependent on a country's economic development, where developed countries compared to developing countries provide more equal opportunities for pursuing entrepreneurship (Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 2). This indicates that Sweden has better conditions compared to others, however, statistics show that conditions are still not optimal. Even though Sweden has the smallest gender gap (33.3 %) regarding the distribution of gender and ownership in a study made by GEM (Kollmann et al., 2015, p. 23), there are only 13 percent female CEO:s in Sweden (Almi, 2020, p. 4). This shows that there are positive aspects of the Swedish entrepreneurial environment, but there are still efforts that need to be made to improve the current situation.

5.3 Challenges

5.3.1 Challenges Implementing the Orientation

When the respondents were asked about the challenges they had faced with implementing their gender equality work, additional challenges to the ones found in theory were identified. However, one highlighted how, in the incubator team, they have not experienced any challenges. A few common themes which were found between their answers were the difficulty for people, in general, to follow the equal outlook on both genders in all situations, and trying to work with people who do not share the same view. Another common challenge is that themselves (the incubator) and others can sometimes believe that everything is equal at first glance, but in reality, it takes time to create a proper understanding of the issue. These challenges seem to be associated with how it requires knowledge and awareness to create equal conditions, and that ignorance present in some people creates barriers for gender-equal entrepreneurship. Another challenge that points to ignorance that an interviewee mentioned is that people choose not to prioritize this matter, as well as how some say that they recruit employees after skills and simply pick men because there are no competent women. The respondent sees this as the easy way out and ignoring the facts. Other common challenges brought up by the interviewees were the effects of stereotypes. A male respondent reflected upon the issue of older white men and their outdated views. These challenges further show the ignorance and refusal among people to address and work with the issues.

5.3.2 Entrepreneurship as a Masculine Field

In the theoretical frame of reference, it was found that entrepreneurship was commonly associated with male characteristics, implying challenges for women's careers in entrepreneurship, both if they were to display these characteristics or not (Balachandra et al. 2019, p. 117; Kroska & Cason, 2019, p. 77). This subject was discussed with both the incubator and incubatees, and their answers were somewhat divided. However, a majority agreed that this had some type of effect on women. The following examples illustrating this are mentioned by employees at the incubator. Women in management positions are called challenging while men are called driven. This example was also found in gender role theory where Balachandra et al. (2019, p. 117) explains how the mismatch of being a woman and occupying a typical masculine role lead to biases against women. Another example the incubator mentioned was how women are stereotypically thought of as incompetent when dealing with suppliers or other companies run by men due to the traditional view of an entrepreneur being a man. This example also points to the previous connection to theory, that there is a mismatch in the occupational roles. Those disagreeing with the statement said that a woman displaying these male characteristics are more likely to succeed, implying it has the opposite effect. The incubatees that agreed with the statement mentioned how women are treated differently by supporting actors such as advisors, banks, venture capitalists, etc. and are assessed according to their gender. Some male incubatees mentioned that their female peers are viewed as having the "*wrong qualities*" when possessing these male characteristics. This shows evidence of role incongruity, which is when the norms of a gender do not match their social role (Ferguson, 2018, p. 410). This further explains why women are perceived as having the "*wrong qualities*" when displaying typically male characteristics because their role is not aligned with their gender. However, one of the women expressed that this norm is not affecting her as much as it has before, implying a change for the better. The incubatees who disagreed with the statement said, as well as the incubator, that they have experienced the opposite where they are viewed as brave, driven, or creative instead. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that challenges are still prevalent for women with entrepreneurship being associated with male characteristics. However, with both women and men disagreeing with this having a negative effect, it insinuates that the context and what people they have met or been involved with could influence their perceptions. The ones who have had positive experiences disagreed with the statement, while the ones experiencing discrimination or being stereotyped were agreeing with the statement. In conclusion, even though occurrences are pointing at a positive change, the fact that women still experience negative consequences from this indicates that this challenge is still present and relevant to include in the framework.

5.3.3 Gender Discrimination

The topic of gender discrimination was frequently discussed among both the incubatees and in the incubator team. Many of them had a lot of different experiences with how they had been discriminated against due to their gender and some of the examples will be further discussed and analyzed below. Firstly, many (of the incubator and incubatees) expressed how women and men are questioned in different ways and receive different types of comments and feedback. For instance, women and men get asked certain types of questions by banks and or other actors, where the women receive questions about risk while men get asked about opportunities. Research by Malmström et al., (2017a, p. 835) showed that women and men's performance are evaluated based on different standards, which is what the example above illustrates. This example can also be compared to the

findings by Malmström et al. (2017b, n.a.) where they found that government VC's viewed men as promising and their female counterparts as inexperienced. An example from one of the incubatees that showed evidence of gender discrimination involved her being complimented on her looks and greeted with "*hi hottie*" by a male incubatee instead of getting credit for her innovation. She finished the story by saying that this would not happen if she was a man. Furthermore, several female incubatees mentioned stories about being in meetings where their male subordinates were asked all the questions even though it was clear that the women were the CEOs. One incubatee expressed the injustice of men's potential being higher valued no matter the industry and regardless of them having lower education or fewer competencies. These examples can be connected to the issue of occupational sex-role stereotypes, which explain how certain jobs are viewed as more suitable for men or women (Hechavarría et al., 2019, p. 134). These so-called occupational sex-role stereotypes are the reason for the women CEO's being ignored and their male subordinates lifted in meetings, as well as the explanation for male entrepreneurs being higher valued than their female peers.

Another discrimination that was commonly expressed by both the incubator and incubatees were how women are often questioned about their family-life and that women need to consider this when making valuations of their company. It was also mentioned that ambitious women are questioned more and that this is based on the male norm. By looking back to the theoretical chapter, it was found that how women are stereotyped impede women from achieving their supposed entrepreneurial potential (Marlow, 2020, p. 42). This suggests that gender stereotypes present itself as a significant challenge for women in entrepreneurship. To continue on the line of stereotypes, some incubatees mentioned how male entrepreneurs are seen as having their ducks in a row while their female counterparts have to prove themselves to a much larger extent. Besides, if a woman were to put on a suit and be assertive and fearless, they would be perceived as threatening to many people. This highlights the issue of men being expected to show behaviors associated with masculinity, such as dominance and assertiveness, while women should display feminine traits, such as warmth and emotional expressiveness (Balachandra et al., 2019, p. 117). This further shows how stereotypes of how the genders should act damage their career and hinder them from being themselves. There were some, both men and women, who disagreed with the effect of gender stereotypes, and those were people who expressed that they have not experienced this in any way. One further explained how if a woman has and also shows the same competencies as a man, there will be no differences. As those in disagreement only represent a small share, along with not having experienced any form of gender discrimination, these are viewed as the exception. The vast majority of the examples above highlight the influence gender stereotypes have, it emphasizes that this is still a challenge today.

5.3.4 Access to Financing

When it comes to female and male entrepreneurs' access to financing, research showed many differences between the genders, and these were also brought up by the respondents. There were several people from the incubator, but also the incubatees, who mentioned that overall men receive more capital from financiers. Statistics from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicate just this and also state that women are faced with significant barriers to the financing of both debt and equity (Elam et al., 2019, p. 40). Malmström et al. (2020, p. 1) also discuss how women are not naturally linked to the features of an entrepreneur as men are, which contributes to different impressions of credibility and creates barriers for women in receiving financial support. This also relates

to an issue that one of the employees from the incubator brought up, which stated how male investors choose to support male entrepreneurs and their ideas rather than a woman who has a similar idea. An incubatee continued on this perspective and mentioned how women have to defend their idea more often than men to venture capitalists. In theory, this is connected to gender bias where it was found that people are more likely to connect males with resource providers when the occupation is typically dominated by men (Abraham, 2019, p. 172). These perspectives implicate that women receive less financial capital as the entrepreneur is often associated with a man, along with the favoring of male entrepreneurs as they are supposed to have this type of occupation, unlike women. Another theoretical example illustrating this notion is the fact that VC's still value men above women regardless of their equal position and prerequisites (Malmström et al., 2018a, n.a.).

