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Article

Hegemonic Conceptualizations of Empowerment in Entrepreneurship and Their Suitability for Collective Contexts

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Abstract: The relationship between empowerment and entrepreneurship in collective societies is, in our view, insufficiently examined. Accepted definitions of empowerment and the assumptions underlying programs and research designs based on them result in outcomes that self-fulfil and, as a result, disappoint. Several issues are prevalent: the empowerment potential of programs is overestimated and the dominant view of what constitutes an 'empowered self' does not go deep enough to explore, and reframe, the self and its relationship to agency—two issues at the core of empowerment definitions and formulations. In this conceptual article, we examine the entrepreneurship and empowerment literature to suggest ways forward for the future health and relevance of the subject area. We highlight a serious methodological and perceptual issue within the literature, which offers many opportunities for theory development in the field.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; empowerment; collectivism; women; development

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is considered the motor for economic development (Schumpeter 1983) and a tool to generate economic wealth (Acs and Szerb 2007), create jobs (Wennekers and Thurik 1999), increase social welfare (Bastian et al. 2020; Anderson and Ronteau 2017), and accelerate modernization (Al-Dajani et al. 2015). In this context, governments and international development organizations, such as the World Bank (2014, 2018), the World Economic Forum (WEF World Economic Forum) and the United Nations (UN United Nations), promote entrepreneurship as a catalyst to women's empowerment in the pursuit of gender equality, which is understood as a critical antecedent for human development (UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2018). Underlying this understanding is the neoliberal assumption that financial and economic autonomy entail independence from male-dominated structures and social institutions, such as families, husbands and male guardians (Gray and Finley-Hervey 2005; Vera-Sanso 2008), as well as independence from state support (Ennis 2019; Goyal and Parkash 2011). Furthermore, in the prevalent development logic, which is anchored in Anglo-American and neoliberal thinking (Ennis 2019; Escobar 1992), women engage in entrepreneurship to create jobs and businesses for themselves and, through this, liberate themselves as well from discrimination in gendered labor markets and organizations (Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Jamali 2009; Ennis 2019). However, empirical studies regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship, as in starting new businesses for women's empowerment, reflect mixed results. Many studies and reports cite conventional development outcomes, such as increased income, better access to education and increases in female education as evidence for greater women's empowerment (Kantor 2002; Lombardini and McCollum 2018). Others show that gains in

financial autonomy do not automatically enable women to challenge subordinating power structures (Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Mehtap and Al-Saidi 2019; Wolf and Frese 2018) or that women benefit psychologically from more flexible work than traditional corporate working models (Jennings et al. 2016). Evaluating empowerment outcomes remains challenging because programs and projects often lack measurement rigor (Garikipati 2013; Malhotra et al. 2002; Mosedale 2005). In our opinion, much is related to the 'uncritical use' of the term 'empowerment' (Rowlands 1995) itself, which has different meanings in different socio-cultural contexts. Specifically, understandings of the underlying root-concept of *power* and the notion of *self* are pivotal for the definition of empowerment.

Conceptual research, research that contributes to theory by advancing the thinking around research topics, is vital at this juncture in the entrepreneurship research canon. Instead of empirically replicating models which are now brought into question in their minority base and bias, entrepreneurship and empowerment needs to reassess, reevaluate and restructure frameworks to make better, more relevant and more appropriate theoretical and empirical contributions to the field, and this paper is a step towards this refreshing of perspectives and approaches. Through striving towards extensions and combinations of thought, theory is influenced, laying the groundwork for empirical testing, which will allow conceptual offerings to be proven or disproven and, subsequently, accepted or rejected (Dul and Hak 2007). Across the business disciplines, calls are being made for just this kind of examination to be undertaken (Belk 2020) and we willingly take up the call for entrepreneurship and empowerment.

This article addresses differences in understandings of empowerment in individualist, compared to collectivist, cultures, and analyses what that means for empowerment in entrepreneurship forms. Collectivist contexts emphasize needs and rights of the group as a priority, or at least as equally important to an individual's own needs and rights (Matsumoto et al. 1996; Triandis et al. 1988; Ng et al. 2019). Individualist contexts focus on individual needs and rights, considering that individual wellbeing will benefit the entire group—an individual to many approach (Matsumoto et al. 1996). According to Lasch's original thesis regarding the USA, individualist arrangements within capitalist, materialist contexts lead to a culture of narcissism (Lasch 2018). In fact, collective values across different cultures are shown to be negatively correlated with narcissistic individualism (Ghorbani et al. 2000). The prevalent understanding of women's empowerment is based on definitions stemming from individualist cultural contexts which are rooted in neoliberal traditions within the US and Europe (Anderson and Gaddefors 2017; Bastian et al. 2019; Ojediran and Anderson 2020). Additionally, the currently dominant concept of entrepreneurship emphasizes an individualist self, notably, an independent, autonomous person that is emancipated from institutional constraints (Rindova et al. 2009; Ahl and Marlow 2012). The expectations are that women's venturing is intimately linked with an understanding of entrepreneurship as a liberating instrument from the collective bonds which constrain them (Ojediran and Anderson 2020) allowing them to pursue individual women's wellbeing as the most important antecedent for collective development and wellbeing. However, such a vision ignores the embeddedness of female venturing in collectivist contexts, which dominate in most regions in the world and especially in the Global South (Ojediran and Anderson 2020; Welter 2020). In our view, this leads to several issues: the implicit ideological premises of programs tend to overestimate the empowerment potential of entrepreneurship, and the prevailing view of an 'empowered self' independent from the group tends to underestimate the level of female empowerment in collectivist societies.

