Tampere University

DEMET DEMİREZ

Gender (in)equalities in Knowledge Intensive Entrepreneurship

Experiences of Women Entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey

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Demet Demirez

ABSTRACT

Knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE) refers to businesses that rely on intellectual assets, innovation, and high-value knowledge-based activities within innovation systems and the knowledge economy (Brinkley 2006; Kabir 2019; Malerba 2010; Malerba and McKelvey 2016). However, KIE remains largely male-dominated, with women being significantly underrepresented in Europe and globally (Amoroso and Link 2018; Walby 2011), even in countries with high levels of gender equality, such as Finland (Saarela et al. 2024). This lack of representation limits the diversity of ideas and skills that are crucial for driving innovation and economic growth. However, there is little research on the gendered aspects of KIE across different countries (e.g. Amoroso and Link 2018).

My research addresses this research gap and analyses how gender influences women's entrepreneurial initiatives and how they manage gender inequalities in KIE in Finland and Turkey. It explores how gendered practices affect the entrepreneurial careers of Turkish and Finnish women, identifying the similarities and differences between their experiences.

My research focuses on two questions: 1) In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered? 2) In what ways do women entrepreneurs manage gender inequalities in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in Turkey and Finland? I examine how societal and, cultural norms, expectations and workplace practices influence the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs. Moreover, I explore how these dimensions affect their access to business networks and economic resources, and how they manage the gendered barriers of entrepreneurship in KIE. I further explore the ways women employ, to deal with gender inequalities throughout their entrepreneurial career.

My research focuses on theoretical approaches to doing gender (Gherardi 1994; Korvajärvi 2021; Martin 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987) and undoing gender

(Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007) as well as postfeminist thinking (Gill 2007; Kelan 2009; Lewis 2014).

In 2019 and 2020, I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs in in KIE – 13 from Finland and 16 from Turkey. The interviews with Finnish participants were conducted in English whereas the interviews with Turkish participants were conducted in Turkish. The participants–represented a variety of KIE sectors, including software development, consultancy on research and development projects, the health sector, and marketing for product development. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, combining both inductive and deductive approaches.

Both Turkey and Finland have made progress in women's education, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, creating opportunities for women's entrepreneurial careers in KIE. However, while Finland's educational and welfare systems have fostered an inclusive environment for women in KIE, Turkey faces socioeconomic disparities that affect access to quality education and professional opportunities. My findings show that women entrepreneurs in both countries are driven by shared motivations, such as gender inequality in previous workplaces and a desire for independence and flexibility.

However, the way in which they manage work–family life balance differs Finnish women benefit from strong public childcare systems, while Turkish women manage deeply rooted gender norms and inadequate childcare support. Gender inequalities persist in both contexts, with women entrepreneurs frequently having to prove their competence and expertise. In this study, the Finnish participants tended to emphasise personal choice and respect for their own decisions, as well as those of their peers, while the Turkish participants were more critical of what they considered a lack of initiative among their peers. Additionally, both groups utilised feminine characteristics such as empathy and multitasking to their advantage. Networking and securing resources present difficulties for women entrepreneurs in both countries, with exclusion from male-dominated networks being a common issue. Finnish women also find value in supportive, female-centric networks, while Turkish women often collaborate with male partners to strengthen their businesses.

The findings reveal that both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs employ personal approaches aligned with postfeminist thinking, downplaying gender inequalities and emphasising individual traits. The Finnish participants often claimed

that gender equality is largely achieved within their society, despite still having to deal with ongoing gender inequalities. The Turkish participants acknowledged structural issues but focused on personal strength to manage gender inequalities. These differences highlight the varying cultural influences on their entrepreneurial careers, emphasising the need for continued efforts to address gender inequalities in both contexts.

I conclude the thesis by offering recommendations based on the findings, to advance gender equality in KIE in Finland and Turkey. These recommendations include supporting women's entrepreneurship, increasing the share of women-led companies, fostering networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs, and collecting gender-specific data with annual updates on women entrepreneurs, including their access to funding, government support programmes, and networking opportunities at the national level. In addition, I recommend providing more support for women to achieve an adequate work-family life balance, especially in Turkey.

Keywords: women's entrepreneurship, knowledge intensive entrepreneurship, interviews, thematic analysis, gendered experiences, gender (in)equality, networks, innovation systems, doing/undoing gender, postfeminism.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Sukupuolten tasa-arvo ja eriarvoisuus osaamisintensiivisessä yrittäjyydessä: Naisyrittäjien kokemuksia Suomessa ja Turkissa.

Osaamisintensiivisellä yrittäjyydellä (*knowledge intensive entrepreneurship: KIE*) viitataan yrityksiin, joiden toiminta perustuu aineettomaan omaisuuteen, innovaatioihin ja korkeaa lisäarvoa tuottavaan tietoon innovaatiojärjestelmissä ja osaamistaloudessa (Brinkley 2006; Kabir 2019; Malerba 2010; Malerba ja McKelvey 2016). Osaamisintensiivinen yrittäjyys on pysynyt miesvaltaisena, ja naiset ovat merkittävästi aliedustettuina alan yrityksissä Euroopassa ja maailmanlaajuisesti (Amoroso ja Link 2018; Walby 2011), myös maissa joissa sukupuolten tasa-arvo on suhteellisesti hyvällä tasolla, kuten Suomessa (Saarela ym. 2024). Tämä naisten vähäisyys typistää innovaatioiden kehittämisen ja taloudellisen kasvun kannalta ratkaisevaa ideoiden monimuotoisuutta. Silti osaamisintensiivisen yrittäjyyden sukupuolittuneista piirteistä eri maissa on vain vähän tutkimusta (poikkeuksena Amoroso ja Link 2018).

Tutkimukseni kohdistuu tähän vähän tutkittuun aiheeseen. Analysoin, kuinka sukupuoli suuntaa naisten yrittäjyyden käynnistämistä ja kuinka naiset suhtautuvat kohdatessaan sukupuolten välistä eriarvoisuutta osaamisintensiivisen yrittäjyyden alalla Suomessa ja Turkissa. Tutkin, kuinka sukupuolittuneet käytännöt näkyvät turkkilaisten ja suomalaisten naisten yrittäjyydessä. Tavoitteena on tunnistaa turkkilaisten ja suomalaisten naisyrittäjien kokemusten samanlaisuuksia ja erilaisuuksia.

Tutkimuskysymykseni ovat: 1) Millä tavoin turkkilaisten ja suomalaisten naisten kokemukset osaamisintensiivisestä yrittäjyydestä ovat sukupuolittuneita? 2) Millä tavoin naisyrittäjät Suomessa ja Turkissa käsittelevät sukupuolten välistä eriarvoisuutta osaamisintensiivisessä yrittäjyydessä? Tutkin, miten yhteiskunnalliset ja kulttuuriset normit, odotukset ja työpaikan käytännöt näkyvät naisyrittäjien sukupuolittuneissa kokemuksissa. Tarkastelen myös, miten nämä normit, odotukset ja käytännöt ovat yhteydessä heidän pääsyynsä yritysverkostoihin ja taloudellisiin resursseihin ja miten he kohtaavat yrittäjyyden sukupuoleen liittyviä esteitä. Lisäksi

tarkastelen tapoja, joita naiset yrittäjinä käyttävät selviytyäkseen sukupuolen mukaisista eriarvoisuuksista ja joilla he torjuvat niitä.

Tutkimukseni perustuu sukupuolen tekemisen (Gherardi 1994; Korvajärvi 2021; Martin 2003; West ja Zimmerman 1987) ja sukupuolen purkamisen (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007) teoreettisiin lähestymistapoihin sekä postfeministiseen ajatteluun (Gill 2007; Kelan 2009; Lewis 2014).

Vuosina 2019 - 2020 tein 29 puolistrukturoitua haastattelua osaamisintensiivisillä aloilla toimivien naisyrittäjien kanssa. Heistä 13 oli Suomesta ja 16 Turkista. Suomalaisia osanottajia haastateltiin englanniksi ja turkkilaisia turkiksi. Tutkimukseeni osallistujat tulivat erilaisista osaamisintensiivisen alan yrityksistä, jotka toimivat ohjelmistokehityksen, tutkimus- ja kehityshankkeiden konsultoinnin, terveydenhuollon ja tuotekehityksen markkinoinnin aloilla. Haastatteluaineisto analysoitiin käyttämällä temaattista analyysia, jossa yhdistettiin induktiivista ja deduktiivista lähestymistapaa.

Sekä Turkki että Suomi ovat edistäneet naisten mahdollisuuksia koulutukseen, myös luonnontieteiden ja tekniikan aloilla, mikä luo vankan perustan naisten yrittäjäuralle osaamisintensiivisillä aloilla. Suomen koulutus ja hyvinvointijärjestelmät ovat edistäneet laajasti naisten mahdollisuuksia näillä aloilla. Turkissa taas on sosioekonomisia eroja, jotka vaikuttavat laadukkaan koulutuksen ja ammatillisten mahdollisuuksien saatavuuteen.

Tutkimushavaintoni osoittavat, että molempien maiden naisyrittäjiä ohjaavat samankaltaiset motiivit. Niitä ovat kokemukset sukupuolten eriarvoisuudesta aiemmilla työpaikoilla sekä halu työskennellä itsenäisesti ja joustavasti.

Kokemukset työn ja perheen yhteensovittamisen mahdollisuuksista ovat puolestaan erilaisia. Suomalaiset naiset hyötyvät vakaista julkisista lastenhoitojärjestelmistä, kun taas turkkilaiset naiset toimivat syvään juurtuneiden sukupuolinormien ja riittämättömän lastenhoidon tuen varassa. Sukupuolten välinen eriarvoisuus jatkuu molemmissa maissa, ja naisyrittäjien on usein todistettava pätevyytensä ja asiantuntemuksensa. Suomalaiset haastateltavat korostivat henkilökohtaisia valintoja ja kunnioittivat omia ja toistensa päätöksiä. Turkkilaiset haastateltavat taas arvioivat kriittisesti alansa naisyrittäjien aloitteellisuuden puutetta. Lisäksi molemmissa maissa naisyrittäjät käyttivät hyödykseen naisellisina pidettyjä ominaisuuksia, kuten kykyä toimia empaattisesti ja tehdä yhtä aikaa monia tehtäviä.

Verkostoituminen ja resurssien hankkiminen tuottivat molemmissa maissa vaikeuksia naisyrittäjille, ja miesten hallitsemien verkostojen ulkopuolelle jääminen oli yleinen ongelma. Suomalaiset naiset pitivät tukea antavia naisverkostoja arvokkaina, kun taas turkkilaiset naiset tekivät usein yhteistyötä miespuolisten kumppaneiden kanssa liiketoimintansa vahvistamiseksi.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että sekä suomalaiset että turkkilaiset naisyrittäjät käyttivät postfeministisen ajattelun mukaisia individualistisia strategioita, joissa vähätellään sukupuolten välistä eriarvoisuutta ja korostetaan yksilöllisiä piirteitä. Suomalaiset haastateltavat väittivät usein, että sukupuolten välinen tasa-arvo on suurelta osin saavutettu heidän yhteiskunnassaan, vaikka heidän on edelleen käsiteltävä jatkuvaa sukupuolten välistä eriarvoisuutta.

Turkkilaiset haastateltavat taas tunnistivat rakenteelliset ongelmat, mutta he painottivat henkilökohtaisia vahvuuksiaan sukupuolten välisten eriarvoisuuksien käsittelyssä. Nämä erot korostavat, että naisten yrittäjyyspolkuihin vaikuttavat erilaiset kulttuurit. Samoin ne korostavat tarvetta jatkaa ponnisteluja sukupuolten välisen eriarvoisuuden poistamiseksi molemmissa maissa.

Päätän väitöskirjani esittämällä tutkimustulosteni pohjalta suosituksia sukupuolten tasa-arvon edistämiseksi osaamisintensiivisessä yrittäjyydessä Suomessa ja Turkissa. Suosituksiin sisältyy naisyrittäjyyden tukeminen, naisten johtamien yritysten osuuden lisääminen ja naisyrittäjien verkostoitumismahdollisuuksien edistäminen. Lisäksi suosituksiin kuuluu sukupuolen mukaan eritellyn tiedon kerääminen naisyrittäjyydestä ja tiedon vuosittainen päivittäminen kansallisesti. Lisäksi suosittelen, että naisille osoitetaan nykyistä enemmän tukea työn ja perheen tasapainon saavuttamiseksi, erityisesti Turkissa.

Asiasanat: naisten yrittäjyys, osaamisintensiivinen yrittäjyys, haastattelut, temaattinen analyysi, sukupuolittuneet kokemukset, sukupuolten tasa-arvo ja eriarvoisuus, verkostot, innovaatiojärjestelmät, sukupuolen tekeminen ja purkaminen, postfeminismi.

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List of Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
JDP	Justice and Development Party in Turkey
KBE	Knowledge Based Enterprises
KIBS	Knowledge Intensive Business Services
KIE	Knowledge Intensive Entrepreneurship
KOSGEB	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Development Organization in Turkey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TA	Thematic Analysis
TÜBİTAK	The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever I presented my PhD research at conferences, the first question, I often received, was why I chose Finland and Turkey for my study. People were curious about this choice because Finland and Turkey represent two different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Finland, a Nordic country with well-established welfare services and European Union (EU) membership, ranks high in gender equality (World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023:5). In contrast, Turkey, with its blend of Islamic traditions, EU connections, and influences from Southern cultures, faces ongoing struggles with gender inequality, including lower female participation in the labour market and limited political empowerment (UNDP-United Nations Development Program-Gender Social Norms Index 2023:35; World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023:11).

The answer I gave to the question of why I chose Finland was that Finland served as a model for Turkey during the early years of the Turkish Republic. The book "The Country of White Lilies", written by Russian author Grigoriy Petrov, describes Finland's national development process and caught the interest of Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. In his book, Petrov explains how Johan Wilhelm Snellman, along with a group of idealistic teachers, clergy, lawyers, and civil servants, led the Finland in an educational campaign. In 1928, Atatürk had the book translated and encouraged it to be taught in schools, hoping that the development described in it would inspire Turkey's modernization efforts. The book influenced Atatürk with its emphasis on hard work, dedication, and the vision of building a new state. It highlighted the importance of creating a national language and history, prioritizing women's rights, and involving intellectuals in guiding society. The book also stressed the need for education and enlightenment in rural areas. Inspired by these ideas, Atatürk launched an educational campaign focused on teacher training based on reason and science (Altaş 2017).

Atatürk saw education as important as the fight for independence in building the Turkey's future. He actively involved teachers and intellectuals in this effort. During

the Turkish War of Independence, intellectuals played a key role in promoting national consciousness, supporting the development of a national language and history, and advocating for women's rights—ideas that aligned with Snellman's vision for Finland. Atatürk emphasized the role of intellectuals in public enlightenment and education reform. However, his reforms were not only based on this book. Özakman (2010:294) notes that Atatürk had already implemented many of these reforms long before reading it. Still, among the works he studied, this book holds a significant place in the realization of the Turkish revolution.

As a result, Finland became widely recognized in Turkish society and is the most well-known Nordic country among the public. Additionally, Finland's education system is consistently ranked among the top globally (OECD 2024), further enhancing its reputation in Turkey. This is why I chose Finland over other Nordic countries.

Women entrepreneurship as a research topic holds personal significance for me, as it builds on my professional experience and previous master's research (Demirez 2016) on how gender norms and structures impact the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Turkey. Choosing women's entrepreneurship as the focus of my doctoral research is a meaningful decision, rooted in my work experience at a small and medium enterprise (SME) development organization in Turkey. This experience has given me an insider's understanding of the obstacles and opportunities faced by woman entrepreneurs in general, and a first-hand perspective on the specific difficulties women face in entrepreneurship. Witnessing these difficulties not only raised my awareness but also awakened a deep curiosity within me.

During my time working at an SME development organization and researching the impact of government entrepreneurship support on women's empowerment for my master's degree, I had the chance to work closely with entrepreneurs and small business owners, many of whom were women. I noticed that most of the women entrepreneurs in my network were focused on retail, food, fashion, and services. While these sectors are important, I started to wonder why women were underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related entrepreneurial ventures. My research on the effects of government support programs for women entrepreneurs revealed that, while these programs were valuable, they were mostly designed for and used by women in female-dominated sectors (Demirez 2016). There was a clear lack of specialized support for women

looking to start or grow businesses in STEM fields. Based on these findings, I redirect my research focus to better understand the difficulties and inequalities women face in STEM entrepreneurship. My practical experience with SMEs, combined with my passion for addressing gender-related issues, led me to focus on research and development in this critical area. This decision was motivated by a desire to promote a more equitable entrepreneurship environment, while drawing on my experiences in the SME sector and my commitment to supporting women entrepreneurs in underrepresented fields.

While these personal connections provide valuable context, my study also aims to fill a gap in the scholarly literature on the gendered nature of knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE). Few studies have examined the relationship between gender, entrepreneurship, and KIE.

For instance, Walby et al. (2007) examine the knowledge economy and its relationship with gender and employment, while Walby (2011) further highlights its gendered nature. Amoroso and Link (2018) explore how male and female ownership influence innovation and employment growth in KIE across Europe, emphasizing the need for more research on gender's impact on firm performance, particularly in innovation. Similarly, Saarela et al. (2024) address the persistent gender gap in entrepreneurial potential in Finland, noting that despite the country's high levels of gender equality, women continue to face barriers to entrepreneurship.

Therefore, building on my personal and scholarly reasons, firstly, my study advances research on gender and entrepreneurship by focusing on less researched women's entrepreneurship in KIE. Secondly, it bridges insights from two different contexts—Finland, a country often held as a model of gender equality, and Turkey, which faces ongoing struggles in this area—to provide a detailed understanding of how gender operates within KIE across diverse social, cultural and political environments.

Researching two countries goes beyond a comparison; it is about exploring the ways in which these environments affect and sometimes present obstacles to opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Finland's membership in the EU highlights the importance of specific policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and supporting women's entrepreneurship within a European context. In contrast, Turkey has followed the gender equality policies of the United Nations and the EU to some extent, but its socio-economic dynamics differ significantly from those of Finland. Finland and Turkey provide contrasting perspectives on gender equality and

women's empowerment. Finland is known for women's active participation in the workforce, education, and politics, along with its progressive gender equality policies. In contrast, Turkey faces persistent obstacles rooted in its political and cultural structures, which hinder the achievement of gender equality and limit equal opportunities for women across society. This research explores the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey to better understand how to create more inclusive and supportive business environments for women in KIE. It looks at how gender shapes women's entrepreneurial careers in KIE, with a focus on identifying commonalities and differences in their experiences in these two different socio-cultural contexts.

1.1 Theoretical backgrounds

In recent years, the significant contribution of women to entrepreneurship, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors, has gained increasing recognition. Knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE), defined by its dependence on intellectual assets, innovation, and high-value knowledge-based activities, has become a tool in driving economic growth and technological progress (Kabir 2019). This form of entrepreneurship is based on the creation and management of new enterprises that emphasize the generation and application of knowledge. These enterprises are characterized by their focus on developing advanced technologies, introducing innovative products or services, and strategically applying knowledge—including scientific research and expertise—to address existing challenges (Malerba 2010; Malerba and McKelvey 2016).

KIE operates within the broader knowledge economy, where producing, sharing, and using knowledge are key drivers of economic growth and progress. The knowledge economy depends on intellectual assets, innovation, and creating value through knowledge. Within this framework, the knowledge economy offers a supportive environment for KIE by providing access to knowledge resources, networks, and markets that facilitate the growth and development of new ventures. As a result, KIE and the knowledge economy support each other, with each influencing and benefiting from the other (Brinkley 2006; Kabir 2019; Malerba 2010; Malerba and Mckelvey 2016).

Additionally, KIE is closely linked to innovation, which is a key part of its success in the knowledge economy. Entrepreneurs in KIE are always looking for new and creative ways to use knowledge, technologies, and ideas. Innovation goes beyond

creating new products or services; it also includes improvements in processes, business models, and organizational structures (Malerba 2010; Malerba and McKelvey 2016).

While KIE relies on intellectual assets and innovative practices, it is crucial to recognize the specific obstacles and opportunities women entrepreneurs face in this context. They encounter barriers and biases that affect their participation in networks, limit their access to resources and opportunities, and impact their overall success in KIE. These difficulties often result in positions as "token" (Kanter 1977) or minority representation within the KIE.

STEM fields are the usual background for entrepreneurs and employees in KIE, However, women are still less represented within the population of employed scientists and engineers, they represented only 40.8 per cent along European level (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:63). Moreover, women in the labour market are significantly under-represented in entrepreneurship, more specifically in technology-oriented fields. The results show a significant gender gap at European and country level, women made up less than 25 per cent of self-employed professionals in science, engineering, and information, communication and technology (Ibid, 73). In Turkey, self-employed women in the science, technology, and innovation sectors make up only 21.86 per cent of all self-employed people in the industry and in Finland, the figure is similar at 21.79 per cent (Ibid, 76 figure 3.6).

As a researcher in the field of gender studies, my research aims to explore and understand how gender influences women's experiences in KIE in Turkey and Finland and to investigate the ways women entrepreneurs employ to manage and overcome gendered inequalities in Turkey and Finland. To achieve this, I use two theoretical frameworks: the doing gender approach (Butler 1993, 1999, 2004; Gherardi 1994; Korvajärvi 2021; Martin 2003, 2006; West and Zimmerman 1987) and postfeminist ideas (Gill 2007; Gill et al. 2017; Kelan 2007, 2010; Lewis 2006; McRobbie 2004, 2009). These approaches—doing and undoing gender, along with engaging with postfeminist ideas—provide frameworks for understanding the persistence of gender inequalities in workplaces, particularly within the context of KIE.

The doing gender approach, pioneered by sociologists West and Zimmerman in 1987, forms the foundational basis of my research. This theoretical perspective

questions the view of gender as a fixed and unchangeable characteristic. Instead, it emphasises that individuals actively shape and express their gender identities through their day-to-day actions and interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). In essence, people actively do gender, and in doing so, they reinforce specific gender norms and expectations. For women business owners, this means they have culturally embedded practices through which they enact and reshape gender using social interactions to contest established gender differences. Consequently, gender is continually either consciously or unconsciously reinforced, depending on the circumstances and individual actions. The gendered expectations of balancing work and family responsibilities, the desire for autonomy, the need to escape rigid organisational constraints, and the aspiration to make independent decisions without external control can all impact the choices and opportunities available to women (Ahl 2002; Patterson and Mavin 2009).

In this context, entrepreneurs deal with gendered expectations and stereotypes while pursuing entrepreneurial activities (Ahl 2006). Gendered practices within organisations and industries shape the expectations and perceptions of women entrepreneurs, affecting their access to resources, networks, and opportunities (Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean 2018; Vehviläinen et al. 2010). Furthermore, female entrepreneurs face gender biases[1] stemming from these expectations, requiring them to demonstrate their expertise and capabilities in male-dominated industries (Hardey 2019; Katila and Eriksson 2013; Martin et al. 2015).

In the scope of my research, the doing gender framework is useful in examining and understanding how women entrepreneurs engage in the performance and perpetuation of gendered stereotypes that have historically been associated with masculine image of entrepreneurship. This theoretical approach focuses on how these entrepreneurs shape and reinforce societal expectations through their actions and interactions within entrepreneurship. It is important to note that while the doing gender framework illuminates how women entrepreneurs engage in perpetuating gendered stereotypes within entrepreneurial contexts, it does not discount the significance of structural constraints and societal expectations. Instead, it emphasises individual ability and performance in shaping and reinforcing these dynamics.

[1] Prejudiced measures or thoughts based on the gender-based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity are called gender bias (European Institute for Gender Equality 2016a)

Gender inequalities in working life and KIE, which are discussed in this study, also occur as individuals act within institutional and societal contexts. They are influenced by structural constraints. Gender inequalities are social inequalities that women experience more frequently than men, leading to disadvantages for women (Evans 2017:9).

In my research, postfeminism provides a useful framework to examine the research questions around individuals and societal structures. Postfeminism signifies a shift in feminist thinking, suggesting that gender equality has been achieved, granting individuals, including women, greater autonomy in their choices (Ferguson 2010; Lewis 2014). Postfeminist sensibility, as described by Gill (2007), includes a range of ideas and discussions that shape current views on gender. The interaction between postfeminist ideas and gendered practices in knowledge-intensive fields can influence women's experiences with gender inequalities and their perceptions of success. This suggests that gender equality is now seen as a reality, making gender disparities appear less relevant in modern societies. However, by focusing on individual empowerment and choice, postfeminist discussions often overlook the systemic obstacles and biases that continue to affect women in entrepreneurial contexts (Gill 2007; Lewis 2014; McRobbie 2009).

The influence of postfeminist ideas on KIE has a dual effect. Firstly, they create an illusion of gender equality, shifting focus away from the persistent gender inequalities and biases faced by women entrepreneurs. Secondly, they reinforce norms and hierarchies by downplaying the nature of gender inequalities and focusing primarily on individual success stories. It is important to critically evaluate and contest these ideas to address the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's entrepreneurial opportunities and progress in KIE. By incorporating postfeminism into my research, I gain insight into how women entrepreneurs manage these structural limitations and societal expectations. This perspective helps me to identify the gendered stereotypes shaping women's experiences in KIE and explain why these assumptions continue to exist despite claims of gender equality.

In examining gender dynamics within entrepreneurship, it is crucial to acknowledge the interactions among various elements, such as individuals, organisations, societal norms, and policies. To understand the gender equality context in each country, I incorporated the analysis of policy documents such as Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019) and Turkey 11th Development Plan (2019-2023),

aiming to explore the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem that shapes gender within entrepreneurship. This approach allows me to examine not only the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs but also the potential impacts of policies on their careers, businesses, and the overall entrepreneurial environment. This comprehension is crucial for formulating more efficient policies to advance gender equality in entrepreneurship (Brush et al. 2019).

1.2 Research questions

This study is grounded in feminist research, focusing on the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey. By examining these experiences within different socio-cultural and economic contexts, I examine how gender shapes these experiences, including the obstacles and opportunities, and how it influences women's entrepreneurial careers. By examining KIE through the lenses of doing gender, postfeminist ideas, and policy frameworks, my goal is not only to identify current barriers and inequalities but also to suggest policies that promote a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment. Building on the discussions above, I have formulated specific research questions to better understand the complex experiences of women in KIE. The research questions for my study are:

RQ1. In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered?

The first research question of my study explores how societal norms, cultural expectations, and workplace practices shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE in Turkey and Finland. It examines the impact of gender on their entry into the KIE sector, as well as their ability to access markets, business networks, and economic resources. Additionally, it analyses the gendered barriers these women face, such as gender inequality, limited career advancement opportunities, and societal stereotypes, and how these gendered experiences motivate them to view entrepreneurship as a way to overcome these inequalities.

RQ2. In what ways do women entrepreneurs manage gender inequalities in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in Turkey and Finland?

The second research question of my study examines the ways in which women entrepreneurs address, overcome, and manage gender inequalities in Turkey and Finland, as well as the gendered inequalities they face in KIE. By "manage", I refer

to how women entrepreneurs deal with and adapt to these gender inequalities. The research aims to understand how these women entrepreneurs perceive and respond to gender inequalities, considering the influence of cultural and societal contexts on their experiences and actions. Also, it investigates the various mechanisms and practices developed by women entrepreneurs to reduce the impact of gendered inequalities and biases on their professional interactions and business operations, such as using societal norms to their advantage, embracing feminine characteristics, and forming strategic partnerships. Furthermore, it explores how the cultural context of each country shapes the ways women entrepreneurs manage the gendered landscape of KIE, highlighting the differences and similarities between Turkey and Finland in terms of societal norms, perceptions of gender equality, and the structure of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

To achieve these objectives, I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs in KIE in Finland and Turkey in 2019 and 2020. I employed thematic analysis (TA) to analyse the interviews, using a structured approach to examine their experiences and identify both similarities and differences.

1.3 The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows: After the introduction, in Chapter 2, I explore gender and gender equality in both Turkey and Finland. I examine the societal, cultural, and political processes that influence women's participation in the workforce, STEM fields, and entrepreneurship within KIE. By presenting the gender equality contexts of Finland and Turkey, I highlight the historical, cultural, and political elements that have shaped each country's approach to gender equality, particularly within KIE.

In Chapter 3, I discuss knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in the context of my empirical research, highlighting its significance within the knowledge economy and innovation systems. Additionally, I explore the relationship between KIE and knowledge-intensive business services. Moreover, in this chapter, I focus on the gendered context of KIE, reviewing international research on women's participation, the obstacles they face in education related to KIE, and the inequalities in entrepreneurial and innovation environments. I examine gender segregation in STEM fields, the masculine images of entrepreneurship and innovation, and the underrepresentation of women in KIE.

In Chapter 4, I first present the theories that underpin the importance of the doing gender approach, focusing on how individuals actively shape and express gender through their social interactions. Subsequently, I introduce postfeminist discussions within the context of work life and examine their influence on the formation of gender in work and organizations.

In Chapter 5, I present the methodology of my research, providing an overview and discussion of the methodological approaches employed. This includes the semi-structured interview method and the creation of research materials, covering participant selection and the introduction of the research participants. Additionally, I outline the process of analysing the interview data using thematic analysis and discuss the ethical considerations involved in my research.

In chapter 6, I address the first research question of this study: In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered? I examine the participants' prior work experiences highlighting their decision-making processes and the obstacles they faced before entering entrepreneurship. I explore the ongoing difficulties they face in KIE, particularly those related to gender and expertise, participation in networks, and access to funding in KIE. Furthermore, I explain how gender becomes significant in shaping their entrepreneurial experiences and the advantages of being a woman in KIE.

In chapter 7, I address the study's second research question: How do women entrepreneurs manage gendered inequalities in KIE in Turkey and Finland? Building upon the analysis presented in Chapter 6, I employ a postfeminist lens and the concepts of doing and undoing gender as analytical tools to examine how women entrepreneurs manage and overcome the gendered constraints. I examine the ways women use to resist gender inequalities within KIE. Additionally, I provide insights into how women internalize gender biases and inequalities in KIE.

In Chapter 8, I summarize and discuss the research findings related to the research questions. Additionally, I sum up the gendered experiences of KIE in both Turkish and Finnish contexts. Furthermore, I address the practical implications of my research. In conclusion, I discuss the limitations of my study and provide suggestions for future research in the field of KIE, based on the insights gained from this study.

In the upcoming chapter, I examine the gendered structures that underpin entrepreneurship, specifically focusing on examining the social, political, and

economic frameworks at the national level. This examination provides a necessary background for how gender influences the landscape of knowledge-intensive women's entrepreneurship in both Turkey and Finland.

2 TURKEY AND FINLAND AS GENDERED CONTEXTS FOR KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As Ahl (2006:611) emphasizes that understanding entrepreneurship requires looking beyond individual entrepreneurs. A comprehensive analysis should consider the broader context, including laws, societal norms, family policies, economic strategies, and labour market structures, all of which significantly influence the experiences of women entrepreneurs In this chapter, I examine the historical formation of gender and gender equality in Turkey and Finland, with a particular focus on the societal and cultural orders that shape the barriers and inequalities encountered by women entrepreneurs in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE). By doing so, I emphasise the societal and institutional barriers present in these male-dominated fields, revealing the persistent gender inequality faced by women entrepreneurs.

The cultural and historical backgrounds of both countries provide insights into how women entrepreneurs manage gendered inequalities in KIE. Despite witnessing an increase in the number of women pursuing science and technology education in recent years (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021), women entrepreneurs' representation in these fields remains lower than men in Turkey and Finland. Although the paths of gender equality in these two countries are different, they share a common problem: a limited presence of women in KIE. In the following sections, I explore the social, cultural, and political dimensions that shape gender-related practices in KIE, starting with Turkey.

2.1 Gender equality in Turkey

2.1.1 Historical roots of gender equality

Historically Turkey was the first country to start the transition from Islamic empire to a modern secular nation-state outside Europe (Göl 2009; Warhola and Bezci 2010). The issue of gender equality in Turkey, regarding legal changes and societal awareness, goes way back to the late Ottoman period and the early days of the

Turkish Republic. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and its first president (1923-1938), emerged as both a military and political leader. The new state placed heavy stress on secularism and modernity. During the nation-building process of the Turkish Republic, the modernising elites aimed to invent a "new" nation that broke its bonds with the Ottoman Empire. The transformation from an empire to a nation-state and the modernisation process was shaped according to the principles of Kemalism (the ideas and principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk are termed Kemalism, and it still constitutes the official ideology of the Turkish state). As the state and society transitioned from an Islamist to a secular structure, religion came under state control at constitutional, institutional, and social levels. Consequently, the Caliphate, Ministries of Sharia, and religious foundations were abolished, and the state sought to prevent the inclusion of religion within the identity of its citizens while confining Islam and its practice to the private sphere in 1920s (White 2003).

Additionally, during the nation-building process of the Turkish Republic, the government secularized the legal system and educational institutions to transform the culture. This included changes such as altering dress codes, adopting the Latin alphabet, and implementing the Gregorian calendar (Ozcetin 2009). A new Civil Code was introduced by the government, adopting elements of the Swiss Civil Code, to ensure equality between men and women in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody rights. Turkish women earned the right to participate in local elections by 1930, and by 1934, they were also given the opportunity to vote in national elections and the right to be elected (Müftüler-Bac 1999:307). As a result of the political reforms, a total of 18 women were elected to the National Assembly in 1935, holding 4.5 per cent of the seats (Tekeli 2010:194). All these social and political reforms during the early years of the Turkish Republic laid the foundation for legal equality between men and women (Müftüler-Bac 1999:907). The Kemalist modernity project used the public visibility of women to display Turkey's new secular character as women were seen as the carriers and symbols of secularism and modernity (Eslen-Ziya and Korkut 2010). The first government of the Turkish Republic aimed to move women from a secondary role to a more active position in society, promoting equality through development and education. In this effort, modernizing elites sought to make women publicly visible, socially and politically active, and to create a mixed-gender social and public sphere. Therefore, women's rights, women's liberation, and women's visibility became central to the Kemalist Republican projects of the 1920s and 1930s (Eslen-Ziya and Korkut 2010). During this period, women

obtained many economic and political rights, including the right to vote and be elected, access to higher education, and the ability to work in various professions, that they had demanded since the first instances of women's activism in the late Ottoman period. According to Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011:558), by the late 1980s, Republican leadership continued to advocate the idea that Turkish women had been emancipated from tradition and had achieved equal rights as citizens of the Republic.

In 1985, Turkey signed and adopted the United Nations Convention on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). The acceptance of CEDAW in 1986 brought gender equality issues to the agenda of the Turkish government. In 1987, to increase gender awareness in public policies, The Advisory Board for Policies Regarding Women was established as a separate unit within the Governmental State Planning Organisation with representatives from public agencies, non-governmental organisations and universities. It was the first time a specific unit for gender equality was set up in the public sector (Müftüler-Bac 2012:6).

Following the acceptance of CEDAW, a General Directorate of Women's Status (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, KSGM) was established in 1990 to advance the goals of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women the with the cooperation of NGOs and academics working on women. It was initially tied to the Office of the Prime Minister, but in 2004, it was transferred to the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Its primary mission is to promote gender equality in Turkey by developing programs and policies to reduce all forms of gender-based discrimination. It puts together reports on gender policy, including periodic reports for CEDAW and national action plans for gender equality, and organizes training programs for public institutions. It also collaborates with Ministries on gender related issues, such as violence against women.

Starting from the mid-1990s, gender equality efforts in Turkey were influenced by reforms aimed at EU accession. In 1995, the Turkish government signed the Beijing Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women and committed itself to its Action Plan (Öztop and Finkel 2015). These efforts gained momentum under the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which came to power in the 2002 elections, positioning itself as a proponent of conservative democratic values.

Within the first 5 years of governance (November 2002 - August 2007) and the beginning of the second (2007-2011) period, JDP, made a commitment to liberal

economic principles, presenting itself with Western standards, and emphasised its dedication to democratic values by promoting Turkey's accession to the EU that had begun following the European Council Helsinki Summit in 1999 (Acar and Altunok 2013). In these periods, Turkey experienced several signs of progress in women's rights, including the amendments of the Turkish Penal Code and Civil Code and the hosting of the EU Istanbul Convention. Turkey became the first country to sign the Istanbul Convention, the first European treaty aimed at securing a region free from violence against women and domestic violence, regardless of sexual orientation (Telseren 2020). However, towards the end of the second period, conservative policies deepened, and the JDP's policies shifted towards a de-Europeanization path, meaning that national policies became less aligned with European standards or less influenced by European integration than they had been previously (Yilmaz 2016). This coincides with the transition from an egalitarian policy to a conservative one and a rhetoric of the importance of family and the role of women within the family. While the government's discourse continued to underline a commitment to increasing female employment, practical measures to achieve this were limited to promoting flexible work arrangements and female entrepreneurship (Bugra 2014). The government appreciates the flexibility of working hours, which allow women to care for their children and manage household responsibilities while simultaneously improving their financial position. It also values entrepreneurship, particularly for low- and middle-class women in female-oriented industries (Acar and Altunok 2013).

During the third phase (July 2011 - November 2015), the JDP shifted away from democratic perspective towards conservative, patriarchal, and populist discourses intertwined with religion, which became increasingly prominent in policymaking. The party's conservative policies created additional barriers for women seeking equal employment opportunities, deepening existing structural and cultural challenges (Telseren 2020). During this period, the government redefined working women primarily as mothers and shifted the responsibility for providing childcare facilities to the private sector. The government's inability to provide affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare and education services, along with insufficient financial support for parents, who choose to care for their children at home, placed an unfair burden on women to take on childcare responsibilities. The lack of early-age childcare options for children aged 0-2 and limited access to affordable, quality nursery services for those aged 3-6 highlights a systemic dependence on the private sector for childcare solutions (Women's Labour and Employment Initiative 2014). The impact of care policies varies across different socioeconomic classes. As

discussed by Dedeoglu (2012), Ecevit (2013) and Soyseçkin (2016) middle-class families, with their relatively higher income and educational levels, have more resources and choices available for them. These families often develop solutions such as hiring babysitters, relying on family-based support, or utilising extended unpaid leave to manage care responsibilities alongside professional work. However, lower-income families face more significant difficulties due to the lack of affordable and accessible childcare options. These families are less likely to afford private childcare services and may not have the option of extended family support, especially in urban areas where families might live far from their extended kin.

Consequently, lower-income mothers often have to rely on informal work arrangements or stay out of the labour force entirely to manage caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, the 16-week paid maternity leave, although an important support for families, is too short and insufficient. This limited duration forces mothers to make difficult choices between their careers and their primary caregiving responsibilities, often resulting in a significant imbalance. The short leave period does not adequately address the needs of both the child and the mother, making it difficult for mothers to maintain their career while fulfilling their essential caregiving roles. To solve this care problem, many mothers adopt solutions to prolong their unpaid leave, which is crucial for maintaining their dual roles. These solutions often include saving annual holiday days to add to maternity leave, and obtaining medical reports for additional sick leave. The choice between public and private sector employment further influences these solutions, with public sector employees generally finding it more accessible to extend their leave (Soyseçkin 2016).

As JDP's tenure progressed from the fourth phase (November 2015 – July 2018) to the fifth phase (starting from July 2018), early elections held between these phases led to a noticeable shift toward authoritarianism. This period also saw a consolidation of patriarchal, conservative, and populist discourses, which exacerbated obstacles to equal employment opportunities, particularly for women. The governance under JDP has significantly shifted Turkey towards a religio-conservative gender climate (Ayata and Doğangün 2017). As a result of these political changes, Turkey became the first country to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention in 2021. The withdrawal was carried out through a presidential decree issued by President Erdogan. The decision was formally announced in the country's official gazette, without obtaining approval from the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Telseren 2022). The weakening of democratic institutions, as evidenced in recent decades under the JDP,

has coincided with a rise in gender backlash and anti-gender policies. This aligns with Bogaards and Petö's (2022) argument that de-democratization often leads to the erosion of gender equality, as traditionalist and patriarchal values re-emerge to reinforce gender hierarchies. In Turkey, this trend is evident in the shift towards conservative policies that emphasise women's roles within the family and the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. These developments highlight the precariousness and weakness of gender equality when democratic institutions struggle.