As mentioned by both the incubator team and the incubatees, women who pitch their ideas to investors receive completely different questions than men. For instance, one incubatee has received questions about her as a woman and the role of a mother who brings children into the world and how this affects her business role. She also mentioned that this has been experienced by a lot of other women she has been in contact with. These examples show how the masculine view of entrepreneurship prevents women from gaining credibility and how differently the genders are evaluated by investors (Malmström et al., 2017a, p. 835). Furthermore, additional evidence on how men and women receive different questions show that while men get asked promotion questions, women receive prevention questions. A disturbing consequence of this is that the women who deserve the venture capital the most face the most cognitive resistance from the VC's (Malmström et al., 2020, p. 5), and females may go through a more stringent screening process (Balachandra et al., 2019, p. 116). By looking at the evidence from the incubator and incubatees, and connecting it to the research that was found, it is evident that this is a challenge faced by female entrepreneurs today. The fact that women are faced with these unjustified challenges without any other reason than their gender as described by Malmström et al. (2018a, n.a.) makes it even more concerning. However, one interesting aspect of the financing issue is that one of the male incubatees doubted that there are any differences at all between how men and women receive venture capital. One of the women also expressed that she had not experienced any differences. However, the fact that a man doubted that there are any differences might be because he is a man, and therefore has not been faced with the challenges. Although it is very interesting to hear that a woman had not experienced any differences, this seems to be a lucky exception considering the high number of women expressing the complete opposite experience.

5.4 Opportunities

5.4.1 Motivational Factors

As mentioned in the theoretical frame of reference there are different founding motivations between the genders due to having different intentions in their pursuit of starting a new venture (Manolova et al., 2007, p. 78; Renko et al., 2012, p. 667). There were several similarities found between what motivational factors the incubator team thought female and male entrepreneurs have and what research has shown. The number one motivational factor for men mentioned by the incubator team was money, followed by power and prestige. This was also identified in the theoretical chapter where Sperber & Linder (2019, p. 543) stated that men aspire more financial success and thereby put more effort into their work. Men's focus on money was further highlighted by Nordström

(2017, p. 146) who said that motivational factors are different between men and women, and men care more about financial success and innovation. Amongst the women, there were also similarities found between what the incubator thinks motivates women to start a business and what theory mentions. Frequently mentioned factors were intrinsic reasons such as independence, being impact-driven and the want to do good for society. In theory, it was also described how women become entrepreneurs for intrinsic reasons, such as independence and job satisfaction, while men do it for extrinsic reasons like seeking economic success (Albort-Morant & Oghazi, 2016, p. 2126). This seems to cohere with the incubator's answers. Creativeness and problem solving were also often mentioned as motivating factors for women, and that starting a new venture allows them the opportunity to live out their interests. These factors can be related to the research by Nordström (2017, p. 146;147;149) where it was found that self-fulfillment, working independently, and developing oneself were the most common motivational factors among women.

A common theme was found in the incubator team when they talked about what kind of innovation the different incubatees have. The female incubatees often had innovations involving sustainability, HR, or other social innovations that consider people in different ways. The male incubatees had their focus on technology, digital solutions, or engineering solutions. This further highlights the fact that motivational factors are very different between men and women. However, one of the respondents in the incubator team expressed that the differences mainly lie within the individuals rather than gender when it came to the innovation itself. Another respondent said that similarities in motivation between the genders were the freedom of running their own business and planning their days in comparison to being an employee.

When the incubatees were asked what motivated them to start their business, both genders expressed the want to pursue their idea that they were passionate about. However, there were also several connections to the research that indicated the differences between men and women. The two male incubatees talked about technology and development as well as an appropriate organizational form to pursue an idea as the motivational factors. This is further evidence on Nordström's (2017, p. 146) statement about men's focus on financial success and innovation. Among the female incubatees, some described how they wanted to test their competences and reach self-fulfillment, along with the aspect of freedom. This was also found in theory which was mentioned above by Nordström (2017, p. 146;147;149). Other female incubatees mentioned problem-solving as a driving force, and one mentioned how this stemmed from her child's dyslexia. The ability to work with what you love and are good at was also motivational. In conclusion, a lot of connections could be identified between the incubatees' motivational factors and those mentioned in theory. This shows how male and female entrepreneurs' motivational factors affect what opportunities they choose to approach.

5.4.2 Opportunities for Becoming an Entrepreneur

A topic that was discussed in the incubator team as well as among the incubatees was the opportunities that exist for becoming an entrepreneur. The answers among the incubatees were very scattered. Working with what you like, stimulating, pursuing your passion, a rollercoaster of ups and downs and, endless opportunities were only a few of their answers. Some of the incubatees also brought up some negative sides, which included high risk and vulnerability, responsibility, and hard work for little money. Hence, when it came to what opportunities the incubatees themselves saw with pursuing entrepreneurship, no significant differences were found between the genders. However,

when they were asked if they think the opportunities look different for men and women, that is where they started to divide their answers. This will be discussed further below. Looking at what opportunities are created to ease the process for female entrepreneurs, gender blind support from institutions is crucial (Sarfaraz, 2014, p. 1). Some opportunities for women that were mentioned frequently by the incubator team involved *The Yes Way* and *Asynjor Invest*. The latter is a modern investment platform in Sweden that is run by women who are working with other women and helping them to take control of their opportunities for financing (Asynjor Invest n.d.). *The Yes Way* is a movement of four Swedish incubators that have developed a program with new methods and tools to combat the gender equality issue (Vinnova, 2017). These are both examples of platforms that are created to better the environment for female entrepreneurs, and this further strengthens the importance of these kinds of institutions. As without them, the opportunities for women in the Swedish setting would not be as favorable.

One interviewee highlighted how the opportunities for women in entrepreneurship are increasingly better than before. However, this person and several others, both from the incubator and incubatees, referred to the norm of having to take care of family and the household as an exclusive challenge for women. One male comment on this specific subject said that women “*have to*” consider the family-aspect when pursuing a career in entrepreneurship, which implies that this is a given for women and something that is continuously placed upon them. A female incubatee expressed how she has never heard of a man that takes a step back to take care of the family. Another woman (incubatee) mentioned how the opportunities for single moms are small, while compared to single dads who have other opportunities. Furthermore, continuous comments that women receive according to a female incubatee are questions like “*Are you really going to do it? Isn't it a bit risky?*”. Also, people wonder how women are going to handle the family-life and having children at the same time as pursuing an entrepreneurial career. Another woman (incubatee) stated how norms rule the environment’s view on women’s entrepreneurship. This was a common theme discussed among a majority of the respondents, but what is interesting is the fact that according to Bögenhold and Fachinger (2016, p. 17), the opportunities with female solo self-employment could help lessen the threats women experience regarding the family-care constraint placed on them. Still, women are faced with these issues, and based on their answers it seems to impact their opportunities for a career in entrepreneurship. To explain this, Marlow (2020, p. 42) states how “*socially constructed forms of subordination*”, which means how women are stereotyped, actually impede women from achieving their supposed entrepreneurial potential. This notion demonstrates that by placing the family-care constraint upon women and continuously stereotyping how a woman is supposed to be and act, constrain their entrepreneurial opportunities.

The research by Marlow (2020, p. 20) also discusses how women are portrayed as the problem in debates about their engagement in entrepreneurship. The author further mentions that initiatives to encourage women into entrepreneurship imply that women need makeovers to become more like men (Marlow, 2020, p. 44). These perspectives presented above present a contradiction to how women are supposed to take a stand. On the one hand, they are socially subordinated to take care of the family and this will hinder their entrepreneurship, but then it is also implied that they should become more like men. To combat these issues, Marlow (2020, p. 45) states how perhaps a new perspective is required where we look at “*What entrepreneurship can do for women rather than vice versa*”. The incubator is very aware of this traditional picture of entrepreneurship and has

chosen to use communication and pictures that are critical to the norm and that does not continue to cultivate and grow it. They also mention how in their communication efforts towards increasing the number of women in entrepreneurship, they try to convey their message without signifying “[...] *look it is a woman who is starting a business*”. This perspective coincides with the thoughts presented by Marlow (2020) above and indicates that this is a change that could benefit women’s opportunities.