The objective of the present paper, therefore, is to contribute to a better understanding of empowerment through entrepreneurship in collective contexts that are characterized by differing values and cultural norms, which affect patterns of social relationships and fundamental conceptions of power and self and which differ substantially from those of individualist settings. We argue that the current understanding of empowerment and entrepreneurship stands in need of a deliberately contextualized definition to be of greater value in policy making and international development practices.

Our text is structured as follows: we start by introducing the concepts of women's empowerment and entrepreneurship and how they have become increasingly important in international development and policy making worldwide. This is followed by a critical analysis of the concepts of power and self and a detailed description of the characteristics of collectivist societies and how they relate (through power and self) to empowerment and entrepreneurship.

2. Empowerment and Women's Entrepreneurship in Practice

Empowerment aims at enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop et al. 2004; Rowlands 1997). The empowerment concept, however, has been specified in the literature in a wide array of ways. Numerous studies agree that empowerment is an ongoing process (Mosedale 2005; Kabeer 2005; Lombardini and McCollum 2018); it cannot be reduced to an individual, but instead entails the component of social change, notably, with regard to power structures in society and the social mobilization and power of communities (Calás et al. 2009; Kabeer 2005; Bennet 2002; Craig and Mayo 1995); empowerment cannot be imposed, but the process requires a change in consciousness on behalf of empowered individuals, and a certain understanding and recognition of their marginalization and subordination (Batliwala 1994). Mechanisms that foster empowerment include agency, autonomy, self-direction regarding the development of the self, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilization and self-confidence (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). Domains of empowerment that have been identified include health, economic, political, educational (UNDP 2018; Duflo 2012; Sen 1999; Alsop et al. 2005) and spiritual consciousness (Hennink et al. 2012). Finally, empowerment research considers various levels of analysis such as individual, community (in traditional societies this includes families and tribes), and organizational (Hennink et al. 2012), as well as personal, relational and collective levels (Rowlands 1997). Prevalent economic definitions of women empowerment correlate it with economic development (Duflo 2012; Sen 1999; Luttrell et al. 2009): gender inequality is in fact greater among the poor (Duflo 2012) and in underdeveloped contexts where women tend to have less access to education and health care (World Bank 2016) and mortality rates of girls and women are significantly higher compared to boys and men in extreme poverty circumstances (Duflo 2012). Amartya Sen (1999) refers to a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women empowerment, where development helps reducing gender inequalities; however, continuous discrimination against women will impede development.

Empowered women are expected to have better opportunities for income generation, which allows them to make changes across all spheres of their lives (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007; Kabeer 2011). Aligned with economic views, current international development efforts strongly emphasize financial autonomy as an important antecedent for women empowerment (WEF World Economic Forum; UNDP 2018; Luttrell et al. 2009; Hughes et al. 2015) and the focus is on economic autonomy and an 'individual opportunity nexus' (Lounsbury et al. 2019, p. 1215). For example, the numerous international development programs supporting women through microfinance and conditional cash transfer schemes to promote entrepreneurship among women. Such development policies, as well as governmental efforts aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and entrepreneuring (Ahl and Marlow 2012), consider it an empowerment tool and a developmental necessity. The rationale behind promoting women's venturing roots is the neoliberal belief in the effectiveness of free markets and private enterprises as a growth motor (Ennis 2019): self–employment programs, micro-enterprises and others encourage women to join the workforce and to create their own employment as well as to contribute to growth and private sector development (Paramanandam and Packirisamy 2015; Ennis 2019). Women here are considered to be an underdeveloped resource that should be tapped into in order to generate economic growth and to channel benefits or profits received through such development aids to provide for families (Cornwall 2016). It is a form of objectification that