While there are gender equality reforms and policies, as well as westernised education, institutions, financial systems, and ways of living, there is also the historical influence of Islamic values, norms, and practices, particularly regarding gender and patriarchy in Turkey. Consequently, two competing political ideologies are evident in Turkish society: secularism and Islamism (Özkazanç-Pan 2015). Özkazanç-Pan (2015) highlights secular and Islamic feminist approaches to entrepreneurship as a potential way to address gender inequality in the Turkish context. According to her, secular and Islamic feminist approaches in Turkey differ in their philosophical foundations, approaches to gender equality, and engagement with societal norms. Secular feminism is rooted in principles of gender equality and social justice, focusing on restructuring society to ensure equal access and opportunities for women and men. It advocates for women's rights through social policy reforms and development programs, emphasising equal rights and opportunities for women.

According to Özkazanç-Pan (2015:51), Islamic feminism emphasises gender justice, aiming to empower women within the framework of religious principles and societal norms. It focuses on the needs of religious women in relation to the state, seeking empowerment and sustainable development within Islamic principles. Islamic feminist entrepreneurship activities aim to address women's underemployment by providing opportunities for women within the framework of Islamic values and societal norms. Therefore, "the overlapping of these two political ideologies (secularism and Islamism)" (Ozasir-Kacar et al. 2023:463) and gender are key in organising women's social and economic lives in Turkey (Özkazanç-Pan 2015).

In conclusion, the development of gender equality and women's rights in Turkey is shaped by a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors. From the early reforms of the Turkish Republic, which aimed to secularise and modernise the

nation, to the present day, Turkey has made progress towards gender equality. However, the implementation and impact of these reforms have varied across different segments of society. For example, the difficulties faced by women, particularly in balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities, highlight the persistent gaps in gender equality efforts. For example, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2023:11), Turkey ranks 129th globally in gender equality with a score of 63.8 per cent and this places Turkey among the lowest-ranking countries in the Eurasia and Central Asia region (Ibid, 6). Furthermore, the shift towards a religio-conservative gender climate (Ayata and Doğangün 2017) under JDP governance, along with the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, signals a worrying trend that could undermine decades of progress. As Bogaards and Petö (2022) explain, the erosion of democracy can reverse progress by encouraging anti-gender views. Their analysis of parliamentary debates in illiberal regimes, like Hungary and Slovakia, shows how traditional ideas about gender roles are used to weaken gender equality. A similar trend can be seen in Turkey under JDP governance, where a religio-conservative gender climate (Ayata and Doğangün 2017) and populist discourses have reshaped views on women's roles, further slowing their progress. Building on the understanding of Turkey's complex gender relations and the active pursuit of equality, in the next section, I examine the gendered context of KIE, exploring how these broader societal trends influence and shape the women's entrepreneurship in KIE in Turkey.

2.1.2 Gendered context of knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship

From the outset of the early republic period, the widespread adoption of republican secular ideology led to the establishment of universities that provided young female graduates favourable academic opportunities. The policies of this era actively promoted the inclusion of women in fields dominated by men, such as science, engineering, technology, and mathematics (STEM) (Acar 1993; Sağlamer et al. 2018). However, choosing a career in higher education has often been seen as gendered. Society highly values the role of women as educators, which has influenced female science students to predominantly pursue careers as schoolteachers (Sağlamer et al. 2018). Moreover, an academic career, especially one that involves teaching at higher education levels, is still regarded as a safe and appropriate career path for women, aligning with gendered stereotypes and responsibilities, including childcare (Özbilgin and Healy 2000:4).

Turkey's 11th Development Plan (2019-2023)[2], a key governmental document outlining national policies and priorities, significantly emphasises the advancement of education and careers in STEM fields, particularly in higher education. This strategy is essential for promoting KIE, as people with STEM backgrounds are often the ones leading the development of KIE. The Development Plan not only highlights the importance of STEM fields but also acknowledges the barriers that hinder women's full participation in these areas. It sets forth objectives to eliminate gender-based discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for girls and women to pursue careers in STEM.

According to Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021:41-42), in Turkey women are more prevalent in subjects such as biology and health sciences, they remain underrepresented in engineering sectors. Interestingly, the distribution of women among doctoral graduates shows a balance in certain fields, with women making up 52 per cent in mathematics and statistics and 48.72 per cent in information and communication technologies. However, their representation drops to 35.19 per cent (Ibid, 36) in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. Despite these disparities in education, the percentage of women who have graduated from STEM fields and are working as researchers in higher education is 43.3 per cent slightly higher than the EU average of 42.3 per cent (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:105). Despite variations in women's representation across different STEM fields in Turkey, a relatively high percentage of women continue to graduate and work in research positions, which could drive advancements in areas such as knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Women's entrepreneurship in Turkey represents a critical aspect of the country's economic and social development, reflecting both progress and barriers in gender equality and economic empowerment, as I explained earlier. Despite facing significant obstacles, Turkish women entrepreneurs are increasingly making an impact on the economy, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, but in a segregated manner. According to Women on Board (2020:7), women remain significantly underrepresented in top executive positions, with female CEOs (Chief

[2] The Development Plan is a plan prepared by the state since 1963 in Turkey, aiming for development and progress in areas such as economy, health, education, transportation, social security, justice, etc., and determining the policy to be implemented in the public sector. The Development Plans are prepared by the Presidency of Strategy and Budget.

Executive Officers) constituting only 4 per cent, and women holding 17 per cent of board positions in Turkey.

Turkey's 11th Development Plan (2019-2023) outlines an objective to secure high, stable, sustainable economic growth. This goal is to be realised by fostering a competitive, business-friendly climate, while also improving Turkey's position on the global competitiveness index. Key strategies include boosting manufacturing productivity, upgrading physical infrastructure, advancing technology and innovation, broadening labour participation among women and the youth, and strengthening domestic competition. Despite positive efforts to support women in entrepreneurship, Turkey still lacks targeted policies specifically designed for women entrepreneurs. Instead, women are often included in broader special interest group strategies. Çoban (2018) points out that support for women's entrepreneurship usually comes in the form of random support and specific projects, but there is a lack of a consistent follow-up system to evaluate the effectiveness of these services. Turkish Government also supports women entrepreneurs through various programs and financial initiatives. While these practices prioritize women entrepreneurs over men, they also reinforce a gendered perspective that portrays women as needing help (Ozasir-Kacar et al. 2023:466; Özkazanç-Pan 2015:50) rather than emphasising the need to provide equal opportunities.

On the civil society front, various non-governmental organisations are dedicated to fostering female entrepreneurship. For example, KAGİDER (The Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey) is committed to promoting women's economic empowerment and advancing gender equality within entrepreneurship. It offers educational programs, mentorship, and advice to support women entrepreneurs. Additionally, Turkey participates in The European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship (WES), a policy network including members from 31 countries focused on enhancing women's entrepreneurship. WES members offer advice, support, information and contacts regarding existing measures to support female entrepreneurs (She at Work 2024).

Women Entrepreneurs' Council of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) also plays a key role by providing resources, guidance, and training to aspiring women entrepreneurs. It promotes entrepreneurship awareness, facilitates internship opportunities with experienced business owners, develops a coaching and mentoring framework for newcomers, and advocates for

policies supporting women entrepreneurs in academic institutions and various industries.

Despite these efforts, there remains a significant gender gap in KIE. According to the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021:76), only 21.86 per cent of women entrepreneurs in Turkey are professionals in science and engineering and information and communications technology (ICT), indicating a significant underrepresentation in these areas of KIE. Although women's education and their involvement in research and development have improved, the gender gap persists. For example, in Turkey's private research sector, women make up approximately 25.8 per cent of researchers and in manufacturing sector, women represent 24.79 per cent of all workers. However, in specialised areas, this percentage increases significantly: women make up 50.82 per cent in the manufacturing of chemicals and chemical products, and 63.69 per cent in manufacturing basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations. In the business economy services, women's representation stands at 26.46 per cent, while in other economic activities, it is 28.3 per cent (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:88).

In summary, there are educational opportunities available for women to acquire the necessary backgrounds for KIE, including in STEM fields, and many women have pursued education in these areas in internationally high numbers. Efforts have been made in Turkey to promote gender equality and women's entrepreneurship. The government acknowledges the importance of encouraging education and careers in STEM fields, particularly in higher education. However, relatively few women enter entrepreneurship and KIE, as barriers such as gender discrimination and unequal opportunities for girls and women in STEM fields persist, hindering progress. This highlights the gap between policy intentions and real-world outcomes. Furthermore, policy efforts remain fragmented, for example, by failing to adequately integrate care services. In the following section, I explore the social, cultural, and political dimensions that shape gender-related practices in KIE in Finland.

2.2 Gender equality in Finland

2.2.1 Historical roots of gender equality

The gender equality approach within Finnish society is strong, reflected in various aspects that highlight the dedication to this principle. These include high levels of women's full-time employment, a free educational system, and effective social policies promoting work-life balance, public advocacy for gender equality, and a longstanding tradition of women's political involvement (Husu 2001; Kantola 2008; Koskinen Sandberg 2018; Kylä-Laaso and Koskinen Sandberg 2020).

This commitment to gender equality is deeply rooted in Finland's history of women's rights. Notably, Finland granted women the right to vote and to become members of parliament in 1906. This important move laid the foundation for women's significant involvement in politics, with the first female parliamentarians primarily emerging from women's rights and working-class women's movements (Kuusipalo 1999:58). The immediate impact was visible in the 1907 elections, Finland's first parliamentary elections, where women constituted 9.5 per cent of the parliament, The proportion of women members of parliament remained higher than in any other Western country until the late 1970s (Bradley 1998), the average was around 14 per cent from the late 1940s to the 1970s (Kuusipalo 1999:59) and the proportion of women members of parliament rose to 47 per cent by 2019, showcasing Finland's progressive approach to female political representation (Nousiainen 2023). During the process of conducting my research, Finland was led by a female prime minister, and women headed all government parties. This achievement in women's political success is frequently viewed as evidence that Finland has completely achieved gender equality.

As members of parliament, Finnish women have been active in shaping the welfare state, advocating for and implementing numerous reforms for women. Starting in the 1920s and 1930s, women fought for the establishment of maternity benefits, childcare services, and school meals in the 1940s, underlining their position as equal contributors to both the economic and social spheres (Kuusipalo 1999), as well as advocating for opportunities for women's full-time work. Full-time work emphasized equality in the economic realm (Anttonen 1994). The creation and functioning of gender equality agencies in the 1980s and 1990s, bridging the gap between women's movements and the state, exemplify the strong influence of state feminism in Finland.

Also, in Finland, those who create feminist knowledge—such as women's groups, feminists in political parties, government officials focused on feminist issues, and scholars studying feminism—have worked very closely with the welfare state, which is generally considered to be supportive. They have been actively involved in the state's operations, participating in its committees and meetings. This close relationship has been seen as essential for developing policies that promote gender equality (Elomäki et al. 2019).

While compulsory education for all children was introduced in 1921 (Korppi-Tommola 1990:36), local government elementary schools were established in the 1860s, providing girls with access to education, even though with potential regional variations. Women also entered secondary schools in significant numbers, and by the 1940s (Lahelma 2023), they were the majority in upper secondary schools. The first institute for teacher education was established in 1863, and women were able to enrol from the beginning (Korppi-Tommola 1990:36). These historical developments highlight the early inclusion of women in various educational opportunities in Finland. Today, women in Finland generally have higher levels of education compared to men, and there are more women than men enrolled in higher education institutions (Statistics Finland 2021).

The high level of women's participation in paid work in Finland can be linked to social and economic changes that began in the late 19th century. During this period, Finland was predominantly an agrarian society that had only started to transition into industrialisation (Korppi-Tommola 1990).

However, Finland remained predominantly an agricultural country until the 1940s (Pohls 1990). The country's economic struggles and need for survival forced men and women to work together and depend on each other. This strengthened the culture of equality. As Finland rapidly industrialised in the 1950s, it transitioned from an agrarian society into a modern service-based society. The growth in women's labour force participation was closely linked to the expansion of the service sector and the public sector. This expansion was driven by the establishment of a welfare society that included healthcare, day-care, and education-related jobs in the public sector, many of which were female-dominated. This allowed women to work with support from these services (Pohls 1990).

Helga Maria Hernes defines Nordic countries, including Finland, as woman (family)-friendly societies, which signifies that the state supports women's political and social

empowerment with state social policy (Hernes 1987 as cited in Anttonen1994; Kantola 2006). According to this definition, a woman-friendly welfare state is based on the political culture and institutions of the Nordic countries, which prioritize social equality (Borchorst and Siim 2002:91). A Nordic gender model can be identified in terms of women's political representation and their participation in paid work. Its normative foundation is the dual-breadwinner model, in which both women and men are wage earners. From a feminist perspective, a woman-friendly welfare state is built on the idea that women's participation in the labour market is key to gender equality, leading to the creation of social policies and services that support and increase women's workforce participation. However, this concept is problematic for some scholars. For example, Saarela et al. (2024) argue that despite significant progress in gender equality, Nordic welfare societies still exhibit a clear gender divide in both education and the labour market, both horizontally and vertically. Although these countries rank highly on global gender equality indexes, this success can make it more difficult to recognize and address the underlying inequalities, including the systems and practices (Ylöstalo 2016).

Additionally, Koskinen Sandberg (2018) discusses how the Nordic welfare state, including Finland, promotes women's economic citizenship by providing social policies and services that support their extensive participation in paid employment. However, according to her, despite this support for economic independence, women in Nordic countries, including Finland, tend to be concentrated in the public sector, which is characterised by feminised occupations that are undervalued and lower paid. The establishment of universal social insurance and the expansion of child day-care services in Finland not only represented significant progress towards gender equality in employment but also set the stage for the Finnish government's formal commitment to gender equality (Nousiainen 2023). This commitment was exemplified in 1980 with the introduction of the first equality program, followed by the enactment of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (1986), which was accepted in 1986 and came into effect in 1987. Since then, it shapes Finland's official policy on promoting equality, particularly in pay, working conditions, terms of employment, and career development. The law also prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Act on Equality between Women and Men (1986) on achieving gender equality in teaching and education also refers to research. In the 1992 amendment of the act, gender discrimination was banned in pregnancy and family care responsibilities. It was later legislated that if the number of staff in the employer's service is regularly 30 or more, the employer must create

an equality plan at least once every two years to promote equality by implementing measures. This equality plan addresses decision-making, employment (salary, segregation, working conditions), reconciliation, education, and issues of discrimination and harassment. Thus, this act provides a framework for addressing gender issues in Finnish society.

Finland has made significant progress in gender equality and social welfare by implementing a series of social policy reforms and legislative improvements that support women's participation in the workforce and promote the sharing of parenting duties. However, the 1990s brought significant changes to Finland's welfare system and its approach to social services. According to Holli and Kantola (2007), Finland's political context changed significantly in the mid-1990s because of the recession, welfare state retrenchment, and EU membership. The collapse of the Soviet Union strengthened a severe recession at the beginning of the 1990s. The recession, along with global impacts and changes in governance, led to shifts in the women-friendly welfare state ideology. This situation placed more responsibility on individuals, families, municipalities, and the market (Holli and Kantola 2007:83). This shift transformed municipalities into more autonomous entities, altering the dynamic of social service provision and indicating a move towards decentralised welfare administration (Nousiainen 2023). The recession also negatively affected women's labour market participation. Before the recession, public-sector employment was high, with 63.1 per cent of women employed in public bodies (Manninen and Setälä 1990:154). However, after the recession, women's employment shifted towards short-term fixed contracts rather than permanent jobs in the public sector (Holli and Kantola 2007).

In 1995, Finland joined the EU, which changed the multilevel governance framework affecting gender equality policies. Although there is a strong tradition for women's participation in Finland, governmental gender equality policies have been developed within the international frameworks of United Nations and EU (Holli and Kantola 2007). Finland has adopted the EU's approach aimed at integrating gender perspectives and considerations into all sectors of governance and all stages of policy-making, planning, and program implementation, i.e. gender mainstreaming[3].

[3] Gender mainstreaming was adopted in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) as the EU's official approach to gender equality. It is a strategy to include gender perspectives in all stages of policy-making, planning, and program implementation. The aim is to make gender equality a core part of decisions across government, the economy, and society, rather than treating it as a separate issue (Rees 2005).

The adoption of soft law from the EU, including recommendations, guidelines, and action plans, further shaped Finnish gender equality policies. The impact of the EU is evident in legislative organisations and processes: the Gender Equality Unit was established in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and as a result of EU directives, Finnish anti-discrimination legislation has been strengthened in areas such as equal pay, discrimination based on age, nationality, religion, and belief, indirect discrimination, sexual harassment, and compensation for discrimination (Holli and Kantola 2007:90). Such legislative reforms represent a substantial step forward in creating a more inclusive and equitable society. However, Holli and Kantola (2007) argues that gender mainstreaming within the EU, including Finland, has predominantly focused on integrating gender considerations into existing policy frameworks in a technical manner. This approach highlights the use of data and statistics to make complex gender equality issues easier to understand by breaking them down into measurable numbers. Focusing too much on technical aspects could align with neoliberalism's dominant market-driven goals and policies, potentially treating gender equality as something to be integrated into existing systems rather than as a force for transformative change. Also, Holli and Kantola (2007) highlights the soft nature of gender equality legislation within the EU and Finland, characterised by recommendations and voluntary actions rather than strict rules that must be followed. Therefore, how well gender mainstreaming works depends greatly on whether local actors, and organisations are truly committed to making these changes.

According to Ylöstalo (2016:548) while Finland is a leader in gender mainstreaming within the EU, the guidelines for implementing these strategies in Finnish state administration present gender mainstreaming as a straightforward, technical task. The guidelines overlook the complexities of gender and gender equality and fail to acknowledge that promoting gender equality can be a controversial issue, often leading to resistance within the organization. Also, Vehviläinen and Valaskivi (2022) argue that authorities' resources and competence to implement gender mainstreaming vary. Although authorities recognise the need for gender equality in the analysed research and innovation development, they lacked knowledge on how to implement it effectively.

During the 2010s, discussions around the Nordic welfare model received a new aspect, focusing more on cultural aspects than on political and economic foundations. For some political figures, Finland's achievement in gender equality

became a point of national pride, reflecting the country's cultural values and heritage. As a result, inequality came to be associated with immigrants, while equality was seen as an inherently Finnish characteristic. Gender equality was then used to emphasize these differences and incorporated into anti-immigration and anti-Islamic arguments (Nousiainen 2023:80).

Furthermore, measures for gender equality vary from government to government. In 2015, Finland got the right-wing, conservative-populist Sipilä government (2015-2019) that introduced strict budget-cutting measures, aiming to fix the economic problems. Notably, for the first time in two decades, this government's agenda did not include initiatives to improve gender equality. Instead, it famously declared that "Women and men are equal in Finland," a statement that underscored the government's neglect of feminist input in policymaking (Elomäki et al. 2019:823). The policies enacted by the Sipilä government reflect a broader trend of democratic decline and the rise of anti-gender movements. As discussed by Lombardo et al. (2021) these movements often capitalize on economic crises to justify the reduction of gender equality measures, framing such policies as unnecessary in a context where equality is claimed to have already been achieved.

According to Elomäki and Kantola (2018), this administration significantly reduced public services and benefits, temporarily removing the guaranteed access to public childcare, which had been a key feature of what was once considered a women-friendly welfare state. The policies of neoliberalism, conservatism, and nationalism, which are circulating worldwide and adopted in Finland, negatively impacted gender equality, efforts to create fair policies, and the activism of women's movements.

However, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sanna Marin, the Government Programme (2019) once again directed national efforts towards improving gender equality, addressing not only economic and social rights but also the protection of women's integrity (Nousiainen 2023). In the next section, I examine gendered divisions in KIE in Finland.

2.2.2 Gendered context of knowledge intensive entrepreneurship

In the previous section, I discussed how Finland's welfare system and gender equality initiatives have supported women's participation in the workforce, education and politics. Korvajärvi (2003) identified several key elements in Finland that support women's employment, including their active participation in full-time jobs, high levels of educational achievement, and a cultural acceptance of women's role in the workforce. These elements are crucial for creating equal opportunities for all in the workplace. According to the Statistics Finland (2022), the employment rate for women in Finland was high 73.8 per cent, almost matching the 73.9 per cent rate for men. In contrast, the employment rate for women in Turkey was significantly lower at 35.1 per cent (Turkish Statistical Institute 2024) indicating a disparity in workforce participation between the two countries.

Although Finland has a high overall employment rate, its labour market remains deeply gender-segregated. Koskinen Sandberg (2018) states that while women have increasingly participated in paid employment, they are often segregated into lower-paid occupations. This segregation results in a labour market that is divided along gender lines: women predominantly occupy positions in the public sector, while men tend to dominate the private sector. This division shows a larger pattern in gender equality—while there has been progress, gender-based inequalities and divisions still exist. The coexistence of these advancements alongside ongoing disparities is often referred to as the "gender paradox" (Griffin and Vehviläinen 2021:3).

According to Statistics Finland (2021:57), the most female-dominated sectors were health and social services, education, accommodation and food service activities and arts, entertainment and recreation; other service activities. In contrast, according to the same statistics, male-dominated sectors encompass construction, transportation and storage, Information and communication. This gendered occupational segregation is evidently apparent, with 40 per cent of women working in education, health, and social work, compared to only 9 per cent of men (European Institute for Gender Equality 2019).

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2023)[4], Finland ranks third globally in gender equality with a score of 86.3 per cent, strengthening the Nordic countries' dominant presence in the top five, alongside Norway (87.9%, 2nd) and Sweden (81.5%, 5th). Because of these high rankings, gender equality is sometimes viewed more as a characteristic of Finnish identity rather than the result of deliberate equality policies and efforts across various sectors of society. This perception can lead to the underestimation of existing gender equality issues within Finland, such as the wage gap and a job market divided along gender lines. When compared to other countries, these problems might seem less significant (Tuori 2012: 275–276 as cited in Ylöstalo 2016:553). This interpretation of equality creates a situation where individuals can claim support for gender equality without actively working to advance it, or they might even resist efforts to promote true gender equality.

In Finnish working life, there's a strong emphasis on gender neutrality, where gender differences are often overlooked, leading to what is known as gender blindness, which fails to recognise the diverse, socially defined norms, responsibilities, and abilities of men and women (Kantola 2008; Korvajärvi 1998; Saari 2013). Saari (2013) examines the perspectives of local trade union representatives on the issue of unequal pay, their efforts to reduce the gender pay gap, and their potential opposition in discussions about achieving equal pay. She found that the approach to wage discussions in Finland tends to ignore gender differences, treating everyone equally regardless of gender.

Ylöstalo (2016) further examines the implementation of gender mainstreaming within the Finnish state administration, particularly focusing on the Ministry of Defence. She identifies gender blindness as a significant issue, pointing out its adverse effects not only on male-dominated sectors like the Ministry of Defence but also on the broader application of Finland's equality policies. Saari (2013:50) has described this situation as the "Finnish Dilemma: promoting gender equality without a gender perspective".

[4] The Global Gender Gap Report was first introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 to benchmark progress towards gender parity and compare countries' gender gaps across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health and political leadership (World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2023:9).

Moreover, Saarela et al. (2024) suggest that balancing gender participation in entrepreneurship in Finland is difficult due to ongoing structural and systemic barriers. Although Finland is often ranked as one of the gender-equal countries, these barriers still contribute to gender gaps in entrepreneurship. Although despite minimal disparities in educational, political, and employment achievements between women and men, in Finland, the gender gap persists in STEM occupations, with only 8 per cent of women working in STEM occupations while 42 per cent of men work in them (European Institute for Gender Equality 2019). This imbalance also affects women's involvement in starting and running their own businesses. According to the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021:76), the proportion of self-employed women among science and engineering and ICT Professionals is 21.79 per cent in Finland.

Saarela et al. (2024:34) argue that Finland provides a favourable environment for entrepreneurship, with low administrative burdens for start-ups and easy access to debt financing for new and small businesses. Additionally, women in Finland have a long history of participating in entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, businesses led by women in Finland typically remain small in scale, and only a small portion of them operate in high-growth industries (Grünfeld 2020:13). Instead of primarily focusing on rapid expansion, these businesses often seem to have the goal of creating employment opportunities primarily for the entrepreneurs themselves. About 65 percent of all female entrepreneurs in Finland do not employ any staff, in contrast to 49 percent of male entrepreneurs (Ibid, 14).

In Finland, men are more likely to be entrepreneurs than women. Specifically, 6.4 per cent of women and 9.4 per cent of men are involved in entrepreneurial activities (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report 2021/2022). This indicates that a smaller proportion of women, compared to men, are starting or running their own businesses, highlighting a gender disparity in entrepreneurship. Additionally, female entrepreneurs tend to be concentrated in specific sectors, including personal services, entertainment, culture, business services, and social welfare and healthcare services (Sutela and Pärnänen 2018).

Knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship depends on the use of advanced, often scientific and technical knowledge with recruitment of researchers in STEM fields. The representation of women and men in STEM careers varies significantly, reflecting the broader gender disparities in the labour market and educational

choices. For instance, data on the distribution of researchers across economic sectors in Finland indicates a higher presence of women researchers in the higher education (48.7%) and government sectors (43.3%). In comparison, the business enterprise sector has a lower representation of women researchers at 17.4 per cent (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:105-107). Based on data from the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021:88), female researchers make up only 17.62 per cent of the manufacturing sector, highlighting a gender gap in this field. In contrast, women are more represented in specific areas, such as the manufacture of chemicals and chemical products (46.67%) and the manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations (67.58%), indicating a more balanced gender distribution in these specialized industries. The services of the business economy sector also show a relatively low proportion of female researchers at 16.28 per cent. These statistics across various economic activities highlight the different levels of gender distribution in research within Finland's business enterprise sector. This issue has also been acknowledged in government programs.

Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019) highlights its commitment to ensuring gender-neutral access to education. It emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals to pursue their educational goals regardless of gender. Additionally, the program recognizes the role of human capital development in promoting a knowledge-based economy. KIE is part of this initiative, benefiting both men and women by enhancing employment prospects and overall economic well-being. However, the program also acknowledges the ongoing issue of gender segregation in education and the workforce, stressing the need for continued efforts to address this concern.

For decades, Finnish governments have been committed to supporting research and development through various funding channels, including public funding agencies and research programs with different but complementary objectives. These include Business Finland (formerly the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation before 2018), the Research Council of Finland[5], and Sitra (Finnish Innovation Fund). The Research Council of Finland is a funding organization that supports the Ministry of Education and Culture's science policies. Business Finland is the Finnish government organization responsible for innovation funding, trade, travel, and investment promotion. Its start-up grants are designed to help new entrepreneurs

[5] Until August 2023, its official English-language name was Academy of Finland.

establish businesses and create employment opportunities. KIE based on research and innovation is in the core of these activities and thus well supported.

However, Finland has limited provisions to promote gender equality in research and innovation. The Research Council of Finland has been implementing Gender Equality Planning since the 1980s (Husu 2001:85–89;Vehviläinen et al. 2024). The Research Council evaluation boards maintain gender parity, and provisions for parental leave are in place. However, Business Finland, the primary funding agency for KIE, has not implemented systematic policies for gender equality (Vehviläinen et al.2024).

Finland is committed to gender equality in research, development, and innovation. This includes policies and initiatives, such as those outlined in the Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019). These initiatives aim to create an inclusive innovation ecosystem by providing equal opportunities, eliminating gender biases and inequalities, and fostering a supportive environment. However, despite these efforts, women's representation remains relatively low in the research and development sector. The existence of a gender gap in STEM fields, with women being underrepresented in technical and leadership positions, indicates the need for further measures to encourage and support women's engagement and advancement, for example, in KIE.

2.3 Summary

In this chapter, I examined gender and gender equality issues in Turkey and Finland, focusing on the societal, cultural, and political elements that influence women's participation in the workforce, STEM, and entrepreneurship in KIE. The comparison of gender equality issues in Finland and Turkey reveals distinct historical, cultural, and political landscapes that have shaped each country's approach to gender equality, making the context for KIE. Both countries have made significant strides towards gender equality and have promoted entrepreneurship and KIE in particular.

In Finland, an early commitment to gender equality demonstrated through granting women political rights and access to education, has established a strong foundation for women's participation in the labour force and political life. The country's status as a modern Nordic welfare state further supports work-life balance and social policies that promote gender equality. However, Finland struggles with gendered

labour market segregation, gender pay gap, and the underrepresentation of women in STEM that play a significant role in facilitating KIE and entrepreneurship generally. Governments promote entrepreneurship actively, relying on the gender mainstreaming approach. Women do have equal access to education, resources, and networks. Gender and gender equality are intended to be integrated into all activities without targeting special support specifically for women to become entrepreneurs in KIE. However, the practices of gender mainstreaming vary significantly from governmental sector to governmental sector and authority to authority. Notably, the governance of entrepreneurship and industry has not focused on promoting gender equality.

Furthermore, the perception of achieved gender equality in Finnish society sometimes hinders further progress, leading to a passive approach towards addressing issues such as the gender wage gap and gender-segregated labour market may appear insignificant when compared to other countries (Brunila and Ylöstalo 2015).

Turkey's route towards gender equality began with the foundational reforms of the Turkish Republic, which emphasised secularism, modernity, and gender equality. Significant legal reforms have highlighted Turkey's dedication to advancing gender equality. Nevertheless, the country has recently experienced a regression, with the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and a shift towards more conservative policies under the JDP government, signalling a potential backtrack on gender equality gains. Although there is strong support for women's entrepreneurship, societal norms, the influence of conservative political ideologies of JDP and insufficient childcare services continue to limit women's participation in KIE.

Both Finland and Turkey share a common issue: despite legal and institutional frameworks supporting gender equality and KIE, both countries grapple with societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender gap, particularly in the labour market and entrepreneurship. Turkey's situation is further complicated by the interplay of secular and Islamic ideologies, affecting women's societal and labour market positions, along with a lack of care services that hinder women's full participation in KIE, entrepreneurship and the labour force in general.

To compare the gendered structure in KIE between Turkey and Finland in relation to international research, it is important to note both countries' efforts towards gender equality and women's entrepreneurship within STEM fields, albeit with

varying degrees of success. Finland, with its strong emphasis on gender neutrality and equality policies, has seen substantial female participation in the workforce, including in KIE. Turkey, on the other hand, has shown a commitment to advancing women's roles in STEM and entrepreneurship through national development plans and support for female entrepreneurs. However, both countries still face challenges such as occupational segregation and a gender pay gap. The Finnish approach to integrating women into KIE and the broader workforce benefits from decades of gender equality policies, whereas Turkey is making strides in overcoming barriers. The difference in the approaches and outcomes of Turkey and Finland provides insights into the impact of policy, cultural norms, and support systems on gender equality in KIE on an international scale.

In the next section, I discuss the concept of KIE in the context of knowledge economy. Secondly, I examine the gendered patterns of STEM fields, gender segregation in STEM fields and careers, gendered image of entrepreneurship, gender in the context of innovation, and women entrepreneurs in KIE drawing on existing research literature. This examination is essential for a clear understanding of the key findings and analysis that will be presented later to locate the Turkish and Finnish cases in the international context.

3 KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS GENDERED PATTERNS

The objective of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I discuss knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE) to form an understanding of KIE, through which I identify the participants for my research. Secondly, I investigate the gendered patterns and experiences within KIE, examining how gender influences access, participation, and success in this field based on existing literature. I start by briefly outlining the knowledge economy as it facilitates the development and growth of knowledge-intensive firms. The knowledge economy encompasses the resources, networks, and institutions that support the creation, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge within an economic context. Building on the existing literature on KIE (outlined in sections 3.1 and 3.2), I create my own definition of KIE as a gendered phenomenon. This focuses on how gender influences, and is influenced by, the processes, structures, and outcomes of KIE, as discussed in the gendered aspects of KIE in section 3.3.

3.1 Knowledge economy

The evolution of economies throughout history has been closely tied to the role of knowledge in driving growth, innovation, and technological advancements. As highlighted by David and Foray (2003) and Kabir (2019), the shift towards a knowledge-based economy is not a sudden departure but a gradual transformation, progressing through different phases from agrarian to industrial and now, the information or knowledge economy. Knowledge economy is multifaceted and can be understood from three perspectives. First, it is sector-based, focusing on industries reliant on ICT and knowledge-intensive services, often offering high-quality jobs. Second, a holistic approach views it as a system where changes in knowledge-based sectors affect employment across the economy, potentially deepening inequalities in the sense of class, education, ethnicity, nationality and gender. Third, knowledge economy emphasizes the process of creating and sharing knowledge, focusing on how personal, unspoken (tacit) knowledge is turned into

clear, shared (explicit) knowledge through organizational practices (Walby et al. 2007).

In this contemporary landscape, ICT plays a crucial role, improving information processing capabilities and allowing firms to utilize scientific and technical knowledge for a competitive edge (Alvesson 2004; Brinkley 2006; Kabir 2019; Walby et al. 2007). Creative thinking and innovative ideas are indispensable across all sectors. Science-based firms are a well-known example of enterprises in the knowledge economy, but also service-based firms offering consulting, design, and marketing services actively participate in the knowledge economy by utilising their expertise to participate in businesses. For instance, they refine organisational processes, design logos, and develop comprehensive marketing strategies. In this context, knowledge emerges as the primary driver of economic growth and competitiveness. It encompasses both codified knowledge, such as patents and scientific research, and tacit knowledge as well as skills, expertise, and experience. Various institutions, including universities, research institutions, and knowledge-intensive firms, play a key role in the production, sharing, and utilisation of this knowledge (Brinkley 2006; Kabir 2019).

According to Walby et al. (2007), the knowledge economy is associated with two contrasting trends. On the one hand, it promotes an economy that offers higher-skilled jobs, greater independence, simpler management structures, flexible working hours, and an overall improved quality of working life. On the other hand, it drives a new economy shaped by modern ICT, which accelerate globalization. Building on this, Walby et al. (2007) and Kabir (2019) highlight that the processes of knowledge creation, exploitation, and diffusion not only open doors to new market opportunities but also give rise to a new class of entrepreneurs within the knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, Walby et al. (2007) and Kabir (2019) argue that the emergence of the knowledge economy has led to the development of new organizational forms and a shift in employment relationships. In this context, knowledge workers are increasingly becoming portfolio workers, often working for multiple companies or organizations at the same time, such as freelancers or entrepreneurs. Fundamentally, the knowledge economy creates the conditions for the rise of KIE, shaping an environment where innovation and the use of knowledge are key to economic progress and achievement.

In short, the knowledge economy, which depends on ICT and knowledge-based services, offers both opportunities and difficulties for gender equality in the workplace. It can create higher-skilled and more flexible jobs, but it also often worsens gender inequalities, as women are still underrepresented in high-skill areas like ICT. Additionally, masculine workplace practices typical, for example, in ICT can limit women's involvement in creating and sharing knowledge, hindering their career growth and maintaining job quality gaps. As a result, the knowledge economy presents both possibilities for empowerment and ongoing inequality. In the following section, I examine the characteristics of KIE, thus offering also insights into the knowledge economy.

3.2 Knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship

In the knowledge economy, entrepreneurship has been widely discussed, with enterprises examined through various concepts such as knowledge-intensive firms, knowledge-intensive business services, and knowledge-based entrepreneurship. These notions reflect the different dimensions of entrepreneurial activity. In this chapter, I focus on exploring knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship (KIE) as part of my empirical research. My aim is to build an understanding of KIE within the contemporary business environment.

KIE, as defined by Malerba and Mckelvey (2016:26), represents a specific category within entrepreneurship. According to Malerba (2010) and Malerba and Mckelvey (2016), knowledge-intensive enterprises are firms based on knowledge across various sectors and contexts, and their operation linked to innovation systems. KIE is related not only to advanced science and technology but also to low-tech, medium-tech, and service sectors, as well as to knowledge, skills and creativity for example, in design and marketing. However, this definition explicitly excludes firms that primarily operate based on repetitive and routinized knowledge or rely on established technologies without any development. The distinguishing characteristic of KIE lies in its ability to effectively transform knowledge into novel or enhanced goods and services that can be introduced into the market. This implies a dynamic process of using knowledge to generate innovation and value, rather than simply copying pre-existing knowledge or technologies. Additionally, since KIE focuses on making a profit, it does not include non-governmental or voluntary organizations in its definition. Malerba and McKelvey's (2016) definition of KIE in their European project AEGIS (Advancing knowledge- intensive entrepreneurship and innovation

for economic growth and social well-being in Europe) covers only new enterprises and excludes firms older than eight years. However, they acknowledge that KIE is broader than more specific definitions of start-ups, such as new high-tech firms. KIE also emphasizes the importance of considering both knowledge-intensive and innovative companies, which can be found across all sectors, technologies, and industries (Malerba and McKelvey 2019:13).

Malerba (2010) and Malerba and McKelvey (2016) closely connect KIE to innovation. For them, innovation is not simply the introduction of new products or services; it is a dynamic process of creating and implementing novel ideas that generate value and initiate significant positive change, echoing Schumpeter's (1934 cited in Malerba and McKelvey 2016:28; Malerba and McKelvey 2020:504) broader perspective on economic evolution and development. This conceptual framework sees innovation as the application of knowledge and ideas to create value, a cornerstone in the development and growth of new firms. Thus, KIE and innovation emerge as mutually reinforcing phenomena, where KIE depends on innovation to flourish and expand, while innovation itself is driven by KIE, leading to the introduction of new products, services, and processes to the market.

By aligning with Schumpeter's view that entrepreneurship involves the carrying out of new combinations, Malerba (2010) examines entrepreneurship through the lens of innovation, treating it as an activity focused on creating something new—whether it's technology, a product, an organization, or a market. This perspective highlights the central role of innovation in entrepreneurship, aligning with Schumpeter's vision, and emphasizes the importance of understanding entrepreneurship within the broader context of innovation systems that facilitate the creation, growth, and dissemination of transformative ideas.

Malerba and McKelvey (2016; 2020:507) locate KIE within innovation systems. They describe these systems as networks of public and private institutions, policies, and activities that work together to support the development and spread of new technologies and innovations within a country. This framework emphasises the role of government policy, culture and the interactions between universities, research institutions, companies, and government agencies. These actors interact within a network, exchanging knowledge and resources to support technological advancement and innovation (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000). Therefore, entrepreneurs in KIE interact with other actors within specific institutional settings,

such as suppliers and users, scientific organisations (universities and research organisations), government agencies, and financial organisations all of which are necessary to turn an idea into a process, product, or service on the market. These networks allow entrepreneurs to share information and insights about the market, technological opportunities and lessons learned from entrepreneurial activities (Malerba and McKelvey 2016:20)[6].

Knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS)

Knowledge-intensive business services constitute a significant part of KIE, as noted by Malerba et al. (2016:2), who incorporate KIBS within the broader category of KIE. According to Muller and Doloreux (2009), KIBS refer to private companies and organisations that heavily rely on specialised knowledge, expertise, and intellectual capital. These services apply advanced knowledge and skills to address complex problems, provide specialised advice, or offer customised solutions to clients. KIBS are typically characterised by their high level of knowledge intensity, where the value they deliver is primarily derived from intellectual assets and expertise. Muller and Doloreux (2009) provide examples of knowledge-intensive business services, including:

- consulting firms offering strategic, operational, or organisational advice,
- research and development services aiding in the development of new products, technologies, or processes,
- engineering services providing design, analysis and project management,
- Information technologies and software development services offering consulting and solutions,

[6] KIE is also discussed through Knowledge-Based Entrepreneurship (KBE) with minor differences to KIE. According to Kanellos (2011), KBE is deeply rooted in scientific and technological knowledge. Such enterprises are significant in fostering an innovative culture, promoting research and development, and enhancing market competitiveness. Based on the views of Malerba and McKelvey (2016) and Kanellos (2011), the difference between KIE and KBE lies in their approach to knowledge utilization. Firms in KBE primarily apply established sector or market-comprising recognized practices, products, and services—rather than relying on new creations or innovations.

- market research and analysis services assisting businesses in understanding market trends and consumer behaviour.