When the incubatees were asked if they thought there are any differences in the opportunities for men and women to become an entrepreneur, the men said no while the women said yes, with one exception of a woman who also said no. One of the men defended his answer by stating that legally there are no differences, and the challenges reside in running and developing a company. However, since commercial high-growth entrepreneurship is very masculine, it makes it problematic for women to start growth-oriented ventures (Hechavarria et al., 2019, p. 131), which in turn indicates that the opportunities actually are different. As mentioned several times before, entrepreneurship is very gendered, and highly associated with masculinity (Hechavarria et al. 2019, p. 133). This affects the opportunities for female entrepreneurs since they do not match the norm of an entrepreneur. The female incubatees all agreed on them not having the same opportunities as their male peers, with one exception of a woman who did not agree. What makes this interesting is the fact that the men said there are no differences while the women said there are. This could be connected to an example from one respondent in the incubator team. He mentioned an exercise they had performed about how blind people can be when they are privileged and therefore have difficulties with seeing an issue because of this. The exercise showed that if you are on one end of the spectrum, being a white, straight, educated man with a job, you will have a completely different answer to a person on the other end, a black, gay, uneducated, unemployed woman. This shows that just because you, the male incubatees, say that there are not any differences in opportunities, does not mean that that is the truth. The reason for the men’s answers differentiating from the women could be because they have not been exposed to the same circumstances, as the example tells. This further highlights the importance of making people realize, no matter what prerequisites they have, that just because they do not see the issue does not mean that it is not there.

5.4.3 Gender Stereotypes

The incubator and incubatees were asked how they think gender stereotypes impact men’s and women’s opportunities in entrepreneurship concerning the concept of necessity-driven entrepreneurs. The reason for this is because research showed that women tend to start a business out of necessity to respond and battle the gender stereotypes rather than seizing an opportunity (Adom & Anambane, 2019, p. 100). Based on the overall answers among the respondents, a majority of them shared the opinion that gender stereotypes do not affect why they start a business, but it definitely affects their opportunities. Some respondents elaborated on their answers with examples of issues regarding gender stereotypes. One woman from the incubator mentioned how male and female-dominated fields of entrepreneurship need to change to inspire men and women to enter sectors that are traditionally dominated by the other gender. This would contribute to a larger diversity within all industries. A male interviewee and female incubatee touched upon the same topic and mentioned how many people have a mindset of “[...] *typical male occupations are for men and not women*”. This shows the negative impact that gender stereotypes have on people’s careers since it is not seen as acceptable to pursue certain industries due to your gender. A male incubatee said that society often views an ambitious woman as a

“mannish woman” and older men see these women as a threat due to their higher education level. A woman (incubatee) explained how every career choice is related to gender, past occupations, and education and that this is automatically controlled by the gender norm. Another woman (incubatee) then explained how women worry about how pursuing a career in entrepreneurship will affect their families. This shows how women often consider the family aspect in regards to their careers. This is also interesting as one woman (incubatee) said how it is strenuous to break norms and that people then choose to adapt and act by what is expected from each gender. If this is true, it could most likely have an impact on women’s opportunities with the repeated stereotypes placed on women. Lastly, the overall answers throughout the questionnaires taken by the female incubatees point to topics about self-fulfillment, making it on their own, proving their competencies, etc. As these answers were very different from their male peers, it suggests that the gendered stereotypes they repeatedly highlight has an impact on how women are often downgraded and that this turns into proving a point. For instance, Nordström (2017, p. 153) talks about how women rarely take help from others as they want to manage themselves on their own. This correlates to the women’s answers about proving their competencies and reaching self-fulfillment. Taken together, the women may not have started their venture to prove a point, but they seem to be motivated or driven by it, implying the necessity-aspect mentioned above.

5.5 Perceptions

5.5.1 The Incubator’s Influence

The incubatees were asked if they had been affected by the incubator’s gender equality work since it is quite new. Only two of the eight respondents had been affected by the gender equality work of the incubator. However, it was still relevant and interesting to look into this relationship since gender equality connections can still be made without the incubatees being directly affected by the new orientation. Gender equality can be analyzed based on the areas in which this study asked questions about support and networking (which will be further discussed below). These areas were addressed to specifically analyze the interrelationship between the two as they were both asked similar questions. Gender equality can be connected to these specific areas by making comparisons between the incubator and incubatees’ answers to identify potential differences or similarities.

5.5.2 Support

Studies show that entrepreneurs better benefit from the support that is guided by their individual needs rather than standardized offerings (Scillitoe & Chakrabarti, 2010, p. 157). This is the kind of support that the incubator team is providing as well. They all said that the support they give is based on what type of idea the entrepreneur has and that they have not experienced any differences in regards to the support they give between men and women. Among the incubatees, it was noticed that all of them mentioned business coaching as the main support they have received from the incubator, who also said that to be their main offer. This indicates that the support received aligned with the given support. The incubatees also mentioned the offer of specialist competencies and different working tools as part of the support they received. The overall answers from the incubatees were very similar, which suggests that they have received equal support and that there are no differences between men and women. The incubator also mentioned how they provide support based on the individual, which appears to be true in this case. The majority of the incubatees agreed that the support they were given corresponded with the

support they expected to receive, or that they even exceeded their expectations. However, one woman expressed that she expected more concrete help in some cases. This could be connected to research from Sperber and Linder (2019, p. 541) who said that a woman experiencing less support from the ecosystem will only fund the business when she can by herself mobilize the necessary resources. On the other hand, men who experience this consider themselves as being able to cope autonomously since social support has a minor influence (Sperber & Linder, 2019, p. 542). Since a woman, but no man expressed a lack of support it could indicate that they were able to work around the issue by themselves. However, this was also only one occurrence and it is difficult to make a concrete analysis, so these are therefore merely speculations. Perhaps a larger sample or a more in-depth discussion with the incubatees could have helped to understand the root of this phenomenon. The majority of the incubatees have had a great experience with the incubator's support. This indicates that the incubator has succeeded with adapting individualized programs, which is, as mentioned above, better than providing standardized offerings (Scillitoe & Chakrabarti, 2010, p. 157).

5.5.3 Networking

Looking at how the two genders network, some differences were found in theory and the respondents' answers. Several of the respondents in the incubator team expressed that female entrepreneurs have other conditions and resistances to work with than men when it comes to networking. This could also be identified in the theoretical chapter by Robinson and Stubberud (2009, p. 11) who said that people with positions of helping small businesses are often men, which creates disadvantages for women. As a consequence of this, female and male entrepreneurs network differently (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 332; Watson, 2012, p. 537). Continuing on the disadvantages for women, one respondent expressed how women are stereotyped to be responsible for the household and children, which makes it more difficult for them to participate in networking outside working hours. This again highlights how stereotypes, as mentioned above, affect women negatively.

Some people from the incubator expressed how they do not see a difference in terms of networking between the genders, instead, they describe it to be more dependent on personality. This contradicts the theoretical findings, but there were however few who only said there was no difference at all in their networking. Even one of these people continued by saying how women often request deepened conversations with each other and other women to exchange experiences. In theory, this points to the fact that female entrepreneurs express more importance of personal networks such as partners, family members, and friends, and they rely on the support of them (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 335; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 11; Watson, 2012, p. 553). Another team member from the incubator mentioned how she believes it is easier for men to network with other men, that they have some kind of brotherhood and friendship that is for a woman very difficult to be a part of. She further describes how it is not obvious for a woman to be included whether it is a professional or a more casual setting. This aspect was also found in theory where Kalafatoglu and Mendoza (2017, p. 333) stated how social opportunities are not evenly distributed between the genders. They continued by saying how women are not as able as men to use their networks as social capital, which thereby narrows their access to resources that contribute to business growth (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017, p. 333). These circumstances indicate, yet again, that women experience challenges with their opportunities for networking because of the male role and its position.

Both the male and female incubatees often mentioned that they had searched for contacts by themselves or had a previously established network when they entered the incubator program. However, many of them also appreciated the help to establish contacts through the incubator via, for instance, their networks, speed-dating events, lectures, partners, etc. The answers were quite divided regarding if they had experienced any differences between how men and women get access to networks. The ones saying there are not any differences motivated their answers by stating that personality and other characteristics affect their networking more than their gender. The ones disagreeing with this mentioned how networks are controlled by previous working relationships, that networks are divided by gender, and that men have an advantage since they already have established networks through sports and careers. Another woman expressed how women who actively search for contacts oftentimes are perceived as interested in the opposite gender rather than the networking itself. Men have difficulties with separating professional interests from personal interest, this makes it more complicated for women in building networks. This, once again, shows how stereotypes and norms affect women's entrepreneurial work.