imposes responsibility on women to address their own economic subordination (Marlow 2014). This approach is criticized mainly because it reduces women's entrepreneurial engagement to a means that aims to achieve economic development; but continues to neglect individual women's needs (Chant 2016; Kabeer 1994), reflected in persisting structural gender inequalities and continuous discrimination of women along all empowerment domains, such as education, health, access to resources, political participation (Onditi and Odera 2017), as well as culture (Henry 2011) and psychology (Cattaneo and Chapman 2010) and these operate in shaping and creating perceptions of self and identity. Moreover, the prevalent approaches to empowerment through entrepreneurship echo predominantly, to use an over-generalized description, US- and Euro-centric models of venturing (Gupta and Sharma 2011), which emphasize economic opportunity recognition and exploitation, based on a masculinized ideal of 'homo-entrepreneurs' (Lounsbury et al. 2019, p. 1215) and masculine venturing (Ahl and Marlow 2012). Such gendered economic, political and cultural perspectives related to entrepreneurship underestimate, or even ignore, the diversity of female venturing (Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Brush et al. 2009) as well as different forms of empowerment and possibilities for female achievement with regard to differing cultural contexts (Bastian et al. 2019; Bastian 2017; Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013). Especially with regard to culture, scholars have criticized empowerment as framed by development agencies as often within settings 'that are not of their own [women's] choosing' (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). For example, women's microfinance programs in Africa were found to create conflicts within households and destabilize pivotal family and support structures (Salia et al. 2018); programs often resulted in partner violence and theft in patriarchal societies (Stam and Selhausen 2014). Similarly, Garikipati (2013) notes that rural women in India have limited decision power over how the loan they receive should be allocated and, as a result, the microcredit is frequently diverted into household requirements. Such results are ascribed to a lack of a bottom-up approach in the empowerment process, which would allow a better capturing of the needs and interests of the women concerned (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). Instead of contextualized empowerment efforts (Gümüsay 2015), US- and Euro-centric cultural norms dominate the underlying assumptions regarding entrepreneurship and women's empowerment. This is a particularly difficult issue when it concerns collectivist cultural environments. For example, there is great diversity and difference when it comes to women's rights in the Gulf countries (Metcalfe 2008; Zahidi 2018), yet research on women entrepreneurs in the Arab Gulf shows that Muslim women's empowerment is regularly seen, through an ethnographic lens, as an almost oxymoronic concept. However, the understanding of central notions regarding empowerment, such as the notion of 'power' and 'self' differ fundamentally among cultural contexts. León (2002) discusses empowerment from the viewpoint of the those outside the developed world (often referred to as 'global south') as a collective women's movement aimed at changing lives and social structures that affect those lives. This reflects empowerment as collective. Foucault (1991) considers power to be everywhere and within both individuals and collectives. He distinguishes between appropriating power and exercising power, where appropriating power is when an individual or group acquires power that they did not previously have, while exercising power is the actions taken by someone who already holds power. This conceptualization may explain the mismeasurement of both power and empowerment, when applied by power exercising groups (development agencies, etc.) to those acquiring it (through entrepreneurship or other means). Power analysis acknowledges the complexities of power distribution and sharing in different cultural settings along different intersections of power and people, notably different levels on which power is exercised, different power forms and different spaces of individual participation (Gaventa 2006).

3. Notions of Power and Self

Many of the difficulties in aligning empowerment programs with cultural context spring from a lack of proper understanding regarding the central underlying concepts of

empowerment, notably the notions of 'power' and 'self'. Notions of 'power' and 'self' are reflective of cultural and societal norms and traditions (Smith 2013; Kadirov et al. 2016; Boulanouar et al. 2017; King et al. 2017). Thus, 'power' and 'self' are defined and experienced in various ways by different individuals and in different contexts.

3.1. Power

At the center of empowerment is the concept of power (Kabeer 1999). The way in which power is interpreted and defined significantly affects our understanding of empowerment (Luttrell et al. 2007) and the way, for example, programs and instrument tools are set up and developed to operationalize it. According to Rowlands (1997), a clear definition of power entails an understanding regarding the distribution of power and diverse power forms within societies and how they influence how they 'perceive themselves as able to act, and to be a force to be reckoned with in the wider community' (p. 88). Conventional ideas of power as expressed in mainstream empowerment and entrepreneurship literature are associated with the domination of people and things (Kabeer 2005), or "power over" someone or something, and are based on control and manipulation. This form of power is also identified as being an inherently male expression of power, which takes place within the context of societal hierarchies related to categories such as race, gender, class and others (Rowlands 1997; VeneKlasen et al. 2002; Riger 1993). Moreover, the conventional understanding reflects an individualistic expression of power as a zero-sum game, where the power gains of one person led to another person's loss of power (Read 2012). In particular, the promotion of economic (financial) empowerment of marginalized groups, such as women, has been criticized for trying to fit individuals into the mold of an atomistic, rational 'economic man' (Wilson 1996), which emphasizes agency, mastery, and control over others, as well as over important resources (Riger 1993), individual and collective. Such an understanding of power is closely aligned with the neoliberal thinking style of individual actions being based on pure self-interest and cost–benefit analysis. This reflects a distributive understanding of power where individuals compete for a limited amount of power premised on me/us against the other/them. It is important to note that this positivist understanding has not been shared throughout all cultures and time. For example, Ghandi criticized such an 'economic man' approach which has also been referred to as 'egonomics', where relationships are devoid of value and objectify others for individual egoist gains (Wilson 1996). However, the prevalent understandings of empowered women are reflections of the normative image of rational economic actors who seek profit maximization for their own benefit (Prügl 2015). Castigated as the "neoliberalization of feminism" such empowered women conduct themselves in alignment with market principles to achieve personal gain in (financial and economic) power and freedom (Prügl 2015). This choice of exercised power is expressed as "power over" others and "power to" act on one's choices and decisions even if others contradict or oppose it (Rowlands 1995). For an overview regarding different power definitions, please see Table 1.