In this section, I define KIE, including knowledge-intensive business services as part of the knowledge economy, to establish its concept for this study. Following the definitions provided by Malerba (2010) and Malerba and McKelvey (2016) for KIE, and Muller and Doloreux (2009) for KIBS, I use KIE as an umbrella term to cover the women entrepreneurs in my research. Women entrepreneurs from Turkey and Finland featured in this study represent a wide range of firms across various sectors. As I will explain in Chapter 5, many of the women entrepreneurs in this study, particularly those with engineering backgrounds, are active in industries well-known for their intense use of knowledge, such as ICT, medical software development, defence, and healthcare. Many of them have developed a strong expertise in advanced technical and scientific concepts, which is key to KIE. Additionally, many entrepreneurs in this study are involved in market research and analysis services, as well as consultancy services for research and development as part of KIBS. These consultancy services cover business and project advice to specialised areas like engineering and healthcare. These services are essential for sharing expert knowledge, fostering innovation, and solving complex problems. They help distribute and apply knowledge across various sectors.

This view of KIE, which explicitly includes KIBS, acknowledges the diverse ways in which the women entrepreneurs in my research utilize knowledge in consultancy services—often derived from their prior work experience and educational backgrounds—and also engage in research and development activities deeply rooted in technical and scientific knowledge, leading to the generation of innovations. The businesses operated by these women cover a variety of sectors with varying degrees of technological sophistication, but all consistently prioritize innovation and technological advancement. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of my research involves recognising the importance of innovation, particularly in the development of new products within KIE.

In the next subchapter I examine how gender takes part in KIE. By using existing research on entrepreneurship in innovation and technology, this section helps analyse my findings to identify gender issues in KIE, which will be further discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

3.3 Gendered context and patterns of KIE

As previously discussed, KIE involves introducing innovations into economic systems with a focus on profit generation through the utilisation of research-based knowledge and technology. Consequently, individuals engaged in KIE typically possess advanced professional and often academic backgrounds, and they actively participate in ongoing learning and knowledge-creation processes. KIE operates within innovation systems, encompassing access to resources, innovation opportunities, research institutions, governmental policies and agencies, and networks among various stakeholders. These systems are shaped by customs, culture, and institutions, infusing them with gendered structures. As a result, all facets of KIE exhibit gendered characteristics.

This subchapter reviews international research on women's participation in KIE and the gender-related dynamics within enterprises and KIEs. Since knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship heavily relies on research-based knowledge and technology, this subchapter discusses the gender segregation often observed in STEM education. It then examines the elements leading to women's underrepresentation in STEM careers. Moving forward, I explore the perception of entrepreneurship and innovation as masculine domains, examining this from a gender perspective. Finally, in the last section of this subchapter, I review literature on the gendered barriers that women entrepreneurs face in their entrepreneurial work life.

3.3.1 Gender segregation in STEM fields and careers

This section examines gender segregation in STEM fields, identifying it as a significant obstacle for women in KIE, where innovation and scientific research are key. It outlines the various problems women encounter in STEM, beginning with societal stereotypes that discourage them from engaging with these disciplines.

The policies aimed at promoting gender equality in STEM within the EU and European Commission (EC) frameworks are implemented or operationalised by various actions and initiatives. These efforts are encapsulated in the broader European Commission (2020) and further specified through the European Commission European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda (2021), which includes an action to promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness as part of its objectives. The ERA Policy Agenda (2021)'s objective encompasses developing policy

coordination mechanisms and principles for integrating and evaluating the gender perspective in research and innovation content.

These initiatives and strategies collectively aim to address and improve gender equality in STEM by fostering a more inclusive and equitable research and innovation environment within the EU. However, only 31.3 per cent of European STEM students in higher education are women (European Commission 2022:41). This gender segregation of STEM education, influences the preparing of future entrepreneurs and employees (Kuschel et al. 2020; Kuschel and Lepeley 2016). Once women enter STEM professions, they face persistent stereotypes, pay gaps, limited representation in leadership positions, job segregation and difficulties in managing both their careers and personal lives (Poggesi et al. 2020).

Gender segregation also persists into entrepreneurship, where female entrepreneurs are often concentrated in service-oriented sectors such as retail, catering, and health-education services (Dautzenberg 2012; Marlow and McAdam 2012). According to Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (2021:6), women in Europe continue to be significantly underrepresented in scientific and technological professions (41.3%) and knowledge-intensive business industries (13.5%) (Ibid, 72). This occupational segregation reflects how individuals, consciously or unconsciously, conform to societal norms regarding suitable occupations for their gender.

The persistence of gender segregation in STEM highlights the need for ongoing, targeted efforts to ensure equal opportunities and representation for women in KIE. To bridge the gender gap in STEM careers, it is essential to understand how individual perceptions of gender influence career decisions. Gender stereotypes, prejudices against women's expertise, the perception of STEM as a male-dominated domain, and systemic discrimination all act as obstacles for women considering STEM professions (Martin et al. 2015). These stereotypes are not just passive beliefs; they come to life through everyday actions and decisions. People actively reinforce these stereotypes by the way they behave and the choices they make in their daily life. For instance, the perception of STEM as a masculine field (discussed later in this subchapter) can prevent women from pursuing STEM careers because it conflicts with the established gendered division of labour. However, male domination varies between STEM fields. For example, Ceci and Williams (2011) and Cheryan et al. (2017) observed a higher representation of women in biological and

medical sciences compared to physical sciences and engineering. Similarly, a report on gender equality in education and training (European Institute for Gender Equality 2016b:4) highlighted gender segregation, noting that while women comprise the majority in health and welfare studies, they remain significantly underrepresented in engineering, manufacturing, and construction fields. This dichotomy reflects broader cultural and educational trends, where societal norms push women towards certain scientific disciplines while discouraging them from others (Cheryan et al. 2017). Understanding these differences is crucial for formulating targeted policies to address gender segregation in STEM, recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective across all disciplines.

Furthermore, gendered cultures within organisations and industries align with gendered practices as they actively shape and maintain male dominance (Martin 2006). Unsupportive work environments and limited promotion opportunities manifest in gendered practices within these fields, leading to the underrepresentation of women (Cross and Linehan 2006). The "leaky pipeline" metaphor, highlighted by Marlow and McAdam (2012), illustrates the impact of gendered behaviours and societal expectations on women's career progression. This metaphor creates an image of a path filled with barriers that prevent women from advancing from entry-level positions to top management professions and cause many to drop out of the career path. These barriers include the struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, such as caregiving duties, widespread gender biases in performance evaluations and promotion criteria that tend to favour men, and hostile work environments with organisational cultures that fail to value of women. Such obstacles further intensify the difficulties women face, preventing their advancement in the professional hierarchy (Cross and Linehan 2006). Building on the awareness of how gendered behaviours and expectations influence women's career advancement, below, I discuss the gendered image of entrepreneurship.

3.3.2 Gendered image of entrepreneurship

The prevailing masculine image of entrepreneurship, particularly within technology and science-based firms, remains a significant concern. This issue is closely linked to the underrepresentation of women in these fields. Feminist studies, including Ahl's (2004) research and the ethnographic work of Bruni et al. (2004), have analysed the existing literature. These studies demonstrate how women are continually viewed as

the other in entrepreneurship, highlighting that entrepreneurship is both an economic and cultural phenomenon.

Entrepreneurship includes gendered social practices at the level of interactions and discursive practices. These practices are shaped by cultural ideas inherited in society, such as masculinity and femininity. In this sense, entrepreneurship activities produce and reproduce gender. For example, literature often defines an entrepreneur using traits commonly considered masculine. Thus, being an entrepreneur involves particular gendered practices usually associated with males and masculinities (Bruni et al. 2004).

Building on this, Hytti and Heinonen (2013) explore how men and women perceive themselves differently in entrepreneurship. They focus on an entrepreneurship training program tailored for life sciences, including chemistry, physics, information technology, bioinformatics, and pharmacology. They found that men and women formed different entrepreneurial identities. Men leaned towards a "heroic entrepreneur" identity, taking risks and fitting the usual male entrepreneur image. Women developed a "humane entrepreneur" identity, showing interest in smaller, possibly low-tech businesses or working innovatively within existing companies. Their research shows that high-tech life sciences entrepreneurship is difficult for women due to its male-dominated nature. Hytti and Heinonen (2013) suggest that entrepreneurship programs should support various ways of being an entrepreneur, not just the high-tech, risk-taking kind.

Siivonen et al. (2022) expand upon Hytti and Heinonen's (2013) findings by conducting an ethnographic study. They examine perceptions of entrepreneurship among Finnish higher education students, focusing on age and gender within entrepreneurship education. Their study underscores a disparity in how entrepreneurship is presented to students. It highlights the persistence of aged and gendered hierarchies. Their research identifies the archetype of an ideal entrepreneur as a young, educated, and confident male. This framing marginalises young females, who are often not associated with the risk-taking and profit-seeking behaviours deemed essential for growth-focused entrepreneurship.

Siivonen et al. (2022) further examine the experiences of middle-aged women in entrepreneurship. They highlight how, for this group, experience is a key advantage. Middle-aged women question the common trend that favours younger men in entrepreneurship. Instead of focusing solely on risk-taking, they approach

entrepreneurship with a balance of caution and risk. This approach allows them to align their work with their personal values rather than conforming to the typical entrepreneurial culture.

Siivonen et al. (2022) also highlight the difficulties young women face in entrepreneurship and how their identity as entrepreneurs can evolve with age and experience. They point out that entrepreneurship education often does not treat all students equally, reinforcing societal hierarchies related to age and gender. They stress that prevailing norms favour younger men, which marginalizes women and impacts their entrepreneurial experiences and self-perceptions.

Adding to this discussion, Komulainen et al. (2009:637) argue that a proper entrepreneur is a male who is continuously engaged in the active, dynamic, and competitive risk-taking pursuit of economic opportunity to maximise profit and growth. Additionally, Berglund et al. (2017) examine how entrepreneurship education aims to be gender-neutral but ends up favouring behaviours associated with masculinity. These behaviours include being active, technology-oriented, and independent. Berglund et al. (2017) examine three major entrepreneurship programs in the Swedish education system. They found that despite entrepreneurship programs' goal to encourage everyone, these programs often side-line women and feminine qualities. Their research points out the tricky nature of trying to be gender-neutral in teaching entrepreneurship. Even with good intentions, biases and gendered expectations can be perpetuated.

In another study, Elkina (2021) examines how representations of entrepreneurship often align with masculine behaviours, leading to the perception that entrepreneurship is primarily a man's job. She explores how this gendered image can influence individuals' beliefs about who can succeed in entrepreneurship, potentially causing feelings of inadequacy among those who do not conform to these masculine ideals. Reflecting on her experiences in the student entrepreneurship society programme, she notes encountering coaching styles and messages that embodied attributes such as decisiveness and determination, which are typically associated with masculinity. This masculine perspective on entrepreneurship can create barriers, particularly for women, who may not see themselves fitting into this narrow definition of an entrepreneur.

Furthermore, studies by Matsa and Miller (2014) and Ahl (2004; 2006) express that female entrepreneurs are often seen as taking fewer risks, being less active, and less

autonomous. Their businesses are perceived as less profitable and smaller in size. Moreover, Ahl (2002) and Patterson and Mavin (2009) show that men and women entrepreneurs share similar behaviours but are motivated by different reasons. Men often prioritize financial success, while women aim for work-life balance and job satisfaction, driven by a desire to manage both motherhood and professional aspirations.

Overall, entrepreneurship is often shaped by a gendered image that merges with behaviours and practices associated with a commonly shared understanding of masculinity. Behaviours like assertiveness, risk-taking, competitiveness, and individualism are seen as essential within entrepreneurial contexts (Ahl 2006; Bruni et al. 2004). This alignment with societal expectations reinforces gendered performances and solidifies the association of entrepreneurship with masculinity (Lewis 2006; Marlow and Patton 2005). Consequently, this masculine image influences women's experiences in entrepreneurial environments, exposing them to stereotypes and biases (Achtenhagen and Welter 2011; Bruni et al. 2004; Marlow and McAdam 2013). Building on this discussion, in the next section I examine the relationship between gender and innovation.

3.3.3 Gender in the context of innovation

Gender influences the processes and outcomes of innovation in an entrepreneurial setting. Alsos et al. (2013), Belghiti-Mahut et al. (2016), and Bijedic et al. (2016) discuss the gendered aspects of innovation by questioning the common viewpoint that credits men as the primary innovators in male-dominated industries. They advocate for a broader perspective that recognises and values contribution of women, which is often overlooked in innovation.

Johansson and Lindberg (2011) observe that innovation literature and policies have historically emphasized technological and industrial advancements, frequently neglecting innovations in sectors where women entrepreneurs are more prominent, such as services and creative industries. This bias arises from narrow definitions of innovation that fail to capture the entire innovative activities. They call for a reassessment of these gendered perceptions, highlighting how the marginalization of women entrepreneurs is linked to how innovation is conceptualized and valued.

Some scholars, like Okoń-Horodyńska et al. (2016), argue that innovation should be viewed as inherently gender-neutral, focusing on new products, processes, and

organizations rather than the gender of the innovators. However, Alsos et al. (2013) and Belghiti-Mahut et al. (2016) counter this argument by noting that gendered stereotypes of innovation overlook the diverse potential across genders, industries, and types of innovations. Women's involvement, particularly in women-dominated and gender-balanced industries, as well as in service, organizational, and social innovations, is often minimized and marginalized within innovation studies. Previous studies confirm a strong association between male dominance, science and engineering, and innovation (Dautzenberg 2012; Marlow and McAdam 2012; Wajcman 2010). Consequently, public support for innovation and research and development predominantly benefits men, as the decisions and allocations of this support are largely made by men (Blake and Hanson 2005; Lindberg 2012; Marlow and McAdam 2012; Pettersson and Lindberg 2013; Ranga and Etzkowitz 2010).

According to Pecis (2016:2120), the relationship between innovation and gender appears in two ways: first, who is seen as an innovator, and second, how innovation is defined. Related with the perception of who is seen as an innovator, Alsos et al. (2013:247) note that gender in innovation has often been overlooked because most studies focus on products, processes, or organizations rather than on the people involved. Similarly, Andersson et al. (2012:13) point out that gender stereotypes shape how innovation and innovators are perceived, frequently positioning men and masculinity as the standard. Bijedic et al. (2016) examine women's participation in innovative activities in Germany, highlighting a clear gendered pattern. Women are significantly less represented in innovation activities, particularly in product and process innovations. This gap is attributed to societal and institutional frameworks, including social expectations and personal choices that reduce women's tendency to pursue education in fields like technology, engineering, or science. Additionally, they argue that Germany's regulatory environment favours a male breadwinner model, leading many women to work part-time and limiting their availability and resources to engage in innovative activities. The prevailing perception of an innovator or entrepreneur in Germany is predominantly male, which reduces the likelihood that women see themselves as capable of innovation (Bijedic et al. 2016).

Poutanen and Kovalainen (2013) address how gender stereotypes can obscure the participation and recognition of women in innovation processes. They present a situation where a product given a gendered image opens new opportunities for a female inventor in a male-dominated industry, and offering a new perspective on how women can establish their presence. However, this also shows that even when

women participate in innovation, their status as innovators is not always recognised. Likewise, Foss et al. (2013) suggest that the entire process from idea generation to implementation may exhibit gendered patterns, potentially favouring the implementation of masculine ideas over feminine ones.

Continuing this discussion, Pecis (2016) emphasises that innovation processes are inherently gendered, shaped by specific forms of male and female identities. Her ethnographic research in two research organisations illustrates how innovation is constructed through gendered interactions, where certain behaviours and practices are coded as male or female. For instance, Pecis (2016) highlights that women often face difficulties being recognised as legitimate innovators in male-dominated fields, where characteristics like risk-taking and assertiveness are valued. Conversely, gendered expectations, such as the assumption that women are more collaborative or detail-oriented, may still influence innovation practices in environments where women are dominant.

By examining these dynamics, Pecis (2016) argues for a more diverse understanding of how gender shapes innovation. This perspective aligns with the approach to recognise and value the diverse perspectives of all individuals, regardless of gender, and to question male-centric views of innovation. Her work highlights the importance of creating inclusive innovation environments that support a variety of approaches and recognise the complex ways in which gender influences innovation practices.

In summary, research on how gender influences innovation in entrepreneurial settings shows significant biases that favour male-dominated perspectives and undervalue thoughts and behaviours more typical of women. Scholars like Alsos et al. (2013), Belghiti-Mahut et al. (2016), and Bijedic et al. (2016) contest the view of men as primary innovators, advocating for broader recognition of women's roles in innovation. Historical focus on technological advancements has marginalised sectors where women are prevalent, such as services and creative industries. Gender-neutral perspectives (Okoń-Horodyńska et al. 2016) are debated, but evidence shows that gendered stereotypes and institutional frameworks often limit women's participation in innovation (Alsos et al. 2013; Belghiti-Mahut et al. 2016). Feminist studies, including those by Blake and Hanson (2005) and Marlow and McAdam (2012), highlight the male connotation of innovation, reinforced by public support and recognition mainly directed towards men. Scholars such as Alsos et al. (2013) and

Andersson et al. (2012) argue that addressing these biases requires redefining innovation to include diverse perspectives and creating inclusive environments that recognise the impact of gender in innovation practices. In the following section, I discuss the gendered barriers that women entrepreneurs face in entrepreneurship, including KIE, drawing from the gender and entrepreneurship literature.

3.3.4 Women entrepreneurs in KIE

Gendered aspects, including societal expectations significantly influence entrepreneurship and these aspects shape entrepreneurs' motivations, experiences, and opportunities. Currently, entrepreneurial activities are often linked to a longstanding masculine perception of entrepreneurship, as discussed by Ahl (2002) and Marlow (2002). Ahl (2002) points out that the differences between men and women entering entrepreneurship may not always be obvious. Women's motivations for moving into entrepreneurship are often gender-specific, such as the desire to escape the gender biases in their previous workplaces and the pursuit of greater flexibility and a better work-family life balance (Patterson and Mavin 2009).

However, women frequently find themselves in the minority within male-dominated environments, contending with gender inequalities. Coping mechanisms emerged, with women adopting strategies such as assuming an "honorary man" (Martin et al. 2015:175), to integrate more easily into male-dominated environments. This approach involved downplaying gender issues, adapting to male norms, and demonstrating expertise to gain acceptance and reduce negative perceptions. Women felt that becoming an honorary man helped them manage the male-dominated industry by aligning their behaviours and attitudes with those of their male counterparts, thus facilitating their acceptance and reducing the visibility of gender differences. Another coping mechanism to deal with gender inequality is to mirror male actions in order to assimilate (Marlow and McAdam 2012), and to use the credibility of male colleagues to overcome the lack of perceived legitimacy of female professionals, especially when dealing with external experts who find it difficult to see femininity and technical competence as compatible (Marlow and McAdam 2015).

Beyond personal coping mechanisms, structural barriers are important in shaping women's entrepreneurial careers. In the entrepreneurship literature, funding and network opportunities are the common barriers women entrepreneurs face during

their entrepreneurial careers. Resources are essential for enterprises to carry out their production and business activities and to obtain a competitive advantage.

The discussion of gender inequalities in funding, especially within research and technology-based entrepreneurship, is a significant topic in academic research. The difficulty of securing funding is a critical barrier for entrepreneurs, and this barrier can be even harder for women in the field due to various reasons, including institutional biases and societal stereotypes. Studies have shown that financial organisations are more likely to fund businesses led by men, with a small percentage of funding going to women-led enterprises (Powell and Eddleston 2013; Wheadon and Duval-Couetil 2019). Women entrepreneurs in STEM fields face stereotypes that question their technical expertise and leadership abilities (Marlow and McAdam 2013). This gender inequality is often attributed to the stereotypical perception of men being more suited for STEM fields and entrepreneurship (Alsos et al. 2006; Brush et al. 2019; Eddleston et al. 2016), which influences investors' decisions, often leading to women receiving less funding than their male counterparts (Carter et al. 2003; Coleman and Robb 2009).

In addition to funding, women's access to networks is crucial in influencing their ability to secure financing. Men often have more extensive networks within the venture capital community, which can lead to more opportunities for funding. Women may face difficulties in participating in these networks due to gender or lack of representation in important decision-making networks (Brush et al. 2019). Research has also indicated that how entrepreneurs present themselves during pitches[7] can influence funding outcomes. Investors may have unconscious biases that favour pitches by men, especially in technical or high-growth fields. This is compounded by the expectation that women must perform gender in specific ways to be taken seriously, which can impact the perception of their competence and ambition (Kanze et al. 2018).

While common perceptions often point to problems in securing capital for women entrepreneurs, there are exceptions. Eriksson et al. (2009) investigated how the

[7] In the world of business specifically, pitch refer to presentations made by entrepreneurs to investors, with the goal of securing investment for their startup or business venture. These pitches are a crucial step in the fundraising process, as they provide entrepreneurs with an opportunity to showcase their business idea, market potential, business model, team, and financial projections to potential investors (Sabaj et al. 2020).

gender of business owners impacts their access to and usage of various funding types in Finland. Contrary to the prevailing view, their findings indicate no significant difference in obtaining finance between women-owned and men-owned SMEs in Finland. Both Finnish men and women entrepreneurs predominantly utilise bank loans, and they suggest that Finnish women do not rely more heavily on personal savings for their enterprises than their male counterparts, in other words, there are no significant gender-related differences in the use of bank loans. According to Eriksson et al. (2009:187) women business owners often establish their banking relationships during their previous employment. They argue that this history of stable banking relationships can enhance women's credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of banks, making it easier for them to apply for and obtain loans for their businesses. Additionally, Arenius and Autio (2006) and Eriksson et al. (2009:187) suggest that the equality between men and women in Finnish society could be one reason why women-owned SMEs in Finland do not depend more on personal savings compared to those owned by men.

In contrast, examining the situation in Turkey, Hisrich and Özturk (1999) highlight that Turkish women entrepreneurs face minimal problems obtaining loans from banks, which might initially seem similar to the Finnish case. However, the underlying reasons appear to be distinct. The research indicates that Turkish women entrepreneurs benefit from specific governmental policies aimed at promoting their participation in the labour force and supporting their entrepreneurial activities, leading to relatively easier access to bank loans. Despite this, they face other difficulties in their business operations, such as marketing problems and lack of involvement with business colleagues (Maden 2015).

Another significant problem for women entrepreneurs is the difficulty in accessing networks that provide information, resources, and mentor relationships. Research shows that women in fields such as technology and research and development are disadvantaged compared to men in accessing these networks, connecting with mentors, and establishing firms (Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean 2018).

In the competitive business world, founders must rely on critical resources obtained through their networks to grow. However, gender segregation persists in networking, driven by gendered stereotypes. As a result, women entrepreneurs often face limited opportunities to engage in these networks, hindering their ability to

access resources, build business connections, and gain legitimacy for their ventures (Ahl 2006; Godwin et al. 2006).

The study conducted by Vehviläinen et al. (2010:68) on gendered work practices in science parks argues that expertise is not just recognized through the skills and knowledge gained from education and work; but also through social connections and emotions. Employees are more likely to get to know and trust each other in informal meetings and leisure activities held outside of business hours, allowing them to connect each other to get information, resources and meet investors to build entrepreneurial networks.

Godwin et al. (2006) explore the benefits for women entrepreneurs of forming mixed-sex founding teams in male-dominated industries. Due to prevalent gendered stereotypes, women often face difficulties in accessing essential resources. They suggest that partnering with a man can help women overcome these difficulties by increasing their credibility, expanding access to resources, and diversifying their social networks. This partnership can help women secure loans, receive venture capital, or access credit, with the male partner acting as the representative in dealings with financial institutions. Additionally, male partners may have access to business and funding opportunities through their connections in social networks that women may not be part of it (Godwin et al. 2006:636). This finding also explains that why women in technology-based industries tend to start firms with a male partner (Dautzenberg 2012:87).

Moreover, O'Connor et al. (2006) explore entrepreneur couples who share ownership and responsibility for a business, focusing on the dynamics of mixed-gender co-entrepreneurial firms. They note that men are frequently recognised as the lead founders within these partnerships. Specifically, they observe that more than three-quarters of the founders claimed there was a lead founder, with the majority of these indicating that the lead founder was male. This suggests a gendered perception of leadership roles within these firms. Furthermore, the study by O'Connor et al. (2006) underscores the tasks done by male and female co-founders. Men tend to work in areas such as sales, marketing, or product development, often seen in outward-facing or technically driven tasks within the company, while female co-founders often find themselves in administration and finance tasks, considered female tasks within the business context. This distribution of tasks indicates a gendered pattern even in mixed-gender co-entrepreneurial firms.

Kuschel et al. (2020), following Acker (1990) explained three areas where organisations might be gendered in entrepreneurship. At first, divisions are created based on gender, such as the division of labour, which includes the separation of work tasks, either horizontally or vertically. Second, gender divisions are expressed and reinforced through symbols and images, such as language, ideology, and cultural aspects. This includes representations of successful entrepreneurs in media, advertisements for events, and competitions that display certain images of entrepreneurs. Third, gendered social structures exist within workplace interactions, including norms that define expected behaviours and interactions based on gender.

Leadership roles and CEO positions show how gender norms affect women's careers. As leaders and CEO, women often face doubts about their abilities and have to overcome stereotypes to prove themselves (Hardey 2019; Katila and Eriksson 2013; Martin et al. 2015). For example, Mavin et al. (2016) explore how women's leadership is subverted under the dominant masculine culture: female leaders are glamorised, fetishised, and sexualised. The public perception of women in technology often highlights their professional achievements in an emotional way, presenting them differently from the more detached and expertise-focused style typically associated with men in management.

The research by Katila and Eriksson (2013) shows how young Finnish business school students do gender in written stories about Finnish male and female CEOs. Although Finnish women are culturally seen as powerful and independent, their study shows that stereotypical gender order is created and recreated despite women's resistance to dominant management approaches. In other words, the female CEO is described as successful in terms of the masculine characteristics required for managerial work. Their findings suggest that managerial work is particularly suitable for masculine subjects, whether they are women or men. Such stereotypes "help perpetuate the think manager–think male mentality" (Godwin et al. 2006:624).

In conclusion, gender segregation persists within networks and funding opportunities in entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs often encounter inequalities in accessing and managing these networks, which are predominantly shaped by existing gender dynamics and biases. Male-dominated sectors tend to have established networks that perpetuate the gender gap, limiting women's access to resources and investment opportunities. Also, gendered societal expectations regarding work-family balance, divisions of domestic labour, and childcare play a

role in influencing women's careers in work life (Forson and Özbilgin 2003; Herman 2015). Understanding women's entrepreneurship in KIE requires analysing the individual experience and structural gendered relations influencing access to opportunities, resources, and markets (Brush et al. 2019; Foss et al. 2019). Professional work in KIE is a particularly important area for exploring these dynamics because it is one of the settings in which inequalities are reproduced.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the characteristics of KIE within the broader framework of the knowledge economy (in 3.1 and 3.2) and examined how gender shapes its processes and outcomes (in 3.3). KIE represents a dynamic and innovative approach to creating firms that utilise specialised knowledge, expertise, and intellectual capital for value creation. These firms are defined by their emphasis on innovation, using knowledge and technology to create new products, services, or processes. As Malerba and McKelvey (2016) suggest, KIE is closely linked to innovation, fostering interactions and networks that support the transformation of ideas into marketable products or services. The discussion in this chapter emphasises that KIE is not just about science and technology-based firms but extends to knowledge intensive service-based firms that apply their expertise in consultancy and marketing to aid businesses in navigating the knowledge economy.

Examining how gender influences entrepreneurship in KIE reveals that a key issue is the gender segregation in STEM fields and careers. Despite numerous initiatives and policies aimed at promoting gender equality within the EU, the representation of women in STEM education and careers remains disproportionately low. This imbalance extends into the entrepreneurial context, where women are often relegated to service-oriented sectors, underlining the gendered barriers that prevent their entry and success in KIE.

The persistence of societal norms and stereotypes plays a significant part in perpetuating gender segregation, pushing women away from STEM and entrepreneurship in KIE, and reinforcing the view of these fields as male-dominated. This is further intensified by the gendered practices and cultures within organisations and industries, where unsupportive work environments and limited promotion opportunities result in the underrepresentation of women in KIE.

The circumstances in Finland and Turkey reflect the European context of occupational and educational segregation by gender, especially in the fields of STEM and entrepreneurship. Both countries exhibit patterns of gender segregation. Despite women's broad participation in education and labour market in Finland, there is still a significant divide in STEM and entrepreneurship, with women often work in female dominated sectors. Despite strong policy measures to support KIE, there are still obstacles to increasing the participation of women. Turkey's efforts to increase women's representation in STEM and entrepreneurship reveal a struggle against societal norms and stereotypes, with women facing barriers to entering entrepreneurship in KIE. The similarities between Finland, Turkey, and the broader European context highlight a familiar obstacle: overcoming gender_stereotypes and societal norms that dictate career paths and lead to occupational segregation. Despite some progress and policies to promote gender equality in STEM and entrepreneurship, both countries still struggle with these issues.

Also, as I discuss in this chapter, the image of entrepreneurship aligns with societal expectations and reinforces the association of entrepreneurship with a male-centric perspective. This not only shapes the experiences of women in entrepreneurship but also impacts their access to critical resources such as funding and networks. Studies reveal that women entrepreneurs face difficulties in securing funding and accessing entrepreneurial networks, mainly due to institutional biases, societal stereotypes, and the gendered structure of social capital.

Furthermore, exploring gender in the context of innovation highlights the ways in which gender influences the processes and outcomes of innovation within KIE. The marginalisation of women's participation, particularly in sectors where they are prevalent, reflects broader issues in how innovation is conceptualised and valued. This calls for re-evaluating the innovation literature and policies to ensure a more inclusive and equitable recognition of the diverse innovation potential across genders.

Fundamentally, the impact of gender on KIE involves a mix of social norms, institutional dynamics, and deep-rooted stereotypes. Together, these elements hinder the progress of gender equality in STEM fields, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Addressing these gendered divisions requires an effort to break down the barriers that maintain gender segregation, ensuring equal opportunities and representation for women in KIE. By integrating these insights into my definition of KIE as a

gendered phenomenon, I provide a comprehensive framework to better understand and address the interplay of gender within the knowledge economy. In the next chapter, I discuss the main theoretical frameworks of my study: doing gender and postfeminism.

4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: DOING GENDER AND POSTFEMINISM

The starting point of this study is the idea that gender plays a crucial role in shaping societal structures and influencing cultural interpretation. It goes beyond being just a specific topic and is deeply embedded in various aspects of life. Rather than being a fixed and unchanging phenomenon, gender is shaped by ongoing interactions and the meanings attributed to it. The construction of gender is influenced by various aspects of life, including the division of labour in the household, primary caregiving, the job market, entrepreneurship, and organizational practices. Gendered institutions (Acker 1992), emphasises that gender is not confined to specific areas but is woven throughout many aspects of social life – influencing how things work, the images observed, the ideas held, and societal power dynamics. Therefore, gender is not static; it is deeply embedded in the structure and functioning of society (Butler 1990; Gherardi 1994; West and Zimmerman 1987). In this study, doing gender is closely linked to experiences. It provides a perspective to explore how women, influenced by their gendered experiences, actively construct and manage gender in different socio-cultural and institutional contexts.

In the following sections, 4.1 and 4.2, I introduce approaches on doing gender. I start with the approach developed by sociologists West and Zimmerman (1987) and continue with the approach developed by Butler (1990, 2004), which is rooted in poststructuralism. I aim to enhance my understanding of the performance, dynamics, and negotiation of gender in KIE in Finland and Turkey. In Section 4.3, I examine how postfeminist ideas influence and are influenced by the practices of doing and undoing gender, particularly in the context of contemporary entrepreneurship. Through this analysis, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of the complex ways in which gender is constructed and reconstructed in the context of my study on KIE.

4.1 Doing gender

Doing gender is a widespread framework in the study of work and organisations, offering insights into how gender is actively shaped through interactions within organisational settings. One influential approach to understanding gender as a practice comes from West and Zimmerman within the ethnomethodological tradition. Their work (1987:127) emphasises that individuals actively organise their activities to express and reflect gender, moving beyond the notion of gender as an attribute. For instance, the division of labour in households often aligns along gender lines, with women assuming more domestic tasks and men engaging in more paid work outside the home. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is actively produced and performed in everyday actions.

To clarify the social nature of gender, West and Zimmerman (1987) distinguish between sex, sex category, and gender. Sex denotes biological differences, such as reproductive organs and hormones. In contrast, sex category refers to the social cues people use to show they belong to a particular sex (1987:127), for example, clothing and hairstyles associated with being male or female. Gender, on the other hand, embodies the social meanings and expectations tied to being male or female, including personality traits, behaviours, and social positions. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that while sex is grounded in biology, sex category and gender are complex social phenomena shaped by interactions and cultural norms.

West and Zimmerman (1987) maintain that understanding gender is not just a matter of the bodily appearance. It implies that every individual action is subject to observation and evaluation by others. Therefore, they introduce the concept of "accountability" (West and Zimmerman 1987:136). This means that people are often held responsible or accountable to societal expectations and norms about how they should express their gender. So, instead of seeing gender as something people simply choose for themselves, they suggest that choices are influenced and often constrained by the social and cultural rules shared by people. The expectations and behaviours linked to gender depend on various issues like cultural norms, the time period, and specific social interactions. This shows that gender expression is not fixed; it changes and evolves over time and across different settings. These two forces, person's individual choices and societal expectations, shape how gender is expressed and understood in society.

Furthermore, West and Zimmerman provide a framework for comprehending how gender is created and maintained through social practices and interpersonal dynamics. Doing gender involves both interactional and normative aspects. West and Zimmerman question the possibility of not engaging in gendered behaviours, arguing that when a society is organized based on fundamental differences between women and men, and the classification into sex categories remains significant doing gender is unavoidable (1987:137).

This suggests that commitment to a stable view of gender categories determines continued gender expression. As long as society views gender as a significant and defining characteristic, people will continue to express their gender in various ways. However, if society reaches a point where gender is no longer considered significant in defining a person, the active expression of gender (such as engaging in behaviours specifically to show one is a man, woman, etc.) might become less common or relevant (West and Fenstermaker 1995). West and Zimmerman (1987) frame doing gender within a framework that emphasises gender categories, focusing on female/male and women/men categories.

While West and Zimmerman acknowledge the variability of gender performance across situations and social contexts, Gherardi's (1994) views expand this understanding by emphasising the symbolic and dynamic aspects of gender. She views gender as a symbolic structure subject to interpretation and expression through social interactions and practices. This understanding contests the idea of gender as a fixed and stable characteristic of individuals as well as "the gender we do" view and emphasises the dynamic and performative nature of gender referred to as "the gender we think" (Ibid, 595).

Furthermore, Gherardi (1994) acknowledges that doing gender is closely connected with power dynamics and social hierarchies. According to her, gender performances can reinforce gender inequalities by strengthening existing norms, stereotypes, and expectations that advantage certain genders over others. This suggests that her understanding of doing gender incorporates a critical awareness of power relations and their influence on gender dynamics in social contexts.

To illuminate gendered dynamics and inequalities in the workplace, Gherardi (1994) introduces the concepts of "ceremonial work" and "remedial work". Ceremonial work, as I understand it, involves the unconscious reinforcement of gender through organisational rituals and symbols, such as dress codes, job titles, and the division of

labour based on gender stereotypes. She argues that this type of gendered performance helps perpetuate gender inequalities in the workplace. The symbolic order of gender is maintained, reproduced, and culturally transmitted by ceremonial work, with rules defined by the customs and etiquette of a particular organisational culture (Gherardi 1994:599).

Remedial work refers to deliberate efforts to address and eliminate gender inequalities in organisational practices. I interpreted this to include initiatives like diversity training, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements designed to counter gendered tasks. Gherardi (1994) emphasises the significance of remedial work in achieving gender parity in the workplace. In essence, by introducing these concepts—ceremonial and remedial work—she underscores how gender is constructed and reinforced in organisational settings.

Van den Brink and Stobbe (2009) offer a complementary approach to the discussions of gender. They argue that the construction of gender involves both discursive (speech-acts) and non-discursive (bodily acts and appearances) elements. They emphasise the function of gender stereotypes, which are ideological tools that define what women and men should do or be like. According to them, these stereotypical differences are common in certain workplace cultures and are used by members of the organization to explain, defend, and reinforce the existing gender hierarchy (Van den Brink and Stobbe 2009:454).

I suggest that despite variations in terminology and specific emphases, Gherardi (1994) and Van den Brink and Stobbe (2009) share a view regarding the unconscious reinforcement of gender through organisational practices. Both scholars underscore the necessity of deliberate efforts to confront gender biases and recognise the influence of stereotypes in shaping gender dynamics within organisational settings. Gherardi's explanation of ceremonial and remedial work aligns with Van den Brink and Stobbe's examination of discursive and non-discursive elements that help sustain stereotypical gender differences. Both perspectives align in emphasizing the significance of understanding how gender is performed, reinforced, and normalized in workplaces.

Moreover, Martin (2003) offers an additional perspective on doing gender. By examining how gender is constructed and expressed in social settings, particularly within the workplace, Martin argues that practising gender is a constantly evolving phenomenon that occurs quickly, temporally, and often non-reflexively. In other

words, gender is not always consciously practised or performed but is frequently a habitual and taken-for-granted aspect of social interactions.

Martin introduces the concepts of gendering practices and practising gender. She defines gendering practices as widely known and accepted practices, such as dress, language, expressions, actions, and interests that are culturally available and normatively or stereotypically associated with one gender or the other. Some practices are considered appropriate only for boys or men, while others are regarded as suitable only for girls or women (Martin 2006:257). Gendering practices produced through interaction can undermine women's work and confidence, showing how inequalities are created in the workplace.

Practising gender is about how individuals express femininity and masculinity. Martin (2006) suggests that practising gender affects both women's and men's work experiences. It involves the capacity to act intentionally and make choices. However, individuals often practice gender without being reflexive about it. This means that they may not be aware of how gender norms and expectations influence their actions and choices. Consequently, their practices can reinforce gender inequalities in the workplace.

To summarise thus far, this section has highlighted the approach of doing gender that explores how gender is not simply an attribute individuals possess but an ongoing performance shaped by social interactions and organisational contexts. This approach, first developed by West and Zimmerman, claims that gender is actively produced in everyday activities. West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest that gender is a social construct shaped by cultural norms and interactions. Further developments in the study of doing gender include Gherardi's (1994) examination of gender as a symbolic structure enacted through social practices, emphasising the dynamic and performative nature of gender. Gherardi introduces the concepts of ceremonial work and remedial work to describe how gender norms are perpetuated and confronted within organisations. Martin (2006) adds to the perspective by differentiating between gendering practices (socially learned and adopted behaviours associated with one's gender) and practising gender (the enactment of femininity and masculinity), highlighting the significance of action and the often non-reflexive nature of gender performance. Martin's work explains how gender practices can perpetuate inequalities in the workplace by reinforcing gender norms. Overall, the concept of doing gender offers an understanding of how gender and inequalities are

produced and maintained through social interactions and organisational practices, emphasising the need for awareness and intentional efforts to address and undo taken-for-granted gender norms.

4.2 Performing and undoing gender

Another significant body of work that conceptualizes gender as doing is rooted in poststructuralism, building upon Butler's views (1990; 2004). Butler explains that gender and sex are created through social and cultural practices. She points out that gender is not something fixed or a set of behaviours but something people actively do, calling it "always a doing" (Butler 1990:25).

Butler (1993; 1999) demonstrated the performative nature of gender and sex, questioning the essentialist distinction between male and female. In line with West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler's theory rejects taken-for-granted views of gender as a fixed and inherent characteristic and emphasises the performative nature of gender. She suggests that gender is continually created and recreated through actions and expressions, and it can change over time, rather than being determined by prior conditions or existing categories. In other words, how someone identifies in terms of gender is influenced by experiences and interactions, rather than based on biological or societal expectations. According to Butler, performing gender is not about showing an existing identity. Instead, it is a process of making and defining that identity through repeated actions and gestures. Like West and Zimmerman, Butler argues that gender is not something that a person simply does, as if they already exist as a fixed identity before performing it. Instead, gender identity is created through the actions and expressions that are seen as its outcomes.

