

Doing gender in family business: Embracing gender within the business family and beyond

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Manuscripts (in French or English) should be sent by email to numerospecial.mi@gmail.com no later than **April 30, 2024**. They must adhere to the standards outlined in *Management international's* [editorial policy](#). They will be peer-reviewed following the traditional double-blind review process. The publication of the special issue is scheduled for the first half of 2026.

For this special issue, we invite researchers to explore how gender is done within business families and family firms. We are looking for contributions embracing a social constructionist, critical or interpretivist perspective to understand and theorize the doings of gender by considering the interplay of norms, practices, and contexts, within Western societies as well as in countries and regions from the Global South. Acknowledging that social and cultural norms beyond gender also play a major role in family businesses, we are keen to see conceptual and empirical papers that address the doings of gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions, intersecting at the individual level.

Within this call, we are interested in business families and family firms, the dominant form of organization worldwide (Cadiou & Cadiou, 2014). Businesses and families are not gender-neutral and neither are the roles played by family members within them (Byrne, Fattoum, Thébaud, 2018; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017). The ongoing interaction among family members creates (gendered) social norms and structures that generate systemic constellations of expectations and shared schemata (Emerson, 1976) which are carried forward in the family business context (Daspit et al, 2016). Therefore, not only individuals, but also groups, families, and businesses “do gender” as they construct social norms around men and women, masculinity and femininity, as well as other cultural norms, such as those attached to age, ethnicity and class.

Prior research conducted in family businesses largely embraces the gender-essentialist idea that men and women are inherently different, such that “men are like this, and women are like that” (Bradley, 2007; Nelson & Constantinidis, 2017). Indeed, family business research often uses the terms “gender” and “sex” interchangeably. However, by equating gender with biological sex, we fail to acknowledge the broader impact of gendering processes in our everyday lives—at the individual, institutional and societal levels (Bradley, 2007). Indeed, family business research has largely imitated entrepreneurship research in that it has taken a mainly individualistic, “gender as a variable” approach (Ahl, 2006; Heinonen & Hytti, 2012; Henry et al, 2015).

Over the last decades, the gender research agenda mostly focused on women in entrepreneurship (e.g., Byrne, Fattoum, & Diaz Garcia, 2019) and family business (e.g., Essers, Doorewaard, & Benschop, 2013; Fattoum & Byrne, 2017). While the stark absence of women in CEO positions was first noted decades ago (Daily, Certo, & Dalton, 1999; Oakley, 2000; Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998), it persists as a major societal and organizational concern (Dwivedi, Joshi, & Misangyi, 2018; Jeong & Harrison, 2017; Knippen, Palar, & Gentry, 2018.). As an estimated 163 million women around the world are involved in new business ventures, a significant “gender gap” in entrepreneurship persists (Kelley et al, 2017; Verheul, Van Stel and Thurik, 2006). The lower incidence of women entrepreneurs has taken on renewed importance in the wake of the recent financial crisis, with many national governments eager to boost economic activity through new business creation (Byrne, Fattoum, & Diaz-Garcia, 2019).

The masculine ideology of entrepreneurship (Marlow & McAdam, 2015; Swail & Marlow, 2018) was emphasized as a main theoretical explanation of women’s underrepresentation in CEO positions, both in family and non-family firms. Entrepreneurs and CEOs must fit cultural expectations and norms relative to who should be an entrepreneur (Lewis, 2015) or a family business CEO (Hytti, Alsos, Heinonen, & Ljunggren, 2017) as well as dictating how people should behave in order to belong (Stead, 2017). Emerging evidence shows however that gender norms affect not only women but also men, both at work and at home (Giazitzoglu & Down, 2017). Gender is far from being a “woman’s problem” only. Particularly, studies investigating multiple masculinities demonstrate that men as well as women are evaluated against a particular form of masculinity, labeled “hegemonic masculinity” (Collinson & Hearn, 2005); those not corresponding to this idealized form of



masculinity are perceived as less professional and performant, and therefore as less adapted to a leadership role (Byrne, Radu-Lefebvre, Fattoum, & Balachandra, 2019).