Some observations that were made by the incubator team in regards to how the incubatees network did not align with what was found in research. However, this shows that changes will be made in the framework of this study to cohere with the findings. For instance, one respondent has noticed that the female incubatees are more proactive in looking for contacts, they are very driven and thorough, which in turn reflects upon their results. Another respondent mentioned that women are very good at networking and a sort of "*swordplay*" does not occur as with men who tend to compete with each other. However, the incubator team does not know if these observations can be applied to the entire country, but it is present in their incubator. Considering the challenges mentioned above in networking by female entrepreneurs, incubators have an opportunity to aid in overcoming these barriers and help expand their networks (Hackett & Dilts, 2004, p. 41; Robinson & Stubberud, 2009, p. 12).

5.6 Developing the Categories of the Research Framework

Previously, a research framework was established (see Figure 3) explaining the interrelationship between the incubator and its incubatees. The research framework is constructed like a process starting with the incubator, which in turn shows what possible opportunities and challenges that arise with the incubator's gender equality-orientation. These later translate into the incubatees perceptions of how the gender perspective affects them. This assumption of the process matches the actual relationship identified between the incubator and the incubatees. Therefore, no changes will be made to the framework, instead, alterations will be made to the categories of the research framework (see Figure 4). As previously stated, this research intended to investigate the opportunities and challenges that follow with a gender equality orientation. The focus was also on trying to explain the interrelationship between the incubator and incubatee in terms of the gender equality orientation. Because of this, an additional figure was created to further elaborate upon the research framework's dimensions and their meanings. These included the most common themes found in the theoretical frame of reference. As a result of what information was collected in the empirical data and the discussions from the analysis, some changes were necessary to the categories of the research framework. The alterations included some parts being erased due to its inaccuracy with the collected data, some new parts were added that were not covered in the theoretical frame of reference, and other parts were elaborated upon due to added insights from the collected data. This, of course,

affects the internal context of the categories, but not the actual structure of the processual model, which is why *Input*, *Process*, and *Output* remain the same. Their underlying meaning has just received new interpretations based on the accumulated knowledge gathered from the literature, empirical data, and analysis. A new figure is created below (see Figure 5) and the changes are further explained underneath the figure.

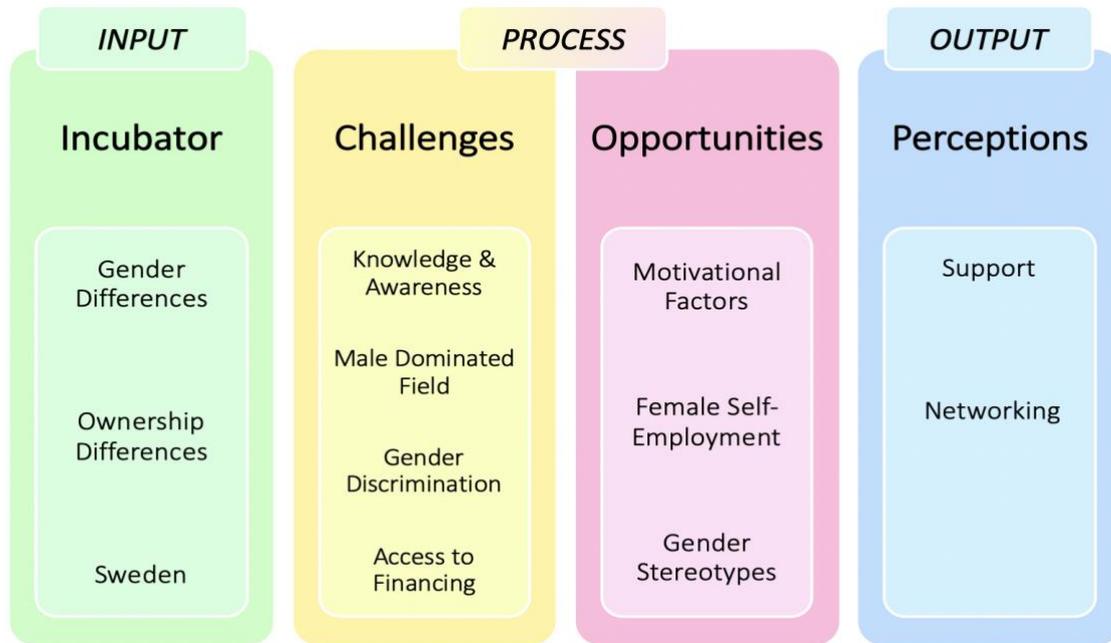


Figure 5. Developed Categories of The Research Framework

Above is the newly developed figure comprising the categories of the research framework (see Figure 5). Compared to the original one, no changes were made to the *Incubator* category as the results and analysis addressed all of these themes. Most of the adjustments were made in the *Challenges* category. These involved adding a new theme found, known as *Knowledge & Awareness*, which was a result of a common topic that was discussed among the incubator team. In addition, *Social & Liberal Feminism* was renamed to *Gender Discrimination* as this was a more significant part of the challenges and *Social & Liberal Feminism* only represented a smaller part of this. The last alteration to this category was renaming *Venture Capitalists* to *Access to Financing* due to more aspects than just VC's were found and discussed in terms of financing. The *Male-Dominated Field* theme was kept like in the original figure as this topic composed an equally big part in theory as it did in the results and analysis. In regards to the *Opportunities* category, *Motivational Factors* remained the same. Likewise, for *Female Self-Employment*, however, this subject pertained to a larger significance since more information about this was collected. Furthermore, "*Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurs*" was removed from this category and was instead changed to *Gender Stereotypes*. The reason for this was that none of the respondents agreed with the concept of "*Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurs*", making this less relevant to research. Alternatively, gender stereotypes were frequently discussed, leading to larger relevancy to include this topic instead. However, "*Necessity-Driven Entrepreneurs*" is still covered as a part of *Gender Stereotypes*, but from another perspective, as discussed in the analysis. The only change that was made in *Perceptions* was the removal of *Expectancy Theory*, as it was covered in *Support* and realized to be not as important as it seemed in the theoretical chapter. Some additional insight was added in both *Support* and *Networking* as the collected data provided new information.

6. CONCLUSION

The first part of this chapter answers the research questions. This is then followed by a section of the theoretical and practical implications addressing the contributions of the study. Societal, social, and ethical implications are then discussed to highlight moral and ethical issues that have been considered throughout the thesis. This chapter ends with presenting the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

6.1 Main Research Findings

This study has been able to answer all of the research questions and fulfill the purpose of the study based on the literature search, collection of primary data, and analysis of the respective findings. Through the interviews held with a Swedish incubator team, and the questionnaires gathered from some incubatees, some insights regarding challenges, opportunities, and perceptions about gender equality in entrepreneurship were established. This thesis had a multi-purpose, where the main aim was to study the opportunities and challenges that might surface with a gender equality-orientation in the context of a Swedish incubator. In addition to this, a part of the purpose was also to study the effect of their work and the incubatees perceptions.

What are the opportunities and challenges for the incubator working with gender equality?

As discussed in the analysis, the incubator saw several challenges by working with gender equality. Patriarchal structures, traditional views, and the stereotype of women are challenges that affect women's entrepreneurship. It was also concluded that the challenges with the Swedish environment are the ignorance of inequality issues and that there still are unequal conditions for women in entrepreneurship. These are for instance the extremely low percentage of women who secure venture capital and the fact that only 13 % of CEOs are women. Theoretically, there were several challenges identified with gender equality in entrepreneurship, and based on the results from the empirical data and analysis, three challenges were strengthened and elaborated upon, along with one new identified challenge. The newly identified challenge arose from how the incubator established that it is difficult to know whether people have an equal outlook on both genders and some can believe that everything is equal at first glance. The challenge with this resides in the knowledge and awareness that is required for working with gender equality, in which it was found challenging and time-demanding to create a proper understanding of this subject. Therefore, it has been difficult implementing this orientation because people can tend to ignore the problems and not realize the facts.