The conventional understanding of power (and empowerment) willfully ignores existing power distributions (Rowlands 1997) and structural inequalities within societies (Sato 2016), where power is differently understood by actors in various positions and also by different communities; similarly, it is understood differently in varying cultural settings (Rappaport 1987). Contemporary approaches reflect on these diversities and promote a definition of power that can be shared (Gaventa 2006; Rowlands 2016). In fact, the possibility that power can be expanded is seen as a necessary precondition for successful empowerment (Page and Czuba 1999). Studies on empowerment by grassroots movements (Perkins 1995), and development literature (Women and Development (WAD) and Women in Development (WID)) (Jaquette 1990; Tinker 1990) perspectives emphasize the expandable nature of power (e.g., "relational power" (Pratto 2016), "integrative power" (Korten 1987)), where power takes different forms in different contexts (Rappaport 1987). Aligned with this, Pettit (2012) conceives power as the interdependence between actors and culture as a representation of an invisible form of power. Transformational power is an

example where leaders who rank higher in social hierarchies (unequal social relations) are not driven by self-interest, but they intend to reduce social inequalities through investment and development in others and the group (Pratto 2016). Thus, the understanding of power in context and the aims of powerful individuals is pivotal when it comes to the successful operationalization of empowerment projects (Luttrell et al. 2007). Within collectivist contexts power bases are grounded in underlying cultural collective values reflected in collaboration, sharing and mutuality (Kreisberg 1992). Therefore, the notions of power need to be extended (aligned with Rowlands) from controlling power ("Power over") and productive power ("power to") to power from individual self-respect ("power from within") to collective power, which is strengthening the power of the group, and rests on the empowerment of individuals interested in "power with". In development terms, the attempt by organizations to implement empowerment as part of projects in societies where people hold different worldviews and by applying a Western agenda are bringing more harm than good (Vonimary 2018). As well as missing the opportunity to "gain an understanding of the process of empowerment through acknowledging the [local community's] own world view" (p. 5).

Table 1. Expressions of power.

Expressions of Power	Meaning
Power over	Dominance over other (Riger 1993); Controlling power (Rowlands 1997)
Power to	"freedom to act" (Riger 1993); "productive power" (Rowlands 1997)
Power with	Tackling problems with a group (Riger 1993)
Power from	The ability of the individual to resist others (Riger 1993)
Power from within	Self-respect/spiritual strength (Rowlands 1997)

3.2. Self

The understanding of 'self' is pivotal to the concept of empowerment. The self-concept refers to beliefs a person holds about themselves and how they evaluate themselves on certain personal qualities (Solomon et al. 2017), and is an important theme in social psychology. It consists of several basic dimensions, such as the actual (realistic), ideal (aspirational), private (how I am and would like to be) and social self (how we would like to be seen by others). The self-concept is socialized from childhood: people learn about themselves from others, through social comparisons and direct interactions (Ekinci and Riley 2003; McGuire 1984; Solomon 1983). As such, as in the case of 'power', the notion of self (I/me) is different in various cultural contexts.

Kagitçibasi (2007) emphasizes the way Western societies privilege an individualistic hegemonic conception that emphasizes personal autonomy and independence with fixed personal boundaries (Schwartz 2004). Here, the 'self' is separated from an individual's social context ('independent self-construal') (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Such notions of 'individuated' self (Kagitçibasi 2007) are at odds with understandings that see the self as a part of the broader social context and bases it on an 'interdependent self-construal' (Iyengar 2010; Kagitçibasi 2007; Nisbitt 2003). The interdependent self, then, emphasizes the wider group, whether that group is the in-group, the tribe, the local community, the nation, or all of humanity (Kagitçibasi 2007). This conception of the self is particularly relevant for 'collective' societies (Triandis et al. 1990) and those with higher order values, which emphasize the group and community wellbeing and have a social focus. Moral reasoning of Americans and Indians regarding 'non-helping situations' illustrate well the fundamental difference:

> . . . for the Indian related self, the welfare of others (beneficence) is an integral aspect of moral code, invoking social responsibility. For the American separate

self, however, moral code is limited to justice and individual freedom; it does not include beneficence. (Miller et al. 1990, p. 113)

Most of the cultures in the world are group cultures, organized around extended families, tribes and interwoven communities. How each person understands his/her self is at the core of their interactions with the world around them, their personal ontologies and, as such contextualizes the definition of self, through culture, their experiences, priorities, frameworks and understandings. Yet, to date, as a form of colonial inheritance (Alvares 2011), the Western hegemonic conception of self continues to be used as a reference point for defining and measuring empowerment paradigms and programs that are used on the wider (non-individualistically cultured) world. This particular Western understanding tends to isolate individual behavior from context (e.g., cultural and social factors) in order to 'control for "unwanted" variation' (Kagitcibasi 1996, p. 4). It places understandings of the self on a continuum, with individualized self at one end and relational, "collectivist" selves at the other. In this sense, individualism, with its individuated autonomous self at the core, is viewed as healthy and, collectivist cultures, which have relational, interdependent selves at the core are viewed as the opposite. Such understanding in science and literature has been formed by the Freudian psychoanalytical dominance in Western psychological thought that considers only one type of self—the separate self –as "the healthy prototype" (Kagitçibasi 2007, p. 111). Psychoanalytic psychology requires children, during early infancy, to "separate" from the parent and during adolescence to become independent from the family (Freud 1958; Mahler et al. 1975; Hoffman 1984; Kroger 2005). The prevalent dichotomous understanding of self leaves little room for any form of collectivist/relational self in primarily individualistic cultures, nor of any perception of individuated self (and associated agency) in collectivist cultures. Interestingly most countries in the world are still collectivists and associated with an unhealthy un-autonomous self—a self which seeks its power and permission from the group, and who privileges "we" over "me" (Parth et al. 2014).

An alternative view to that of Freud is that autonomy is developed from a secure attachment and close relationship with parents and family (e.g., Allen et al. 2003; Grossmann et al. 2005; Ryan and Deci 2000) and, being connected in this way throughout life does not imply a lack of autonomy and agency (Kagitcibasi 2005). In other words, the "documented" correlation between interpersonal distance and agency is empirical, but separateness is not a logical or necessary condition for an autonomous self. Contrary to prevailing underlying assumptions of empowerment, individuals can be high in autonomy (agency) and strong social relatedness (interpersonally), resulting in an autonomous-related self. In this way, autonomy need not imply separateness from others, it must just be willed and felt by the person (free from coercion).

4. Collectivist Societies and Empowerment

Differences exist in how individuals define themselves and their relationships with others. Such distinctions express themselves in a different construal of self (please see the previous section) and are attributed to cultural contexts of shared beliefs and values (Hofstede 2001; Triandis 1995; Oyserman et al. 2002). In individualist cultures, self-construal is based on personal autonomy and separation from others; in collectivist contexts self-construal is based on interdependence with others and the group and is socially embedded (Brewer and Chen 2007; Brewer and Venaik 2011). Collectivism is still predominant in societies in the MENA, Africa, Asia, South America, the Pacific and in immigrant communities of the first, second and third generation in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Ayçiçegi-Dinn and Caldwell-Harris 2011; Smolicz et al. 2001). Although there are different expressions of collectivist societies, they all emphasize extended family, tribe, collective community, or caste, and country; moreover, members of collective societies feel obliged to help and support people in their communities and to satisfy their needs (Triandis et al. 1988). In the following, we will describe how collectivist culture relates to personal, relational, and collective empowerment levels (Rowlands 1997).

4.1. Personal Level

Individual self-esteem and self-image are shaped by group characteristics such as family/ethnic background, class, etc. (Haj-Yahia and Sadan 2008). In collectivist societies, personal merit is less important for the evaluation of an individual's capacities than being assessed by group relationships and connections (Rosen 2000) and, consequently, the group's reputation and status (Triandis et al. 1988; Haj-Yahia and Sadan 2008). Conversely, success and failure of an individual reflects on the collective and is of great group interest and concern (Haj-Yahia and Sadan 2008). Thus, there is a reciprocal link between personal self and identity and collective self and identity in collective societies and the behavior of individuals is perceived as affecting the well-being of the group and each group members' life conditions (Haj-Yahia and Sadan 2008). In line with this, supporting their collectives fills members with personal satisfaction and gives them purpose. They also feel they are contributing to the harmony and sustainability of the group, just as the group is responsible for supporting the individual in their aspirations and achievements (Triandis 2008).