Besides the powerful influence of hegemonic masculinity on the (self-)selection and enactment of entrepreneurship and leadership, recent insights from gender studies indicate that certain identity dimensions of women and men bring additional challenges within the business family and beyond. For instance, women and men migrant entrepreneurs (Essers et al, 2013; Ozasir Kacar & Essers, 2019), entrepreneurs with corporal challenges (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014) or sexual minority entrepreneurs and CEOs (Redien-Collot, 2012) may be confronted with even more challenges as entrepreneurs and CEO successors in family firms. Intersectional frameworks recognize the multiple social categories to which individuals belong, and expose how ethnicity, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, immigrant status and / or other social dimensions may interact in various ways with gender, to produce unique dynamics and outcomes for individuals, groups, families and businesses (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Fielden & Davidson, 2012; Martinez Dy et al, 2017).

Increasingly, gender and organizational scholars have mobilized a “doing gender” approach to understand how women and men embrace gender identities and engage in gendered practices within private and public settings. In their exchanges and relations with others, individuals engage in gender “performances” (Butler, 1990) and their actions are assessed against accepted norms of masculinity and femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). One theoretical distinction between socially constructed *gender* and biological *sex* purports that both men and women can enact multiple forms of masculinities and femininities (Bradley, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). People “do gender” at home and at work, such that they perform their roles in certain ways because those roles are structured to demand certain gender displays (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Hall, 1996; Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). Indeed, families and organizations are key sites for the production (and reproduction) of gender identities (Collinson & Hearn, 1994).

Given the consequences of the masculine ideology of entrepreneurship for individuals, families, firms and societies, the impact of hegemonic masculinity in family business merits extensive scientific study. Prior research explained its prevalence in family firms referring to the persistence of patriarchal relations (Martinez-Jimenez, 2009; Perricone et al, 2001), or to how gender socialization affects women and men successors (Garcia-Alvarez et al, 2002; Iannarelli, 1992).

However, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of how gender is done in business families and in family firms from (post) feminist perspectives. Because the family institution is at the core of gender construction and enactment (Collins, 1998; Nikina, Le Loarne, & Shelton, 2012), we call for conceptual and empirical studies taking a family level approach to examine the doings of gender in multigenerational family firms. Until now, most research conducted in family business contexts only takes into account one family structure—the nuclear family with man, woman and children engaged. However, of the structure and functioning of families have evolved over time (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003), different structures and dynamics of families existing in other contexts, such as families with or without children, same-sex couples, divorced couples with or without children, couple partnerships which do not include marriage, or enlarged families. We call for an integration of contextual approaches in our understanding of how and with which consequences gender is done in family firms. We are interested in proposals combining varying gender lenses (identities, roles, practices) within different family contexts and cultural environments. A particular attention will be given to investigations addressing the issue of doing gender at the intersection of succession, entrepreneurship, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions.

A non-exhaustive list of possible topics includes:

- Doing gender by women and men successors, as well as by same-sex and mixed-sex successorial teams



- Doing gender in nuclear and non-nuclear business families, in different cultural settings
- Doing gender in interaction with family business stakeholders (employees, suppliers, distributors...)
- Doing gender in intergenerational or same-generation family dyads
- Doing gender over time, e.g., doing gender while engaging in entrepreneuring within the family business
- The tensions and conflicts of enacting masculine and feminine gender identities in family business
- The impact of doing gender on successor legitimacy, and on the succession planning, process, and outcomes
- Doing gender within copreneurial couples
- Doing gender within business families across cultures
- How entrepreneurial practices within family businesses shape gendering
- How ethnicity or other identity dimensions affect gender enactment in business families and family firms
- How doing gender transforms family culture and corporate identity over time, across generations.

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