In theory, it was discussed how entrepreneurship is a male-dominated field and how this can create challenges for women. The results show that even if a man and woman share the same qualities, they are labeled differently. An example was how women are called challenging while men are referred to as driven. Women were also found to be assessed differently from advisors, banks, VC's, and other actors who make their evaluations based on gender. With entrepreneurship being a male-dominated field, it was challenging for women to enter this area as it created a mismatch of occupational roles. This was related to gender discrimination which described how occupational sex-role stereotypes placed on the genders, but especially on women, create barriers for pursuing a career in entrepreneurship. Because according to the norm, they are not supposed to occupy this

profession. However, not every one of the respondents shared this view, which indicates that this challenge may not be true in all cases, but perhaps dependent on the context as some had experienced challenges with this. Other types of gender discrimination which creates challenges for women were how women are often placed with the family-care constraint on them, and that men do not have to consider this. Women also received different types of comments and feedback compared to men. A common example was how women are often associated with risk while men with opportunity. Therefore, the challenge was presented as the genders are evaluated based on different standards from different types of actors. This was also connected to the genders' access to financing, which was a significant and often-mentioned challenge among the respondents. Women often had to defend their idea more to VC's and when pitching their idea, they received prevention questions while their male peers received promotion questions. Gender bias in financing was frequently prevalent. Male investors usually chose to support male entrepreneurs over women. Also, as women are not naturally linked to the features of an entrepreneur, they received different impressions of credibility leading to barriers for receiving financial support.

Many challenges were identified when trying to find what opportunities the incubator has with their gender equality work. This further raised the possibility for these challenges to work in favor of the incubator. The identification of these could enable the incubator in helping its incubatees in the situations that deem most important. Regarding the motivational factors for female vs. male entrepreneurs, extrinsic reasons like money and power were common for men, while intrinsic values such as self-fulfillment, independence, and problem-solving were most common for women. Some shared motivational factors were freedom and the possibility to plan your days. It was also noticed that these motivational factors seemed to cohere with what industry and innovation the entrepreneurs choose to pursue. The women often chose sustainability, HR, or other social innovations, while men focused on technology, digital solutions, and engineering solutions. This suggests that what motivational factors you have can affect what opportunities you choose to approach. This can also be connected to many industries being dominated by one particular gender, which in turn leads to stigmatization around the people who try to enter these fields that are traditionally dominated by the opposite gender. Further, this can create barriers for the people who want to enter these industries, and changes need to be made to create larger diversity in different fields. This is where the opportunity arises for the incubator to ease the process for the entrepreneur to enter their desired industry. The support that the incubator can provide might encourage entrepreneurs to pursue fields of interest that seem controversial and difficult at first glance.

Differences between the genders regarding what opportunities they have were identified throughout the analysis. Many of the female incubatees expressed how they have fewer opportunities than their male peers due to different reasons based on society's gender stereotypes that are placed on women. Some of these include the family-care constraints that are placed on women, as well as being seen as incompetent compared to their male counterparts. However, *The Yes Way* and *Asynjor Invest* are projects/companies that help even out the imbalance between men and women's opportunities in regards to issues like financing, as discussed in the analysis. Although, the situation is not yet equal which means it demands more work. It was commonly found that women were portrayed as the problem and in need of makeovers, which suggests that their opportunities are dependent on them changing to become more like men. However, it was also concluded that women

who portray typical masculine characteristics create mismatches in how they are supposed to act and what type of profession they should occupy according to the norm. Therefore, as also made clear in theory and the analysis, a new perspective is required to better the opportunities for women, and looking at what entrepreneurship can do for women rather than vice versa. That is why this is an opportunity for the incubator to also step in and aid this process of making entrepreneurship more gender-equal. Some changes that need to happen revolve around the gender stereotypes that currently are present in entrepreneurship, these need to be destroyed to even out the playfield. The incubator has already made efforts towards this which includes changing their communication to criticize the norm. This has proven to be effective, which further highlights how important it is to continue this work to improve the situation. In conclusion, the identification of the differences in opportunities between the genders enables the incubator to step in where needed and use their communication efforts to help battle the injustices.

How can the incubator's gender equality orientation influence their incubatees?

Since there were only two of the eight investigated incubatees that had been affected by the incubator's gender equality work, it made the analysis of this question more difficult. However, as previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, the gender equality-orientation is a recent implementation. This made the investigation novel and more difficult, which was relatively expected. Furthermore, examining the interrelationship is still interesting as it contributes to an early understanding of the orientations' effects and how it potentially could unfold. After identifying the opportunities in the question above, it was noticed that these can be seen as potential evidence of the incubator's influence on its incubatees. By identifying the opportunities and executing them, these could also be seen as the effect on the female incubatees. Meaning that the incubator's gender equality work has had a positive influence on its incubatees since their work is increasing the number of women in the incubator. As previously mentioned in the analysis, the incubator has done a lot of communication efforts to attract more female entrepreneurs to the incubator program, and the efforts have truly paid off. This shows that the incubator's gender equality work has had an influence on their incubatees that has led to a higher number of women in the incubator. This was the main goal for the incubator, indicating that they have succeeded with their efforts and that it has a positive influence on their incubatees.

How is the work perceived by the incubatees?

To further examine the interrelationship between the incubator and incubatees the study aimed at researching how the incubators work is perceived by the incubatees. As mentioned above and in the analysis, there was only a small share of the incubatees who have been directly affected by the gender equality orientation. Despite this, it was concluded that gender equality and the effect it has on the interrelationship could be analyzed based on the areas related to support and networking. The reason for this was that these topics asked similar questions to both samples to specifically examine the interrelationship through comparisons between the incubator and incubatees' answers, to identify potential gender-based differences or similarities. In regards to support, the incubator described how their main offer was to provide business coaching and individualized offerings to the incubatees. This corresponds to what type of support the incubatees had received. Furthermore, the incubator mentioned how they do not, or at least try to not, give support based on gender. Instead, it is more focused on the individual.

As no differences were found in the answers between the genders of the incubatees, it seems safe to say that the support given was equal. In terms of networking, the majority of the incubatees said that there are many networks and contacts to access through the incubator via various channels and actors. There were also networks available that especially targeted women, which the incubatees described as positive. The incubator mentioned how based on what they have learned from women, such as requesting deepened conversations with other women, they have created certain events just for them. The response from the incubatees seem to be positive and contribute to making the opportunities and conditions for women more equal. Overall, the incubatees, especially the women, seem to perceive that the incubator provides equal conditions and/or are at least working towards bettering the opportunities for women, which is what the incubator is striving for. Meaning, the incubatees' perceptions suggest it corresponds to the incubator's efforts. Lastly, as no negative responses were recorded from the incubatees in regards to the incubator's gender equality work, it implies that only positive experiences have been recollected so far. However, as the work with this issue is novel, it is difficult to say how it will unfold. Nonetheless, the findings indicate a positive trend and if the incubator continues in this direction, perhaps it is likely to assume that the perceptions will remain positive.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

There are several theoretical implications that can be emphasized in this area of research. Firstly, the research on Swedish incubators and their efforts towards gender equality is very limited. Challenges and opportunities for implementing a gender equality-orientation in a Swedish context is also something that little to no research was found on. This gender equality theme in the case of Sweden mostly revolved around entrepreneurship as a whole, and not from an incubator perspective. Compared to research made in other countries, the Swedish scene is much less investigated in regards to incubators and gender equality. Another implication is that this research was not only an identification of what challenges and opportunities that exist within the area of gender equality in entrepreneurship. This research contributes to strengthening the existing literature and proving that this is still an issue, despite the fact that the context of the study is based upon a developed country that also has good conditions for women in entrepreneurship.

This research contributes to new understandings regarding gender equality in entrepreneurship with its descripto-explanatory nature. This study can be helpful for Swedish incubator's in several aspects. First of all, as additional challenges and opportunities to the ones found in previous research were found, a better understanding of these will follow. By receiving this information, it could help other Swedish incubators who are looking to implement more gender equality into their work. They will have a better understanding of how to proceed with the work, what actions need to be made, what challenges to be prepared for etc. Besides the identification of opportunities and challenges, this research added more dimensions to the topic by looking into the effects a gender equality-orientation has on the first party that is affected. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the topic and allows to see how changes towards becoming more gender-equal unfold first hand. As mentioned above, practically this can be used to recognize and make any potential changes along the road of working with gender equality. This provides a learning opportunity in seeing what works and perhaps what does not. As both mentioned in the theoretical frame of reference and by the incubator,

working with other actors and/or incubators helps to improve the situation by learning from each other. Therefore, a practical contribution would be for other incubators to join the projects aimed at sharing methods and tools towards becoming more gender-equal. The final contribution is theoretical. This research contributes to an increased knowledge within the area since it was identified that knowledge and awareness is a significant challenge for attaining more gender-equal conditions in entrepreneurship. Overall, this research could serve as an eye-opener for many other Swedish incubators to realize the importance of a gender equality-perspective, which is proven several times throughout this study.