The concept of doing gender, which refers to the active expression of gender in everyday life, has led to conversations about the possibility of "undoing" gender. This notion was introduced by Butler (2004). In her work, Butler (2004:3) describes undoing gender as breaking free from the continuous, norm-constrained activity of gender. This undoing questions the paradox of autonomy (Ibid, 101), wherein gender regulations may hinder gendered performances. According to Butler, there are clear boundaries on how much control individuals have in performing their gender. Social interactions between people can unintentionally question established gender norms, disrupting expected gender behaviours. Society imposes expectations and standards that limit how individuals express their gender. Interactions in social settings can unexpectedly disrupt these norms, leading individuals to question their

own gender expressions or that of others. Butler (2004) emphasises the importance of understanding gender not just as something individuals perform but as something deeply rooted in embodied experience. She encourages a deeper examination of gender to enhance understanding of how gender influences and operates within social interactions and structures.

One such argument is that gender is becoming irrelevant or diminishing in its influence on shaping interactions between people (Deutsch 2007). Deutsch employs the concept of undoing gender, yet her usage differs from Butler's interpretation. In her article (2007), Deutsch draws upon the work of West and Zimmerman (1987) and her objective is to critically analyse and broaden the scope of West and Zimmerman's framework. Her concept of undoing gender focuses on the ways to eliminate and reduce gender differences in society. Deutsch (2007) argues that doing gender involves generating differences but not necessarily erasing them, emphasising the importance of undoing gender to comprehend interactions that go beyond gender binaries.

She suggests focusing not only on understanding gender differences in social interactions but also on actively working to reduce them. Deutsch proposes confronting gender stereotypes and norms by promoting gender-neutral language and behaviours, emphasizing the need for a deliberate effort to transform interaction patterns towards equality. She underscores the importance of minimizing gender distinctions and advocates for research aimed at questioning the necessity of gender in interactions, highlighting its role in perpetuating inequality. Deutsch suggests that purposeful actions and a re-evaluation of gender approaches are essential for promoting societal change and gender equality.

In another approach, Risman (2009) defines and discusses undoing gender as a process that disputes the binary distinctions based on sex categories and gender norms. She criticizes the binary framework for oversimplifying the complexities of gender and expression, stating that it does not consider non-binary experiences. By questioning these strict categories, she highlights the importance of acknowledging a range of identities, which is crucial for understanding and changing societal norms and expectations related to gender.

Moreover, Risman (2009) points out that doing gender—where people behave according to societal expectations for men or women—has been used so often that it is starting to lose its original, critical meaning. According to her, this overuse

suggests that every action, no matter how small, is seen as a reflection of gender which undermines the initial goal of critically examining gender and inequalities. As perceptions and norms around gender evolve, Risman emphasises the importance of observing and studying how people actively question and transform these taken-for-granted norms and expectations, a process she calls undoing gender.

This involves noticing when people act in ways that do not fit into the boxes of male or female behaviours, such as men doing things considered feminine and women doing things considered masculine. Risman (2009) suggests that there is a need to shift the focus from seeing every action as an expression of doing gender to paying more attention to actions that question or go against gendered norms. She believes that recognising and understanding these actions can lead to a society where gender is less dominant in defining a person's identity and abilities.

Building on the discussions by Deutsch (2007) and Risman (2009), which focus on undoing gender through questioning norms and reducing gender differences in social interactions, I turn to Kelan (2010), who brings a specific professional context into the debate. Kelan examined women's experiences in the ICT sector in Switzerland, where women face resistance due to not fitting into the gendered expectations of their field. This resistance stems from the perception that women in ICT are not conforming to societal norms of gender, given the masculine connotations of the ICT industry. Kelan argues that by expanding the notion of what it means to be an ICT professional, women can question and potentially alter these gender norms within their professional sphere. Despite dealing with obstacles linked to gender biases, women in ICT often see their work environment as gender-neutral, focusing on their identity as professionals first rather than being defined by gender. Kelan (2010:188) argues that "doing gender and undoing gender nearly overlap, with undoing gender appearing to involve a different way of doing gender".

Expanding the conversation further, Korvajärvi (2021) examined the processes of doing and undoing gender, as experienced by highly educated women working in research and innovation in Finland. She posits that engaging in these processes can both empower and hinder women, leading to outcomes that either support or undermine gender equity in workplaces and organisations. Her research uncovers a prevalent uncertainty among women about the significance of gender in their professional settings, often resulting in the belief that gender is irrelevant. This belief primarily stems from an absence of personal encounters with gender discrimination

and a limited perception of gender equality focused on achieving a numerical balance between men and women.

Moreover, Korvajärvi (2021) presents doing gender as a process filled with doubt and scepticism. Women find themselves between acknowledging the potential effects of gender and downplaying its significance by ignoring or denying its impact. When exploring undoing gender, she identifies efforts to reduce the importance of gender or questioning deeply rooted gender norms and binaries. Yet, these initiatives often get mixed up with larger cultural and structural dynamics perpetuating gender inequalities. This complicated relationship between doing and undoing gender highlights how gender issues can vary by situation and suggests the need for a deeper analysis of these dynamics in professional contexts.

In short, the above discussions on research conducted in North American and West European contexts explore the relationship between doing and undoing gender. Starting with West and Zimmerman's (1987) idea of doing gender, which goes beyond biology and emphasises gender as a social practice, Deutsch (2007) and Risman (2009) expand on this by promoting the idea of undoing gender. This concept aims to break societal norms and reduce gender inequalities through deliberate action and societal change. Additionally, Butler's (2004) notion of undoing gender contests the premise that gender expressions are rigidly confined by societal norms. Butler posits that gender extends beyond simple performance, which can be questioned and reshaped through interactions. She believes that while societal expectations can often limit how individuals express their gender, there is an opportunity to question and rethink these norms through interactions in social contexts. Thus, she encourages the reassessment of gender identities.

Collectively, all these discussions surrounding "doing" and "undoing" gender underscore the importance of recognising, questioning, and transforming gender to foster a more inclusive and equitable society. They reveal a critical understanding that gender is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic construct influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms, and individual actions, calling for a deeper examination of gender in perpetuating inequalities and the potential for its redefinition and undoing in various settings.

In my research, I analyse gendered experiences and the actions of women entrepreneurs using doing gender approaches and analyse how gender is done, performed and undone in KIE. This approach helps me to reveal how gender

expectations, stereotypes, and norms influence women's entrepreneurial careers in KIE. By examining gender expectations, stereotypes, and norms in the daily work lives of women entrepreneurs, I aim to explore how gender affects their initiatives and actions in KIE. My goal is to identify and highlight the persistent gender inequalities and biases in KIE and understand how these gendered performances either reinforce or question the existing inequalities. Additionally, this analysis and discussions on doing and undoing gender serve to build policy recommendations aiming to address and mitigate these inequalities.

Although there has been critical discussion on the stable gender binary produced in doing gender approaches (West and Zimmerman 1987), I find this binary perspective relevant for studying gender in relation to KIE. This study adopts a binary perspective due to the deeply rooted male/female structures within professional and entrepreneurial contexts. These binary categories continue to shape organizational norms, workplace interactions, and the dynamics of gender inequality in KIE. Therefore, while acknowledging the limitations and critiques of the gender binary, this study utilises West and Zimmerman's framework as it specifically pertains to the male/female dichotomy in professional settings. However, at the same time the idea of gender dichotomy includes variety within categories of male and female.

Next, I examine the influence of postfeminist ideas on women's experiences in KIE. This perspective guides my analysis and enhances my understanding of postfeminism's role in addressing gender inequalities. It explores how women entrepreneurs work within the constraints of the knowledge economy's gendered frameworks. By adopting postfeminist perspectives, I examine how women make personal decisions and develop solutions to deal with gendered inequalities and biases, aiming to possibly change them. I observe that the way women handle gendered conditions in KIE exhibit aspects from both doing gender and postfeminist ideas. The women in KIE seem to aim to undo gender - to make gender less significant and reduce its impact - and these kinds of interpretations are also included in postfeminist thinking. Therefore, by framing postfeminism as a mode of doing gender, I use both postfeminism, and doing and undoing gender as my analytical lens in this research.

4.3 Gender and postfeminism

Postfeminist discussions and perspectives have gained significant influence and visibility in cultural and media contexts. They have shaped how gender and equality are understood in contemporary societies. Additionally, they have extended postfeminism's influence to the workplace (Gill 2008; Gill et al. 2017). In essence, postfeminism serves as a lens through which researchers in organisation and management studies can comprehend the dynamics of gender in contemporary workplaces. It is characterised by a focus on individualism and choice, a departure from structural explanations of inequality and a rejection of both sexism and feminism (Gill et al. 2017). Postfeminism, which emerged in response to the collective and political nature of second-wave feminism, aligns with broader socio-cultural shifts, particularly the rise of neoliberalism.

The intersection of postfeminism and neoliberal ideology has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention, with studies by Banet-Weiser (2018), Gill (2008), Gill et al. (2017), and McRobbie (2009) highlighting a convergence between the two. Neoliberalism, an economic and political philosophy emphasising free markets, individualism, and minimal government intervention, aligns with postfeminism in various ways (Berglund et al. 2017; Gill 2008). Both postfeminism and neoliberalism emphasise individualism, rejecting external influences, and promote an enterprising, self-regulating subject that actively makes choices and reinvents itself (Berglund et al. 2017). However, the emphasis on individualism and market solutions in both postfeminism and neoliberalism poses obstacles to gender equality, often neglecting structural inequalities and collective solutions to social problems (Lewis et al. 2017). Gill (2016) argues that postfeminism, aligned with neoliberalism, tends to overlook systemic inequalities, focusing on individual empowerment and choice. By emphasising individualisation and personal responsibility, postfeminism—shaped by neoliberal influences—can reinforce gendered norms and expectations. Recognising these dynamics is crucial for understanding and addressing gender inequalities in KIE.

Furthermore, scholars argue that there is a need to investigate how the contemporary political, economic, and socio-cultural backdrop, specifically postfeminism and neoliberalism, the two dominant contemporary ideologies, influence the construction of individual efforts to enact and confront gender norms, examine how

women manage the impact of neoliberal organisational systems and cultures that continue to limit their access to equal opportunities (Adamson 2016).

For instance, Baker and Kelan (2019) explore how, despite facing unfair treatment and limited opportunities, many executive women continue to believe in the neoliberal ideal that hard work and determination lead to success. They illustrate how women executives unconsciously cope with the psychological consequences of neoliberalism through interconnected processes of splitting and blaming. Baker and Kelan (2019) discuss repudiation, which refers to executive women distancing themselves from undesirable aspects of the workplace, effectively denying or ignoring the existence of gender inequality. In contrast, individualisation, involves executive women attributing their failures or lack of success to themselves or other women, thereby individualising failure and responsibility for change within a neoliberal workplace that prioritises individual achievement over collective action (Baker and Kelan 2019).

4.4 Postfeminism in work life

Organizations and professions are often presented as gender-neutral; however, persistent stereotypes and barriers remain, including vertical and horizontal gender divisions as well as the gender pay gap (Acker 1990, 2006; Bailyn 2003; Kanter 1977; Lewis 2006). Postfeminism is increasingly used as a concept in organizational studies to examine structures of discrimination and inequality (Kelan 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Lewis 2014) and to analyse its themes of individualism, choice, and self-improvement (Gill 2016; Lewis 2014). While post-feminism was initially confined to discussions about the media, it has expanded to include work (Kelan 2009), organisations (Lewis et al. 2017), and the cultural and creative industries (Scharff 2012).

Gill (2014) examines the experiences of cultural workers in the creative industries and explores how postfeminism influences perceptions of gender inequalities. She critiques postfeminism for masking gender inequalities, including the glass ceiling, promotion gaps that hinder women from reaching top positions despite equal qualifications, pay disparities, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership status. She also highlights the difficulties cultural workers face in balancing work and life, as societal expectations often place a burden on women. Additionally, Gill (2014) highlights that cultural workers often deny experiencing sexism and gender inequality. She links this denial to a desire to appear successful and empowered,

rather than as victims. However, she argues that this refusal to acknowledge systemic gender inequalities prevents discussions about sexism. Her later work Gill et al. (2017) further supports this, showing how gender inequalities are commonly accepted in workplace.

These approaches promote postfeminist thinking that rejects both sexism and feminism while perpetuating gender inequalities. Gender inequalities are often seen as something from the past (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009) or framed as problems located elsewhere, such as in specific countries (Scharff 2012) or not in the present organisation or work context. As a result, women's experiences of gender inequality are downplayed. Additionally, the focus on individual choice minimizes explanations of inequality rooted in social structures. For example, Ikonen and Korvajärvi (2023) argue that in the research and innovation in Finnish context, choice can obscure ongoing inequalities faced by women, particularly in balancing work and family responsibilities. The emphasis on individual choice may hinder collective efforts to address gender inequalities and promote equal opportunities for everyone, including those with caregiving responsibilities. Finally, the status quo is accepted as the norm, reinforcing the notion that gender inequalities in the workplace are just accepted as normal (Gill et al. 2017).

Gill et al. (2017) critique the normalization of gender inequalities presented as individual choice within postfeminism. In contrast, Kelan's (2007) research on ICT workers in Switzerland and Kelan and Jones' (2010) study on MBA (masters of business administration) programs in the UK explore how individuals perceive and respond to gender discrimination. Their work also examines how contemporary organizations are portrayed as gender-neutral. Gender discrimination is often seen as rare, and when it does happen, it is considered a personal problem that individuals must overcome on their own. This aligns with the postfeminist climate, where women's belief in their equality often leads to the invisibility of inequality.

As a result, it becomes difficult to recognize and address structural and cultural sexism. This is one of the ways in which discussions of gender inequality are often avoided in organizations that are presumed to be gender-equal and neutral, where structural and cultural sexism is denied (Gill et al. 2017; Lewis and Simpson 2017; Ronen 2018).

Similarly, research on entrepreneurs (Lewis 2006) and academics (Bailyn 2003) shows that entrepreneurs often overlook the gendered structure of their work

environments. Many individuals in these careers claim that gender does not matter and deny the possibility of gender discrimination in their workplaces. This phenomenon is widespread across various organisational settings (Jorgensen 2002), where gender inequality is treated as an individual issue rather than a systemic problem. Gender becomes invisible in work situations, and individuals no longer perceive themselves as gendered actors (Korvajärvi 2021; Lewis 2006, 2014; Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). This phenomenon, referred to as "gender fatigue" by Kelan (2009), reinforces the perception of workplaces as gender-neutral despite the persistence of gender discrimination in work life. Korvajärvi (2021:14) characterises this as "an affective stance towards gender," which leads workers to regard gender issues as irrelevant, although not non-existent. Moreover, Korvajärvi's (2021) research further shows how, despite awareness of gender discrimination, many individuals tend to minimise the influence of gender, frequently attributing this to their lack of direct discrimination experiences. This body of work highlights a tendency where gender discrimination is acknowledged, but its impact is downplayed, often due to personal experiences and a widespread sense of "gender fatigue".

Building on the phenomenon of gender fatigue and its implications for workplace dynamics, Ronen's (2018) study also provides insights how postfeminist ideas operate within the design field, influencing gender norms, expectations, and inequalities. Ronen's (2018) study reveals that gendered stereotypes rationalise gender segregation within the design profession. For instance, some designers argue that women excel in designing soft and emotionally driven products, while men are better suited for complex and technically oriented products. Ronen's findings suggest that postfeminist ideas may help sustain gender inequality through gendered stereotypes.

Integrating the denial of gender inequalities under postfeminist ideas with the process of doing and undoing gender offers a lens to understand gender dynamics in KIE. The connection between postfeminism—which focuses on individual choice, personal freedom, and the idea that gender equality has been achieved—and the ways gender's influence is recognized and questioned, as described by Korvajärvi (2021), highlights the complexity of gender relations. The fluctuation between doing and undoing gender among individuals, particularly in contexts presumed to be gender equal, highlights the contradictions inherent in postfeminist ideas. These contradictions manifest in the varied ways in which individuals and organisations

manage gender dynamics, from downplaying gender's relevance to attempting to change gender imbalances.

Furthermore, the postfeminist emphasis on individual achievement, particularly in terms of career and personal success, may unintentionally perpetuate existing inequalities. This focus can weaken collective efforts to fight systemic oppression because it places the responsibility of overcoming gendered barriers on individual women, instead of addressing the societal structures that create these barriers. This paradox within postfeminism thus continues to support the norms it claims to be reshaping (Ahl et al. 2018).

4.5 Summary

In summary, the discussion on doing gender and undoing gender shows the complex relationship between societal norms, individual actions, and gender. Rooted in the works of West and Zimmerman (1987), Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), and subsequent scholars like Deutsch (2007), Risman (2009), Kelan (2007, 2009) and Korvajärvi (2021), doing and undoing gender emphasises the active construction and performance of gender within various contexts, including professional settings like KIE. Doing gender refers to the ways individuals actively express their gender within societal norms, while undoing gender questions and seeks to diminish these norms to reduce gender inequalities. By analysing gendered experiences and actions in KIE, my research aims to uncover how gender expectations influence women entrepreneurs and perpetuate inequalities.

Postfeminism, characterized by its focus on individualism and choice, is critiqued for masking structural gender inequalities and reinforcing norms under the view of empowerment. This critique extends to the workplace, where postfeminist sensibilities (Gill 2007) lead to the denial or minimisation of gender discrimination and a lack of recognition of the need for systemic change.

Moreover, the concept of "gender fatigue" (Kelan 2009) reflects a broader trend of denying or downplaying systemic gender issues, fostering an illusion of gender neutrality in various professional settings. This phenomenon enhances the difficulties in recognising and addressing persistent gender inequalities despite evidence of their ongoing impact on women's experiences in the workplace. The discussions highlight a critical tension within postfeminist thought. While it claims to offer a framework for understanding and managing gendered biases and

inequalities in contemporary contexts, it also risks perpetuating the inequalities it seeks to address. By emphasising individual choice and achievement without sufficiently accounting for structural barriers and systemic discrimination, postfeminism may help sustain gender inequalities rather than resolve them. Therefore, these discussions call for a more critical examination of postfeminism and its implications for gender equality. They underscore the importance of integrating an understanding of structural inequalities and the need for collective action into discussions of gender and empowerment, questioning the limitations of an individualistic approach to addressing gender inequalities in contemporary societies and workplaces.

In my research, I explore the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs within the neoliberal knowledge economy, focusing on KIE. Utilising postfeminism as an analytical lens, I investigate how these women manage the gendered social structures. My analysis incorporates the concepts of doing gender, as articulated by scholars like West and Zimmerman (1987), Gherardi (1994), Martin (2003), and Korvajärvi (2021), alongside the notion of undoing gender, as detailed by Butler (2004) and Deutsch (2007). This examination aims to show how the various practices either maintain or seek to reduce the significance of gender in professional environments. These practices include efforts to deemphasise gender, diminish the impact of gender biases, and adopt gender-neutral language.

By using the insights from postfeminist thinking and doing and undoing gender perspective, my goal is to illuminate the dynamic processes through which gender is both constructed and deconstructed within the KIE. This perspective enables a critical exploration of the persistence of gendered stereotypes and the ways women entrepreneurs use to overcome, resist, and occasionally perpetuate the gendered biases and inequalities within KIE. In the following chapter, I present the methodology of my research.

5 METHODOLOGY, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In this research, my primary objective is to explore the influence of gender on the experiences of women entrepreneurs and the ways for managing the gendered inequalities and biases prevalent in KIE. My research aims to uncover the commonalities and distinctions in the gendered experiences of Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs.

I based my analysis on the following two research questions:

1) In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered?

2) In what ways do women entrepreneurs manage gendered inequalities in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in Turkey and Finland?

This chapter presents and discusses the methodological approaches used in the research process. Firstly, I explain the process of selecting participants, detailing the criteria and considerations that guided the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in KIE in my study. Secondly, I introduce the research participants and their backgrounds. Thirdly, I explore the semi-structured interview and thematic analysis as a research approach. I outline the process of analysing interview data. This analysis involved the development of analytical categories and the generation of conceptual frameworks. Fourthly, I integrate insights from both feminist methodologies and reflections on the research process into the discussion, explaining the theoretical foundations and my reflective stance during the research. Finally, I address the ethical dimensions of my research process, highlighting considerations that emerged during my study.

5.1 Selection of research participants

For this study, I conducted twenty-nine semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey in 2019 and 2020. At the beginning of the research, I planned to select participants only from Tampere in Finland and the City of Bursa in Turkey because both Tampere and Bursa are centres of knowledge-intensive industries with a strong manufacturing heritage.

According to Business Tampere (2019b), Tampere has developed from an industrial town in Finland into a modern centre of advanced technology. Today, it features a diverse range of industries, including mechanical engineering, automation, information and communication technologies, health and biotechnology, as well as the pulp and paper industry, footwear manufacturing, cotton production, and education. Now known for its advanced technology and research, Tampere is establishing innovation centres and platforms in close collaboration with universities and research institutions. These research and development practices support local businesses in shaping their concepts, processes, products, and services.

In Turkish history, the first wool, cotton, and silk fabrics were woven in Bursa in 1938. Bursa was also home to Turkey's first organized industrial zone, and in the 1950s, the country's first automobile factory was established there. Today, Bursa's leading sectors are automotive, textile, machinery and metal, information and communication technologies, health, energy, furniture, food, and energy. It has three universities, two technological development zones, one technology development region, an innovation and design platform, and technology transfer offices. Therefore, Bursa plays an important role in the Turkish economy (Toksöz 2016).

In this sense, the industrial heritage of Tampere and Bursa could provide an opportunity to examine the commonalities and differences in the experiences of women entrepreneurs in my study. However, due to unexpected difficulties in reaching the research participants in Finland, I have gone through different stages of the sample selection process in two countries. Below, due to the differences in the participant selection process, I cover this process on a country-by-country basis.

In Finland, in the first phase of sample selection, I identified the names and contact information of women entrepreneurs through the Business Tampere[8].

In the second stage, I emailed research invitation letters to women entrepreneurs who work in the knowledge-intensive sector. However, I did not receive any responses. Subsequently, I attempted to reach potential participants through the Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Tampere, but I did not receive any responses from that source either. As a result, I decided to visit some of the women entrepreneurs at their workplaces, obtaining their names and addresses from the City of Tampere's website, to explain my research aim. This initiative led to the identification of the first five participants. The women entrepreneurs I visited agreed to participate in my research. The personal visits to their workplaces and establishing personal connections played a crucial role in initiating the interviews in Finland.

Additionally, my supervisor was involved in a collaborative research project on gender equality in regional development (Vehviläinen and Valaskivi 2022). Through this project, she facilitated more contacts with collaborators, including the Regional Council of Tampere, the Labour Union of Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland, and a female entrepreneur in Finland, who all helped make contact with women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, during my research, some interviewees recommended other women entrepreneurs for interviews, which positively impacted participant recruitment.

Due to the difficulties in finding a sufficient number of participants directly involved in KIE in Tampere, I expanded my research area to several cities across Finland. This flexibility gave me a broader geographical reach within Finland, enriching the KIE diversity represented in my study. In total, I interviewed thirteen women entrepreneurs, all of whom are engaged in KIE. In Finland, ten interviews were conducted in person, and the remaining three were conducted via Skype at the request of the participants.

In the Turkish phase of the research, as originally planned, I began with the city of Bursa when selecting Turkish sample. Before travelling to Turkey for face-to-face interviews, I took preliminary steps by gathering the names and contact information

[8] Business Tampere is the economic development agency of the Tampere region, promoting investments and creating an attractive environment for sustainable business in the region (Business Tampere 2019a).

of women entrepreneurs in the technology sector. This information was obtained by reviewing the webpage of the Bursa Uludağ University Technology Development Centre.

Upon my arrival in Bursa, I contacted the management of the technology development zone, a place known for fostering KIE. I briefed them about my research, focusing on the role of gender in KIE. They kindly assisted by providing me with the names and contact details of women entrepreneurs whose businesses are integral to the technology centre and whose firms are actively engaged in KIE.

Subsequently, I reached out to these women entrepreneurs, providing them with a detailed overview of my research objectives, particularly emphasising a focus on KIE. I explained how their experiences and insights would be valuable in understanding the impact of gender within this specific entrepreneurial context. I requested appointments for interviews, and the majority of these women entrepreneurs, recognising the importance of this research in highlighting gender perspectives in KIE, willingly agreed to participate in my study. Their involvement was crucial, as they represent a dynamic and critical sector where knowledge intensity, innovation, and technological advancement are at the forefront of entrepreneurial activity.

Additionally, my status as a Turkish researcher based in Finland proved advantageous in my search for participants in Turkey. As I explained at the beginning of this dissertation Finland's reputation as a role model for gender equality was well known and generated interest among women entrepreneurs in Turkey. All the interviews I conducted during the first phase on the Turkish side were face-to-face.

Unfortunately, the later stages of my fieldwork in Turkey coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in travel restrictions. At that time, I was residing in Finland. COVID-19 gave me an opportunity to examine how the pandemic affected gender and entrepreneurship—particularly in the context of the unprecedented shift to remote work during this period. Therefore, I explored the experiences of Turkish women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining how the necessity of remote work during this period intersected with their entrepreneurial careers. Consequently, I adapted my methodology to conduct the remaining interviews with Turkish women entrepreneurs online, using platforms like Skype, WhatsApp video calls, and phone.

To recognize the diverse nature of KIE across different regions and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the KIE in Turkey, I identified technology development zones in various cities using online research. These zones are essential centres for KIE because they focus on innovation, technology, and knowledge-intensive businesses. I utilised online resources to systematically identify the universities associated with these technology development zones on a city-by-city basis. After this web research, I prepared a list of women entrepreneurs' names, sectors, and contact information from the web pages of the selected technology development regions. This list specifically focused on women-led firms in sectors that reflect the attributes of KIE, such as technology industries, innovative services, and businesses.

Subsequently, I emailed and phoned the women entrepreneurs on this list, inviting them to participate in my research. My communication emphasized the focus on KIE and their significance to understanding gender dynamics within this sector. I interviewed those who expressed interest, arranging meeting dates according to their preference for a phone call, WhatsApp video call, or Skype session. In total, I conducted interviews with sixteen Turkish women entrepreneurs.

Finding the interviewees in Finland was a long and challenging process, and being a foreigner myself potentially caused difficulties in this regard. Also, some women entrepreneurs did not want to participate in my research, stating that their English skills were not good enough. In this process, my supervisor's connections helped me reach the participants. On the contrary, I did not encounter significant difficulties in reaching participants in Turkey. Interestingly, conducting my research in Finland seemed to arouse the interest of Turkish participants. While some declined to participate, most Turkish participants I contacted responded positively, and interviews were conducted in Turkish.

5.2 Research participants

Among the participants from Turkey and Finland, Finnish women entrepreneurs were active in KIE sectors such as software development, consultancy for research and development projects, the health sector, and marketing on product development. Turkish women entrepreneurs demonstrated a strong presence in KIE fields like energy efficiency, software development, consultancy services related to industrial technologies, and marketing, including mechanical product development.

The educational and professional backgrounds of these entrepreneurs demonstrate their alignment with KIE. Both Finnish and Turkish entrepreneurs held master's degrees in various fields, including engineering, medical studies, and business. This high level of education is a hallmark of KIE, as it often requires advanced knowledge and expertise. Moreover, in both countries, these women entrepreneurs applied their education and work experience while also drawing on a broader set of skills and insights developed over time. All participants had relevant prior work experience, often in roles that helped them gain a comprehensive understanding of business and innovation before starting their entrepreneurial careers. This diverse expertise played a crucial role in the development and innovative drive of their entrepreneurial firms, particularly in their involvement in research and development activities central to KIE.

At the time of the research, most respondents owned their companies as CEO or co-partners. In the Turkish context, six of the sixteen participants worked as co-partners in family businesses, while the remaining ten female entrepreneurs managed their own companies, either as CEOs or with male co-partners. In the Finnish context, three out of the thirteen participants worked as CEOs. Six Finnish female entrepreneurs worked alone, meaning they did not have employees other than themselves. Four women entrepreneurs had male co-partners.

At the time of the interviews, twenty-one participants were married and had one or two children; two were single without children, and four were divorced. The data covers a broad age range from 25 to 60, showcasing a diverse group of participants across various stages of their professional lives. This diversity emphasises the range of experience and perspectives across different sectors within the dataset, such as engineering, medical, software, and consultancy. Women entrepreneurs categorised as "25-30" represent the youngest age group in this dataset. Participants within this group are at the early stages of their careers in entrepreneurship and include Emel, Özlem, Arzu from Turkey, and Laura and Ella, from Finland.

The dataset also shows a significant number of participants in the middle age ranges, specifically "31-35" and "36-40". The "31-35" group features Burcu, Defne, Ece, Didem, İdil from Turkey, Lisa, and Heidi from Finland. The "36-40" group includes Melek from Turkey, Marianna, Elina, and Olivia from Finland. These individuals are likely to be in the mid-stages of their careers, possessing a mix of experience.

In the "41-45" range, participants include Sibel, Elif, Esin from Turkey, and Elea from Finland. This group represents individuals who are further into their careers, bringing a substantial level of expertise and experience.

On the other end of the range, the "46-50" category includes Selin and Beste from Turkey, while the "56-60" category highlights the oldest participants nearing or reaching 60 years. These participants, including Ulla and Kirsi from Finland, offer a wealth of experience accumulated over decades of work. Their long-standing presence in their fields provides them with a deep understanding of industry trends, difficulties, and opportunities. Table 1, below, present information on the research participants. The names of the participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality. This naming policy is consistently applied throughout the study.

Table 1: Information on research participants

	Country	Name	Age	Education	Sector	Marital Status	Number of children
1	Turkey	Burcu	31-35	Engineering	Energy and environment	Married	1
2	Turkey	Emel	25-30	Engineering	Chemical Industry-cosmetics	Married	0
3	Turkey	Defne	31-35	Engineering	Medical industry	Married	0
4	Turkey	Özlem	25-30	Engineering	ICT	Married	0
5	Turkey	Sibel	41-45	Medical	Software	Married	2
6	Turkey	Ece	31-35	Engineering	Software	Married	0
7	Turkey	Melek	36-40	Engineering	Defence industry	Married	2
8	Turkey	Damla	51-55	Engineering	Software	Married	1
9	Turkey	Arzu	25-30	Engineering	Software	Single	0
10	Turkey	Elif	41-45	Engineering	Mobile Gaming	Divorced	1

11	Turkey	Didem	31-35	Engineering	Agricultural production	Divorced	0
12	Turkey	Selin	46-50	Business	Consultancy	Married	2
13	Turkey	Bahar	51-55	Engineering	Consultancy	Married	2
14	Turkey	İdil	31-35	Business	Consultancy	Married	1
15	Turkey	Esin	41-45	Engineering	Software	Married	1
16	Turkey	Beste	46-50	Engineering	Consultancy	Married	2
17	Finland	Marjukka	51-55	Business	Software	Married	1
18	Finland	Ulla	56-60	Engineering	Consultancy	married	2
19	Finland	Marianna	36-40	Engineering	Consultancy	Married	0
20	Finland	Laura	25-30	Economics	Software	Single	0
21	Finland	Elina	36-40	Medical	Software	married	2
22	Finland	Tuija	51-55	Medical	Health sector	married	0
23	Finland	Lisa	31-35	Media	Health sector	partner	0
24	Finland	Olivia	36-40	Marketing	Marketing	Divorced	2
25	Finland	Kirsi	56-60	Business	Marketing	Married	2
26	Finland	Heidi	31-35	Economics	Software	Married	2
27	Finland	Elea	41-45	Engineering	Consultancy	Married	0
28	Finland	Aino	51-55	Engineering	Marketing	Divorced	2
29	Finland	Ella	25-30	Engineering	Marketing	Single	0

As mentioned earlier, the participants in my research come from various KIE sectors, reflecting the diversity of KIE in both Turkey and Finland. Many entrepreneurs, particularly in Finland, have engineering backgrounds, with strong representation in knowledge-intensive fields such as ICT, software development, defence, and healthcare. These industries require advanced technical and scientific expertise, aligning well with the concept of KIE.

Healthcare and software sectors, especially those developing medical software, are prominent among participants, as their enterprises rely on specialized knowledge, continuous research and development, and ongoing innovation. Additionally, entrepreneurs are active in sectors such as energy and the environment, chemical industry-cosmetics, agricultural production, mobile gaming, and marketing. Each of these fields involves a high degree of specialized expertise and a strong focus on developing new products or services, further illustrating the broad scope of KIE.

The involvement of several participants in marketing services like market research, data analysis and consultancy services, such as project consultancy on research and development projects, business consultancy, and specialised fields like engineering and health consultancy, underscores the critical role of KIBS within this dataset. As discussed in Chapter 3, KIBS are characterised by their reliance on professional knowledge and expertise, making them crucial actors in the knowledge economy. These services not only provide expert advice but also transfer knowledge, foster innovation, and solve complex problems for clients. Therefore, KIBS facilitate knowledge flow and innovation within and across industries.

5.3 Semi-structured interview and thematic analysis as a research approach

This section focuses on interviews and data collection in Finland and Turkey from 2019 to 2020. I further explain the steps in the interview and analysis process, outlining details such as interview duration, format, and themes explored in these interactions. Additionally, I discuss the details of transcription, language choices, and the reasons for opting for thematic analysis (TA) as the chosen qualitative analytical method.

This study is based on 29 semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs—16 from Turkey and 13 from Finland—all active in KIE. Interview research, as described by Creswell (2012), serves as a tool to grasp and assess the personal perspectives of individuals or groups on a specific social or human issue. This

involves focusing on how participants perceive a situation, with the data interpreted based on their lived experiences and understanding of that particular context.

In feminist research, interviewing is a widely used qualitative method for gathering rich data, even with a limited number of respondents (Josselson 2013). It provides an opportunity to explore their perspectives on various issues. In semi-structured interviews, although there are specific topics to be covered, interviewers may not follow the schedule precisely in order. They may ask different questions that are not included in the guide as a response to interviewees' replies. King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that flexibility is the key requirement in the interviewing process. It is helpful to obtain more detailed information and make it possible to ask additional questions to carry out a comprehensive examination of the research topic and explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic (Silverman 2014). It allows the interviewee to lead the discussion in various directions (King and Horrocks 2010:35). As Reinharz and Davidman (1992:19) point out, "through interviewing, researchers can gather people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words". This is especially important in feminist research because women's voices have often been ignored or suppressed throughout history. Therefore, I chose semi-structured interviews as a method to explore women entrepreneurs' gendered working life experiences.

Interviews lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours. Twenty face-to-face interviews and nine online (WhatsApp video call, skype, or phone) were conducted. The interview themes consist of six parts: educational background, entrepreneurship and work history, current situation of the enterprise, work networks, entrepreneurial supports, and combining family and work-life. The Turkish interviews were conducted in Turkish, which made it easier for me, as a native speaker, to engage in the interviews and interact with the participants. The Finnish interviews were held in English. Since English is not the mother tongue of Finnish participants nor mine, some of the accounts and statements were repeated and paraphrased several times to make sure that I interpreted the participants' words correctly. Therefore, the language barrier with the Finnish participants sometimes hindered smooth communication and interaction during the interviews.

I transcribed each interview myself after it was conducted. This made it easier to review the interview, conduct an initial thematic analysis, and reflect on what I had learned. The Finnish interviews were transcribed in English, while the Turkish

interviews were transcribed in Turkish. While writing the analysis, I translated the Turkish citations into English.

I employed thematic analysis (TA) to analyse the interview data in this study. I chose this qualitative method for its suitability in examining the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE across both countries. Thematic analysis facilitates an understanding of the commonalities and differences within women entrepreneurs' experiences, providing insights into recurring patterns and themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), TA is a method used to systematically identify and interpret themes or patterns in data. It entails categorising and interpreting data to reveal commonalities and differences in participants' experiences or viewpoints (Clarke and Braun 2017). TA consists of stages to establish a thematic framework, analyse data based on this framework, and interpret the results. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021:39), the process of TA develops through the following steps: Step 1 familiarisation, Step 2 coding, Step 3 generating themes, Step 4 reviewing themes, Step 5 defining and naming themes, and Step 6 writing up the analysis.

In the first step of my analysis, defined as "familiarisation" by Braun and Clarke (2021:39), I read and re-read the interview transcriptions to develop a comprehensive understanding of the material. In the next step, I identified key phrases and sentences within the data, referred to as codes (Braun and Clarke 2021). An example of a key sentence is: "People often have expectations about how women should behave in business," which formed a subtheme of "gendered workplace experiences (e.g., gender bias and stereotypes)". Thus, I defined each subtheme by summarizing key sentences and phrases. Sub-themes were further combined into themes, serving as the titles of my analysis chapters (see Table 2).

In my research, the identification of key phrases and sentences and the emergence of themes and sub-themes, as presented in Table 2, were derived not only from the data itself but also from the theoretical insights of doing gender and postfeminism as well as my knowledge of gender inequalities in KIEs. In my analysis, these themes and sub-themes construct an analytical tool for chapters 6 and 7. In Chapters 6 and 7, I found that some subthemes were discussed more than others and were not relevant in every interview. Therefore, instead of presenting every participant, I focus on the variety of themes and perspectives. I also highlight differences in how often certain themes came up and clarify whether they were mentioned by Turkish or Finnish participants.

Table 2: Themes of the thematic analysis

Detailed in chapter	Themes	Subthemes
6.1	Gender inequality and flexibility as motivators for entrepreneurship	Gender inequality experiences in previous paid employment: - Barriers to career advancement -Gendered workplace experiences (e.g. gender bias and stereotypes) A quest for flexibility: -Desire for independence from work schedules -Freedom to manage one's business - Work-life balance
6.2	Gendered expertise in male-dominated entrepreneurship	Gender biases in professional expertise: -Doubts about women's expertise -Subtle gender biases in workplace interactions Career choices and gendered work environments
6.3	Female gender as an advantage	Utilising gendered attributes in KIE: -Multitasking, empathy, patience, and social skills as strengths - Female gender as differentiation and memorability
6.4	Gendered networks and funding	-Limited opportunities for women entrepreneurs -Recognition of the significance of female networks -Importance of previous business relationships for networking for business development Gender (in)equality in access to financial support -Reliance on personal savings as a fundamental financial resource -Availability of national support programs for (women's) entrepreneurship
7.1	Gender inequality elsewhere	Gender inequalities perceived as elsewhere: -In other countries, regions and cultures, -In the past -In other sectors
7.2	Personal responsibility	Downplaying gender issues: personality instead of gender Attribution of discrimination to individual actions Emphasis on personal characteristics in shaping experiences Framing experiences in terms of age and lack of expertise rather than gender
7.3	Individual choices and criticism	Believing in an individual capacity for making free choices Reshaping career paths and entrepreneurial spaces Reinforcement of gender norms in business practices Reframing inequalities as normal and unavoidable (rationalization) Criticising other women entrepreneurs in KIE

The doing gender approaches were central to my analysis of the first research question: In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered? I actively searched for accounts where gender was not only a background characteristic but where I interpreted it as actively done, performed, or even undone in entrepreneurship. This involved identifying instances where participants were conforming to or questioning gender within their entrepreneurial careers. Also, I examined how postfeminist ideas were present in the accounts about overcoming gendered biases in KIE related to my second research question: In what ways do women entrepreneurs manage gendered inequalities in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in Turkey and Finland? During my analysis, I paid close attention to women entrepreneurs' experiences that showed active involvement with gender—whether it was being openly expressed, shown, or questioned. Considering how gender is handled in different situations allowed me to integrate both doing/undoing gender and postfeminist ideas into my research and analysis. This approach provided a detailed view of how gendered biases and inequalities are managed in KIE, such as in accessing networks and resources and dealing with gendered stereotypes related to expertise.

Moreover, my research covers data from Finland and Turkey, giving me a chance to reflect on how different cultural, economic, and social environments affect women entrepreneurs in this field. By analysing themes, I found patterns that were common in both countries. Also, the structural and institutional differences between Finland and Turkey, such as legal frameworks, support systems for entrepreneurs, and levels of gender equality, are considered in my analysis. This perspective of two different countries provides an insight how external conditions shape women's entrepreneurial experiences in KIE.