4.2. Relational Level

In collective contexts, individuals subordinate their own demands and needs to the interests of the group (Triandis et al. 1988). Individual behavior is not subsumed by the group even though it is a function of group norms and the roles of certain group members. However, there is a balance between individual and collective needs, which is shaped through the interactions of group members (Triandis et al. 1988). Changes in behavior reflect a certain collective consensus which, when a greater number of members modify attitudes, the rest of the group follows accordingly (Triandis et al. 1988). Individuals in collectivist cultures accept power differences and hold positive attitudes towards vertical relationships (for example parent—children, mother/father—daughter/son, elder member—younger member, etc.) (Hofstede 2001). Family relations, which go beyond the nuclear type of family and comprise extended family, remain the major source of support for individuals (on numerous dimensions: emotional, social, economic, instrumental, etc.). People in such settings mutually support each other and cooperate with family members; they resent interpersonal competition within their group and pursue harmony between group members as a priority (Chadda and Deb 2013; Triandis et al. 1988).

Competition is accepted between different groups. Collectivist societies have produced diverse forms of arbitration and negotiation to manage confrontations (Gire and Carment 1993; Wall et al. 2001).

In this context, Triandis et al. (1988) identify harmony, face-saving, duty towards parents, modesty, moderation, thrift, equality in reward allocation to group members, and fulfilment of other's needs as typical collectivist values. These contrast with typical individualist values such as freedom, honesty, social recognition, comfort, hedonism, equity of rewards according to individual contribution to the group performance. Cost–benefit analysis regarding human relations is unacceptable in collective societies; transactions are based predominantly on trust and less on formal contracts that represent a legalistic written and objectified approach.

4.3. Collective Level

As noted above, collectivist societies emphasize extended family or wider group, and all members feel they must help others in their group to achieve their individual needs and aspirations and also to support and help the members of their communities (Triandis 2008). The benefit of the collective is considered to be superior to any and all personal benefits or least, to hold at least equal weight to individual well-being and achievement (Matsumoto et al. 1996). Trust tends to be limited to "in-groups" and people connected with in-groups (Tajfel 1978). Consequently, people display little trust regarding people outside their group. People in collectivist societies also tend to show more respect and obedience to in-group authorities than to outgroup authorities (for example, state institutions) (Triandis 2008; Matsumoto et al. 1996; Tajfel 1982).

Empowerment through entrepreneurship programs typically emphasizes the individual's personal capability to create value through business ventures. Empowerment goals here are essentially entrepreneurial goals, which are a reflection of the neoliberal vision of a free and unconstrained market, privatization and continuous economic growth. Based on such understandings (Ennis 2019), individualist values of personal achievement relate to the successful exploitation of business opportunities and financial viability gathered from new ventures. The rationale is that entrepreneurial activities render women financially autonomous and promote their independence, self-reliance, and individualism (Hayton et al. 2002). As demonstrated in Table 2, the focus of entrepreneurship tends to be self-oriented, with the aim to gain 'power over'/'power to' certain resources, human and others. The efforts to support women using venture creation activities is a good starting point to give a sense of independence (Hennink et al. 2012). Success through entrepreneurship can be measured easily through financial terms such as income, profit and growth. Empowerment through entrepreneurship approaches base on the still dominating Western economic idea that development is "a matter of capital, technology and education and the appropriate policy and planning mechanisms to successfully combine these elements" (Escobar 1992, p. 20). Entrepreneurship used as a motor for economic growth, which is expected to lead to maximized outcomes for individuals involved (Vonimary 2018), is a model that has been popularized in many international aid programs aiming to empower women (Garikipati 2013). However, Hart (2001) criticizes development as representing the knowledge and worldviews of the development agencies, deaf to the sound of local cultures, norms and perspectives. For example, the applicability of micro-financing has received criticism (Karlan et al. 2015; Alvarez and Barney 2013; Newman et al. 2014): micro-finance has been considered a solution to perceived issues (and understandings) of poverty and of women's empowerment (Vonimary 2018). El Enany and Wichert (in press) find that microfinance practices, which emphasize economic concerns and focus on tackling income disparities, tend to reinforce existing social roles/social order. Instead, programs should consider issues as multi-dimensional and be sure to integrate the nuances of the context the entrepreneurship is performed within.