6.3 Societal, Social & Ethical Implications

It is important to conduct research ethically that is moral and responsible (Gray, 2019, p. 78). Researchers can damage their dissertation by producing a study that is misleading and or includes errors. Therefore, it is very important to consider ethics in this part of the research process (Gray, 2019, p. 98). It is also very relevant to consider ethics when the research involves sensitive topics (Gray, 2019, p. 83). Because of this, a discussion of the societal and social implications of the study was included as the research topic revolves around gender equality. These implications are presented below and contain information about how the researchers have posed to these issues throughout the research.

6.3.1 Societal & Social Implications

As this thesis revolved around the subject of gender equality, societal and social implications of the study were relevant to consider. The immediate stakeholders that are affected by this research are first of all the respondents that took part in the study, as well as other incubators, and female and male entrepreneurs in Sweden. Nonetheless, as gender equality is a societal issue as a whole, topics discussed in this thesis may impact men and women in more contexts than just entrepreneurship. In regards to the respondents, they all shared a positive view of this research, they see it as a real issue that needs to be dealt with and they want the situation to improve. However, it is difficult to know how all the other incubators and entrepreneurs in Sweden look at gender equality in entrepreneurship. Therefore, it was deemed important for this study to highlight the fact that the aim was not to downgrade one gender while lifting the other, it was simply to try and balance it so that both genders have equal opportunities. The point was to highlight the current situation in the hope of shedding light on gender equality issues. It was important to not mediate any results which put any gender in the position of power, dominance, and oppression. However, these sensitive topics were discussed in the research as entrepreneurship is a field dominated by one gender and the other is wrongfully treated in contexts of, for instance, access to finance. By highlighting these issues by adding ways to battle them, it creates a more positive outlook rather than just placing blame. Also, since sensitive topics like gender discrimination are addressed in the challenges of becoming more gender-equal, it was imperative to correctly interpret and communicate the gathered information. This was partly to avoid wrongfully placing harm to participants who shared their personal experiences but also to not use a language that is deceitful and oppresses any of the genders. To further establish a fair treatment of the direct stakeholders of this study, the participants were ensured that they could refrain from talking about issues they were uncomfortable with. Moreover, any information that they did not want to be public knowledge would be taken out of the research. The topic of corporate social responsibility was also an important issue to consider as the study was

written on commission for a Swedish incubator. Therefore, it was critical to not distort their work with these sensitive issues to avoid any consequences on their behalf.

6.3.2 Ethical Implications

All of the respondents that partook in this study were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the research, what their contribution will be used for, as well as their voluntary participation. This meant that the respondents had to give consent before partaking in the study, and they were informed of the possibility to end their participation at any time, as well as the option to refrain from answering certain questions. Informed consent was ensured through providing the respondents with a cover letter explaining what type of study they would be participating in, as well as how their answers and information will be handled. The respondents also received information regarding their anonymity and confidentiality, since these are crucial to maintain throughout the study (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 97). This involves not naming the participant or in any way revealing any information that might make it possible to identify the participant (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 97). Additionally, the respondents' integrity was considered important to maintain. Therefore, anticipating possible harmful outcomes is important in order to protect the participants from any form of direct or indirect harm (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 73). The integrity of this study was further strengthened by the researchers' display of previous knowledge about the subject. Furthermore, openness and transparency have been ensured throughout this study as it is important to display information visibility to the participants and grant them access to information (Turilli & Floridi, 2009, p. 105). This was deemed important in this study to hopefully establish trust between the researchers and the respondents. Accuracy and objectivity were obtained during the research process by sending back the transcribed and translated data to the respondents. This allowed them to edit any answers that might have been misinterpreted during the translation or transcribing process. This further strengthens the credibility and honesty of the material as it was reviewed by the respondents to ensure its accuracy. It is also important to consider ethics when writing on commission for a company (Gray, 2019, p. 82), which is the case for this study. The researchers signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure the integrity of the company and its employees. The incubator also announced their involvement in the study to the incubatees before the researchers contacted them to assure the origin of the study. This also established a sense of trust in the sense that the data collection was only meant for this research purpose. These ethical considerations have been carefully followed to ensure the rigor of the research.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

It is important to highlight any limitations of the study and what potential future research could contribute by adding new perspectives to this subject. One limitation that was identified during this research was that it was not fully possible to answer and investigate the interrelationship between the incubator and its incubatees and how the gender equality perspective influences this. This answer was limited due to the low number of incubatees that had been affected by the incubator's gender equality-orientation. The majority of the incubatees had participated in the incubator program before the orientation was implemented. Furthermore, the incubator's gender equality work was relatively new, which further limited the number of incubatees affected by it. If all the incubatees had been affected by the gender equality-orientation, the ability to investigate the interrelationship and perspectives would have been greater. Concerning the dependability, it would therefore not be possible to study this aspect twice as the context

of the relationship will change over time and as the gender equality works continues with both new and existing incubated ventures. An empirical limitation of this study involved the interviews being held over telephone or skype instead of face-to-face. This was because of the current circumstances involving a worldwide pandemic, which hindered the researchers from traveling inside the country to meet with the incubator team. However, this limitation was acknowledged as well as any potential differences in results, which were actively worked upon to minimize. Another limitation related to the interviews being transcribed in Swedish and later translated into English. Even though the translated and transcribed version were sent back and controlled by the interviewees and efforts were made to not distort any answers, minor loss of meaning is inevitable.

This research was based on a case study of only one Swedish incubator, which means that the transferability of the results may not be applicable or true for the entire context of Sweden, or other countries for that matter. The point of this study was not to be able to generalize the results to the entire population of Sweden, instead it aimed towards describing and explaining the issue at hand in this case, while also shedding more light on this topic. However, future research has the opportunity to do more extensive research including a larger sample to better understand the conditions for the entire Swedish entrepreneurial environment. Future research could also examine more in-depth the underlying reasons why these issues still pertain, but also more about what actions could be done to address the issues. Lastly, a part of the incubator's gender equality-orientation was to increase the number of women in entrepreneurship, which in one aspect is about attracting more women to the incubator. Because of this reason, it was more difficult to investigate the interrelationship due to their novel work that was aimed at reaching people who are not yet a part of the incubator. Therefore, it might explain some parts of why it has been difficult to investigate the gender equality aspect of the relationship between the incubator and their incubatees. Considering this, it could be interesting for future research to investigate what, why, and how the gender equality perspective influenced new entrepreneurs and what conditions that exist for them. Potential research topics could address whether there is a difference and if changes have been made, a comparative study could thereby be a relevant option for future research.

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APPENDIX 1: VC's Description of Entrepreneurs

According to Malmström et al. (2017b) an average male entrepreneur is described with the following characteristics:

- *“Young and promising”*
- *“Arrogant, but very impressive competence”*
- *“Aggressive, but really good entrepreneur”*
- *“Experienced and knowledgeable”*
- *“Very competent innovator and already has money to play with”*
- *“Cautious, sensible, and level-headed”*
- *“Extremely capable and very driven”*
- *“Educated engineer at a prestigious university and has run businesses before”*

A female entrepreneur is however described according to these attributes:

- *“Young, but inexperienced”*
- *“Lacks network contacts and in need of help to develop her business concept”*
- *“Enthusiastic, but weak”*
- *“Experienced, but worried”*
- *“Good-looking and careless with money”*
- *“Too cautious and does not dare”*
- *“Lacks ability for venturing and growth”*
- *“Visionary, but with no knowledge of the market”*

(Malmström et al., 2017b)