5.4 Research relationships in two cultures

Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002:4) argue that it is difficult to clearly define research as feminist because there are no strict rules for what makes research feminist. Moreover, it is difficult to classify some methods as feminist and others as not, since there is no single standard for conducting feminist research. Nevertheless, it can be argued that feminist research focuses on understanding and highlighting women's lives, and experiences. It works to uncover hidden knowledge and gendered stereotypes and biases about gender. By questioning the systems and ideas that sustain inequality, feminist research focuses on empowering women and other

marginalized groups to support efforts for social change and justice (Hesse-Biber et al. 2007:4; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). In that sense, I attached my study to feminist research.

Also, the role of the researcher is complicated in qualitative studies since human instruments rather than questionnaires or machines are used for data collection (Lincoln and Denzin 2003). Moreover, "the researcher's position as an insider or outsider is an epistemological question because researcher's relationship with the participant affects the knowledge produced during the interaction" (Hayfield and Huxley 2015:91). In this study, I find myself navigating the dual roles of insider and outsider. I embraced an insider's perspective, not because of personal identification as an entrepreneur— which is not the case—but because I share the same social culture as the Turkish participants. In addition to knowing the cultural norms of the Turkish society where I grew up, the knowledge I gained from women's studies courses during my undergraduate and master's education helped me understand the existing gender perspective in Turkish society. Furthermore, my experience working in a public institution that developed support programs for entrepreneurs in Turkey before my doctoral studies provided me with insight into women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in general. However, I also consider myself an outsider because I had not been immersed in Finland's cultural and social structure prior to my research, leaving me largely unfamiliar with this culture.

Hayfield and Huxley (2015:92) argue that there has been much discussion on the advantage and disadvantages of both insider and outsider researcher positions. Commonly, it is argued that an insider positionality refers to the researcher's role when conducting research within communities or groups to which they belong. This involves being a member of the group being studied, sharing an identity, language, and common professional experiences with the study participants, which can provide insights and access to culturally specific information (Asselin 2003; Kanuha 2000). Such engagement with membership status often enhances the researchers' credibility and access to valuable insights. Researchers gain quicker and more comprehensive acceptance from their participants due to their insider status. Consequently, participants tend to be more welcoming with insider researchers, potentially leading to a richer and more in-depth collection of data (Dwyer and Buchle 2009; Merriam et al. 2001).

While being an outsider in research can offer valuable advantages, it is often perceived as a challenging position due to difficulties in gaining access and the potential for misunderstandings and misinterpretations when studying a group with which one is not familiar (Merriam et al. 2001:411). In my situation, conducting research in Finland, where I am not a native but have had a prolonged stay, offers a perspective on Finnish society. However, it also brings potential limitations. For example, cultural understanding goes beyond my academic knowledge. Cultural knowledge involves understanding everyday practices, unspoken norms, and hidden social cues that might not be fully articulated in literature. Living in another culture provides experience but may not always lead to a deep understanding of these cultural aspects. This gap can result in a lack of understanding of the current cultural context. As an outsider, I missed the insider perspectives of being socialised and raised within a particular culture. These perspectives are often important to an understanding of the attitudes and values that guide behaviour and social norms. Despite my extensive examination of the cultural and political background of Finnish gender equality through a comprehensive pre-field literature review, it is important to recognise the potential limitation that my understanding of the context may still be incomplete. Being an outsider can sometimes mean a lack of emotional connection to specific cultural or historical aspects, which might be crucial for a deeper understanding. This emotional distance can impact the interpretation of social and cultural phenomena. Nevertheless, it is important to balance the benefits of being an outsider with its potential limitations. Being an outsider also requires more time and effort for cultural immersion and understanding to ensure meaningful and respectful research.

Sometimes, my research raised several interesting and complicated issues. Although most Finnish interviews took place in a friendly environment, one of the interviews that impacted me the most was the judgmental attitude I encountered as a researcher. During my interview with one of the Finnish participants, who believed that gender inequality exists only in Muslim countries, I had a negative experience as a researcher from Turkey (a Muslim country) due to the repeated judgments: "There is inequality in your country, but not in ours".

The incident I described above during the interview with a Finnish participant highlights the complex dynamics of power relations in research, particularly when I as a researcher, belong to a group that is being discussed or compared unfavourably. In this case, I, the researcher from a Turkish background, felt a sense of

disempowerment during the interview. The participant's repeated judgments about my country's gender equality situation have made me feel defensive or marginalised, impacting my perceived authority as the researcher. The participant, however, seemed to assert a certain level of authority or superiority in the conversation, driven by her belief that Finland is more gender-equal than Turkey. This perception of superiority led to a power imbalance, where the participant felt entitled to challenge my authority as the researcher by expressing opinions and making judgments. This incident potentially affected the objectivity of my research. For instance, the participant's perception of superiority influenced her responses to interview questions and interactions during interviews. As a result, the interview situation was uncomfortable and less conversational.

As a researcher, it is essential to maintain neutrality during interviews to create a safe space for participants to share their perspectives without feeling judged or biased. This approach fosters open dialogue and ensures the integrity of the research process (Letherby 2003). However, I experience a conflict when dealing with judgments about my country during interviews. On the one hand, I needed to uphold my role as a neutral facilitator, but on the other hand, addressing these judgments ethically was crucial. Navigating these power dynamics required careful consideration to ensure the validity and integrity of the research findings. However, this incidence influenced how I framed questions and guided the conversation. I stopped asking most of the questions and ended the interview early, resulting in less information.

The primary methodological difficulty I encountered with Turkish participants was their tendency to ask me questions about my opinions and experiences during the interviews. While this can indicate a positive connection being established, it is essential for me, as the interviewer, to maintain control over the situation. The main concern is that if I simply agree and share my views, I could unintentionally bias the interviewee's subsequent responses, similar to what can occur with leading questions.

To avoid bias, I approached their questions about my experiences by providing brief, neutral, and objective responses. I acknowledged their inquiries respectfully while refraining from sharing personal opinions or experiences that could have influenced their responses. This helped ensure that the interview remained unbiased and that the participants' responses were not influenced by my own perspectives.

In this section, I introduced and clarified the issues that have influenced the conduct of this study. The knowledge generated by my research is primarily derived from

interactions with participants in the field and subsequently through the analysis phase. Additionally, ethical guidelines and considerations form an integral part of the methodology. Feminist methodology aligns with other methodologies, underscoring that researchers bear ethical responsibility for their political stances and practices (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002:14). I discuss the ethical considerations of my research in the following subchapter.

5.5 Ethical considerations of the research process

The following discussion addresses the ethical considerations I faced during the research process. The ethical dilemmas vary depending on the stage of the research, and the considerations in this section focus mainly on the fieldwork and the analysis process.

By including a separate section about ethical issues, I want to emphasise their importance and help the readers find and distinguish the ethical questions I faced. Research ethics cover the research activity, such as the informed consent of the participants, the reliability of the methods used in data gathering and analysis, the questions dealing with securing the participants' anonymity, and the presenting of the research findings. Thus, the primary ethical principle is to protect participants from harm and to protect their rights (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008).

In light of the research ethics before the interviews, an information sheet (see Appendix i)[9] was presented to the women entrepreneurs who volunteered to participate in my research. The information sheet included the researcher's contact information, a short description of the research topic and the data collection method, the estimated time required for participation, how the interview data would be archived for secondary use, and the voluntary nature of participation. The participants had an opportunity to ask questions about the research before the interviews.

One of the ethical principles in research is to obtain freely given, informed consent from each participant. The main principle of informed consent is that the human subjects of research should be allowed to agree or refuse to participate in the light

[9] The information sheet includes a description of the research topic. However, there were some changes in terminology during the research process. The term "gender ideologies" was used in the information letter at the start of the study, but later in the research, the focus shifted to emphasize the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs.

of comprehensive information concerning the nature and purpose of the research (Sin 2005). The interviewees signed a consent form (see Appendix ii) acknowledging that they had received both written and oral information on the research and had the opportunity to pose questions to the researcher. I prepared consent forms in English for English interviews and in Turkish for Turkish interviews. The form stated that the interviewees' participation in the research was voluntary and that I would keep the information they had given in the interview in confidence.

Furthermore, data confidentiality has been carefully maintained throughout the study, with a commitment to preserving the anonymity of the participants. Therefore, details about the research participants, such as their real names, exact ages, names of the KIEs, and specific business fields, were not included in the description of the participants, as combining this data could compromise anonymity.

To ensure data security, I implemented several measures. Raw data, including notes, audio recordings, and interview transcriptions, were securely stored in password-protected files during the study. It is worth noting that all interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent. I kept the audio recordings until I finished transcribing them, and then I deleted them to protect the participants' privacy. Throughout the entire process, the research has been conducted with complete compliance to ethical standards and the participants' consent.

In summary, as a guiding ethical principle, I provided participants with an information sheet before the interviews outlining my research, methods, and the voluntary nature of their participation. I prepared consent forms in both English and Turkish, which the interviewees signed to confirm their understanding and voluntary involvement. I securely stored and carefully handled all data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, and ensured the anonymity of the participants by not using real names and by describing their background information through categories such as age groups.

5.6 Summary

For this research, 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2020. The method of semi-structured interviews allowed me for a flexible exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. I employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the responses, offering a comprehensive understanding of shared aspects of women's experiences in these entrepreneurial

contexts. Following the process suggested by Braun and Clarke's (2021), I aimed to be reflective and detailed, considering my role as a researcher in shaping interpretations.

As a researcher, I play a dual role, both as an insider and an outsider. My understanding of Turkish culture helps me in recruiting participants and guiding my research, while my outsider perspective in Finland offers new insights. By balancing these two roles, I can draw on my knowledge of Turkish culture to improve the research process, while also gaining fresh perspectives from my experience in Finland. Simultaneously recognising the advantages of a partially outsider perspective in Finland demonstrates an awareness of the potential biases and limitations that can arise from cultural proximity. Also, the difficulties I faced in participant recruitment in Finland highlighted the importance of knowledge of networks and cultural sensitivity in qualitative research.

Ethical considerations were central throughout my research process. Informed consent, both written and oral, ensured participants were fully aware of the study's nature and purpose. I took measures to protect confidentiality and data security, including the secure storage and eventual deletion of audio recordings. Avoidance of loaded questions and a reflective procedure during data analysis aimed to minimise biases and enhance the validity of findings.

In this study, I followed ethical guidelines such as obtaining participants' consent, maintaining their confidentiality, and ensuring their voluntary participation. However, I also recognize the importance of how research participants can benefit from the study's findings. Therefore, I will provide blog posts or other social media updates to share the research results in a more accessible way. A blog can help present the findings simply while reaching a wider audience, including research participants, other entrepreneurs, and anyone interested in the topic. These outcomes for professional communities and other stakeholders will offer a public space where participants' voices can be heard, and their contributions to the study recognized and valued. In the following two chapters, I present and discuss my research findings.

6 GENDERED EXPERIENCES IN KIE

This chapter focuses on the first research question of this study: In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered? It provides insights into women's everyday experiences in their previous workplaces and explains why they decide to become entrepreneurs. I begin the data analysis by examining the participants' prior work experiences, providing insights into their decision-making processes and the difficulties they encountered when entering entrepreneurship. Subsequently, I explore the participants' experiences as women entrepreneurs in the predominantly male-oriented KIE. This subchapter examines women entrepreneurs' experiences with gender and expertise, their participation in networking, and their access to funding by analysing their everyday work practices. I explain how gender shapes their experiences and explore the benefits of being a woman in KIE.

6.1 Gender inequality and flexibility as motivators

I explored entrepreneurship as a phase in women's careers. To understand women's experiences in KIE, I wanted to know how they had become entrepreneurs and how their choices fit into their overall work-life history. This subchapter uncovers the main reasons that pushed them into entrepreneurship. A major reason is their desire to overcome gender inequality experienced in previous jobs and the labour market, along with seeking flexible working conditions that provide freedom from the strict limitations of organizational structures. All the women entrepreneurs had prior work experience in paid employment, having worked in either the public or private sectors before starting their entrepreneurial careers.

Sub-chapter 6.1.1, "Gender Inequality in the Labour Market", focuses on the systemic barriers and inequalities women encounter, influencing their move towards entrepreneurship as a path to professional fulfilment and equity.

Subchapter 6.1.2, "Flexibility and Entrepreneurship", explores how the desire for independence and control over work emerged as a significant driver for many

women. This analysis reveals that this desire manifests in two key ways: the need for autonomy in managing work schedules and tasks, highlighting the value of flexibility, and a determination to redefine the norms and limitations imposed by organisational employment settings. The trend towards remote work, further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, aligns with this broader shift towards more flexible working arrangements.

6.1.1 Gender inequality in the previous workplaces

Women's careers and social relations at work are influenced by their own history and perceptions and diverse organisational and societal contexts. Practices in organisations reinforce the barriers that prevent women's career advancement. Despite the progress women have made, negative attitudes and stereotypes of women as leaders continue to exist. Men are viewed as organisation leaders, while women are viewed as supportive followers (Karataş 2013; Minibaş-Poussard et al. 2011; Özbilgin and Woodward 2004).

Marianna, is a Finnish woman entrepreneur with an engineering background. She started working during her university years as an intern at different companies. Now, she is a co-founder of an engineering consultancy firm. Her decision to establish her own firm stems from a desire for autonomy and a departure from gendered norms within her previous workplace:

"I worked at a company for almost ten years, where packages were offered to employees who wanted to resign. My current male co-founder and I were colleagues there. He decided to leave and start a business, while I initially stayed. He decided to leave and start a business, and initially, I stayed on. Although I held a supervisory position, I wanted to learn new things. We remained in touch and eventually, I became the sales manager at his company, despite my engineering background and lack of sales experience. However, I thought it was a good idea. Later, I was appointed as a sales director, taking on responsibilities for sales and marketing. It was like my first entrepreneurial experience. In this company, there was at least one woman in the leadership team. However, the CEO at the time seemed to prefer working mainly with male colleagues he knew, along with one or two women. The women in the company all appeared to have personal connections with him. I often felt like an outsider, as those without connections did not seem to have a good chance of advancing. Sometimes I felt relegated to handling office space and administrative tasks. It seemed like I would be doing more administrative work, so I eventually decided to resign. I took a break to clear my mind and then made the decision to establish my own firm."

Marianna's path to entrepreneurship involves both conforming to and contesting gendered norms, and it highlights the persistence of gender biases and networks in professional settings. For instance, her mention of her male colleague's preference for male colleagues and the influence of personal connections on hiring decisions shows the existence of gender inequalities and the impact of social connections in the workplace. Additionally, her observation that the CEO favoured male colleagues and those with personal connections highlights the importance of personal networks in career advancement. In this context, the perception of being an outsider signifies a form of exclusion based on gender. Also, the expectation of potentially doing more administrative rather than engineering work and taking care of office space reflects gendered assumptions about specific tasks being more suitable for women. Her choice to start her own business is not only a pursuit of autonomy but also a move towards engaging in work that aligns with her education and professional background, avoiding gendered expectations in the work environment.

Ece, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in software, graduated from the mechanical engineering department. She has a master's degree in software development. Ece worked in different companies as a manager, and she worked in the family business before establishing her own company. She stated that she did not face any difficulties at the university, even though the department was male-dominated. However, when Ece entered the business world, she realised that it is a male-dominated field. Ece's experience points out the gender dynamics in male-dominated sectors within the technical industry. Despite her qualifications as a mechanical engineer, Ece faced inequalities in advancing her career in a male-dominated field. To overcome these inequalities, she decided to establish her own company, with combining her technical expertise in software with her engineering educational background and turned to fields that are less male-dominated and more commonly associated with women, such as design and marketing:

"I used to work in the family business with my father and male cousin. Despite being an engineer, my father always kept me in the background. He treated me as if I had just come to work as a hobby. The others, especially my male cousins, were always at the centre of things where they should have been. He always ran the business with them, rarely consulting me. When problems arose and became unsolvable, only then would my father come to me. He would only come to me when there was no other solution. That is why I am strongly against family businesses. One of the reasons I chose to take a different path is this. I want to be free to be able to do what I want, not confined to predetermined paths set for me. When you are working in a technical field, I mean, when

you are working in the male-dominated field, then you realise that you do not have any career options here. You have to stay one step behind, and this affects you negatively. Therefore, I decided to establish my firm in a field where gender tasks are more determined. I combined my technical knowledge of software development with design, a more feminine field. I created a middle ground for myself by combining mechanical engineering and software with design."

Ece's experience highlights how gendered practices (Martin 2003) operate within the technical field. Despite her qualifications and expertise as a mechanical engineer and software developer, she felt limited by the gendered practices that prevailed in the male-dominated technical sector. Her quotation, "stay one step behind", suggests that these gendered practices forced her to conform to certain gender norms and expectations, which were disadvantageous to her career progression. In response to these difficulties, Ece decided to establish her own company, deliberately entering a field more open for women engineers. In this context, her decision can be seen as a response to the gendered practices common in KIE. By creating her entrepreneurial space, Ece redefines her career path on her terms. Through founding KIE, she merges mechanical engineering and software, reshaping the focus and skill sets required in her field. Ece's career choices align with Kvande's (1999) idea that some women engineers move towards sectors seen as more supportive of women's career goals. This shift can create a hybrid space where women can better combine their skills and ambitions.

Another participant, Olivia, a Finnish woman entrepreneur in marketing, worked in an engineering company before becoming an entrepreneur. Working in a predominantly male environment, she found herself fulfilling a role as an office psychologist, with co-workers seeking her out for personal conversations. Despite feeling appreciated by colleagues, the lack of acknowledgement from her manager led her to leave the firm:

"In the company, there were two women out of 10 people, and I was the only woman for a few years. I noticed that among my co-workers, they treated me like an office psychologist. Especially on Fridays when they were leaving, if they had personal problems, they wanted to have a conversation with me about what was going on in their lives. They expressed that they trusted me, and I felt appreciated among my co-workers. However, my manager did not appreciate it. Even when I did a good job, I never received any acknowledgement or appreciation from him. I wished to know that he valued my work, but he never communicated it. Eventually, I became tired of this situation, which made it quite easy for me to leave the firm."

In her statement, Olivia emphasises the impact of gendered expectations on individuals' career decisions and the significance of recognition when managing gender dynamics in the workplace. Olivia found herself associated with certain expectations, particularly in providing emotional support and care to her colleagues. The fact that her co-workers often approached her to talk about their personal problems on Fridays suggests that gendered norms shaped their perceptions of her tasks within the office. This illustrates the expectation for women in such environments to fulfil stereotypically gendered tasks even if these expectations extend beyond their official job responsibilities. Despite Olivia's commendable performance in her job, the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation from her manager led her to decide to leave the firm. This highlights how individuals, like Olivia, manage and make career choices based on their experiences of gender inequality in the workplace, emphasising the impact of recognition on professional satisfaction and staying in a job.

The Turkish woman entrepreneur Özlem, an ICT professional, also shared an experience similar to the gendered expectations encountered by Olivia in her workplace. As the only woman among engineers, Özlem was assigned the responsibility of organising social events based on her gender, to which she objected:

"At my previous workplace, I was the only woman on a team of engineers. Despite this, my colleagues expected me to organize dinners and birthday celebrations simply because of my gender. When I asked why this responsibility fell on me, their response was, "because you are a girl". In response, I made a joke, saying I didn't remember signing a contract that stated: you are a girl, so you must organize social events."

According to Özlem's statement, there was an expectation in the workplace that, because she is a woman, she should take on the responsibility of organizing social events such as dinners and birthday celebrations. This expectation aligns with the gendered division of work that often assigns women the role of nurturers and organisers of social activities. The phrase "you are a girl" highlights how gender is performed and reinforced. It suggests that her colleagues expected her to conform to a specific gendered task based on her femininity. This performance of gender reinforces the continuation of gender stereotypes. By joking and saying she did not sign a contract with such a clause, her response opposes the gendered expectation placed upon her. This resistance disrupts the gender stereotypes within her personal business environment.

Marianna, Olivia and Özlem faced situations in the workplace that aligns with Butler's (2004) concept of performativity, underscoring the active role of individuals in conforming to and reinforcing gender through social expectations and behaviours. The workplace's imposition of gendered expectations, as discussed by Hatmaker (2013:387), reinforces the persistence of gendered stereotypes. Gherardi (1994) discusses remedial work, which refers to the efforts to address, mitigate, or counteract the effects of gender inequalities in the workplace. My analysis showed that these women entrepreneurs resist and redefine the gendered constraints imposed upon them. Marianna's decision to found her own firm, Olivia's departure from a role that undervalued her efforts, and Özlem's objection to organising social events such as birthday parties based on her gender are all forms of remedial work. They represent individual efforts to contest and transform the gendered environments in their fields. The influence of gendered expectations, encompassing societal pressures and assumptions rooted in stereotypes, significantly shaped their paths towards entrepreneurship.

In the above discussions, I explored the impact of gendered organisational and institutional practices on women's professional careers and workplace relationships. I examined the practices within organisations that create barriers to women's career progression, focusing on the prevailing stereotypes that question their suitability for career progress. Despite the progress women have made, the enduring presence of negative attitudes towards women in career progression remains a significant concern.

Burcu, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in the energy and environment sector, shared her negative experiences related to career opportunities in her previous workplace before entering entrepreneurship. Her husband owns a company in the energy industry, and when she decided to leave her job, he was looking for a partner. He offered her a position in his company, recognising her management expertise, which she had gained through her business administration degree. This marked the beginning of her career as an entrepreneur alongside her husband's company.

Before starting her own business, Burcu worked at a textile company, where she eventually became the head of the quality control unit. However, she decided to leave the company due to strict gender-based rules, discriminatory practices in recruitment and promotion, and limited career opportunities. Her decision reflects resistance to institutional discrimination and a desire for a more equitable professional

environment. Throughout this path, she faced various difficulties at work that ultimately motivated her to start her own business:

"I am a chemist, and I worked in the textile sector, specifically in the dye house department. The factory had stringent rules for women employees. While there were not many women working in the factory, those who were primarily held white-collar positions. We were required to wear a work apron at all times, unlike our male counterparts, who had the option to remove it. Additionally, wearing nail polish, noticeable clothing, heavy or eye-catching makeup, and heeled shoes were all prohibited. One of my colleagues, who excelled in her work, aspired to become a manager at the factory. Unfortunately, she was unable to achieve this goal because the company did not open managerial positions to women. It often felt like men had more opportunities and luck than us. While I did not have any issues with following the rules, I ultimately decided to leave the company because there were no opportunities for career advancement."

Burcu's experience highlights several gendered practices in her former workplace, particularly in recruitment and promotion. Strict rules imposed on female employees, such as dress and makeup codes, and the preferential treatment of men in leadership status, illustrate how ceremonial work (Gherardi 1994) helps maintain gender hierarchies and stereotypes. These organisational rituals and symbols reflect and reinforce the cultural and social norms that prioritise men over women in professional settings. Burcu's decision to leave the company can be seen as a response to institutional discrimination. Her case supports previous research that shows discriminatory practices still persist in sectors like engineering and construction in Turkey (Karataş 2013; Minibaş-Poussard et al. 2011; Özbilgin and Woodward 2004).

Moreover, Burcu's experience shows how gender is constructed and maintained through everyday organisational practices and policies. This finding aligns with Korvajärvi's (2003) study that gendered hierarchies within the organisations are not static but are actively produced and maintained through daily activities. The organisation's enforcement of gendered rules reinforced the marginalisation of women and limited their career opportunities. Burcu's decision to leave the company was a form of resistance to this institutional discrimination, as she sought a more equitable environment where her skills and qualifications would be recognised and rewarded without gender bias. Her choice to explore alternative career paths or entrepreneurial opportunities reflects an individual response to the gendered

constraints she faced, especially when changing the organisation's discriminatory practices seemed impossible.

Another Turkish entrepreneur, Emel, also highlights gender disparities in the chemistry industry. Her experience as a chemical engineer reflects the coexistence of various managerial and organisational cultures within the sector. Gender bias in recruitment, a preference for male candidates, and additional barriers for married women underscore the complex relationship between gender and marital status in shaping employment opportunities.

During our discussion on gender issues in KIE, Emel highlighted the contrast between the high female representation in university biology and chemistry departments and the low number of women working in the biology and chemistry industry. She pointed out that male candidates are often preferred in the private sector of the chemistry industry. This preference is linked to the expectation of working overtime, which is assumed to be more feasible or acceptable for men. Her specific experience with a paint company, where she was rejected based on her gender, further underscores this bias. The example given by Emel shows the complexities within the chemistry sector in the private domain, highlighting how perceptions and practices regarding gender:

"When applying for positions in the private sector within chemistry, male candidates are often favoured. This preference stems from the perception that the chemical industry demands excessive overtime, making men more desirable candidates. In my personal experience, I applied to a paint company but was not accepted solely because of my gender. Unfortunately, being a woman can be a significant disadvantage in such industries. Additionally, if you are a married woman, particularly if newly married, this can further compound the challenges you face in securing employment opportunities."

Emel is a chemistry engineer, and she was newly married. When she participated in my study, she did not have a child. After graduating from the university, Emel worked as a teacher for six months. Then she changed her workplace and worked in research and development units of different firms in the private sector. Although Emel has work experience in her field, her job applications were not accepted. This situation was a significant turning point in her work life, and Emel decided to establish her own company. Despite her qualifications, Emel's experience of discrimination in the chemical industry exemplifies the persistence of gendered regulations and expectations in workplaces. Moreover, her reference to marital status

introduces another dimension to the conversation. She observed that being both a woman and married can be viewed as a disadvantage, particularly for newly married. This aspect touches on the combination of gender and marital status, where societal expectations and biases intersect to influence employment opportunities. Such complexities highlight how gender dynamics are influenced by elements like marital status, particularly in Turkey.

Studies in Turkey show extensive gender discrimination, not only in male-dominated sectors like engineering, construction, and mining but also in female-dominated sectors such as banking. Women often face inquiries about their marital and parental intentions during the recruitment process (Dedeoglu 2009). Due to childcare responsibilities, some employers/managers do not prefer to hire women no matter whether public or private sector. Despite legal efforts to create gender equality, gender-biased organisational cultures and practices stemming from negative attitudes result in discriminatory organisational practices, including recruitment and promotions (Burke et al. 2008; Özbilgin and Woodward 2004). The interview confirmed this situation, and Emel is moving from a private sector company to her enterprise.

Another Turkish entrepreneur Melek, works in the defence sector in Turkey, underwent a career change due to limited career opportunities and the influence of her spouse's profession. Melek, a computer engineer, worked as a software engineer in a company while pursuing her master's degree. Upon completing her master's and doctoral degrees, she transitioned to an academic career, becoming a university lecturer at a private university for five years. However, she ultimately decided to leave the university, citing the demanding working conditions and personal reasons:

"I started a little bit with the request of my physics teacher. I had the opportunity to work at a university for five years after my doctorate. I was in Ankara, and my husband was a doctor in Izmir. We lived 4-5 years apart. Recently, I got tired of the extreme injustice and gossip in the academy and decided to become an entrepreneur. I was already working for a software company while doing my doctorate. Therefore, I know the industry as well. As a result, I left the academy, went to Izmir, and became an entrepreneur there."

Melek's path highlights the multiple influences on career decisions, including limited professional opportunities and personal circumstances. Her transition from academia to entrepreneurship reflects the difficulties women face in scientific and

academic fields in Turkey, such as demanding workloads, family responsibilities, and biases against female academics (Sağlamer et al. 2018).

Melek's transition can be seen as her way of managing gender expectations. By moving from the structured environment of academia to the more flexible life of entrepreneurship, she gains more control over her career. Melek is shaping her professional identity to align with her personal goals, regardless of the gender norms. Ultimately, her career shows how she is actively transforming her work life to better suit her ambitions.

In conclusion, the experiences of the interviewed women entrepreneurs demonstrate how gender shapes workplace practices, which are influenced by societal norms and behaviours. These experiences clearly illustrate how gendered practices influence hiring decisions and career opportunities. The interviewees' experiences related to their previous workplaces also emphasise the impact of discriminatory practices, acting as formidable barriers to women's professional advancement. In this context, it is important to recognise that gender inequalities played a significant role in their career routes as entrepreneurs. They faced these barriers in their career and turned them into sources of strength and determination. These gender-related issues, while not the only factors, significantly impacted their paths as entrepreneurs and highlight the need for ongoing research and efforts to address and remove these obstacles in entrepreneurship. In the following section, I explain other reasons given by the participants for choosing to be an entrepreneur.

6.1.2 Flexibility and working from home

Fundamentally, while the knowledge-intensive sector can enhance the attractiveness of independence, being one's boss and flexible working hours remain core drivers of entrepreneurship across industries. They represent fundamental aspects of entrepreneurial spirit and the desire for greater autonomy and control over one's career and life (Shane et al. 2003). The interviewed women entrepreneurs had a strong desire to be independent at work. This manifests in two ways: they want more control over their work schedules and tasks (flexibility), and they are eager to get rid of the rules and restrictions set by others that control how they work.

For both Finnish and Turkish participants, being their own boss and having flexible working hours are among the most favourable aspects of entrepreneurship. For

instance, Laura, a Finnish woman entrepreneur in software, does not like bureaucracy—that is, formal rules. She explained:

"I never really thought of myself as becoming an entrepreneur. At first, I wanted to work for big organizations like NGOs. But after working in roles like internships and entry-level positions, I realized I wanted to create something smaller, with more flexibility and impact. The bureaucratic structures in big organizations frustrated me, so I decided to start my own company."

Laura's desire for a more flexible work environment, free from rigid rules and procedures, originated from her past experiences as an intern in both NGOs and corporate settings. In these environments, she likely faced strict structures that limited her autonomy. These experiences motivated her to become an entrepreneur, where she could design her own work conditions. Today, she is the founder of a software company with five employees, having turned her desire for flexibility into a business model that reflects her values and career goals.

Ulla, a Finnish woman entrepreneur, specialises in patent consultancy through her firm. She began her career in medical engineering, gaining experience in her early working years. Following a series of work tasks in different companies, focusing on patent and innovation matters, Ulla chose to become an entrepreneur. At the time of the interview, she ran her own firm, working independently from her home office without any employees. She clarified her motivation for entering entrepreneurship in the following manner:

"There are two main aspects to it. Firstly, I had considered this for quite some time because I have always been opposed to being under someone else's authority. It is a common trait among entrepreneurial individuals, but it truly reflects my perspective. The second aspect of my decision to pursue entrepreneurship is the flexibility it offers in terms of my work environment. These days, I operate from my home, where I have set up a sort of home office. I tend to work outdoors frequently because I do not have strict schedules, except when I have client meetings. This flexibility allows me to tailor my work environment to suit my preferences and maximise my productivity."

Working from home is a popular theme among both Finnish and Turkish participants in this study. This practice is not limited to a specific sector. Finnish entrepreneur Aino, has also adopted the idea of working from home. Aino's business specialises in management consultancy, and similar to Ulla, she operates her enterprise without any employees.

Aino's choice to work from home mirrors the flexibility and autonomy highlighted by Ulla as motivators for entrepreneurship. Managing her consultancy business from the comfort of her home gives her the freedom to structure her workday according to her preferences. This level of independence is a central aspect of the entrepreneurial mind-set shared by many participants in this study.

It is clear that both Finnish and Turkish participants recognize the advantages of a home-based office, emphasizing its importance in their entrepreneurial careers. This trend aligns with the broader shift toward remote work and the growing acknowledgment that technology allows for successful business operations outside of office settings (Urbaniec et al. 2022).

Selin is a Turkish woman entrepreneur and the founder of a project consultancy firm specialising in research and development, where she works alongside her husband. She and her husband share ownership, commitment, and responsibility for a business. Like Finnish women entrepreneurs, Selin believes that since they are selling knowledge, they can work at home in a home-based office because their only necessary work equipment is a laptop:

"Having our own business comes with its advantages. I can leave early, and I have the flexibility to work from home. All I need is a laptop since I primarily deal with selling technical knowledge. There are times when I can work from home, as I do not require a lot of office equipment. Just a laptop is enough."

Selin appreciates the advantages of having her own business, such as the ability to leave early and the flexibility to work remotely. She finds that working from home suits her needs well, as she only requires a little office equipment beyond her laptop. However, another Turkish entrepreneur, Beste, who runs a software firm with four employees, has a different perspective. Despite occasionally working from home, Beste finds the home environment less favourable for productivity. She believes the line between home and work can blur, leading to distractions and inefficiencies. As a result, she decided to reopen her office:

"Sometimes, I work from home, but I do not know if the home is a suitable environment for work because it is not clear whether home or work. Therefore, I reopened the office again."

It is important to note that some of the interviewed women entrepreneurs, like Selin, prefer working from home because they work alone. However, those who choose

to have an office feel it provides a clear boundary between work and personal life, enhancing focus and productivity. Additionally, having an office space can be advantageous for hosting face-to-face meetings with clients providing a professional environment for business interactions.

Flexibility is a central theme in women's career paths, shaped by individual economic motivations, labour market conditions, and balance work and life/family duties. A significant aspect of this flexibility involves maintaining and pursuing a work-life balance, which concerns overall personal well-being and fulfilment, including personal interests, hobbies, relaxation, self-care, and social activities, as well as harmonising work and family responsibilities. The methods of achieving such balance vary significantly between Turkey and Finland. This divergence becomes particularly noticeable when examining the experiences with child-care policies. Finland has a well-established history of public day-care services, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s as I mentioned in Chapter 2.

The Finnish welfare state plays an important role in facilitating these societal dynamics by providing highly affordable day-care options for all children, thus allowing Finnish parents to participate in full-time employment. However, before the reform in autumn 2022, the Finnish family leave system favoured mothers by allocating them more leave days than the other parent (Ikonen and Korvajärvi 2023). This system implies that Finnish mothers have more responsibility over parenthood than mothers in other Nordic countries, although they are all countries that are included to social democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Consequently, it reinforced a culture where mothers primarily assumed the responsibility for caregiving duties and professional mothers often needed relatives to help (Ikonen et al. 2024). Despite this, Finnish participants generally perceive their country's system as highly supportive. For instance, Ulla expressed her satisfaction, highlighting that her children attended kindergarten, and she received assistance from her family for childcare:

"*My kids went to kindergarten. I got some help from my family for childcare, but in Finland system is very well.*"

Also, Olivia, who worked from home in her family's company, stressed the significance of having a partner to share childcare responsibilities. She mentioned that after 1.5 years, when Olivia returned to work, her husband would spend time

with the kids when he came home, allowing her to focus on her tasks. Although Olivia did not explicitly mention the extent of her husband's involvement in caring for the children, she emphasised the importance of having a supportive partner. Olivia noted that gender did not significantly affect her professional responsibilities and personal well-being, indicating that she and her husband likely shared childcare responsibilities—a practice more common among Finnish interviewees than Turkish ones.

Conversely, the Turkish participants' experiences are marked by different obstacles. Gendered division of work at home and outside the home is more deeply rooted in Turkish society, with women often expected to prioritise family responsibilities over their careers. Additionally, childcare in Turkey is seen as a problem that women must solve via their networks and capacities (Korkut and Eslen-Ziya 2011). For example, several Turkish participants relied heavily on the assistance of their mothers in caring for their children. For instance, Damla and Melek expressed appreciation for their mothers' support, emphasising that their mothers played a crucial role in helping their professional success. Damla:

"If it was not my mother, I could not have been so successful in business life; my mother took care of the children."

Damla has a firm in the software sector. She works with two other business partners in the firm. Damla's mother provides all manner of services for her children, from reminding them of their schedules to ironing their clothes and cooking their favourite food to making up their beds. She thinks of her mother's work at home as essential to her success at work. It is a widespread phenomenon for grandmothers to care for grandchildren in Turkey. Melek's story confirms this:

"*I received a lot of support from my family; my mother took care of both of my children; she knew the troubles as she was a working woman. So she promised me. If you have a child, I will look after him/her, and even I will look after the second. She kept her word, and she looked at them both*."

Despite the increase in women's labour force participation and female-owned businesses in all countries (Powell 2011), working women are still expected to emphasise their family responsibilities (Eagly et al. 2000; Lippa 2005; Wood and Eagly 2010) as in Turkey and partially in Finland. Finnish participants generally perceive their society's childcare policies and services as accommodating, facilitating

a more balanced approach to work and family responsibilities. In contrast, the Turkish participants face more significant difficulties primarily due to deeply rooted gender norms and limited support from public childcare services. These different experiences highlight the relationship between gender, family responsibilities, and entrepreneurship in various cultural contexts.

Moreover, balancing work and family commitments manifests differently in individuals' lives, with distinct dynamics observed between those with children and those without. For example, Didem, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in agricultural production, stated:

"*I am newly married and have no children yet, so I do not have much trouble balancing family and work-life.*"

Elea, a Finnish woman entrepreneur in consultancy, thinks that children create a disadvantage for women:

"Kids are a big difference. Maternity leave again is the problem. Babies are attached to women. It is easier for me because I do not have a child."

Even though women take part in employment, no matter whether they internalise the existing gender norms or not, the gendered structure of society causes them to deal with both the claims and myths that children need their mothers more and the unequal share of care responsibility. Therefore, in addition to the family and work duties, they struggle to organise their lives within the framework of expectations regarding being a mother. They overcome this difficulty by limiting their social lives. Maintaining family unity is a significant matter in Turkish society, and women are aware that the tasks associated with womanhood and motherhood play a vital role in this unity. Unlike the Turkish participants, Finnish participants indicated that they received support from their spouses. This support can be interpreted as collaboration, as it typically involves shared responsibilities and joint efforts to manage work and family duties. While the Finnish participants spoke about receiving help from their spouses, it also suggests a level of collaboration in which both partners work together to balance their professional and personal lives.

According to Hilbrecht (2016) women have consistently cited their need to balance work and family responsibilities as their primary motivation for taking up entrepreneurship in terms of responsibilities around childcare, household, and

spousal degree of support. However, the descriptions of choosing entrepreneurship as a career by the Turkish and Finnish participants do not support the arguments made by Hilbrecht (2016). Many of the entrepreneurs I interviewed believe that entrepreneurship is a good choice to balance family responsibilities and work life, but it is not the primary reason to begin an entrepreneurial life.

At the same time, external conditions continue to shape how entrepreneurship is practiced. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed work environments, providing my research an opportunity to examine how these changes are affecting entrepreneurs' daily operations in KIE. In Turkey, according to the results of the research (Akbaş and Dursun 2020), working women spent more time on housework during the pandemic period[10]. The experiences of research participants during the early days of the pandemic indicate a transitional period in which they adopted the role of household organisers and became the primary caregivers, particularly for those with children. The closure of schools and day-care centres necessitated the relocation of caregiving responsibilities back into the home, even as remote work became the norm. In my research, this process produced two distinct yet closely interconnected themes: "the disappearance of personal space" and "the feeling of inadequacy". The sense of being unprepared for the demands of family life and the feeling of inadequacy in managing all responsibilities were linked to the loss of personal space stemming from a lack of external support and help within the home.

Turkish participant Melek, who has two children, expressed, that being at home with all responsibilities created a state of confusion and shock:

"I used to travel back and forth to Ankara, but when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, these trips became impossible. Intercity commuting was restricted, and my children were constantly at home. My parents, who are already in the high-risk age group, were at even greater risk if they

[10] A study conducted by United Nations (UN) revealed that there was a notable increase in women's working hours, particularly among those in paid employment and self-employment. Specifically, 3.7 per cent of female paid workers reported an increase in their working hours, compared to only 1.9 per cent of men in similar positions. Furthermore, among self-employed individuals, 7.7 per cent of women experienced an increase in their working hours, while this figure was significantly lower at 1 per cent for self-employed men (UN Women 2020).

visited, so since I gave birth to my children, I've been more active than ever. We spent 24 hours a day together in the same house, with occasional arguments and compromises. We managed to get through this period somehow. However, it did have negative effects on my business. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it made more sense to work at night because it was nearly impossible to work during the day with all the chaos and while taking care of the kids. Of course, I still worked during the day, but I could not concentrate fully. Therefore, I had to sacrifice sleep at night to focus on tasks that required concentration."