Looking at how collectivist culture relates to personal, relational, and collective empowerment levels, individual success in terms of finance is not a sufficient condition for empowerment, especially as the effects of entrepreneurial activities for relevant communities or groups remain unclear (Garikipati 2013; Ganle et al. 2015). Moreover, this measure of individual success is of little relevance in collective cultures, which value success beyond the self and connect it, instead, to family, tribe and community. Substantial actions would be required to move entrepreneurship as a means of empowerment along the continuum from promoting self-independence to achieving interdependence among the members so they could support the empowerment of others in the community. This is aligned with works emphasizing the role of collective consciousness for women empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002; Cornwall 2016). Agarwal (2001) in Mosedale (2005) argue that successful empowerment requires a strategic focus on women's collective functioning. This is particularly valid since women's entrepreneurial activities in collective cultural environments are targeted at the well-being of their group/family and always consider the reputational impact on their group (women's venturing should reflect positively on the family). Women, here, want their collectivist values to reflect in, and on, their entrepreneurial activities. For example, Tlaiss (2015) shows how Islamic values such as fairness, justice and benevolence are strongly reflected in entrepreneurial activities of Muslim women entrepreneurs who also consider them pivotal for venture success. Further empirical research on female Arab entrepreneurs finds that collectivist values rooted in traditions or in religious interpretations (Tlaiss and McAdam 2020) were a major source of strength and entrepreneurial resilience for women.

Table 2. Elements of Empowerment in Individualist versus Collectivist Contexts.

Elements of Empowerment	Dimensions	Primarily Individualistic Contexts	Primarily Collectivist Contexts
POWER	Personal	• Motivated by individual profit maximization • Motivated by personal gains • Seeks mastery • Seeks control	• Seeks Strengthening and increasing the power of the group • Seeks to promote greater good for the group • Values sharing, mutuality, and collaboration with the group • Obligation to support the group • Agrees that group benefits are superior to personal benefits
	Relational	• Power as a zero-sum-game (power gain of one individual leads to loss in power of another) • Seeks control over others and control over resources of others	• Power is expandable • Power relations characterized by collaboration, mutuality and sharing with others and the group • Relational Power
	Collective	• Control over resources	• Integrative power • Transformational power • Power relations characterized by collaboration, mutuality and sharing with others and the group • The group's reputation reflects on the individual reputation
	Notions of power	"Power over" "Power to"	"Power with" "Relational Power"" Integrative Power"
SELF	Personal	• Independent and autonomous self • Agentic self	• Collectivist and relational self • Interdependent self
	Relational	• Separate self with fixed boundaries • Interpersonal distance	• Fluid boundaries • High level context, physical closeness
	Collective	• Sources of power/energy are not derived from the group	• Sources of power/energy are derived from the group seeks its power and permission from the group
	Notions of Self	• "me" over "we"	• "we" over "me"

5. Empowerment in a Collectivist Context (The Way Forward)

How can empowerment through entrepreneurship best be achieved in a collectivist context? To date, underlying normative assumptions in empowerment policies and programs originate in individualist cultural understandings of the global North, notably in Anglo-American teachings. Based on these, most programs assume that empowerment is a result of economic development and that women are automatically empowered if they gain in economic strength. Yet, empirical research shows that the correlation between economic and financial development of women and their empowerment is not linear or straight forward and depends largely on cultural understandings and elements. Moreover, economic empowerment does not automatically lead to greater awareness regarding the value of women's work and employment. Instead, it liberates governments from policy responsibilities and puts the brunt of job creation on the individual (Ennis 2019). For women this means that in addition to the traditional responsibilities of home and family, they receive added responsibilities related to economic prosperity and growth (Marlow 2014).

5.1. Empowerment Methodology

As Vonimary (2018) notes, agency is at the core of what it is to be human. How agency is understood and manifested depends on cultural context, and most of the world are represented by the minority in terms of judgements, paradigms, proposed solutions to issues and success and failure metrics. The dilemma around what empowerment means, in contexts that privilege a close interpersonal distance and, therefore, the recognizable manifestations of the accepted antecedents of empowerment—autonomy and autonomous agency—must be uncovered, identified, considered, and contextualized. Empowerment cannot be successful if it is directed from the top down, or the outside in. Empowerment must be from the bottom up, with objectives firmly embedded in a nuanced cultural context. Seeking women's engagement with the empowerment process makes it primordial to involve them in the definition and design of the empowerment goals and outcomes. It should be understood as a process, encompassing the individual as well as the collective. "If empowerment is studied in places where people hold radically different worldviews than the researchers" it must be asked if the Western concepts and frameworks are a suitable medium for peoples of "different epistemologies" (Vonimary 2018, p. 15).

Empowerment is a process (Afshar 2016), which "represents an enabling process to individuals that can have implications on a collective level for political and social change" (Vonimary 2018, p. 12). It is logical to think of empowerment as a process, something that occurs on a continuum over time—especially if one quantifies its success through projects that are expected to change society. Changes to societies, to institutions and structures, naturally take time and, like the entrepreneurship ventures through which they are often made in metaphor, it is a "3 steps forward, and 2 steps back" process of development and change. Understanding that the evaluation of entrepreneurial women fully takes on the "cultural embeddedness of judgment processes" where necessity entrepreneurship is linked with women, where microfinance is associated with women, but where, on the other hand, the very term entrepreneurship is associated with men (Ahl and Marlow 2012)—as are terms of growth, expansion, profitability, high tech and other verbal manifestations of the 'commanding use of power'. The gendering of all language (Kubota 2020), with that around business being highlighted by several prominent entrepreneurship scholars (e.g., Marlow), reflects that each definition and each assumption is both gendered and cultured. Perhaps most significantly in the case of women entrepreneurs in contexts outside of the individualized contexts, we see that understanding the defining of the self, and the associated use and manifestation of agency, autonomy, and power, are easily both mis-gendered and mis-cultured.