APPENDIX 2: Female Entrepreneurship Opportunities

Table 3. Changes to Enhance Female Entrepreneurship Opportunities

| |
|---|
| Recommendations - Policymakers & Governments |
| <i>“Ensure that legislation provides equal opportunities for women and men.”</i> |
| <i>“Where legislation is gender-neutral, ensure that nondiscrimination is actually practiced.”</i> |
| <i>“Partner with private sector companies (including financial institutions) to enhance regulatory frameworks for the benefit of women entrepreneurs (for example, credit reporting, opening hours of financial institutions, etc.).”</i> |
| <i>“Explore opportunities for supplier diversity policies that promote sourcing from SMEs (including from women-owned enterprises).”</i> |
| <i>“Further knowledge around opportunities and obstacles faced by women-owned enterprises.”</i> |
| Recommendations - Private Sector |
| <i>“Conduct market research to identify the potential business case for women-targeted interventions.”</i> |
| <i>“Look for opportunities to finance women-owned SMEs, including sources of finance and equity capital.”</i> |
| <i>“Join programs that provide knowledge of how to profitably reach the women’s market (such as the Global Banking Alliance for Women for financial institutions).”</i> |
| <i>“Explore partnerships that better link access to finance with capacity-building programs (including targeting entire value chains).”</i> |
| <i>“Identify support-program mechanisms for women entrepreneurs that impact entire value chains in which women entrepreneurs are concentrated.”</i> |
| <i>“In partnership with research institutes, improve results measurement frameworks that better capture success factors of capacity-building programs for (women) entrepreneurs.”</i> |

(Niethammer, 2013, p. 10)

APPENDIX 3: Interview Guide

Cover sheet

Information to Respondent

Purpose of the interview/study: We are two business students at Umeå University who write our degree project in business development. This study is about examining a Swedish incubator's work with increased gender equality in entrepreneurship and the potential opportunities and challenges that come with it. The purpose also involves studying the influence that the incubator has on the companies in their program. In addition, the study will examine the companies' perceptions of how the gender perspective affects them.

Format of the interview: The interview is made up of four parts and has about 20 questions. The first section of the interview contains a few background questions. This is followed by the second part which includes questions that are directed towards establishing how you perceive the incubator's role in gender equality in entrepreneurship. The third section revolves around what potential challenges you, as a part of the incubator, sees in certain areas when it comes to gender equality in entrepreneurship and if conditions are different between men and women. The last section focuses more on your perceptions of what opportunities women have in business. When the interview is completed, any feelings or questions will be raised. After transcribing your answers, these will be sent back to you for approval to ensure that no misinterpretations have occurred.

Anonymity: You as a respondent will remain anonymous throughout the study and no answers will be identifiable to a specific individual. The thesis will, however, be published and made available to the public. As interviewers, we have signed a confidentiality agreement and no personal or sensitive information will be disclosed. Your participation in the interview and the study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw when you want, and refrain from questions you do not wish to answer.

Interviewers: Erica Damsten & Lee Hasselgren

Consent to the audio recording: YES or NO (*circle the option*)

Filled by Interviewer

Date:

Place:

Total time of interview:

Special conditions/circumstances:

Demographic about respondent:

Interview Questions

Background questions

- Gender?
- What is your role in the incubator, what does this role entail?

Incubator

- Ownership Differences
 - Why do you think that there is a significant gender gap between men and women who start and run a business?
 - How do you think an incubator can decrease the gender gap and increase the number of women in business?
- Gender Diversity
 - What challenges (if any) have you experienced so far with implementing a gender equality orientation in your work?
 - Why did you implement this gender equality orientation and what opportunities (if any) do you see working with this moving forward?
 - How have you worked with implementing this gender equality orientation, what changes have been made?
- Sweden
 - How do you think the Swedish environment affects women's opportunities or challenges in entrepreneurship?
- Support
 - Can you tell us how and what kind of support you give the companies in the incubator?
 - Do you see any differences in how and what kind of support you give between women and men?

Challenges

- A Male-Dominated Field
 - It is stated that entrepreneurship is associated with what is considered “*male characteristics*” and women who display these “*masculine*” characteristics are viewed more negatively and experience career backlash from it.
 - How do you think this affects women's careers in entrepreneurship?
- Social & Liberal Feminism
 - Tell us about your thoughts and experiences about gender discrimination in entrepreneurship?
- Venture Capitalists
 - Can you tell us how entrepreneurs get access to finance, how does the relationship between men and women's access to capital look like?
- Networking
 - How do you view men and women's approach to networking?

Opportunities

- Motivational Factors
 - What do you think are the biggest motivational factors among men and women as to why they start a business?

- Female Self-employment
 - What opportunities (if any) do you think are created for women that choose to pursue self-employment as a career?

- Necessity-driven Entrepreneurs
 - It is researched that gender stereotypes create a “*push*”, serving as a motivational factor that causes women to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Gender stereotypes shape “*necessity-driven*” female entrepreneurs rather than “*opportunity-driven*” ones. It is stated that more women than men start a venture out of “*necessity*”. This implies that women see it as a must to respond or escape the gender stereotype, instead of seizing an opportunity driven by “*want*”.
 - How do you think gender stereotypes* impact men and women in entrepreneurship?

*Gender stereotype - norms and characteristics applied to an individual based upon their gender. These beliefs create occupational gender stereotypes which lead to certain jobs being viewed as more suitable for men than women, and vice versa.

APPENDIX 4: Intervjuguide

Försättsblad

Information till Respondent

Syfte av intervjun/studien: Vi är två civilekonomstudenter vid Umeå Universitet som skriver vårt examensarbete inom affärsutveckling. Denna studie handlar om att undersöka en svensk inkubators arbete med att öka jämställdheten i företagande och vilka potentiella möjligheter och utmaningar som följer med detta. Syftet involverar även att studera inflytandet som inkubatorn har på företagen i deras program. Därtill kommer studien att undersöka företagens uppfattningar om hur jämställdhetsperspektivet påverkar dem.

Format på intervjun: Intervjun består av fyra delar och har cirka 20 frågor. Den första delen av intervjun innehåller några bakgrundsfrågor. Därefter följer del två som innehåller frågor riktade till hur du uppfattar inkubatorns roll i jämställdhet inom företagande. Den tredje delen handlar om vilka potentiella utmaningar du, som en del av inkubatorn, ser när det kommer till jämställdhet i företagande. Det sista avsnittet fokuserar mer på dina uppfattningar om vilka möjligheter kvinnor har i entreprenörskap. När intervjun är avslutad tas eventuella frågor eller funderingar upp. Efter transkribering av dina svar kommer dessa att skickas tillbaka till dig för godkännande för att säkerställa att inga misstolkningar skett.

Anonymitet: Du som respondent kommer att vara anonym genom hela uppsatsen och inga svar kommer att kunna identifieras till en specifik individ. Uppsatsen kommer däremot att publiceras och finnas tillgänglig för allmänheten. Vi som intervjuare har skrivit under ett sekretessavtal och ingen personlig eller känslig information kommer att tillkännages. Din medverkan i intervjun och studien är frivillig och du kan välja att avsluta när du vill, samt avstå från frågor du ej önskar svara på.

Intervjuare: Erica Damsten & Lee Hasselgren

Medgivande till ljudinspelning: JA eller NEJ (*ringa in ett alternativ*)

Ifylles av Intervjuare

Datum:

Plats:

Total tid av intervju:

Speciella omständigheter:

Demografi om respondent:

Intervjufrågor

Bakgrundsfrågor

- Kön?
- Vad är din roll i inkubatorn, vad innebär denna?

Inkubator

- Skillnader i ägandeskap
 - Varför tror du att det är ett så stort könsgap mellan män och kvinnor som startar och driver företag?
 - Hur tror du att en inkubator kan minska könsgapet och öka antalet kvinnor i företagande?
- Könsmångfald
 - Vilka utmaningar (om det finns några) har du/ni hittills upplevt gällande implementeringen av ökad jämställdhet i ert arbete?
 - Varför valde ni att implementera detta jämställdhetsarbete och vad ser ni för möjligheter (om det finns några) med detta arbete i fortsättningen?
 - Hur har ni i praktiken implementerat jämställdhetsarbetet, vilka förändringar har gjorts?
- Sverige
 - Hur tror du att den svenska miljön påverkar kvinnors möjligheter eller utmaningar i entreprenörskap?
- Stöd
 - Kan du berätta om hur och vad för typ av stöd ni ger till företagen i inkubatorn?
 - Ser du några skillnader i hur och vad för typ av stöd ni ger mellan kvinnor och män?