In addition to this confusion, Melek clearly expressed that the space she created before the pandemic disappeared. The absence of help in household responsibilities caused women to experience a feeling of inadequacy they had not faced before in their family lives. Participants have had to organise their work responsibilities according to the time left after childcare and household chores. It was seen from Melek's statement that women could engage in work late at night when the children were asleep, which led to an intense and tiresome work pace and sleep deprivation.

The interviews with Turkish entrepreneurs show that the borders of work and home life responsibilities have become unclear in the COVID-19 period. Turkish entrepreneur Damla, who does not have children, offered insights into her experience by saying:

"I start working at 9 a.m. and continue until 8 p.m. My laptop is always within reach at home. When customers send me emails and request something, I find it challenging to decline their requests, so I end up responding to them. As a result, working from home has effectively extended my working hours."

Damla's quotation illustrates the practical difficulties of working from home during the COVID-19 period, where the boundaries between work and personal life become less defined. The constant accessibility to work-related tasks can lead to extended workdays, as individuals find it difficult to disconnect from work even during the out-of-work hours. My research also highlighted that marital status and the presence of children were significant aspects influencing the amount of time women dedicated to domestic labour, particularly in Turkey. As the number of children living in a household increased, women's workload in terms of domestic chores also increased proportionally. For single-parent families, where women typically assume all childcare responsibilities, the pandemic substantially increased their workload. Although I do not have Finnish interviews from the COVID-19

period, the situation in Finland had significant commonalities (Mesiäislehto et al. 2022)[11].

Key findings from subchapter 6.1 highlight the importance of prior work experiences in shaping women's decisions to start their own businesses, the effect of gender on everyday interactions in previous work settings, and the responses to gender inequalities. The experiences of women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey show how gender is actively shaped in their professional settings. Furthermore, I explored the aspirations for flexibility and independence as motivations for women's entrepreneurship, illustrating how desires for autonomy over work schedules and resistance to paid employment structures drive the entrepreneurial career. The discussion on working from home emphasised the growing trend of home-based offices among women entrepreneurs, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages associated with this mode of work, the disadvantages becoming stronger, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, I examine how gender and expertise intersect within KIE, which is usually dominated by men.

6.2 Gendered expertise in male-dominated KIE

This subchapter explores the gender inequalities and biases related to expertise that women entrepreneurs face in their daily work in KIE. Women in male-dominated workplaces often face hierarchical and gendered constructions of skill. Phillips and Taylor (1980:79) argue that skill definitions are often shaped by gender biases. This subchapter discusses the doubts about women's expertise, hidden gender biases in workplace interactions, and how these issues affect women entrepreneurs' career.

Ezzedeen and Zikic (2012) highlight a particular obstacle faced by women entrepreneurs in high-tech fields: resistance from male financiers and clients. While interviewees in my research described gender inequality within their current businesses as an exception, they more commonly reported doubts about their

[11] According to Mesiäislehto et al. (2022), in Finland remote work rapidly became very common, as half of the working parents, mothers (49%) nearly as often as fathers (53%), told they had been working remotely in the first wave of the COVID-19 (spring 2020). Working mothers also reported more changes in their workload during the spring 2020 than working fathers: 36 per cent of mothers and 25 per cent of fathers reported that their workload increased. Many parents thus struggled to combine paid work with the care of their under-school-aged children, especially during the first wave of the pandemic in spring.

expertise from male clients. Despite holding STEM degrees and demonstrating their expertise in the field, their status as experts was frequently questioned. For example, Turkish participant Didem stated:

"In Turkish society, especially among men, there is a belief that women work in some areas; there is a perception that every field is not for women. It is not easy to accept these views. For example, they say that you cannot do the drilling. It makes no difference after you know the technique of using. The body is the same, you can do the same job, whether you are a woman. It is difficult to explain these to the farmers. They called me an engineer lady, and first, they put you through a test to see what you know, how much you know. They test to see if you know something or not. They ask questions and measure your knowledge regardless of your subject. After that, they trust you and believe you do something."

Didem runs a company that focuses on using new technology in farming. She believes that men and women engineers are equally capable when performing the same job. By rejecting the belief that women are less competent than men, Didem confronts common stereotypes, which makes it even harder for women like her to overcome these biases in the workplace. For example, some people doubt that a woman can perform tasks like drilling, even though Didem knows how to do it well. This illustrates how gender beliefs shape the way women are treated in KIE. Didem works to change these beliefs by demonstrating that she is just as capable as any man in her field. However, despite proving herself many times she still faces doubt and resistance. Her experience also highlights how people often judge others based on gender rather than skills. She is frequently expected to do tasks seen as women's work, even though she is an engineer. Being called an "engineer lady" is one example of this, showing how certain tasks are still viewed as more appropriate for men.

Some Finnish participants, like Ulla also described doubts about women's technical knowledge, which occasionally led to biases in customer relations:

"When you meet the male customer, they do not trust you because they believe that you (as a woman) are not good at technical issues, but when you begin to talk about technical issues professionally, they change their attitudes towards you."

Ulla's experience shows how gender stereotypes affect women entrepreneurs when interacting with male customers in KIE. Initially, customers may doubt a woman entrepreneur's technical skills because they believe men are naturally better in these areas. This belief stems from societal assumptions that men are more suited for

technical tasks. However, when Ulla speaks confidently and professionally about technical matters, she breaks down these stereotypes. By showing her knowledge and expertise, she disproves the notion that women are less capable than men in technical fields. As a result of her professional behaviour, male customers begin to view her differently. This highlights how people's perceptions of gendered skills and expertise can change based on an individual's actions. It also reinforces that gender is not fixed—it can shift depending on the situation and how people present themselves.

In their experiences Didem and Ulla both find ways to address and manage gender inequality in KIE. When faced with doubts about their professional abilities because of their gender, they use blocking tactics to confront these biases. Blocking (Hatmaker 2013) refers to an approach employed by individuals, particularly women entrepreneurs in this case, to deal with and counter gender-based inequalities in the workplace. When their professional abilities are questioned or dismissed due to gender, women using blocking tactics directly respond to these inequalities. They highlight their qualifications and expertise, shifting the focus to their abilities rather than allowing themselves to be judged by stereotypes. In essence, blocking involves standing up to gender biases and ensuring that individuals are recognized and respected for their skills and contributions, regardless of gender.

Scholars such as Ridgeway (2009) and Ridgeway and Correll (2004) suggest that people often view their workplaces as gender neutral. However, gender becomes apparent when it unexpectedly emerges in these supposedly neutral settings. In environments culturally viewed as masculine, there is often a bias in favour of men. When gender issues suddenly emerge in contexts where they were previously ignored, they draw significant attention. This highlights how gender can unexpectedly become relevant in situations where women entrepreneurs see their work environments gender neutral. As Turkish participant Elif, woman entrepreneur in mobile gaming, stated:

"I do not have a particular experience to share, perhaps because I am used to working with men. However, sometimes you pick up on things between the lines—nothing is said directly to you, but, for example, I once heard someone say that I should not be too smart, but I am smart. This was said by a person I had always considered to be very kind, so I never thought he would think that way. He implied that I was an intelligent woman and that he had never encountered

such a smart female manager before. When I heard this, I was shocked because I did not expect such a statement. Other than that, I have not experienced anything similar."

As in Elif's quotation, gender usually functions as a background identity, and the reference to gender as a background identity implies that it operates symbolically (Gherardi 1994), influencing perceptions and behaviours without necessarily being explicitly expressed. Elif's statement highlights the presence of subtle gender biases and inequalities in the workplace. She mentions that she pays attention to things "between the lines" indicating that the biases may not be overt or directly stated. Instead, they are implicit and require a keen awareness to detect. She describes an incident where someone indirectly suggested that she should not be "too smart". This unspoken expectation reflects the stereotype that women should not appear too intelligent or assertive, as it might disrupt established gender norms. This performative aspect of gender is demonstrated in Elif's statement, illustrating how gender inequalities and biases, though subtle and often unspoken, are maintained in environments shaped by masculine norms. The comment about her intelligence goes beyond a simple remark on her abilities; it becomes a moment where gender norms are both reinforced and contested. This highlights the ongoing construction of gender through everyday interactions, underscoring individuals' active roles in either reinforcing or questioning these norms in their professional lives.

A Finnish entrepreneur Marianna, expressed a similar point. She believes that gender biases are often tied to subconscious thoughts and expectations, which exist even in Finland:

"Women tend to be more sensitive and hesitant when it comes to boosting their self-confidence. They might hold themselves back due to certain gender biases, which I strongly believe exist. It is interesting to note that women often choose to sit behind the table, which makes you wonder about how the human brain works and the reasons behind such behaviours.

I think this tendency is rooted in our DNA. Of course, there are many personal differences, and there are definitely young women, especially, who don not exhibit any signs of this inequality. However, there is also a significant number of women who, like one of my friends in her 50s, are incredibly talented but still struggle with low self-confidence. They fear that if they speak up, they will not be hired because they are expected to conform to certain stereotypes. These subconscious thoughts exist, I believe, even in Finland. But, of course, it varies from person to person. In general, women often grapple with such thoughts, and I have my moments too."

In the first quotation, Marianna highlights the multifaceted nature of gender. She emphasised that individual choices do not solely determine self-confidence and behaviour in professional settings but are deeply influenced by societal gender biases and expectations. She recognised the influence of societal perceptions and expectations on women's behaviour. The observation that women often choose to sit behind the table in professional contexts raises questions about the impact of gender on behaviour. This choice may reflect a tendency to occupy a less dominant or less visible position, potentially influenced by societal expectations. Additionally, in the second part of her quotation, she acknowledged the presence of hidden inequality, suggesting that it might be deeply embedded in the culture "rooted in our DNA". However, she also acknowledged that the experiences of different groups of women vary. She mentioned that some young girls do not display signs of this inequality, but there are older women, like their friend in her 50s, who face self-confidence issues due to societal stereotypes. Her response underscores that hidden inequalities can affect women of different generations.

In a workplace context, such gendered expectations and stereotypes also affect work content and career choices. Özlem, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in ICT, noted that she personally had not encountered negative attitudes when discussing gender inequality. However, she offered examples of inequalities that her friends had experienced. In this way, Özlem's insights highlight issues of inequality that may exist beyond her own workplace (Korvajärvi 1998). Her example serves as a valuable indication of gender inequalities within the ICT sector, and therefore, I include Özlem's words in this context:

"*There are various roles in the project, such as tester, analyst, and software developer. The software developer is like the group that kneads the main dough, while the tester checks the product before it reaches the customer. The analysis team determines the project's scope and components, handling the more verbal aspects. For example, there will be a division of labour: who will be an analyst, who will be a tester, and who will be a software developer. The results often show that men become software developers, while women are directed towards roles as analysts or testers. Girls tend to analyse because they take good notes—this may seem irrelevant, but they are often directed toward verbal tasks. Unfortunately, many girls accept this thinking: 'I cannot do software development, so I will become an analyst. Many of my software developer friends have questioned whether this is the right decision. I have also known many women who have transitioned from software development to roles like database management, data processing, or analysis, often due to these psychological pressures.*"

Özlem's example highlights a situation in a workplace where gendered expectations and stereotypes influence job tasks and career choices. She describes a gendered division of labour within the workplace. Men are primarily assigned to software developers, which is often associated with technical and problem-solving skills. In contrast, women are encouraged or directed towards analysts or testers, which are perceived as requiring more verbal or non-technical skills. This division reflects gender stereotypes related to women's supposed strengths in communication and organisation, while men are expected to excel in technical fields. These gendered divisions of work are not based on inherent abilities but are also socially constructed. Women are directed towards certain tasks not because they lack the skills but due to societal expectations and stereotypes. This reflects how individuals, consciously or unconsciously, conform to and perpetuate gender within their workplace.

Guerrier et al. (2009) conducted interviews with senior managers in ICT organisations. They discovered that these managers perceived the creation of hybrid competence, blending technical skills with soft skills such as creativity, business, marketing, and communication, often associated with women. In alignment with this finding, the experience shared by Turkish research participant Özlem shows a gendered work environment in the Turkish ICT sector. Despite women being engaged in software-related work, there is a preference for departments that emphasise soft skills.

Both Turkish participant Özlem and Finnish participant Marianna reflected on the obstacles women face in male-dominated fields, shedding light on why many leave these environments. They highlighted a common observation: women in such sectors often tend to remain reserved, preferring to stay in the background. Marianna pointed out that women in these fields frequently avoid taking the lead in meetings and are hesitant to express their thoughts, driven by a fear of making mistakes.

These insights from Özlem and Marianna highlight the complexity of gender dynamics within KIE. They emphasise that the self-confidence and behaviours of women in male-dominated fields are not solely a result of individual choices but are deeply influenced by societal gender biases and expectations. In this context, the reluctance of women to assert themselves or take leadership is portrayed as a response to broader societal norms, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles women face in these environments.

In summary, in this sub-chapter, I examined the experiences of women entrepreneurs' expertise in KIE, focusing on the difficulties they face due to gender inequalities and biases. The interviews reveal a common theme of resistance from male clients, who often doubt the expertise of women entrepreneurs despite their qualifications and demonstrated competence. They question preconceived notions and disrupt gendered stereotypes by asserting their professionalism and competence.

Furthermore, women entrepreneurs' experiences show hidden gender inequalities present in professional settings, where women entrepreneurs manage implicit expectations and stereotypes. Instances like those shared by Elif and Marianna underscore how gender operates in the background, influencing behaviours and perceptions in the workplace. Furthermore, the findings touch upon the gendered division of labour within specific industries in KIE, such as the ICT sector, where women are often directed towards tasks that require softer skills, despite their technical capabilities. This observation highlights how societal expectations shape career choices and work dynamics, perpetuating gender inequalities. Women entrepreneurs manage gender inequalities, questioning stereotypes and asserting their competence to shape their professional experiences. However, gender inequalities persist, influencing career paths and work environments within KIE.

6.3 Utilizing female gender as an advantage

In this subchapter, I examine the positive aspects associated with womanhood and femininity, such as the ability to multitask, empathy, and being noticeable in male-dominated work environments. While many interviewed women entrepreneurs viewed being a woman in KIE as a disadvantage, some noted advantages. They proposed that female gender could be advantageous, especially in multitasking and handling responsibilities, where they perceive men as potentially less proficient. These women stressed their patience, empathy, and the memorable presence they bring due to their gender. For example, Turkish participant Esin, who works in the software sector, reflected that women are good listeners, calm, and, in her words, have the characteristics of being mothers. She stated that women are more successful in solving customer problems. In addition, she explained that women are more organized, plan well in advance, and pay attention to details, which contributes to their success.

Furthermore, Finnish participant Elea, who works in consultancy, argues that being a woman in a male-dominated industry increases memorability:

"I have always said that I have benefited from being a woman in a male-dominated world. I cannot afford to be perceived as a dumb blonde, so when I show up and demonstrate my experience and expertise, I am taken seriously. I also believe that being a woman has its advantages. When a young and pleasant woman comes to discuss something, it can be slightly different from dealing with the typical salesmen. I tend to be remembered because I am different from the others, and that uniqueness often works in my favour."

Both Turkish participant Esin and Finnish participant Elea touch upon gendered norms and stereotypes. Esin suggests that women in KIE are seen as more patient, empathetic, and nurturing, which aligns with stereotypical expectations of women being caring and motherly.

Elea's statements also highlight the impact of gender in male-dominated industries, underlining the potential for differentiation and memorability. She noted the advantages of her womanhood, particularly how it enables her to be noticeable in a predominantly male field. This observation aligns with the understanding that gender emerges through distinctions and positioning relative to other genders. It echoes Gherardi's (1994) analysis of gender performances and their role in perpetuating gender inequalities. Elea's experiences exemplify the active construction of gender through the emphasis on differences. This focus not only enhances Elea's visibility but also benefits from gendered distinctions for competitive advantage or recognition.

It is essential to recognise that using qualities like youthfulness or motherhood skills to one's advantage in KIE and working life is not an option for all women. Also, these attributes might not be helpful or lasting throughout a woman's entire career. For instance, a woman's youthful appearance naturally fades over time, making it less effective for standing out in the long run. Similarly, while mother competencies can also be useful in KIE, there is a danger of getting caught up in giving care, leaving less time and energy for advancing one's entrepreneurial goals.

My analysis shows that different settings strongly affect how gender influences the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE. Societal norms and expectations often restrict women's opportunities. However, as illustrated by Elea and Esin, these gender-based perceptions can sometimes work in their favour. This observation leads to a more focused argument: the act of being judged based on gender is not just about conforming to gender expectations; it is about making use of the specific characteristics that arise from these judgments. I argue that by emphasizing these

particular aspects of performing gender, women entrepreneurs can manage and sometimes overcome the limitations imposed by societal expectations in KIE.

6.4 Gendered networks and funding

Entrepreneurs connect with others through various channels, sharing valuable information such as market trends, competitor activities, funding opportunities, potential collaborations, and emerging technologies. They also exchange experiences, discussing best practices and problem-solving strategies. So, these networks are forums for sharing information, facilitating teamwork and supporting their members within the innovation systems of knowledge economy. However, women entrepreneurs often face limited opportunities to participate in these networks. Male-dominated industries frequently rely on informal connections and relationships that are difficult for women to access, making it harder for them to secure resources, build business relationships, and establish credibility for their entrepreneurial initiatives (Ahl 2006; Godwin et al. 2006). In this sub-chapter, I analyse networking in KIE, focusing on women's limited access to networks, the networks of women entrepreneurs and previous collaborators, and gender (in) equality in entrepreneurial funding, including savings, bank loans, and support programs for women entrepreneurs.

Many Finnish and Turkish participants noted that they maintain networks with former colleagues and develop new networks through contacts of their former colleagues. These existing relationships provide opportunities to grow their professional networks, and access resources and opportunities for their entrepreneurial initiatives by demonstrating their expertise, showcasing business success, earning industry recognition, and building trust with investors, customers, and peers. Despite facing limited opportunities and encountering gender inequalities in such settings, women entrepreneurs recognise the significance of networking for staying informed about market trends, competitor activities, and emerging technologies.

Bahar, a Turkish entrepreneur in the software sector, runs a company with her husband—she is the CEO, while her husband is the co-founder. Initially, she attended industry-related meetings alone, seeing them as valuable networking opportunities. However, after experiencing unfavourable behaviour from male colleagues, she started sending her husband to represent the company. She explained:

"I have always felt strong and capable, never perceiving any negative attitudes from my male colleagues. As the CEO, I regularly attended sector-related meetings alone without feeling uncomfortable. However, my perspective changed after an experience at a Chamber of Commerce and Industry meeting. During one of their evening networking events, I felt like an unnecessary person and asked myself, what am I doing here? There were only three women in the room, and nobody seemed to take our opinions into account. This experience left me feeling frustrated and undervalued, so I decided to send my husband to these meetings instead of attending them myself."

Bahar's experience highlights the power dynamics and gender hierarchies within professional networks, where women may find their work marginalized or dismissed due to prevailing gender norms. Her decision to stop attending these meetings underscores how societal expectations shape behaviours and reactions, ultimately reinforcing gender disparities. By choosing to manage these inequalities through her husband's presence, she exemplifies how individuals adapt to and negotiate gendered practices within male-dominated professional environments.

Many Finnish women entrepreneurs shared that they had not faced negative experiences in male-dominated networks. In addition, some Finnish interviewees spoke about participating in events organized by female entrepreneurs, which helped them connect with more women in business. Meanwhile, Finnish entrepreneur Marianna, who works in consultancy, initially found male-dominated networks more beneficial but has recently changed her perspective and started engaging with women's networks as well. She stated:

"I have undergone a shift in my perspective. During my time at the company, I was not inclined to participate in female networks because I did not find them as enjoyable as male networks. However, I have recently come to recognise the importance of being part of female networks, especially given the significant shortage of women in technical fields."

Marianna's reflection highlights a personal transformation in her views on professional networks, particularly regarding gender dynamics in the workplace. Initially, she preferred male-dominated networks, perceiving them as more enjoyable. However, she later recognized the importance of engaging with female networks, especially in response to the underrepresentation of women in technical fields. This shift demonstrates a growing awareness of the systemic barriers and gender inequalities in male-dominated industries, reinforcing the importance of solidarity and support among women.

By embracing female networks, Marianna moves beyond an individualistic approach and toward collective empowerment. These networks not only provide crucial support, mentorship, and opportunities, but also serve as spaces where women can share experiences, exchange knowledge, and promote structural change. This shift in perspective reflects a broader societal conversation about diversity and inclusion, emphasizing the role of gender-specific professional groups in fostering career development and addressing industry imbalances. Marianna's realization highlights the collective effort needed to build more inclusive environments.

Recognising the significance of female networks, particularly in male-dominated industries, can be seen as counter-postfeminist stance as it questions the idea that gender equality has been fully achieved. Instead, it calls for ongoing collective action to address persistent gender inequalities. Marianna's shift in perspective emphasizes the value of solidarity and community-building among women, aiming to disrupt existing power structures and foster greater inclusivity, especially in technical fields. Her recognition of the importance of female networks underscores the continuing struggle for gender equality and the importance of collective action in driving meaningful change.

Regarding funding, some Finnish participants mentioned receiving support through various national programs tailored to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises such as like Starttiraha[12], which provides financial support to new entrepreneurs during the early stages of business development. Finnish entrepreneur Lisa, who works in health sector, shared that she used her savings to start her business and partnered with a male colleague to secure more financial resources. Lisa noted:

'Finding financial support in Finland is not difficult for women, as everyone can apply to institutions that provide financial assistance to businesses, and gender does not pose a problem in this respect."

Lisa's comment aligns with Eriksson et al.'s (2009) findings, confirming that women in Finland have access to financial resources and there is no significant difference in the ability of women-owned and men-owned SMEs to secure funding in Finland. Both male and female entrepreneurs in Finland primarily rely on bank loans. However, Lisa also mentioned without naming that funding institutions are very competitive and tend to support male entrepreneurs. She stated:

[12] A grant provided by the Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices).

"Funding institutions are extremely competitive, and it often feels like they prioritize male entrepreneurs. Women have to work twice as hard to secure the same opportunities, even though there is no gender discrimination in applications in Finland."

While gender does not explicitly pose a problem in applying for financial support, as noted in the Finnish context, generally institutional practices and the competitive nature of funding allocation can still indirectly disadvantage women entrepreneurs more, especially when the businesses are more based on research and innovation. As discussed in Chapter 3, women entrepreneurs in STEM fields encounter stereotypes that question their expertise and leadership capabilities (Marlow and McAdam 2013). This bias is often linked to the stereotype that men are better suited for STEM fields and entrepreneurship (Alsos et al. 2006; Brush et al. 2019; Eddleston et al. 2016), influencing investment decisions and resulting in women receiving less financial support compared to their male counterparts (Carter et al. 2003; Coleman and Robb 2009; Powell and Eddleston 2013; Wheadon and Duval-Couetil 2019).

In Turkey, women entrepreneurs express overwhelmingly positive views about the support available for entrepreneurship, especially initiatives specifically designed for women, in addition to their personal savings. Sibel, who works in the software sector, explained:

"*There is actually a lot of support available for female and young entrepreneurs. Institutions like KOSGEB, offer slightly higher grant rates for female entrepreneurs. I established my company with financial support from TÜBITAK and I did not encounter any negative situations due to being a woman. On the contrary, I received a great deal of financial support from the governmental organisations."*

The Turkish women entrepreneurs I interviewed acknowledged the availability of financial support programs tailored for women entrepreneurs, such as those offered by KOSGEB[13] and TÜBİTAK[14]. These programs provide financial aid and

[13] The Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Development Agency of Turkey (KOSGEB) played a significant role in supporting these entrepreneurs. KOSGEB provides a range of services, including funding, training, and consultancy, aimed at fostering the growth and development of SMEs.

[14] The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) is the leading agency for the management, funding, and conduct of research in Turkey. It generally funds research and development projects.

entrepreneurship training to help women establish and grow their businesses. Support is offered in various forms, including workshops, access to resources, and facilities. Additionally, some women entrepreneurs benefit from incentives designed to encourage female participation in entrepreneurship. However, these support programs have been crucial for many Turkish women entrepreneurs, some women entrepreneurs, such as Elif, who works in mobile gaming, have criticized them for being specifically targeted at women, arguing that they make women appear weaker. Despite Elif's concern, it is clear that such programs play a significant role in helping women overcome financial barriers to entrepreneurship and success in KIE.

In conclusion, this subchapter emphasizes the importance of networks and funding in helping women entrepreneurs succeed in KIE. Access to funding has been essential, providing the financial support needed to start and maintain entrepreneurial businesses. Additionally, developing strong networks has facilitated knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collaboration, further empowering women in their professional careers within KIE. The findings highlight gendered patterns in professional networks, especially in Turkey. This is evident in the experience of Bahar, a Turkish woman entrepreneur who works in consultancy. Due to societal expectations and power structures that limit women's participation, she sent her husband to networking events. Despite facing obstacles, women entrepreneurs in both countries leverage existing relationships and attend networking events to expand their professional circles and access resources. Marianna's evolving perspective on female networks underscores the ongoing struggle for gender equality in technical fields. Furthermore, women in both countries utilize various support mechanisms, including government programs, to overcome financial barriers and enhance their entrepreneurial activities in KIE.

6.5 Summary

Chapter 6 examines the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE, highlighting the influence of gender on their professional careers. Key findings from this chapter show the obstacles women entrepreneurs face before KIE and in KIE. These obstacles include doubts about women's professional expertise and capabilities in technology and technology-related issues. Despite having the necessary qualifications and proving their competence, women entrepreneurs often have to overcome doubts about their expertise from male clients and colleagues. This doubt is deeply rooted in societal gender divisions that delineates specific fields and tasks as unsuitable for women. Such biases not only question women's professional capabilities but also create additional obstacles in building credibility and trust. However, the experiences also show the strength and ability of women entrepreneurs in managing these gendered work environments. By engaging in professional discussions and demonstrating their knowledge, women entrepreneurs disrupt the stereotypes that portray them as less capable, allowing them to assert their expertise and reshape perceptions. The experiences shared by participants also highlight the performative nature of gender and the potential for individuals to influence and change gendered expectations through their actions.

The interviews with Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs show the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in KIE. While some Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs acknowledge societal norms and stereotypes that may limit opportunities for women, others highlight the strengths and memorability associated with their gender, such as patience, empathy, and differentiation, as advantageous in KIE. Also, young women entrepreneurs may be noticed due to their gender and youthfulness. However, their expertise and competence may still be questioned, particularly in KIE, where gender inequalities are prevalent. Despite drawing attention, they might face additional doubt regarding their technical expertise because of their age and gender. The discussion on gendered networks illuminates another dimension of the entrepreneurial experience. The limited access to and participation in professional networks pose significant barriers for women entrepreneurs, impacting their ability to secure resources, establish business connections, and gain credibility. However, the formation of female networks and the shift in perspectives towards the value of such networks, as experienced by Finnish woman entrepreneur Marianna, signify a recognition of the importance of solidarity and support among women in overcoming these obstacles.

7 MANAGING GENDERED CONSTRAINTS

This chapter focuses on the study's second research question: How do women entrepreneurs manage gendered inequalities in KIE in Turkey and Finland? Within KIE, women face diverse gendered structural and interactional barriers hindering their entrepreneurial paths. By building upon the analysis in Chapter 6, this chapter employs a postfeminist lens, doing and undoing gender approaches as an analytical tool to examine how women entrepreneurs overcome these gendered constraints. It involves identifying their ways of resisting gender stereotypes and expectations within KIE. Insights are provided into how women internalise gender inequalities and biases in KIE, attributing them to elsewhere and to personal responsibility rather than recognising systemic barriers.

The analytical framework here is influenced by scholars like Gill (2007; 2014), Kelan (2014), Scharff (2011; 2016), and McRobbie (2009), whose work provides perspectives on the intersection of gender, entrepreneurship, and postfeminism. Their perspectives offer insight into analysing how women entrepreneurs manage gender inequalities and biases within KIE.

7.1 Gender inequality elsewhere

In examining participants' perspectives on gender inequality within entrepreneurship, a common theme emerges: inequality is seen to take place elsewhere, not in one's surroundings. Significantly, Finnish women entrepreneurs often explain gender inequality as if it were non-existent in Finland, contrasting with situations in other countries. For instance, during the interviews, Ella, specialising in marketing, and Laura, in software, both placed gender inequalities outside the Finnish context, in Laura words:

"In some places, gender inequality is still a major issue, but here in Finland, I have not really experienced it myself. Of course, I know it exists, but it feels more like something that happens in some other countries rather than in my own environment."

As Laura stated, she avoided from specifying a particular country, suggesting it might be prevalent in some nations. Ella, however, explicitly named a region with a specific religion, rejecting the relevance of inequalities to her personal life. She expressed her viewpoint as follows:

"*In Finland, we are all treated equally, and I have not experienced any form of discrimination. Such issues may be more visible in other countries, such as some Islamic countries, but not in our country.*"

Ella and Laura turn to comparing Finland with other nations, implying that gender inequalities might exist elsewhere but not in Finland. This perspective aligns with the postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007), which often downplays the existence of gender inequalities within a specific context. By framing gender issues as problems limited to other countries, Ella implied that gender inequality is not a significant issue as long as her enterprise operates only inside Finland and in her life.

In line with previous research, my findings reflect a pattern identified by Czarniawska and Calås (1997). Their study reveals how individuals from various countries interpreted gender discrimination as occurring elsewhere, particularly outside the modern Western world. This pattern reflects a uniform perception of the other, in which certain cultures, particularly Arab and Muslim societies, are viewed in a stereotypical manner. Furthermore, Korvajärvi's study in Finland (1998) supports this notion by highlighting a tendency among Finnish individuals to perceive inequalities as distant issues while considering equality to be closer at hand in one's workplace.

As noted in Chapter 2, in Finland during the 2010s, discussions about the Nordic welfare model changed significantly. Instead of focusing only on political and economic aspects, there was more emphasis on cultural issues. During this time, Finland made progress in gender equality, which became a source of national pride for some political leaders, highlighting the country's cultural values and heritage. This shift in perspective led to the perception of inequality as a distant issue and found expression in anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric (Nousiainen 2023:80). This tendency to downplay gender inequality within Finland was also reflected in the experiences of Finnish women entrepreneurs, such as Ella and Laura, who attributed such disparities to other countries. At the same time, this instrumentalisation of gender equality served to perpetuate a dichotomy where inequality became

associated with immigrants, contrasting with the portrayal of equality as an inherent Finnish characteristic.

In contrast, in my exploration of Turkish data, I observed varied experiences among women in Turkey shaped by political and cultural perspectives. It is crucial to note that no singular, standardised viewpoints emerged. For instance, Defne, a chemical engineer residing in Izmir, known as Turkey's most secular city, provided insights into gender inequalities in the workplace. She stated:

"I do not face gender inequality, perhaps because of my location. In Izmir, which is one of the most secular cities in Turkey, such issues are less common. I have never heard about it from my friends or neighbours."

Defne attributed her lack of gendered workplace inequalities to Izmir's cultural and political environment, emphasising the city's secular nature. This perspective suggests that her positive experiences are influenced by her region's broader cultural and political context rather than just individual choices or actions. Defne's viewpoint highlights the importance of the cultural and societal setting, suggesting that these factors are crucial in shaping women's experiences in the workplace. Her statement, therefore, tends more towards recognising the impact of external, collective influences rather than individual ones.

Also, Defne's interview account echoes Ella's statement: "In Finland, we are all treated equally". Both participants express the belief that gender inequality is not a problem in their respective regions or countries. This similarity suggests a common thread in their perspectives, where they downplay or dismiss gender inequalities based on their experiences and regional contexts.

Nevertheless, women's experiences are diverse, not uniform (Kelan 2014). Differentiators such as race, class, political identity, and age position women differently regarding their access to power and resources and the structure of their experiences (Walby et al. 2012). Specific combinations of these differentiators shape how inequality manifests itself, for example, in the professional work setting (Acker 2009; Gill 2002).

Finnish participants often assert that they do not personally encounter gender inequality in their entrepreneurial career. This aligns with the prevailing belief that gender no longer significantly influences the contemporary Finnish business

environment. The common view is that Finland has achieved gender equality. Tuija, a Finnish entrepreneur in the health sector, confidently stated:

"That is not possible in Finland. We are all equal here."

Additionally, Kirsi, a Finnish entrepreneur in the marketing sector, made a closing remark at the end of her interview that reflects the viewpoint of Finnish participants well. She concluded:

"This is a happy story from a woman who has been very fortunate, living in a country that values equality and is a good place for women."

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the influence of the postfeminist sensibility, as argued by Gill (2014), which may make it difficult to openly address and discuss gender inequality. This notion aligns with Finnish participants' tendency to emphasise gender equality, particularly when interacting with a researcher outside the Nordic region.

Like many others, Aino, a Finnish entrepreneur in marketing, initially believed that gender was not prevalent in her professional life. When we were talking about gender, she began to recall various instances from her past work career by referring to the #MeToo[15] campaign on past incidents:

"*When the #MeToo campaign started, my initial reaction was, Thank God, nothing happened to me. However, as I reflected on my work life before entrepreneurship, I began to recognise some incidents, such as tolerating inappropriate sexual jokes. In my role, I hosted several events and noticed that such behaviour was often accepted at the time. It is sad to acknowledge that it was considered acceptable back then. While it was irritating, I dismissed it as something that was just part of the job. It did not seem like a big deal at the time, but looking back now, many years later, I realise that it was unacceptable."*

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[15] The #MeToo campaign is a movement that emerged over a decade ago as part of a grassroots movement spearheaded by African American activist Tarana Burke. It gained widespread traction in recent years, especially in 2017, when American actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet encouraging survivors of sexual harassment and assault to post #MeToo as a status update. This movement aims to raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, encourage survivors to speak out, and hold perpetrators accountable. The campaign has sparked conversations about gender-based violence and has led to policy changes in various institutions (Rottenberg 2019).

Aino's experience highlights the importance of recognising that while Finland may have made strides towards gender equality, there are still inequalities rooted in the past. While many participants may claim that gender equality is a reality in their work and social lives, instances like Marianna's experience show that gender inequality or discrimination can still have an impact, even in a generally egalitarian society. Marianna, an engineering graduate who worked in various organisations before opening her consultancy company with her husband, shared her experience of gender inequality in work life. This inequality influenced her decision not to have a child. She explained:

"I recall that in my youth, I chose not to have children because I believed my career was more important. I encountered several situations where I was considered the top candidate for a position, only to be passed over with the reasoning that all women eventually become pregnant, so we cannot hire you. While it is illegal to openly express such sentiments, it unfortunately happened. Women face disadvantages such as maternity leave. I remember a meeting from about 15 years ago when I was serving as chairperson of a local government organisation. There was one man present, and the rest of the participants were women. The women began sharing their experiences with career challenges. One woman mentioned that she was not hired after being asked about her children in a job interview. The only man in the group then pointed out that no one had ever inquired about his parental status or asked about children in interviews because he was a man."

As our conversation progressed, Marianna observed that the current situation is an improvement compared to the past. Like several other Finnish participants, she believes that gender equality issues have evolved positively over time.

This sentiment aligns with my broader findings from interviews. While engaging with Finnish participants, I found a compelling article on Yle News. This piece provided insight into the ongoing public view and media coverage regarding gender-related matters in Finland during my interviews.

The Yle News article (2020), titled "Being a Woman in Finland: What Has Changed in 10, 20, 30 Years?" recognises the shifts in cultural climate and legislative changes over time. This article maintains a positive tone, emphasising Finland's progress in moving away from a previously sexist culture. However, it is important to recognise that the Yle News article offers a somewhat limited perspective on gender equality, primarily addressing the gender pay gap as a gender-related issue. According to the Attila et al. (2019:64), workplaces with a gender-balanced composition tend to have more positive views on achieving gender equality. In contrast, women working in

male-dominated workplaces tend to perceive gender equality progress as less satisfactory, with only 18 per cent of women in such environments believing that gender equality has been achieved very well, compared to 44 per cent of men.

Additionally, Attila et al. (2019:68) argue that women in male-dominated workplaces report the highest number of experiences related to gender-based disadvantages, accounting for 71 per cent of such instances. Nevertheless, these experiences are not exclusive to male-dominated workplaces; they are also prevalent in female-dominated and gender-balanced work environments, where more than half of the women report having encountered gender-based disadvantages.

Despite the participants' views on the achievement of gender equality, statistical data highlights the persistence of inequality within the labour market. This contrast emphasises the importance of recognising that gender inequalities may still exist, even when individuals believe that gender equality has been attained.

Furthermore, Finnish participants often engage with what Billig et al. (1988) describe as an "ideological dilemma". This refers to the conflict they experience between opposing beliefs or values within the same ideology. In this study, Finnish participants demonstrate this dilemma in their approach to gender equality. They often assert a strong belief in gender equality as a core value in Finnish society, yet their experiences in KIE sometimes contradict this belief. This contradiction presents a dilemma in reconciling these views, particularly evident as they acknowledge and dismiss instances of gender inequality. For example, in sectors they perceive as female-dominated, like marketing, participants argue there is no gender inequality, viewing their workplaces as gender-neutral. However, this perspective coexists with an awareness of gender inequality in male-dominated sectors. Kirsi, a woman entrepreneur in marketing, embodies this dual perspective: she sees her field as gender-neutral but recognises gender inequality in other areas of Finnish industry. This highlights the complex ways participants express their perceptions of gender equality and inequality in their entrepreneurial experiences in KIE. Kirsi explained:

"It depends on the sector. For example, food sector, there are a lot of women, but there is some discrimination because the intermediate level managements were all women, but the director was men. Before that, I worked part-time in the paper industry during my studies and then worked in the metal industry. The metal industry was much discriminated. Most of the employees were men, which was the same in the paper industry. The director was a man, but we are talking about the '80s. Yes, it has changed, but at that those times, it was like that."

Ulla took a similar position when we were talking about gender balance in sectors. She stated:

"Start-ups are often male-dominated, though this can vary depending on the industry or sector. For example, in the food industry, there are more women. However, it is not easy to generalize about gender balance across different sectors. I did not pay much attention to that."

The perception of gender inequality as something that happens elsewhere or in the past, as discussed in this section, refers to the tendency of individuals to view gender inequality as an issue primarily affecting other countries, regions, or sectors rather than their environment. This understanding can hinder efforts to address gender inequalities in KIE. By attributing gender inequality to elsewhere, women entrepreneurs may underestimate the prevalence and impact of gender inequality and bias in their own KIE work. This can result in a lack of proactive measures to address systemic inequalities and foster a more equitable work environment. Ignoring or dismissing gender inequalities within the entrepreneurial ecosystem can perpetuate existing disparities and limit opportunities for women in KIE.

The above analysis primarily focuses on the views of Finnish participants, who frequently perceive gender inequality as a distant issue rather than a local one. However, also Turkish participants, such as Defne from Izmir, also share a belief that gender inequalities are less prevalent in their specific contexts, attributing positive experiences to their secular environment. This underscores the importance of recognising that the perception of gender inequality as something that occurs elsewhere is not unique to Finland but is also observed in Turkey, though influenced by different cultural and regional issues.

7.2 Personal responsibility

Women often downplay or disregard the significance of gender in their interactions. Some scholars state that "women may tend to attribute gender biases to the actions of a few individuals, viewing a focus on gender as a distraction or an exaggeration" (Britton 2017:9). Consequently, individual activities become a common coping mechanism for dealing with gender discrimination (Kelan 2009). Women often construct themselves as active agents, believing they can overcome gender discrimination by taking personal responsibility. Therefore, the structural nature of discrimination is hidden (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). Hiding discrimination leads to a situation where, even if women face gender discrimination, they assume there

are personal reasons for the situation rather than believing that gender might affect their treatment (Kelan 2009). This view was visible in both Finnish and Turkish participants. For example, Sibel, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in software, remarked:

"*The perspective on women varies among men and is also influenced by individual personalities. While some men see women as second-class and believe we are not equal, others support women based on their achievements. Personally, I have not encountered such problems, and I think it may be related to my own personality.*"

Sibel suggested that individuals' perspectives on gender equality varied based on their personalities and not solely on their gender. Sibel implied that personal attitudes and beliefs played a more significant role in shaping one's experiences with gendered biases than gender alone. This reflects the idea that some individuals may perceive gendered biases as a problem related to the attitudes of a few individuals rather than as a systemic issue.