5.2. Indicators and Measurements

We must be careful to use the right indicators to measure empowerment success. Indicators need to relate to women's personally meaningful (emp)power(ment) goals. Such objectives must help increase a woman's influence in social relations (Cattaneo and Chapman 2010), which very much relate to the socio-cultural context and could refer to more individualist interests (for example, profit maximization; independence), as much as such goals could comprise the strengthening of the group (as in collectivist contexts). Equally, action at the core of empowerment cannot be imposed from outside but requires a certain level of self-direction depending on a woman's agency, which bases on her values and her perceived situation. Moreover, actions must relate to the equivalent power goals that were previously defined. Women need to be involved in the definition of relevant indicators of change to evaluate their empowerment progress. Indicators cannot be reduced to typical entrepreneurship measures such as number of female startups, growth expectations, numbers of employees, and others. To date, empowerment through entrepreneurship programs is overlain by economic agendas that seemingly encourage women to participate in the labor market and to become productive and (economic) value creating market participants. Notably, women promoting entrepreneurship programs rolled out by governments and development organizations tend to work on a large scale

that require a certain level of program uniformity; moreover, such funding organizations themselves are obliged to show quick results. This, in fact, contradicts the needs to provide space and flexibility for the concerned women to align entrepreneurial empowerment with their personal goals and ambitions. Programs should be facilitating change, not imposing it.

6. Conclusions

Empowerment has become a buzzword in development (Cornwall and Brock 2005), but policy approaches and development programs that intend to empower women through entrepreneurship and business venturing still lack definitional focus regarding central notions of 'power' and 'self'. To date, empowerment through entrepreneurship reflects a neoliberal Western vision of the women being empowered because they are productive and value-creating market participants that create their own jobs and employment for others and thus, contribute to the economic development of their country. Yet, the pivotal notions of 'self' and 'power' are not stated explicitly, and prevailing practices do not question underlying assumptions of the predominant empowerment concept, which refer to the independent self and to 'power to' and 'power over' as prevailing in individualist cultures. This is problematic since the majority of women empowerment and development programs take place in the Global South within predominantly collectivist countries. Current practices tend to ignore collectivist understandings of power and self. However, it is precisely on such understandings that empowerment efforts' success or failure is evaluated, and decisions made on whether empowerment outcomes will be sustainable over time. We need to prevent empowerment outcomes being confounded with entrepreneurial outcomes and applied through measures of entrepreneurial success. Women can be financially successful, but they still may not be empowered with regard to their own specific power goals. As such, we need to define empowerment more precisely with regard to the cultural context and the sociocultural realities, which create the backdrop for the entrepreneurial activities of women. If we have a clear understanding of empowerment in different cultural contexts, we can better plan, develop and implement empowerment through entrepreneurship.

A limitation of the paper might be that as authors, we are constrained by our own cultural biases, which relate to our multi-national backgrounds. Yet, as researchers, we have continuously challenged our interpretations of the previous literature and scrutinized our own perspectives. We are, therefore, confident that the concepts we present in this paper make a substantial contribution to the debate of women empowerment and will help to re-think underlying assumptions and reasoning on the issue.

To supplement the research on empowerment, we have recommended several future research directions in the previous section 'The way forward'. Moreover, the empowerment entrepreneurship nexus is embedded within contexts of existing cultural and institutional norms that have their proper approach to power and self. Thus, our empowerment critiques need to give voice to more diverse cultural perspectives and consequently, to a more diverse range of authors (including authors from collectivist cultural backgrounds). In this context, we also need to provide space to draw on thinkers and works not originally published in the English language. Hamed Dabashi (2015) states that the powerful abuse their power because they create knowledge at their service. With regard to the present research debate, this reflects in the proliferation of empowerment knowledge that serves the interests of prevailing economic and political powers. Future research should, therefore, strive for a transformation of our knowledge regimes that must reflect new metaphors and understandings of key concepts, as well as calling for a broader reflexivity regarding our research methodologies. Moreover, the current approach to meritocratic entrepreneurship as a means to reduce poverty and marginalization and to generate empowerment underestimates the individual woman's perspective. Here, research must afford greater visibility for marginalized women by focusing directly on their needs and giving voice to their personally meaningful empowerment goals, which will ultimately reflect in a greater women's impact in social change.

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