Utmaningar

- Mansdominerat område
 - Det sägs att entreprenörskap är förknippat med vad som betraktas som "*manliga egenskaper*". Kvinnor som uppvisar dessa betraktas negativt från andra, samt att de får uppleva bakslag i karriären om de besitter "*maskulina*" karaktärsdrag.
 - Hur tror du att detta påverkar kvinnors karriär inom entreprenörskap?
- Social & Liberal Feminism
 - Berätta om dina tankar och upplevelser kring könsdiskriminering inom entreprenörskap?
- Riskkapitalägare
 - Kan du berätta om hur entreprenörer får tillgång till finansiering, hur ser förhållandet mellan män och kvinnors tillgång till kapital ut?
- Nätverk

- Hur ser du på män och kvinnors tillvägagångssätt till nätverkande?

Möjligheter

- Motivationsfaktorer
 - Vad tror du är de största motivationsfaktorerna bland män respektive kvinnor till varför de startar ett företag?
- Kvinnligt egenföretagande
 - Vilka möjligheter (om några) tror du skapas för kvinnor som väljer att bli egenföretagare?
- Entreprenörskap som nödvändighet
 - Det är forskat att könsstereotyper skapar en “*knuff*” som motiverar kvinnor att bli entreprenörer. Könsstereotyper bidrar till att kvinnor drivs av nödvändighet istället för viljor/möjligheter. Därav är det fler kvinnor än män som startar ett företag utav nödvändighet. Detta tyder på att kvinnor ser det som ett måste att svara på och/eller undkomma dessa könsstereotyper.
 - Hur tror du att könsstereotyper* påverkar män och kvinnor i entreprenörskap?

*Könsstereotyp - normer och egenskaper som är applicerade på en individ baserat på deras kön. Dessa antaganden skapar yrkesrelaterade könsstereotyper som leder till att vissa jobb är uppfattade som mer lämpliga för män än för kvinnor, och vice versa.

APPENDIX 5: Questionnaire

Covering Letter

Gender Equality in Entrepreneurship

We are two business students at Umeå University, who write our degree project in business development. This study is about examining the work of a Swedish incubator to increase gender equality in entrepreneurship and the potential opportunities and challenges that come with it. The purpose also involves studying the influence that the incubator has on the companies in their programs. In addition, the study will examine companies' perceptions of how the gender perspective affects them.

You have been selected to take part in this study because you either participate or have participated in the incubator's program. Also, because of the gender distribution we want to achieve with the study. The form consists of 19 questions and is expected to take around 30 minutes. The nature of the questions consists of descriptive answers aimed at capturing your experiences. The questions are divided into four categories, the first of which is background questions. In this, we ask you to tick your gender as it is important for our work to be able to make comparisons. The following three categories are about your challenges, opportunities, and personal views on gender equality in entrepreneurship. The answers are completely anonymous and will not be linked to the individual. Apart from one background question, it is optional to answer all other questions. The answers will be published in our thesis, which will then be available to the public when it is uploaded.

Thank you for your help.

Erica Damsten & Lee Hasselgren

Background questions

- Gender?
- Length of current venture?

Challenges

It is stated that entrepreneurship is associated with what is considered “*male characteristics*” and women who display these “*masculine*” characteristics are viewed more negatively and experience career backlash from it.

1. How do you think this affects women’s careers in entrepreneurship?
2. Have you experienced any discrimination since starting your venture due to your gender?
3. Do you think men and women are treated differently in business? Why/why not?
4. Do you think that there is a difference between the genders and how they access funding/venture capital? Why/why not?

Opportunities

5. What motivated you to start a business?
6. What opportunities do you see with pursuing self-employment as a career?
7. Do you think that there are different opportunities/conditions between men and women who want to start a business? Explain.
8. Do you think gender stereotypes* (see explanation below) have an impact on why and how someone starts a business? Explain.

**Gender stereotype - norms and characteristics applied to an individual based upon their gender. These beliefs create occupational gender stereotypes which lead to certain jobs being viewed as more suitable for men than women, and vice versa.*

9. If yes on question 8. Do you think gender stereotypes create different opportunities for men and women?

Perceptions

10. Have you experienced the new gender equality orientation that the incubator has implemented?
11. If yes on question 10. In what way?
12. What type of support have you received from the incubator?
13. What type of support did you expect to receive from the incubator and how did your expectations align with the actual support?

14. How have you accessed network contacts?
15. Has the incubator helped you with gaining access to network contacts? If so, how?
16. Have you experienced any difficulties when trying to access network contacts?
17. Have you experienced, or do you think, that there are any differences between the genders when it comes to opportunities and challenges of networking?

APPENDIX 6: Frågeformulär

Följebrev

Jämställdhet i entreprenörskap

Vi är två civilekonomstudenter vid Umeå Universitet som skriver vårt examensarbete inom affärsutveckling. Denna studie handlar om att undersöka en svensk inkubators arbete med att öka jämställdheten i företagande och vilka potentiella möjligheter och utmaningar som följer med detta. Syftet involverar även att studera inflytandet som inkubatorn har på företagen i deras program. Därtill kommer studien att undersöka företagens uppfattningar om hur jämställdhetsperspektivet påverkar dem.

Du har valts ut att delta i denna undersökning på grund av att du antingen deltar eller har deltagit i inkubatorns program, samt på grund av könsfördelningen vi vill uppnå med studien. Formuläret består av 19st frågor och beräknas ta runt 30 minuter. Frågornas karaktär består av beskrivande svar som syftar på att fånga era upplevelser. Frågorna är uppdelade i fyra kategorier, varav den första är bakgrundsfrågor. I denna ber vi er att kryssa i ert kön då det är viktigt för vårt arbete för att kunna göra jämförelser. De tre följande kategorierna handlar om era utmaningar, möjligheter och personliga uppfattningar gällande jämställdhet i entreprenörskap. Svaren är helt anonyma och kommer inte gå att kopplas till individen. Utöver en bakgrundsfråga är det valfritt att svara på alla frågor. Svaren kommer att publiceras i vår uppsats, vilket sedan kommer att finnas tillgängligt för allmänheten när den laddas upp.

Tack för din hjälp.

Erica Damsten & Lee Hasselgren

Bakgrundsfrågor

- Kön?
- Hur länge har du drivit ditt företag?

Utmaningar

Det sägs att entreprenörskap är förknippat med vad som betraktas som “*manliga egenskaper*”. Kvinnor som uppvisar dessa betraktas negativt från andra, samt att de kan uppleva bakslag i karriären om de besitter “*maskulina*” karaktärsdrag.

1. Hur tror du att detta påverkar kvinnors karriär inom entreprenörskap?
2. Har du upplevt någon sorts diskriminering på grund av ditt kön sedan du startade ditt företag?
3. Tror du att kvinnor och män behandlas olika inom företagande? Varför/varför inte?
4. Tror du att det finns en skillnad mellan könen och hur de får tillgång till finansiering/riskkapital? Varför/varför inte?

Möjligheter

5. Vad motiverade dig till att starta ett företag?
6. Vilka möjligheter ser du med egenföretagande som karriärval?
7. Tror du att det finns någon skillnad gällande möjligheterna/förutsättningarna mellan män och kvinnor som vill starta eget företag? Förklara.
8. Tror du att könsstereotyper* (se förklaring nedan) har en påverkan på varför och hur någon startar ett företag? Förklara.

**Könsstereotyp - normer och egenskaper som är applicerade på en individ baserat på deras kön. Dessa antaganden skapar yrkesrelaterade könsstereotyper som leder till att vissa jobb är uppfattade som mer lämpliga för män än för kvinnor, och vice versa.*

9. Om ja på fråga 8, tror du att könsstereotyper skapar olika möjligheter för kvinnor och män?

Uppfattningar

10. Har du påverkats av inkubators nya jämställdhetsarbete?
11. Om ja på fråga 10. På vilket sätt?
12. Vad för typ av stöd har du fått från inkubatorn?
13. Vad för typ av stöd förväntade du dig att få från inkubatorn och hur överensstämde dina förväntningar med det stöd du fått?
14. Hur har du fått tillgång till nätverkskontakter?

15. Har inkubatorn hjälpt dig med att få tillgång till nätverkskontakter? Om ja, hur?
16. Har du upplevt några svårigheter med att få tillgång till nätverkskontakter?
17. Har du upplevt, eller tror du, att det finns skillnader mellan män och kvinnor när det kommer till vilka möjligheter och utmaningar de har för att nå nätverkskontakter?



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Business Administration SE-901 87 Umeå www.usbe.umu.se