Finnish participant Marjukka took a similar position:

"Y*es, we are equal, but there are underlying attitudes that can be subtle and not immediately apparent. People do not necessarily intend to misbehave, but they may hold these attitudes without being aware of them. Sometimes, Maria and I have had similar experiences when presenting our project or product to organisations; the feedback was quite aggressive, which made us feel uncomfortable. However, this is an isolated case and not very common. I think it is just a matter of human chemistry."*

When I asked Marjukka about gender issues at work, she initially stated that gender did not seem to matter in the workplace, although she appeared to recollect a particular incident. Marjukka seemed to downplay her negative experiences by saying, "this is an isolated case and not very common". While she presented discrimination within the company as an exceptional event, it was more common for her to acknowledge that discrimination occurred with male customers.

From her perspective, gender-related attitudes or biases might exist, but she did not perceive them as a significant issue. This perspective aligns with the notion that individuals often minimize or individualize gender discrimination, viewing it as a relatively rare event caused by the attitudes of a few individuals rather than a systemic problem.

Marjukka rejected the idea that gender was the primary driver of these negative attitudes. Instead, she attributed them to what she termed human chemistry. This response diverges from the individualisation perspective, which emphasising personal responsibility in shaping one's experiences with gender inequality.

This perspective is echoed in another interviewee's account of Özlem, a Turkish participant in ICT. While she personally did not face such gender inequalities and biases, she observed that some of her female friends encountered difficulties in the industry:

"*Such experiences did not happen to me, but I had friends who faced difficulties in this sector. Some of my friends cried and struggled. For example, some women were afraid to ask questions if they did not understand something during meetings because they feared being labelled as not understanding anything. As a result, they would not ask questions during the meeting and would later seek support from someone like me or another friend. Fortunately, I did not experience such issues, and perhaps this is due to my own character.*"

Özlem's quote suggests that while women may face inequalities in male-dominated sectors, their experiences can differ depending on their determination, character, and willingness to persist. Her statement highlights the complex interplay of personal attributes, societal expectations, and gender dynamics in women's professional experiences.

Both Finnish and Turkish participants commonly noted two possible ways in which customers responded to women in technical positions: most people were pleasantly surprised and gave women extra credit, but in some cases, there were reservations towards women and their technical abilities, which then had to be overcome. The individualisation of experiences was a frequent feature in the interviews and became apparent in Sibel's and Marjukka's discussions. They subsequently denied the possibility that their experience had a gendered dimension. Instead, they adopted an individualist perspective and claim it was about personality.

Another way to deny or minimize the significance of gender in KIE is to downplay its influence by emphasizing a connection between age and experience while suggesting that gender is either irrelevant or insignificant in shaping negative experiences. Essentially, this view reduces the perceived impact of gender on observed outcomes or experiences.

The experiences shared by both Finnish and Turkish participants illustrated intersections of age and experience bias in technological knowledge. Their encounters align with Scharff's (2011) observation that, rather than regarding gender as the main explanation, younger women often attribute their situations to age and lack of expertise.

For example, Arzu, a 25 year old entrepreneur in software in Turkey:

"*Of course, sometimes I am not taken seriously because of my age. I can sometimes appear to them like a little girl.*"

Laura, a 30 year old entrepreneur in software in Finland, echoes Arzu's statement:

"Male entrepreneurs often receive more trust and credibility compared to women, especially younger women. Since I look younger than I am, people might question how much they should listen to me and instead choose to trust more expert-looking men."

Laura and Arzu highlight the combination of age and experience differences in the context of technical and scientific knowledge, which impact women's workplace experiences. Instead of attributing these experiences to gender, they emphasize age, illustrating how gender dynamics operate in the workplace. This focus on age and the lack of expertise in addressing gender inequalities downplays the relevance of gender in these experiences—a framing interpreted as a coping mechanism for dealing with the workplace more comfortably.

In conclusion, the interviewed Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs demonstrated how individualization influences responses to gender discrimination within professional contexts. A common theme is the tendency to emphasize personal responsibility and attribute gender-related experiences to individuals rather than recognizing systemic issues. In both Turkey and Finland, participants showed a tendency to downplay and individualize instances of gendered biases and inequalities. This approach influences how women perceive and manage their professional experiences. By focusing on personality and the relationship between age and experience, women minimize the significance of gender in their workplace experiences. This framing serves as a coping mechanism for managing the workplace more comfortably but may also reduce the importance of addressing systemic gender inequalities. Regarding KIE, individualising gender inequalities may hinder efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and gender equality within entrepreneurship. When

gender inequality is perceived as an individual issue rather than a systemic problem, initiatives aimed at addressing gender disparities may be overlooked or undervalued in KIE.

7.3 Individual choices and criticism

As I argued in Chapter 4, individual choices emphasize the belief that individuals have equal capacity to make free choices and are held responsible for them (Lewis 2014). Scholars such as McNay (2000), Morgan (1982), and Solinger (2001) suggest that when society emphasizes personal choices, it can hide systemic inequalities and make it harder for individuals to recognize the larger social limitations that affect them. They argue that the concept of choice needs to be revised in comprehensively addressing the circumstances influencing individuals' decisions, resulting in disparate opportunities and constraints for different people.

When analysing the interview transcripts, I observed a distinct contrast in how Finnish and Turkish participants interpret the actions of others regarding gender inequalities in KIE. Finnish women often discussed the choices they and others have made, highlighting decisions that have led to success or failure in professional settings. As Ikonen and Korvajärvi (2023) emphasise, Finnish society strongly promotes the idea that individuals, regardless of gender, should make choices that reflect their personal preferences. The cultural ethos in Finland values personal freedom and autonomy in decision-making, encouraging people to shape their lives according to their circumstances and aspirations. In contrast, Turkish women tended to criticise other women based on their actions rather than their choices. Particularly in entrepreneurship, this suggests that gender inequalities stem from women's failure to aim high enough or to pave the way for their own success adequately. The Turkish participants also established boundaries between different individuals in the interviews, particularly between fighting and non-fighting women. For example, Melek, a Turkish woman entrepreneur in the defence sector, stated:

"To address inequalities and obstacles, a woman must be determined and proactive. Nothing is handed to anyone on a silver platter, and this applies to both men and women. Men often pursue their goals out of necessity, as they typically have households to support and adhere to traditional roles rooted in the past. There are more women in roles as housewives than in the workforce. These women may enjoy a certain level of comfort without the need to earn their own livelihood—it is like having bread from someone else and water from the lake, as the Turkish idiom goes. Men, driven by their cultural responsibility for household affairs, often show greater persistence,

which might explain their higher representation in certain sectors. Women, on the other hand, may not always fight as hard and can give up more quickly."

Melek's perspective, as a Turkish woman entrepreneur in the defence sector, reflects the splitting and blaming notion discussed by Baker and Kelan (2019) regarding women's responses to gender inequalities. Melek emphasises the importance of determination and proactivity for addressing inequalities, aligning with the idea that women may reject or individualise these inequalities. According to Baker and Kelan (2019), women under neoliberalism might minimise or frame others as responsible for their lack of success, creating a view that protects them from wider structural inequalities. The belief expressed by Melek—that the underrepresentation of women in specific sectors is a result of women choosing to step back—reflects the idea that, under neoliberalism, women may attribute their career choices to personal decisions rather than recognising broader systemic inequalities. This perspective aligns with the argument presented by Gill (2008) and Scharff (2016), who suggest that executive women often frame their negative experiences as individual shortcomings, blaming others for wider structural inequalities.

Reflecting on their experiences, another Turkish participant Selin examines her own behaviour, particularly her prioritisation of motherhood and tendency to take a backseat in professional settings. She wonders if these personal choices have caused her to fall behind in her career. This highlights the complexity of women's responses to gender dynamics, showing that their experiences are shaped not only by external influences in society but also by their self-perception. By focusing on both external and internal influences, Selin's experience helps explain the complicated ways women respond to gender inequalities in the workplace. It also reflects broader discussions on how women manage societal expectations and inequity, illustrating the tension between societal norms and individual choices in shaping their career paths.

While the phenomenon of criticising other women for gender inequalities in entrepreneurship remains evident in the statements of Turkish participants, its direct connection to KIE may not be clear. However, the tendency to criticise other women for their perceived lack of ambition or effort may reflect broader cultural attitudes and societal expectations regarding women's roles and responsibilities. In the context of KIE, this approach may create a less supportive environment for

women entrepreneurs, limiting collaboration and collective efforts to address systemic gender inequalities within KIE.

As a foreign researcher residing in Finland, I also noticed that Finnish society strongly emphasises respecting individuals' choices and decisions without a tendency for judgment. Therefore, I observed that the discussion of choice and criticism are shaped by the cultural structures of Finnish and Turkish societies. I would argue that this cultural distinction between Finnish and Turkish society is also evident in the interviews. For example, Ella, a Finnish woman entrepreneur in marketing, talked about her friends' choices not to work. While giving examples from her friends, she said they preferred not to work because of their own decisions, not because of inequalities.

"I have friends who quit jobs after working for a while. They are not working at the moment. But that does not mean they do not work because they are not talented or unsuccessful in business. Or it is not about their gender – it is their choice. They chose not to work."

Ella's perspective echoes postfeminist thinking, emphasising individual freedom to choose without external constraints. Her emphasis on personal choice over societal obligation aligns with Lewis and Simpson's (2017) observation that women have the ability to shape their lives based on personal preferences, skills, and aspirations, rather than conforming to gendered norms. Furthermore, Ella's experience aligns with the view prevalent in Finnish culture. As highlighted by Ikonen and Korvajärvi (2023), in Finnish society, there is an encouragement for individuals, irrespective of gender, to make choices that align with their personal preferences. The cultural ethos prioritises personal freedom and autonomy in decision-making, allowing individuals to manage their lives based on their circumstances and aspirations. Ella's assertion that her friends' decision to stay at home is a matter of personal choice rather than societal obligation aligns with the cultural values of autonomy and freedom prevalent in Finnish society.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, Ece, Turkish woman entrepreneur in software, encountered difficulties and inequalities in progressing her career in a male-dominated field. To overcome gendered practices in her work life, she decided to establish her own company in KIE, leveraging her technical expertise in software and mechanical engineering alongside skills associated with design and marketing, which are seen as more feminine fields. Ece's choice of combining her technical knowledge with design and marketing skills reflects a postfeminist ideas on managing

gendered tasks. Rather than rejecting feminine attributes, she embraces them as part of her professional work activity and leverages them to create a space for herself in KIE. However, she continues to face gender inequalities and biases in her interactions with male clients in KIE where she established her company. Despite being aware of these inequalities, Ece demonstrates an approach to managing such situations. She acknowledged the existence of gender biases and offered two potential solutions based on the significance of the male client to her business:

"*There may be situations where the male customer does not want to contact you. I have met people who refused to see me because I was a woman and wanted to meet with male staff. There are two kinds of solutions. First, if the customer is valuable to the business and the loss would have negative effects, I can accept the situation and direct him to the male staff. Second, if the customer is not important to the business, I choose not to communicate with him.*"

Hatmaker (2013) argues that women working in male-dominated fields, instead of directly confronting or addressing gender biases, rationalise them to themselves as being acceptable or just part of the norm in their workplace environment. By rationalising these interactions, women convince themselves that such behaviour is normal or unavoidable, even though it may undermine their professional standing or perpetuate gender biases. This allows them to tolerate the marginalisation and continue their work without questioning the underlying issues. In essence, rationalisation enables individuals to cope with discriminatory or biased situations by mentally reframing them in a way that preserves their sense of self and allows them to carry on with their responsibilities.

In the quote above, Ece, a Turkish woman entrepreneur, is well aware of gender inequality in her field. When faced with difficult situations, such as male customers refusing to engage with her because of her gender, Ece finds ways to manage these instances. Rationalisation (Hatmaker 2013) comes into play when she decides not to directly confront the inequalities but instead justifies the situation to herself. For example, if the customer's preference for male staff is significant for the business, Ece accepts the situation and delegates the interaction to her male colleagues. Conversely, if the customer's engagement is not crucial, she chooses not to involve herself in the situation, rationalising that it is not worth her time and effort to address every bias and inequality. This coping mechanism allows Ece to manage discriminatory situations by mentally reframing them, preserving her self-confidence

and enabling her to focus on her responsibilities without being affected by gender biases and inequalities.

Ella, the Finnish woman entrepreneur in marketing, also uses the rationalisation approach with the Arabic customer regarding negotiation tactics. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, she also thinks that gender inequality is a problem in other countries.

"*We are equal people in Finland, and I have not faced any discrimination, so it can be seen in other countries like Islamic countries, not our country. For example, we are working with a customer from Saudi Arabia, and he did not want to talk to me during one of our phone calls; and I directed him to my male colleague*."

Ella presents a dichotomy in her approach to gender equality. On the one hand, she views gender inequality as a problem that exists elsewhere, not in Finland. This perspective aligns with her personal experiences, as Ella asserts that she has never faced discrimination in her home country. On the other hand, rather than recognising the behaviour of the Arabic customer as discriminatory, she adopts a rationalisation approach, attributing it to cultural differences and portraying it as a routine phone call. By redirecting the customer to her male colleague, Ella accepts and perpetuates the gendered dynamics, thereby undermining the principles of equality she advocates for within her own context.

Turkish participant Ece's and Finnish participant Ella's experiences illuminate the diverse ways women entrepreneurs employ to address gender inequalities within KIE. Ella's and Ece's decision to redirect male customers to male colleagues reinforces existing gender norms. Instead of directly questioning the male customer's behaviours, this action can be interpreted as accommodating the situation. The intention seems to be preserving business relationships while acknowledging and adapting to existing gender biases.

Another Turkish participant, Bahar, who runs a technical consulting firm with her spouse, has implemented her own solution to handle gender biases in her business. Bahar chooses to attend client meetings alongside her co-founder spouse, who employs a rationalisation approach discussed earlier. This decision, in line with the choices made by Ella and Ece, recognises and adjusts to the existing gender inequalities within her professional environment:

"I typically prefer to attend client meetings with my spouse. When I attend alone, I often sense a lack of serious consideration, possibly due to gender biases. This is evident in attitudes during meetings that suggest a limited understanding of technical matters. As a result, I choose to bring my husband along. However, if the client is a woman, I attend the meeting alone."

By bringing her husband to these meetings, Bahar found a way to deal with the gender inequality in her field. While this approach may help her gain recognition and respect for her expertise, it raises questions about how effective it will be in the long run. This solution might reinforce the stereotype that women need male approval in technical fields. It is a pragmatic approach to dealing with biases, but it also indirectly supports the perception that she might not be independently competent in technical matters. This situation highlights the complicated choices women in male-dominated fields often face, balancing the need to demonstrate their expertise with managing existing gender inequalities in KIE.

Bahar chooses to meet with female clients on her own, demonstrating that her adaptation goes beyond managing perceptions. It reflects her recognition of opportunities to conduct business without having to fight against gender bias. In meetings with women, Bahar finds an environment where her expertise and professional standing are more likely to be acknowledged without a male colleague.

In conclusion, the discussion on individual choices and criticism within postfeminism shows the complexities of addressing gender inequalities in KIE. Emphasising personal choices hides systemic inequalities, leading individuals to focus on self-criticism rather than recognising broader societal constraints. This phenomenon is evident in the experiences of Turkish participants, who interpreted gender inequalities differently from their Finnish counterparts. Finnish women often discussed personal choices and their consequences, while Turkish women tended to attribute criticism to individual shortcomings, often overlooking systemic gender inequalities. Influenced by cultural norms, Turkish participants frequently criticised other women for their perceived lack of ambition or effort, reflecting broader societal attitudes. However, blaming indirectly shapes entrepreneurial experiences, affecting confidence, networking opportunities, and access to resources for women entrepreneurs. In contrast, possibly because Finnish society emphasises individual freedom and autonomy, women like Ella view personal choices as paramount and attribute inequalities to other countries.

Additionally, individual experiences within KIE further illustrate the complexities of managing gender inequalities. Women entrepreneurs often encounter gender inequalities and biases, leading to rationalisations such as redirecting male clients to male colleagues. While these solutions may help manage immediate inequalities and biases, they also reinforce gender stereotypes and raise questions about the long-term effectiveness of creating more inclusive and equitable environments for women entrepreneurs in KIE.

7.4 Summary

The analysis of interviews highlights a common trend observed in both Finnish and Turkish contexts: participants often downplay or dismiss the existence of gender inequalities in their experiences. This aligns with the observations of scholars like McRobbie (2009) and Baker and Kelan (2019), who emphasise how women may internalise gender inequalities by attributing them to individual choices rather than recognising systemic barriers. The analysis reveals how women in professional settings manage and interpret gendered obstacles within KIE in both countries, often choosing to overlook or minimise gender inequalities. However, there are differences in how this is handled.

In the Finnish context, a common perception emerges: Respondents often view gender inequality as an issue in other countries, regions, or sectors dominated by men, while seeing Finland as a place that has effectively achieved gender equality. Turkish participants, acknowledge structural inequality within their society but tend to see it as a problem affecting women in other regions or sectors, rather than their own.

A common view between Finnish and Turkish participants is their reference to individualisation. However, the interpretation of individualisation differs significantly. Finnish participants often attribute inequality to the personality of the men they collaborate with, thus diverting attention from structural issues. In contrast, Turkish participants acknowledge structural issues as the root of gender inequality but assert that they personally do not experience such inequalities, attributing this to their strong character and ability to overcome gender inequalities. Interestingly, Turkish women entrepreneurs tend to place responsibility for inequalities on other women entrepreneurs, suggesting that these women have not adequately addressed or taken action to fight inequality within their sectors. This

aligns with the postfeminist portrayal of the strong, do-what-you-want woman figure that is often emphasised.

Furthermore, women entrepreneurs from Finland and Turkey often focus on personal responsibility when confronting gender inequality in KIE. Instead of attributing negative experiences to gender biases, they tend to emphasise personal attributes such as character, age, or lack of expertise. This tendency to downplay gendered biases and frame experiences through a lens of personal responsibility prioritises individual empowerment while overlooking broader structural inequalities.

8 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

During my research, I focused on the relationships of gender and entrepreneurship in KIE in Finland and Turkey. KIE builds its activities on knowledge and operates within a knowledge economy (Malerba 2010; Malerba and McKelvey 2016). Enterprises in KIE engage not only with advanced science and technology, but also with low-tech and medium-tech sectors, utilising diverse forms of knowledge such as market expertise, design, and creativity. Crucially, KIE enterprises distinguish themselves by their capacity to transform knowledge into innovative goods and services, as knowledge-based services (KIBS) are part of KIE. Also, KIE is intertwined with innovation and innovation systems. These systems consist of public and private institutions, policies, and activities that support the development and diffusion of innovations within a country. Within this framework, KIE operates through networks and interactions among various actors, including universities, research institutions, government agencies, and financial organisations. These networks facilitate the transformation of ideas into marketable products or services, highlighting the collaborative nature of entrepreneurship within innovation ecosystems (Malerba 2010; Malerba and Mckelvey 2016).

Previous research in KIE has primarily focused on questions related to the connections between knowledge, innovation, and performance (Heidemann et al. 2018; Malerba et al. 2016) and has also examined how the resources and skills that business founders already have before starting their companies affect how well their businesses perform (Colombo and Grilli 2005; Dencker et al. 2009; Shane and Stuart 2002). Nevertheless, there has been a notable gap in research that examine the impact of gender on KIE from a feminist perspective, with only a few studies, such as Amoroso and Link (2018), Walby et al. (2007) and Walby (2011).

In this research, drawing on definitions provided by Malerba (2010) and Malerba and McKelvey (2016) for KIE, and Muller and Doloreux (2009) for KIBS, I adopted "knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship" as an umbrella term to describe all women entrepreneurs in my research from Turkey and Finland. These women entrepreneurs work in various sectors, such as ICT, software, defence, and healthcare. Many of the

women entrepreneurs in my study, for example, those with engineering backgrounds, are engaged in sectors known for their intensive use of knowledge. These areas demand a deep understanding of advanced technical concepts. Additionally, a large number of entrepreneurs in my research are involved in market research, analysis services, and consultancy services for research and development. These services not only share expert knowledge but also foster innovation. By expanding the concept of KIE to include KIBS, my study recognised the diverse ways women entrepreneurs leverage knowledge, particularly in consultancy and research and development activities rooted in technical and scientific expertise.

My research builds on the work of Walby et al. (2007) and Walby (2011), who studied gender inequalities in the knowledge economy, by focusing on the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE. Walby et al. (2007) highlight the dual nature of the knowledge economy: it offers opportunities for autonomy and innovation but also maintains precarious employment conditions and occupational segregation. This duality is evident in the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Turkey and Finland, who face barriers such as low participation in scientific and technological fields (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021). My research expands on the theoretical insights of Walby et al. (2007) and Walby (2011) by incorporating a feminist lens through the doing/undoing gender framework and a postfeminist approach, offering an understanding of how women entrepreneurs in KIE manage these inequalities.

In addition, my study complements the work of Amoroso and Link (2018), whose findings highlight sectoral disparities, particularly the underperformance of women-led firms in low-tech industries and their relative success in high-tech sectors. My research contextualizes these insights within KIE, illustrating how societal and cultural norms in Turkey and Finland shape the opportunities and inequalities faced by women entrepreneurs. While Amoroso and Link (2018) call for further exploration of the mechanisms underlying these performance disparities, my study addresses this by examining the structural and cultural factors influencing women's entrepreneurial careers in KIE. By addressing these mechanisms, I provide insights into how gendered organizational practices and societal expectations can be restructured to promote equality in KIE.

In my research, KIE is discussed with a focus on women entrepreneurs. In KIE, women entrepreneurs in Turkey and Finland face gendered biases and gender

inequalities that underscore the gendered nature of their entrepreneurial careers. These biases and inequalities often place women in token (Kanter 1977) or minority status within their professional environment. Women are still significantly underrepresented in scientific and technological careers across Europe. They make up only 41.3 per cent of the workforce in these fields (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:63) and just 13.5 per cent of those employed in knowledge-intensive industries in the EU (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021:72). The same is true in Turkey and Finland: women entrepreneurs make up only about one-fifth of the workforce in the science, technology, and innovation sectors in both countries (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021). Gendered biases and inequalities continue to restrict women's opportunities in entrepreneurship, funding and network opportunities (Ahl 2006; Carter et al. 2003; Coleman and Robb 2009; Godwin et al. 2006; Powell and Eddleston 2013; Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean 2018).

In my study, I examined how societal and cultural norms, cultural expectations, and workplace practices influence the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs. How do these impact their access to business networks and economic resources, and how do they manage and address gender inequalities throughout their entrepreneurial careers in KIE? My research aimed to uncover both the commonalities and differences in the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs in this context.

To address these questions, I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey, 16 from Turkey and 13 from Finland, all operating in KIE. I analysed these interviews using thematic analysis and employed two theoretical frameworks: the doing gender approach (Butler 1993, 1999, 2004; Gherardi 1994; Martin 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987) and postfeminism (Gill 2007; Gill et al. 2017; Kelan 2007, 2010; Lewis 2006; McRobbie 2004, 2009).

In the context of my study, the doing gender approach was beneficial in analysing and understanding how women entrepreneurs actively perform and reinforce gender norms and stereotypes through their actions and interactions in entrepreneurship. Cultural norms, legal frameworks, and societal expectations were crucial elements in shaping the experiences of women entrepreneurs. In addition to doing gender approaches, I benefited from postfeminist views to uncover how these entrepreneurs overcame the gendered barriers, inequalities and ran their businesses

successfully. Postfeminist ideas together with the approaches of doing and undoing gender reveal a complex situation in which gender is both questioned and maintained.

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the findings related to my two research questions. Firstly, in sub-chapter 8.1, I present the outcomes concerning how the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in KIE are gendered. Secondly, in sub-chapter 8.2, I explore how these women entrepreneurs manage gendered biases and inequalities in KIE within the contexts of Turkey and Finland. In sub-chapter 8.3, I discuss the commonalities and differences in their gendered experiences, contextualizing these within the two countries. Following this, in sub-chapter 8.4, I outline the practical implications of my study. In sub-chapter 8.5, I conclude by acknowledging the study's limitations and offer suggestions for future research in KIE, based on the insights gained.

8.1 Gendered entrepreneurial experiences

In addressing the first research question, "In what ways are the experiences of Turkish and Finnish women in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship gendered?" my research focused on exploring the gendered experiences of Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs in KIE. I aimed to understand how gendered norms, cultural expectations, and workplace practices shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE. This analysis examined women's entry points into entrepreneurship within KIE, addressing gender inequality in the labour market and exploring the desire for flexibility. It also examined gendered expertise and how gender differences influence the utilisation of female gender in KIE. Additionally, this study explored gendered networks and funding mechanisms. Overall, this subchapter outlines the research focus on gendered experiences of Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs in KIE, highlighting societal and cultural aspects influencing women's entrepreneurial careers.

In my research, women entrepreneurs from Turkey and Finland covered a variety of KIEs. In Finland, their ventures included software development, technical consultancy, health, and product marketing. Turkish women were prominent in energy efficiency, software development, technical consultancy, and mechanical product marketing. A common point among these entrepreneurs was their educational background, with many holding master's degrees in sciences, engineering, medical studies, and business. Their entry into KIE was characterised

by leveraging knowledge gained through previous work experiences and educational pursuits. This expertise, often rooted in STEM, was crucial to their entrepreneurship. Despite operating in different sectors, Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs share a strong educational background and leverage their expertise in STEM fields to enter KIE. This highlights the importance of education and prior work experience in women's entrepreneurial career.

Based on my analysis, I found two main reasons why these women chose entrepreneurship: the first concerns gender inequalities in their previous workplaces, and the second involves desiring independence and flexibility.

The findings suggest that Finnish and Turkish women entered entrepreneurship to escape gender inequalities in the labour market, including discriminatory practices, limited career opportunities and a male-dominated workplace culture that favours male employees, leading women to explore alternative career paths, as found in earlier studies (Cross and Linehan 2006; Karataş 2013; Minibaş-Poussard et al. 2011; Özbilgin and Woodward 2004). This path into entrepreneurship was a response to barriers such as limited representation and recognition of women in leadership positions, unequal pay, and cultural biases favouring males in organisations. Additionally, gendered practices such as dress codes and the expected responsibility to organise social events, find reinforcement in everyday organisational practices. These practices perpetuate conventional societal norms, a reality reflected in the experiences of Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs at their previous workplaces. These practices help maintain a gendered symbolic order (Gherardi 1994) within organisations, and reinforcing what is considered appropriate behaviour and tasks based on gender. For many women facing such inequalities at work, entrepreneurship has become a crucial and often indispensable option, offering them a space to take control over their work and seek independence.

The interviewed women expressed the expectation that KIE offers entrepreneurs a level of independence distinct from paid work. Being one's own boss is a fundamental aspect of entrepreneurship across sectors. Moreover, the flexibility to set one's work schedule is particularly valuable in knowledge-intensive fields, where creative and innovative work requires adaptability. Entrepreneurs in KIE often engage in research and development, which benefits from the freedom to be productive during unconventional, long working hours. My research revealed that both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs were primarily motivated by a desire

for autonomy, the need to escape rigid organizational constraints, and the aspiration to make independent decisions free from external control, aligning with existing literature (Ahl 2002; Patterson and Mavin 2009).

Flexibility is a crucial aspect of gaining autonomy in entrepreneurship in KIE. Many of the women entrepreneurs expressed a strong desire for a work environment that allows for greater adaptability in terms of work hours, location, and work-life balance. This flexibility is not primarily about convenience; it represents a need to adapt their professional responsibilities to align with their personal lives and aspirations. The ability to have control over one's schedule, to work in a manner that accommodates other life commitments is a significant influence in their decision to pursue entrepreneurship. Contrary to earlier studies (e.g. Hilbrecht 2016), which often cite the need to balance work and family responsibilities as the primary motivation for entrepreneurship, the educated Turkish and Finnish participants I interviewed did not necessarily prioritise this aspect. While many still view entrepreneurship as a means to achieve work-family balance, it is not the primary reason to begin an entrepreneurial career.

At the same time, women entrepreneurs in KIE expressed a strong desire to escape the external controls that governed their work. These controls refer to the hierarchical or systemic constraints often found in organizations. In such settings, decisions are made top-down, and employees have limited influence over their work conditions. By questioning and resisting these external controls, the women entrepreneurs sought to break free from the constraints that limited their professional lives. By transitioning to entrepreneurship, they felt more control over their work environment and practices. My findings on the motivations behind women's pursuit of entrepreneurship—such as the desire for independence, the aspiration to be one's own boss, and the quest for flexible working hours— support the previous research on entrepreneurship (e.g. Patterson and Mavin 2009).

Moreover, the need for flexibility often turns into a preference for working from home. The female entrepreneurs I interviewed in Finland and Turkey preferred to work from home, especially if they were self-employed without employees. This choice provides the flexibility and autonomy highly valued by many entrepreneurs, aligning with the core motivations behind entrepreneurship. However, the perception of working from home varied among participants. Some found it advantageous, while others, particularly in Turkey, viewed it as complex due to the

blurred boundaries between work and family life. This complexity arises because entrepreneurship demands time, effort, commitment, self-determination, persistence, and independence, leaving limited time for caregiving and household responsibilities (Elkina 2021). As a whole, flexibility is a key driver for women entrepreneurs, often manifesting in a preference for working from home. While this offers significant autonomy, it also presents difficulties, particularly in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

Additionally, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 increased the difficulties of balancing professional and personal responsibilities (Bahn et al. 2020) for women entrepreneurs in KIE. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a global problem, forcing people worldwide to alter their lifestyles, and habits. The introduction of social distancing rules, quarantines, curfews, travel restrictions, and the closure of institutions and workplaces led to significant shifts, including the widespread adoption of distance education and remote work. This transition forced many, irrespective of gender, to adapt to working from home. Yet, women, in particular, faced difficulties due to the gendered division of home tasks (Akbaş and Dursun 2020). Aligning with existing research (Akbaş and Dursun 2020; Bahn et al. 2020; Mesiäislehto et al. 2022), my findings highlight that the pandemic, especially the closure of schools and day-care centres, significantly intensified the professional and personal burdens on women entrepreneurs, who were mothers of children living at home. This shift increased difficulties and blurred the lines between work and personal life for women entrepreneurs and those without children at home in KIE in Turkey.

Initially, this research highlighted that the experiences of some interviewed women entrepreneurs in the KIE were unaffected by gender, as explicitly stated by the entrepreneurs themselves. This perspective could be attributed to a deliberate disregard of gender or simply a lack of consideration for gender in their work (Lewis 2006). However, upon further discussions in interviews and closer analysis of the findings, it became evident that their experiences in entrepreneurship were, in fact, influenced by their gender often affecting their interactions and ways of thinking, as discussed in the following paragraphs. For example, the ways in which they enter professional networks, negotiated collaborations, or accessed resources were shaped by gendered expectations and biases within KIE.

In my research, I identified biases and inequalities concerning woman entrepreneurs' professional expertise, such as stereotypical assumptions that women may lack proficiency in certain technical domains, or denial of their competence based on gender stereotypes. The fluid and dynamic nature of gender construction, as described by Martin (2003), closely aligns with the experiences of women entrepreneurs who regularly confront doubts about their expertise. Serving as CEOs or co-founders, these women work in a professional landscape surrounded by gendered cultural norms, requiring them to consistently address these biases and inequalities to validate their knowledge and expertise. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the impact of stereotypes and inequalities in undermining women's expertise, discouraging their pursuit of careers in male-dominated work environment (Ezzedeen and Zikic 2012; Hardey 2019; Katila and Eriksson 2013; Martin et al. 2015). My findings are in line with prior research, such as Dy, Marlow, and Martin (2017), Gherardi and Perrotta (2016), Marlow and McAdam (2015), Patterson and Mavin (2009) and indicating that women entrepreneurs continue to face gender inequalities in KIE, much like in any other business activity. In essence, entrepreneurship does not provide the expected escape from inequalities in KIE.

Also, the results demonstrated that the youngest Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs in KIE tend to attribute the inequalities they face more to their age and perceived lack of experience, rather than directly to their gender. This contrasts with slightly older entrepreneurs, who more frequently link such incidents to gender inequalities. This observation highlights the relationship between age and perceived expertise, and significantly influencing the workplace experiences of women in KIE. Instead of recognizing gender as a primary reason, these inequalities are often interpreted as stemming from a perceived lack of experience due to age. This finding aligns with the research of Gill (2016), Lewis (2006, 2014), and Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), who have observed similar trends where the role of gender is downplayed in favour of other explanations, highlighting the influence of unconscious biases in professional settings. This reframing by women entrepreneurs can be seen as a coping mechanism for managing their professional work environment. They are dealing with the stereotypes that link their expertise with age and experience.

These diverse arguments highlight the complexity of gender inequalities in KIE. It is important to note that inequality in attributing expertise and knowledge is not

exclusive to young women; age can impact how expertise is perceived throughout women's careers. Older women may encounter distrust regarding their knowledge, which necessitates further investigation. The combination of gender, age, and expertise shapes individuals' experiences (Hytti and Heinonen 2013) also in KIE. This finding highlights the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of how these aspects interact and affect women entrepreneurs in KIE.

This study revealed that many women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey perceived gendered disadvantages in how their expertise in KIE was recognized. However, some of them interestingly acknowledged the advantages of being women in this domain. Instead of highlighting their expertise, they emphasised qualities associated with femininity, such as patience, empathy, and the memorability linked to their gender. Additionally, this emphasis on empathy, patience and memorability not only created opportunities but also questioned the image of entrepreneurship, often associated with male-centric and masculine practices as found in several other studies (Ahl 2004; Bruni et al. 2004; Hytti and Heinonen 2013).

Moreover, this research showed that both Finnish and Turkish entrepreneurs in my study shared a common practice of maintaining connections from previous workplaces and expanding networks through connections established by former colleagues. Additionally, they recounted their experiences attending events organised by female entrepreneurs, which led to the formation of connections with more women in the field. It sheds light on the influence of gender in networking events, where some Turkish women entrepreneurs, whom I had the opportunity to interview, expressed that interactions with individuals of the same gender were more effective. The experiences shared by these women entrepreneurs provide insights into the relationship between familiarity and gender in networking.

In addition to networking, the division of labour within entrepreneurial firms often occurs along stereotypical gender lines. Women entrepreneurs I interviewed in Finland and Turkey, especially those collaborating with their spouses, frequently conduct different tasks to their male business partners despite having prior experience from their previous careers before embarking on entrepreneurship. Consistent with the findings of Godwin et al. (2006), Hardey (2019), and O'Connor et al. (2006) my research identified a clear division of labour within the workplace. It appeared that women entrepreneurs who work with their spouses tend to focus on tasks typically associated with women's work, such as administrative tasks and

marketing. This division of labour within family businesses and entrepreneurial collaborations highlights the persistence of societal expectations and tasks, which continue to influence the distribution of responsibilities among business partners.

In conclusion, this study showed that Turkish and Finnish women in KIE face gendered experiences influenced by cultural norms and workplace practices. Despite their educational backgrounds and expertise in STEM fields, many women turned to entrepreneurship to escape gender inequalities such as discriminatory practices, limited career opportunities, and male-dominated cultures in previous workplaces. Their motivations also include a desire for independence, flexibility, and control over their professional lives. However, entrepreneurship does not fully protect them from gender inequalities and biases, as they still encounter inequalities regarding their expertise. Interestingly, younger women often attribute these inequalities to age rather than gender, highlighting the relationship between age and perceived expertise. Additionally, women entrepreneurs benefit from previous business networks and emphasising qualities associated with femininity, such as empathy and patience, which contradict the gendered image of entrepreneurship. Overall, the findings underline the persistent influence of gender on the entrepreneurial experiences of women in KIE, despite their pursuit of autonomy and flexibility. Building on this foundation, subchapter 8.2 examines how these women manage gender inequalities in KIE, considering the cultural and societal contexts that influence their actions and experiences.

8.2 Managing gendered inequalities

In addressing the second research question "In what ways do women entrepreneurs manage gender inequalities in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship in Turkey and Finland?" I analysed the ways developed by women entrepreneurs in Turkey and Finland to manage gender inequalities in KIE, considering the cultural and societal contexts that shape their experiences and actions. This section explores how they deal with gender inequalities in KIE, such as distancing themselves from gender bias, embracing personal responsibility, making individual choices, and critiquing the decisions of other women.

My research results indicated that women entrepreneurs in both countries consistently face enduring gendered inequalities and biases in their professional interactions. Nevertheless, gender equality appears as an ideological dilemma (Billig et al. 1988). On the one hand, the interviewed women neglect gender inequality, and

on the other hand, they have developed several ways to manage KIE by addressing these inequalities. To understand this ideological dilemma further, I explore the diverse perspectives on gender equality among the participants.

My study revealed that the participants had diverse perspectives on gender equality. Finnish participants generally believed that their country had achieved gender equality. As a result, they felt that gender inequality was not a significant issue in their own professional fields. Some even believed that gender inequalities were a thing of the past or existed only in other countries. They emphasized the progress made in moving away from previous gendered inequalities. They often view their own sectors as relatively gender-neutral but acknowledge the persistence of gender inequality in male-dominated sectors. Moreover, Finnish participants perceive gender equality as prevalent within society, attributing it to elements such as accessible education and care services, which lay the groundwork for gender equality. However, it is noteworthy that the interviewees themselves do not explicitly mention these aspects as explanations for gender equality. Those seem to be a self-evident background in their lives. This analysis highlights an ideological dilemma (Billig et al. 1988): while Finnish participants assert the existence of gender equality, they also recognise ongoing gender disparities, particularly in male-dominated sectors. This contradiction underscores the various perceptions surrounding gender equality and shows the ideological tensions between the assumption in equality and the acknowledgment of persistent inequalities.

In contrast to their Finnish counterparts, Turkish participants contextualise their experiences compared to other women entrepreneurs in KIE in their own country. Unlike Finnish women, Turkish women do not claim that their country is gender equal. Instead, they emphasise how they personally have managed and succeeded despite barriers. They criticise other women entrepreneurs in KIE as not being strong enough to create their own way and opportunities. Conversely, Finnish women tend to show respect for those they perceive as less determined, attributing differences in choices rather than implying fault.

My study highlighted a common viewpoint among both Finnish and Turkish participants concerning gender inequality: they mainly see it as an issue to be addressed through personal efforts, not through changes in institutions or society as a whole. This attitude is in line with postfeminist thinking, which emphasise self-empowerment and independence within the current social systems. Participants

from both countries adopt a mind-set that expects women to deal with inequalities on their own—by working harder, making different choices, or adopting certain behaviours—without seeking to alter the wider social, economic, or cultural foundations that maintain these inequalities. This perspective views gender inequality as a problem for individuals to solve on their own, instead of relying on collective action. As a result, the burden of addressing these issues falls on the individuals who experience them, rather than on society to create broader changes. Personal efforts, individual choices, and independence are commonly emphasised in entrepreneurship studies (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Patterson and Mavin 2009). Moreover, postfeminist scholars have also noted the normalisation of entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour, they advocate the belief that women possess all necessary freedoms and opportunities, suggesting that additional support is unnecessary. This perspective aligns with the idea that individuals are responsible for their own success (Ikonen 2020; Komulainen et al. 2020; Scharff 2016).

Many Turkish female entrepreneurs in male-dominated industries have a male co-partner, which can help in managing gender inequalities in KIE. Partnering with a male co-founder allows these women entrepreneurs to cope with biases and stereotypes that question their competence, as the presence of a male partner can legitimise their business in the eyes of male investors and clients. This solution is especially relevant when seeking access to networks, resources, or funding opportunities, where male partnership is viewed as a sign of legitimacy and reliability. By adopting this view, women entrepreneurs use prevailing societal norms to their advantage, rather than confronting them directly. Essentially, this way of solution both acknowledges and manages the gendered practices and perceptions that might undervalue women's contributions. My findings align with those of Godwin et al. (2006), who discuss how society often associates male characteristics with effective leadership in business. This mentality can influence perceptions of leadership capability and create barriers for women entrepreneurs in male-dominated industries. By partnering with a male co-founder, women entrepreneurs utilise these societal expectations to enhance their firm's success by gaining access to resources, legitimacy, and a broader network.

In line with Kvande's (1999) study on the workplace experiences of female engineering students, my research also showed that one way to address inequalities in KIE is to move into areas with a higher representation of women, such as marketing or design within KIE. This deliberate shift can be seen as a response to

the gender inequalities inherent in male-dominated entrepreneurship. Through this choice, the women entrepreneurs I interviewed in Turkey created a space where they are able to run their business. Essentially, this decision is a pragmatic response to the systemic barriers they encounter in KIE and reflects women's efforts to cope with the gender inequalities in their profession.

Moreover, my research highlighted the barriers women entrepreneurs face in terms of participation in networks in KIE. These findings corroborate the claims of Ahl (2006), Godwin et al. (2006) and Vehviläinen et al. (2010) by demonstrating the obstacles women face in accessing resources, building connections, and establishing credibility for their entrepreneurial initiatives. In the Turkish context, some women entrepreneurs' decision to stop attending networking events alone as female CEOs highlights gender inequalities in KIE networks. Their experience underscores the power dynamics and gender hierarchies prevalent in networks, where women's participation can be marginalised or dismissed due to prevailing societal and cultural norms. Decisions not to attend networking events not only illustrate the personal ways in which women entrepreneurs cope with inequalities, but also underscore the need for societal and professional inclusivity and equity in networking environments. While Finnish entrepreneurs reported fewer negative experiences in participating networks, networks among women are valued, especially in technical fields where female representation is low. This points to the need for solidarity and support among women in male-dominated fields, highlighting the evolving landscape of professional networking and the potential for more gender-inclusive environments.

This research found that when Finnish participants talked about the choices made by their female colleagues, they often emphasised the importance of personal choice. This finding on choice is in line with the work of Ikonen and Korvajärvi (2023), who discuss the concept of "choice" in the context of decision making in relation to the different individual choices of combining work and childcare among highly educated Finnish women in research and innovation. In my study, Finnish participants suggest respect for individual action and autonomy. The results show that Turkish participants are more likely to criticise the actions and decisions of their female colleagues, in contrast to the Finnish participants who respect choices. I suggest that these contrasting attitudes can be linked to the cultural backgrounds of the participants. As I discussed in chapter 2, Finnish society, known for its emphasis on equality and individual rights encourages an interpretation of actions that centres on personal choice and freedom. Meanwhile, the Turkish perspective on gender

inequalities is shaped by the country's cultural norms, religious beliefs, and historical background. Men are expected to be the main bread winner, while women are seen as caretakers of the home and children. Religious beliefs especially those about modesty and behaviour, also influence gender roles, creating a complex mix with the secular values promoted by early 20th-century reforms that aimed to modernise Turkey. In the workplace, these established norms often lead to criticism and unfair treatment of women colleagues, who may be judged more unfairly for pursuing a career or being assertive. Despite these difficulties, there is a growing effort in Turkey to change these norms, driven by women's rights groups, progressive policies, and increasing public awareness.

The above contrasting attitudes towards gender and decision-making observed between Finnish and Turkish participants, can have consequences for the running of KIE in both countries. In Finland, where there is an emphasis on personal choice and individual rights, the respect for women's decisions and autonomy, as well as the emphasis on equality, may foster a culture of inclusivity within KIE where diverse perspectives are valued and leveraged for business success, leading to increased participation and innovation within the KIE.

Conversely, in Turkey, the mind-set of Turkish participants to criticise the actions and decisions of their women colleagues for not being strong enough may limit collective efforts to advocate for broader societal or institutional changes. In addition, this critical attitude may create a competitive rather than supportive environment among women entrepreneurs, potentially discouraging collaboration and solidarity, thereby further widening the gender gap in KIE.

Also, this research demonstrated the influence of feminine characteristics in shaping the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE. While societal norms and expectations often present obstacles for women entrepreneurs, Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs' experiences demonstrated how these gendered perceptions can sometimes serve as an opportunity rather than obstacles. Utilising attributes associated with female gender represents a way for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to manage the constraints imposed by societal expectations. By emphasising qualities such as patience, empathy, and memorability women can create a distinctive presence in KIE. However, it is essential to recognise that leveraging feminine characteristics as a competitive advantage is not universally feasible or sustainable for all women. Attributes like youthfulness or motherhood skills may have

limitations in longevity or applicability throughout a woman's career. Rather than simply conforming to gender expectations, embracing these qualities can be viewed as an utilisation of societal perceptions to further entrepreneurial objectives.

In conclusion, this subchapter examined how women entrepreneurs in Turkey and Finland manage gender inequalities in KIE. This study emphasised that despite differing societal contexts, women in both countries struggle with persistent gender inequalities. Finnish participants generally perceive their country as more gender equal, matching with societal features such as accessible education and care services. In contrast, Turkish participants contextualise their experiences in comparison to other women in KIE rather than claiming gender equality in their country. Both groups predominantly view gender inequality as a personal issue to overcome through individual efforts, reflecting a postfeminist thinking that emphasises self-empowerment within existing systems. The ways women entrepreneurs employ, such as partnering with male co-founders or transitioning into less male-dominated fields in Turkey, highlight adaptive responses to gendered barriers in KIE. Furthermore, contrasting attitudes towards personal choices among Finnish and Turkish participants reaffirm how cultural backgrounds shape perceptions and responses to gender inequalities within entrepreneurship. Expanding on these findings, in the next subchapter, I summarise gendered experiences of KIE in Finnish and Turkish contexts.

8.3 Gendered experiences of KIE in Finnish and Turkish contexts

My research on women's entrepreneurship in KIE enhances the discussion on gender and entrepreneurship from the perspective of two countries and their cultural settings. Drawing from Kelan's observation that every woman has different experiences (Kelan 2014:790), my study discusses the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs in Finland and Turkey. While my research aligns with previous studies primarily conducted in Western countries, it is crucial to consider the cultural and contextual differences between the Turkish and Finnish entrepreneurial environments. Although approaches to gender equality vary, as discussed in Chapter 2, my research shows that gendered entrepreneurship experiences exhibit similar characteristics across different settings. The commonalities between Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs' experiences suggest that some aspects of KIE extend beyond cultural boundaries. In this subchapter, I summarise the commonalities and differences in how gender influences the entrepreneurial paths of women in KIE

across the different cultural, institutional and political country contexts in Finland and Turkey.

Both the Finnish and Turkish governments, as I discussed in Chapter 2, recognise the significance of KIE for national economic growth and have implemented measures and policies to promote them. Turkey and Finland exhibit both commonalities and differences in the context of KIE and women's participation in higher education and STEM fields. Both countries have seen significant advancements in women's education, with women attaining higher education degrees, often in sciences or engineering, at relatively high international rates (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2021). In Turkey, the early republican era policies promoted women's participation in academia and STEM, resulting in a considerable number of women pursuing careers in these areas. Similarly, women's relatively long participation in work and education, the development of a comprehensive welfare system and commitment to gender equality in Finland have fostered an environment where women actively engage in KIE.

However, there are differences in education between these two countries. Finland offers free education, making it accessible to all citizens. This universal access has led to high levels of educational achievement and participation in the workforce in equal numbers for both women and men (Statistics Finland 2021). In contrast, Turkey's education system, while progressively inclusive, still faces socioeconomic barriers that can limit equal access to education. Despite public education being officially free, socioeconomic disparities such as family background (including size, income, and education level) and place of residence (highlighting geographical inequalities in education, income, welfare, and opportunity) remain critical in determining access to and the quality of education (Ataç 2019). Children from lower-income families face difficulties in accessing high-quality educational resources and opportunities. Additionally, private tutoring and private school education —often necessary to perform well in national exams —are mostly accessible to wealthier families, further reinforcing class divisions in education.

In my study, women entrepreneurs in Turkey and Finland share similar motivations for careers in KIE, primarily driven by experiences of gender inequality in previous workplaces and a desire for greater independence and flexibility. In both countries, organisational practices such as segregation, division of labour, along with embedded behaviours like undervaluing women or assigning them to less prestigious tasks,

often create and reinforce gender inequalities. These inequalities lead women to search alternative career paths where they can have more control over their professional lives. While the need to balance work and family life is a significant consideration for these interviewed women entrepreneurs, it is not the primary motivator for their entrepreneurial careers. This is distinct from some previous research (e.g. Hilbrecht 2016) that emphasises the importance of childcare responsibilities in women's decisions to become entrepreneurs.

In Finland, the public childcare system helps women balance professional and personal responsibilities, reducing the impact of care work on their entrepreneurial decisions. Finnish women benefit from a supportive gender equality policies and practices which includes comprehensive public childcare services, progressive parental leave policies, and a cultural acceptance of women in work life. This supportive framework allows Finnish women to focus more on their professional development and less on balancing domestic responsibilities.

Conversely, in Turkey, the lack of adequate public childcare services and deeply rooted gendered norms place a burden on women to manage family responsibilities, often limiting their career advancement (Aybars et al. 2019) and reinforcing gender biases in professional settings. Despite these inequalities many Turkish women prioritise autonomy and professional fulfilment over childcare considerations in their motivations for entrepreneurship. They manage deeply rooted gender inequalities, where societal expectations often require them to balance household and professional duties.

Despite the expectations loaded for entrepreneurship, both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs continue to face significant inequalities in KIE, particularly related to gendered expertise in male-dominated and strongly segregated sectors. They share the experiences of gender inequalities, such as male clients' doubts about their expertise, which persist despite their qualifications and proven capabilities. Interviewed Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs are often required to constantly demonstrate and prove their competence. Additionally, subtle gender inequalities manifest in daily interactions, where implicit expectations and stereotypes shape how they are perceived and treated. These experiences align with international research that highlights the ongoing struggles women face in gaining recognition and respect in male-dominated industries (Cross and Linehan 2006; Martin et al. 2015).

Also, interviewed women entrepreneurs in both Turkey and Finland often leverage female characteristics such as empathy, multitasking, and social skills—characteristics that women are typically viewed as having, such as being more communal or socially oriented, kind, and helpful—to their advantage in KIE. These characteristics help them gain recognition, and build strong client relationships. For example, some Turkish participants emphasised that women's inherent patience, empathy, and problem-solving skills, often linked to motherly characteristics, make them successful in handling customer issues and managing multiple responsibilities effectively. Similarly, some Finnish participants highlighted how being a woman in KIE increases their memorability and distinctiveness, giving them an advantage among male colleagues.

There may be differences in how these feminine characteristics are perceived and used across different cultural contexts. In Turkey, such qualities are often linked to caregiving and family roles, and women entrepreneurs use them to demonstrate their ability to manage professional responsibilities. In contrast, in Finland, feminine qualities are utilized to highlight women's distinctiveness and advantage in the workplace, where gender equality is more established, and these characteristics are valued for their capacity to create differentiation and recognition.

Women entrepreneurs in both Turkey and Finland share experiences of being marginalised from male-dominated professional networks, which often hinders their ability to secure resources and establish business connections. They are frequently left out of influential networks where information about market trends, funding opportunities, and emerging technologies takes place. This marginalisation limits women entrepreneurs' access to valuable contacts and new opportunities, investment opportunities, growing their businesses, and gaining credibility in KIE aligning with previous research (Ahl 2006; Godwin et al. 2006; Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean 2018).

Interviewees acknowledge gender disparities by developing both individual and collective ways. In both Turkey and Finland, women entrepreneurs leverage connections with previous colleagues who recognise their expertise. In Finland, besides male networks, Finnish interviewees participate in women's networks, which provide a supportive environment for sharing experiences and resources. Women entrepreneurs in Turkey often collaborate with male partners and network with male clients to engage with professional networks. In Turkey, some women entrepreneurs

even reported avoiding networking events alone as women CEOs due to the gendered stereotypes that marginalise their involvement. This highlights a key difference: while Turkish women often rely on mixed-gender strategies, Finnish women also benefit from female networks. Despite these differences, the shared experiences of marginalisation underscore the necessity for more equal networking environments for women entrepreneurs in KIE.

In both Finland and Turkey, women entrepreneurs operate within innovation systems supported by funding programs and collaboration opportunities. Governmental programs for KIE in both countries aim to foster innovation and entrepreneurship by providing financial support and resources. While Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs predominantly rely on personal savings to start their businesses, they also benefit from various governmental programs designed to support the business establishment, both in Finland and Turkey. However, in Turkey, these opportunities, which often require both university education and financial resources, tend to be more accessible to a limited group of women who have higher education and sufficient financial resources (Altan-Olcay 2018). Moreover, in Turkey public organizations, such as KOSGEB, offer women entrepreneurs' greater financial support than for male entrepreneurs (Ozasir-Kacar et al. 2023:465). However, as some interviewed Turkish women express, these practices positively discriminate in favour of women entrepreneurs but also reinforce the notion that women are "in need of help" (Ozasir-Kacar et al. 2023:466).

Turkish and Finnish women entrepreneurs manage the gendered work environment of KIE in line with postfeminist thinking. Both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs tend to downplay the presence of gender inequality in their work environments, often attributing it to other places or to the past. Finnish women express a belief in gender equality within their society, while acknowledging that gender biases still exist in other countries, other sectors and the past. In contrast, Turkish women do not perceive gender inequalities as problems in other countries; for them, elsewhere refers to different cultural, sectoral, or regional contexts within Turkey rather than international comparisons. This difference highlights the cultural and societal influences shaping women's perceptions of and responses to gender inequality.

Another shared point is that both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs develop personal solutions by downplaying gender. They emphasize other aspects,

such as age and individual characteristics, shifting the focus away from systemic issues. This approach, aligned with postfeminist views, reduces the importance placed on gender inequalities. However, a key difference is that Turkish participants, while emphasizing personal responsibility and strong personalities, acknowledge the structural nature of gender inequalities in Turkey. They attribute their success in dealing with these inequalities to their strong personalities and often criticise other women for not overcoming such obstacles, blaming inequalities on a lack of ambition or effort. In contrast, Finnish participants tend to attribute inequalities to the behaviours of individual male clients rather than systemic issues, showing a difference in how gender inequality is understood and dealt with in their work environments. Finnish women believe in gender equality within their society but see the issues as stemming from individual male clients' personalities, while Turkish women, despite recognizing structural inequalities, focus on personal strength and responsibility to overcome gender disparities.

These findings proved that there are two distinct contradictions at play. For Finnish participants, the contradiction arises from their claim that gender equality is largely achieved within their society, yet they still need to manage ongoing gender inequalities in specific contexts such as male client personalities. For Turkish participants, the contradiction lies in recognising the structural nature of gender inequalities while simultaneously employing personal strength to manage these inequalities. These contradictions include the many ways in which cultural and societal contexts influence the approaches of women entrepreneurs in dealing with gender inequality in KIE.

Overall, Finland has a well-developed system of gender mainstreaming and gender equality plans, ensuring a systematic approach to gender equality. Finnish societal structures, characterised by comprehensive policies and initiatives, offer a supportive environment for women entrepreneurs in KIE. The Finnish government aligns with the European Union's gender mainstreaming initiatives, integrating gender perspectives into all stages of policy-making, planning, and program implementation. However, the resources and competence of authorities to implement gender mainstreaming vary (Vehviläinen and Valaskivi 2022). In contrast, Turkey's efforts for gender equality, while containing targeted measures for women in KIE, tend to be more fragmented and lack consistent follow-up. This results in gaps between policy intentions and real-world outcomes. In KIE, significant barriers persist, driven by socioeconomic conditions and deeply rooted gender norms.

Both Finnish and Turkish governments recognize the importance of supporting KIE and have implemented policies to promote gender equality. However, the effectiveness and outcomes of these measures remain limited. Efforts to remove ongoing barriers and ensure equal opportunities for women in KIE continue, highlighting how societal contexts shape the entrepreneurial careers of women in both Finland and Turkey. This could be attributed to the globalisation of business practices and the integration of economies. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial ecosystems in both countries share common elements, such as technological advancements, the educational backgrounds of entrepreneurs in KIE, and the nature of industries within KIE. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite these common trends, cultural, social, and economic differences distinctly shape gendered entrepreneurial experiences in KIE. In the next subchapter, I provide policy suggestions for more equal opportunities in KIE.

8.4 Practical implications of the study

In this sub-chapter, I discuss the societal and organisational measures supporting women's entrepreneurship and promoting gender equality in Finland and Turkey, in line with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)[16] guidelines and the European Commission's (2013) European Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan[17]. Based on my research on women's entrepreneurship in both Finland and Turkey, along with 13 years of experience as an SME expert in a Turkish government organization dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship, I propose the following targeted policy suggestions to promote gender equality in KIE. These suggestions aim to address the barriers women face in entrepreneurship, improve support mechanisms, collect and analyse gender specific data to identify gaps, support

[16] The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policy makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe (The European Institute for Gender Equality 2017).

17 While European Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan invites Member States to design and implement national strategies for women's entrepreneurship that aim at increasing the share of women-led companies, to collect sex-disaggregated data and produce annual updates on the state of women entrepreneurs nationally, to continue and expand the existing networks of female entrepreneurship ambassadors and mentors for women entrepreneur, to implement policies enabling women to achieve an adequate work–life balance, by establishing appropriate and affordable care for children and elderly dependents (European Commission 2013).

women achieve a better work–life balance, and create a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The recommended measures engage various groups beyond just women and operate at multiple levels, which can enhance their broader impact on society. To improve gender equality in KIE, institutions within both Turkish and Finnish innovation systems, such as government agencies, universities, NGOs, and industry associations, could benefit from these policy suggestions.

Addressing barriers and promoting gender equality

The results of my study in Finland and Turkey confirm the persistence of doubts about the expertise of women entrepreneurs and perpetuating gender inequalities in KIE.

In Finland, despite the widespread implementation of gender equality policies across sectors like employment and education, gender inequalities in women's entrepreneurship remain significant. My research suggests that, to address these inequalities, more comprehensive policies are needed to tackle systemic barriers that continue to hinder women's entrepreneurial ambitions. While progress has been made, gender gaps still exist in areas such as entrepreneurial intentions, fear of failure, and perceived entrepreneurial skills (Saarela et al. 2024). Promoting women's entrepreneurship requires further development of comprehensive policies, as highlighted by both Saarela et al. (2024) and my own research findings. These policies should aim to increase the number of women-led firms and address the underlying barriers that hinder women's participation in entrepreneurship. There is a need for support programs, promotion of gender diversity in entrepreneurship education, and the fostering of inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Considering the male dominated nature of KIE and my findings on hidden gender biases against women's expertise in KIE, Finland would benefit from more gender-responsive entrepreneurship education. These programmes would be integrated into educational institutions such as universities and vocational schools. They would provide aspiring women entrepreneurs with the skills, knowledge and support they need to succeed in KIE. Such initiatives should specifically address the barriers and opportunities faced by women in KIE, designing a curriculum that addresses their specific needs and difficulties, such as gender biases and stereotypes in entrepreneurship, and accessing financing and funding opportunities.

In Turkey, despite efforts to reduce gender inequality through historical and recent policy initiatives, societal norms and stereotypes continue to create difficulties for

women entrepreneurs in KIE. To address this, the Turkish government could improve existing policies and introduce new measures adjusted to the cultural and societal context. Based on my research in the Turkish context, education campaigns promoting gender equality in KIE—targeting schools, universities, funding agencies, and others in the innovation system—are crucial to overcoming structural barriers in entrepreneurship, particularly considering societal norms that strongly reinforce gender inequalities. Introducing campaigns to evaluate and change gendered norms and stereotypes could alter societal perceptions, emphasising the economic benefits of women's participation in KIE. Introducing gender bias training from primary education is vital for addressing structural inequalities, and advocating for policy reforms to remove barriers affecting women's entrepreneurship in KIE is crucial in Turkey.

These education campaigns should utilise a mix of traditional and digital media channels, including television, radio, social media platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn, print media, and online forums. By adapting the content and delivery of these campaigns to the cultural and societal context of each country, they can effectively address barriers and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs in KIE. In the following section, I provide practical initiatives to encourage equal participation of women entrepreneurs to KIE through entrepreneurial training and network enhancement.

Entrepreneurial training and network enhancement

To address gender biases and stereotypes in entrepreneurship, I recommend expanding "KIE Entrepreneurship Bootcamps" for women entrepreneurs in both Finland and Turkey. These intensive training programmes are designed to help potential entrepreneurs develop the skills, knowledge and mind-set they need to start and run a successful business (Brethenoux 2015). They offer practical training in essential entrepreneurial skills such as business planning, financial management, and marketing. Participants also have the opportunity to present their business ideas, models, or products to potential investors, aiming to secure financial investment and develop competencies for successful firms.

In addition to bootcamps, I suggest developing entrepreneurial skills workshops or webinars to equip women entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to excel in competitive environments. Complementing these initiatives fostering partnerships and collaboration between women-led enterprises and established firms or research

institutions should be supported. Such collaborations facilitate knowledge exchange, give access to new markets and the integration of women entrepreneurs into broader business and research networks, thereby enhancing their participation to the economy and innovation ecosystems.

Furthermore, my findings demonstrated that both Finnish and Turkish participants maintained networks with people they knew from previous workplaces and developed new networks through contact with their former colleagues. These existing relationships serve as a foundation for expanding their networks in KIE. However, Turkish women entrepreneurs face barriers to accessing these networks due to prevailing social and cultural stereotypes. While Finnish women entrepreneurs generally do not report difficulties in networking, they also primarily rely on their previous network connections to seek market opportunities. Both Finnish and Turkish women entrepreneurs acknowledged the importance of networks and mentorship in supporting their entrepreneurial careers.

In relation to networks, I propose a "Success and Failure Stories Campaign", where women can share both their successes and struggles through international collaboration. This initiative would raise awareness, create a supportive space for women to connect, learn from each other, inspire others, and address common stereotypes in KIE in Finland and Turkey. By including both success and failure stories, the campaign would provide a more realistic view of the entrepreneurial career, helping to acknowledge difficulties and encourage determination.

Each country should collaborate with international NGOs to empower women in technology careers, such as "Women Who Code"[18]. Additionally, establishing national communities within these international networks, as "Women in Tech in Finland"[19] has done and "Girls in Tech in Finland"[20] will promote women's careers in KIE and bring local initiatives to a global audience. These activities are crucial in creating a sense of community and empowering women in KIE. Learning from successful models in other countries can help in adapting and implementing effective policies within the national context. These efforts should be promoted extensively through diverse channels, including social media, websites, newsletters, and media partnerships, to ensure broad outreach and engagement. In addition to training and

[18] https://womenwhocode.com

[19] https://womenintech.fi

[20] https://angelsbosch.com/girls-in-tech-finland/

networking opportunities, funding opportunities are crucial for women entrepreneurs. Below, I discuss specialised funding programs for women entrepreneurs in KIE.

Special funding programs

In this section, I suggest special funding programs for women entrepreneurs in KIE. As discussed in the section 3.3.4, women face difficulties in getting loans or investments to grow their businesses. This happens for several reasons, such as gender bias in banks, investors favouring industries like STEM where women are less represented, and male-dominated networks that make it harder for women entrepreneurs and investors to connect (Powell and Eddleston 2013; Wheadon and Duval-Couetil 2019). Moreover, women entrepreneurs often start their businesses with less money than men and depend more on their own funds instead of seeking outside financing (OECD 2021). My research findings also show that women entrepreneurs primarily rely on their own savings to start their ventures in both Finland and Turkey. In both Finland and Turkey, anyone can apply for financial support to improve businesses. The Turkish women entrepreneurs I interviewed noted that financial support rates are increased if the applicant falls into certain categories, such as being a woman or disabled, as outlined in the regulations of the support programs (e.g. KOSGEB 2024). However, these support programs fall under a general entrepreneurship support program, without specific applications for KIE. Despite this, institutional practices and the competitive nature of funding allocation can still indirectly disadvantage women entrepreneurs, especially those with businesses focused on research and innovation. Therefore, I recommend establishing special funding support programs specifically prepared for women entrepreneurs in KIE in both Turkey and Finland. Although Finnish policies already incorporate gender mainstreaming in all areas, based on my research findings, I also suggest establishing special funding support programs tailored for women entrepreneurs in Finland. Furthermore, gender equality planning would need to be incorporated into funding institutions and their procedures, as has been done by the National Research Council of Finland (Vehviläinen et al. 2024). This ensures that women entrepreneurs have equal access to financial support and opportunities for growth.

To eliminate the obstacles women face in accessing funding, The Female Founders Fund (n.d.), based in New York, focuses exclusively on investing in companies

founded by women in order to remove the barriers women face in accessing funding and to create a more supportive environment for their entrepreneurial careers. This fund specialises in providing seed-stage funding for women entrepreneurs, which means they invest in the early stages of a firm's development to help it grow and succeed. I recommend that such initiatives would be established in Turkey and Finland. Programs like the Seed Funding Grants for Women Enterprises initiative can provide valuable financial support to enterprises founded or led by women, with a special emphasis on those operating in KIE, where female representation is low. This program can allocate seed funding grants that are essential during the early stages of an enterprise's lifecycle for initiating operations, developing products, conducting market research, and carrying out other foundational business activities significant for initial growth and development. In the next section, I discuss the importance of collecting data on women's participation in KIE to ensure equitable support for women entrepreneurs.

Collecting gender specific data

Based on my work experience, I emphasised that implementing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms along with providing support, is crucial because it improves the delivery of services, resources and systematic assessment of outcomes. This approach not only addresses needs but also improves the overall effectiveness of the support services, leading to sustainable and meaningful results in narrowing the gender gap in KIE.

In the Turkish context, during the research process, I faced difficulties in accessing statistical indicators due to the lack of detailed data on women's participation in KIE. This data gap complicates efforts to reach the statistics on the distribution of women entrepreneurs in KIE. Furthermore, there is limited information on women entrepreneurs' access to capital, loans, and financial resources tailored to the KIE, hindering understanding of their financial difficulties and opportunities. Additionally, there is a lack of data on women entrepreneurs' engagement in networking events, mentorship programs, and other support systems within the KIE. This lack of information limits insights into women's access to crucial support networks, prevents efforts to address their needs effectively. Comprehensive policies are essential to promote the development and long-term success of women's entrepreneurship in KIE. This involves creating and standardising a set of indicators specifically designed to follow the progress of women-led firms, such as to what

extent women entrepreneurs have had access to selected governmental support programs for entrepreneurship. These indicators should cover key areas such as access to funding, and growth to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their success. Collaboration with government bodies, academic institutions, and industry stakeholders is crucial to ensure the relevance and accuracy of these indicators.

While Finland has comprehensive policies supporting gender equality, there is a need for more focused implementation plans tailored to the obstacles women entrepreneurs face in KIE. This could involve conducting gender impact assessments of existing policies and programs to ensure they effectively address gender disparities. Additionally, although Finland has made progress in collecting data on women entrepreneurs, further improvements in data collection methods are essential. The scope of data collection should be expanded to cover all relevant aspects of women's entrepreneurship in KIE, including access to finance, business performance, and participation in entrepreneurial networks. By collecting comprehensive gender-specific data, policymakers can gain a better understanding of the difficulties women entrepreneurs face and improve interventions accordingly.

Supporting women to achieve an adequate work–life balance in Turkey

In Turkey, there's a strong belief that women should focus more on family duties than on their careers. Also there are not enough public childcare services in Turkey which makes it hard for women to balance work and family responsibilities without external help. The lack of public support for childcare is the main reason why women do not participate in, or eventually drop out of, the labour market (Aybars et al. 2019; Korkut and Eslen-Ziya 2011). Childcare in Turkey is viewed as a problem that women must solve via their networks and capacities (Dedeoglu 2012; Ecevit 2013; Soyseçkin 2016). While affordable childcare is crucial in Turkey, it was not extensively discussed by the interview participants. It is worth noting that since childcare is a common problem not only for women in KIE but for all women in the workforce, the government in Turkey could include initiatives such as flexible working arrangements, childcare support, and parental leave policies that encourage gender equality in caregiving responsibilities.

In conclusion, based on research findings and my practical experience, this sub-chapter has examined the societal and organisational measures supporting women's entrepreneurship and promoting gender equality in Finland and Turkey in KIE. By combining the implications of the current political situation as discussed by

Lombardo et al. (2021) and Bogaards and Petö (2022) it is evident that political changes significantly influence women's entrepreneurship and gender equality initiatives in Finland and Turkey. De-democratization processes, which weaken democratic institutions and norms, create additional obstacles for women, particularly in contexts where gendered norms are reinforced by political instability. This situation threatens the progress made in gender equality and restricts women's opportunities in KIE.

Addressing these political threats requires comprehensive and gender-responsive policy frameworks. The proposed measures, engaging a wide range of stakeholders—men, policymakers, educators, and the general public—operate across various levels, including individual (skills development), group (collaborative training), organizational (inclusive policies), network (mentorship and partnerships), and societal (cultural shifts). This multi-dimensional approach ensures widespread change, reducing gender inequalities and fostering more equitable opportunities in KIE. While these initiatives primarily address inequalities faced by women, they also bring benefits to society and organizations, fostering a more equitable and innovative economic environment. Actions such as inclusive policy frameworks, targeted training programs, and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems benefit individuals across genders by encouraging diverse perspectives and fostering a more inclusive KIE. Removing systemic barriers to women's participation in entrepreneurship can lead to broader societal shifts, such as more balanced caregiving roles, equitable access to opportunities, and increased awareness of gender disparities. These measures not only empower women but also promote inclusivity and innovation, maximizing the economic and social potential of entrepreneurship in KIE in Finland and Turkey. In the next section, I examine the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

8.5 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

My research on women entrepreneurs' gendered experiences in KIE in Finland and Turkey highlights important aspects, but it also has several limitations that need to be considered. These limitations include the study's scope, the sample's homogeneity, and the exclusion of larger organisational contexts, language dynamics, and the impact of external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing these limitations is important for fully understanding the findings and guiding future research on women's entrepreneurship in different settings.

My research specifically focuses on women entrepreneurs who are either self-employed or micro-entrepreneurs who employ a very limited number of employees. While this concentration provides insights into the experiences of women entrepreneurs, it has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. One significant limitation is that my study did not explore the experiences of women entrepreneurs within larger organisational contexts. This exclusion restricts the ability to comprehensively understand their positions as leaders within their organisations. In more extensive settings, women entrepreneurs may encounter different obstacles such as managing a larger workforce and more complex operations, maintaining a strong market position, securing large-scale funding or venture capital, all of which are not addressed in this study. Additionally, my research did not extensively investigate how these smaller firms interact with larger ones in the market. Instead, it captured the perspectives and interactions of women entrepreneurs with their male clients and within their own businesses.

The study's results are based on 29 interviews, with 13 participants from Finland and 16 from Turkey, all of whom are women entrepreneurs in KIE. The sample size does not capture the full diversity within KIE, as women entrepreneurs' experiences vary based on factors such as age, educational background, industry specialization, individual circumstances, and other variable. Consequently, the findings should be considered a detailed exploration of a specific group of women entrepreneurs rather than definitive conclusions about all women in KIE.

The findings presented in this study provide insights into the gendered experiences and the ways used by women entrepreneurs to manage gender inequalities in KIE in Finland and Turkey. However, it is essential to recognize that these findings may not apply to all women entrepreneurs in KIE, as the experiences and approaches observed in this research are shaped by the cultural, societal, and contextual circumstances in Turkey and Finland and may not represent the experiences of women entrepreneurs in other regions or countries.

Despite this limitation in generalisability, my study gains strength through its alignment with global findings identified in other research. For example, studies such as Bullough et al. (2022) have similarly underscored the impact of cultural and contextual circumstances on women's entrepreneurial experiences across different regions. These parallel findings suggest that while the specifics may vary, the broader

phenomenon of cultural and contextual influences on women's entrepreneurship in knowledge-intensive fields is a common theme in global research.

While my research provides insight into the gendered experiences and approaches of women entrepreneurs in the selected sample, more research is needed with larger and more diverse samples from different KIE sectors and regions. Consistent with the limited generalizability of my study, similar limitations have been noted in research by Bullough et al. (2022), which highlights the impact of cultural and contextual elements on women's entrepreneurial experiences across different regions. This aligns with a broader understanding that women's experiences in KIE are shaped by their cultural and contextual environments. By positioning my study within the context of these broader trends, I emphasize both the commonalities and differences in women's entrepreneurial experiences across cultures and settings. This approach contributes to the wider body of knowledge on gender and entrepreneurship in KIE and underlines the importance of further research with larger, more diverse samples across different industries and locations to provide a detailed understanding of women's experiences in KIE globally.

Moreover, conducting research involving two countries with different cultural backgrounds, such as Finland and Turkey, presents its own set of difficulties. One aspect to consider is the language used in the interviews, which was English in the Finnish case. This language choice might have influenced the responses of the participants. It is possible that if the interviews had been conducted in Finnish, for example, participants might have given different responses. Interviews conducted in a participant's native language generally make it easier to understand, reduce the chance of misunderstandings, and allow for more comprehensive discussions on the topic. Additionally, it is worth acknowledging that the interviewees likely perceived me as culturally an outsider, this could have shaped the dynamics of the interviews, impacting the depth and nature of the information shared.

Another difficulty I faced was attempting to give equal representation to both countries when presenting the findings. The interviews conducted in Turkish covered a broader variety of topics, resulting in a more extensive dataset from Turkish participants, while the Finnish case remains somewhat limited. Therefore, achieving a balance in presenting the findings for both sides was quite complex. In short, conducting research that explores the gender dynamics of two different cultures within a single study, as in the case of women's entrepreneurship in Finland

and Turkey, has been challenging but interesting, as there are few studies that explore two different cultures within the same research. Combining data from two different countries in a single study was not easy, but I believe that it has made a more significant impact to the literature than a study on one single country. Having data from two countries has been beneficial as it allowed for a more comprehensive and context-specific understanding of the research topic. Relying only on research conducted by other researchers in one country would not have provided the insight into the two distinct contexts.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic created significant difficulties to the fieldwork in my research, particularly during the later stages of the data collection process in Turkey. The pandemic, accompanied by travel restrictions and safety concerns, disrupted the initial plan for in-person interviews and observations. As a researcher based in Finland, these restrictions necessitated a shift in the data collection methods and the expansion of the sample area. I accordingly adjusted the research approach to include online interviews. While this approach allowed for continued data collection, it introduced certain limitations. The absence of physical presence meant that non-verbal cues, body language, and in-person interactions, which can provide valuable context and depth to qualitative research, were not fully accessible.

Also, my working conditions as a researcher underwent significant changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. I transitioned to remote work, conducting interviews and research activities from home. As a researcher with children, my work hours had to be adjusted according to my children's online schooling schedule. This meant that I often had to align my work responsibilities with childcare. Therefore, my research was affected during this period due to the increased household responsibilities. Balancing research commitments with the demands of managing household responsibilities became a new problem. Despite the difficulties, these adjustments also brought about a sensitivity in my analysis. Having roles both as a researcher and a caregiver allowed for a better understanding of the complex dynamics both in the professional and personal spheres. This first-hand experience of balancing work and family responsibilities provided a deeper understanding of the various difficulties that women, particularly those in KIE, can face. This sensitivity enhanced my analysis by providing a more empathetic perspective and a better understanding of the complex relationship between work and personal life.

Additionally, based on my analysis of the data, it is important that the future research adapts an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991), examining how different aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity, age and class, overlap with gender to shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs in KIE in different ways. Also, the overlap of these differences determines how inequality is experienced (Kelan 2014). Therefore intersectional perspective highlights the diverse experiences of women in KIE, as these identities interact to affect access to resources, networking opportunities, and decision-making processes.

In conclusion, future research in KIE should aim to include businesses of various sizes, from micro-enterprises to larger companies, particularly those led by women. This broader scope would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how women entrepreneurs' experiences evolve as their businesses grow. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the internal dynamics of these larger organisations, including issues related to leadership, workforce management, and corporate culture in KIE. This would provide insights into how women entrepreneurs manage gendered experiences within their larger businesses. By addressing the above limitations and incorporating these suggestions, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women entrepreneurs in diverse organizational settings, leading to more effective support and policy initiatives for women entrepreneurs in KIE.

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APPENDICES

Appendix i: Information letter

Tampere University Doctorate Dissertation
Researcher Demet Demirez

INFORMATION LETTER FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Gendered entrepreneurship in innovative sectors:
A comparative study between Finland and Turkey

I am a doctoral student at Tampere University, and I will conduct research interviews as part of my dissertation. For this study, my supervisors are University Lecturer Marja Vehviläinen, University Lecturer Hanna-Mari Ikonen and Professor Emerita Päivi Korvajärvi.

Information about the study

Aim of the research:

My study is about how gender affects the innovative entrepreneurship in Finland and Turkey. The main purpose of my research is to analyse the inequalities that innovative women entrepreneurs encounter as a result of gender ideologies. I am interested in differences and similarities between the two countries regarding to conditions for innovative women's entrepreneurship and how innovations, entrepreneurship and gender are combined together and have impacts on each other. My study documents structural barriers, discriminatory interactions in accessing economic opportunities, productive resources, market, and business networks, and their effects on women and their businesses.

Data Collection:

For this study, I am conducting semi-structured interview with 15-20 woman entrepreneurs both from Tampere Region and Bursa, Turkey. To identify my interviewees in Finland; I am contacting Business Tampere, The Association of

Women Entrepreneurs in Tampere and science and technology centres, parks, incubators in the Tampere Region. I would like to interview you because you belong to my target group of women who are engaged in innovative entrepreneurial work. The interview will take 1-1.5 hours and will be conducted in English. Interview questions will cover topics such as educational background, entrepreneurship and work history, current situation of the enterprise, networks, entrepreneurial supports; work/family balance. I am interested in your own experiences and beliefs on these issues.

Right to refuse and withdraw

Participation in this study is voluntary. As a participant you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reason for your withdrawal. You may indicate your withdrawal verbally or in writing-by telephone, face-to-face, or via e-mail. The interview will be recorded and you can at any time during the study ask the interviewer to stop, start or rewind the tape. You can also request that content be erased retrospectively. However, please note that there is a time-limit for such requests. If you withdraw within 2 weeks after your interview/participation, your data will be destroyed and not used; but after this point the data will remain in the study as anonymised.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The participant's personal data, which is used during the research, are names. The information is in the form of interview recordings, interview transcripts and researcher's notes. The confidentiality of the interview will be ensured through a procedure in which researchers handling the recordings sign a confidentiality agreement. The recordings and interview transcriptions will only be accessible to individuals with specified user accounts. Participants' personal data will not be shared to outsiders at any time.

The data and the results will be processed confidentially following the data protection regulations. The material is carefully anonymised: names are deleted and indirect identification data such as addresses, age and place names are changed in order to prevent any risk of identification. Thus, the participant cannot be identified from the research results or publications. The audio recording will be erased after the interview is transcribed. Data archiving takes place after a research is finished and its data is no more used for the original purpose. The interview recordings are deleted, and the interview transcripts are anonymised before archiving in Finnish

Social Science Data Archive (https://www.fsd.uta.fi/fi) for later use in possible future studies. Information collected from the participants is held according to relevant EU and national laws on confidentiality and data protection.

The collected raw data (e.g. notes, information resource material, audio recordings) will be stored securely, and access will only be given to those responsible for analysing the data in the study. If you have any inquiries concerning the interview, study please do not hesitate to contact me.

Contact point(s) for the study:
Doctoral Researcher:
Demet Demirez
Tampere University
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ph.040 366 9533

Supervisor:
Marja Vehviläinen
Tampere University
marja.vehvilainen@tuni.fi

Appendix ii: Consent form

CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

Statement by the Participant

1. I consent to participate in the study "Gendered entrepreneurship in innovative sectors: A comparative study between Finland and Turkey". I have been provided with a copy of this Informed Consent Form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. In relation to this study:

- I agree to be interviewed by the researchers

3. I acknowledge that:

(a) my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation;

(b) the study "Gendered entrepreneurship in innovative sectors: A comparative study between Finland and Turkey" is for the purpose of research and not for profit;

(c) any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this study will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this study and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher for the purpose of conducting this study;

(d) my anonymity is guaranteed and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name:

Telephone:

Email:

Date:

Signature