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**Barriers and Promoters to Entrepreneurial Action among Female (vs. Male) and
International (vs. Local) University of Twente Students**

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Abstract

Female student entrepreneurs have a considerably important role in promoting economic growth. Although research on female entrepreneurship has experienced significant growth in recent years, much research is conducted from a business administration view. Building upon this, the present study investigates the psychological aspects of this phenomenon by exploring which barriers and promoters are perceived by female, international students at the University of Twente in regard to their entrepreneurial process. International women in particular have to overcome barriers to pursue an entrepreneurial career. Since a global comparison has shown that Greek women in particular are hindered by complex cultural and gender-specific factors from becoming entrepreneurs, this study compared Dutch and Greek students in terms of their perceived entrepreneurial process. Within semi-structured interviews, six university students with Greek and Dutch backgrounds shared their experiences. Additionally, women and men, as well as entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, were selected to explore the gender- and culture specific barriers. The results showed six different themes which appeared to be relevant in the context of students' perceived barriers and promoters: *self-competence, fear of failure, drive for autonomy, supportive social network, university support, and financial support*. Gender differences were mainly visible in participants perceived self-competence, fear of failure, and drive for autonomy. More specifically, women perceived themselves as less competent, experienced stronger fear of failure, and expressed a less pronounced drive for autonomy. Interestingly, non-entrepreneurs also expressed higher fear of failure and perceived themselves to be less equipped with entrepreneurial competencies. Moreover, cultural differences were apparent in students' perceived support for entrepreneurship. The results showed that Greek students, compared to Dutch students, received less support from their social surrounding and the university. Additionally, Greek students perceived less financial support and expressed stronger risk perception with regards to financial resources. Lastly, the thorough comparison between female students from Dutch and Greek cultural backgrounds showed that the Greek female students experienced less social support, more fear of failure, and perceived themselves as less competent than the Dutch female students. The results from this study showed that international female students experience gender specific barriers, and that these barriers are also influenced by cultural norms of their home countries. It is therefore suggestable that the University of Twente use this information to adjust their support system to the needs of international women. For instance, this could be by offering voluntary

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internships, tailored workshops, and guest lectures that aim to reduce women's fear of failure and strengthen their perceived self-competencies.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, University of Twente students, theory of planned behaviour, promoters, and barriers

Introduction

Although today women account for almost half of the Dutch workforce (Statista, 2021), a disproportionately large share of entrepreneurial action is still carried out by men. In fact, empirical evidence indicates that male entrepreneurial activity is almost double female entrepreneurship (Laudano, Zollo, Ciappe, & Zampi, 2019; Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012). However, female entrepreneurship is essential for a sustainable economy of a society: It has been discovered that economic development cannot be achieved without the participation of women (Sarfaraz, Faghieh, & Majd, 2014). Interestingly, increased female entrepreneurship was found to positively impact the occurrence of new innovations and, thereby, contributes to growth and progress in society (Nissan, Carrasco, & Castaño, 2012). In fact, women-owned enterprises are more likely to have a social impact (Cochran, 2019), proportionally create more jobs, and survive longer than male-led businesses (Benavides-Espinosa & Mohedano-Suanes, 2012). Also on a personal level, the participation of women in the entrepreneurial field plays an important role, since women can contribute unique qualities. For example, women entrepreneurs have been found to have a stronger reliance on smaller, strong-ties networks and are, therefore, more embedded in local communities (Minniti, 2010). While this can have direct positive effects for companies, it is also associated with a more immediate impact on the closer surrounding and community (Minniti, 2010).

Understanding the potential of women's entrepreneurial activity in contribution to businesses and society, it is equally important to highlight the role of women's personal and psychological well-being. In research, female empowerment has been seen to positively affect women's overall well-being (Fielding & Lepine, 2017). Thus, empowering women at an early stage to take the necessary steps in order to become independent and self-sustainable is not only relevant for society but also for women themselves. Due to the large contributions that women can make, and the influence on their well-being, research on women entrepreneurship has experienced significant growth, underlining the importance of this topic (Sieger et al., 2010).

Empirical research indicates that university education plays an important role in emboldening women to take the leap into entrepreneurship (Keat, Selvarajah, & Meyer, 2011). In fact, educational institutions like universities have a key role in promoting entrepreneurship and teaching their students necessary skills for the entrepreneurial environment (Keat et al., 2011). As universities are able to provide not only educational assistance but often give financial and social support, they account for a large proportion of the support system needed to achieve a career as an

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entrepreneur (Al-Kwafi, Tien Khoa, Ongsakul, & Ahmed, 2020). This support system plays a particularly important role for one group within student entrepreneurship: female international students.

Within female entrepreneurship, female international students in particular face great challenges when it comes to venturing into self-employment. This is because, next to gender specific barriers, cultural norms influence the self-perceived abilities of individuals with entrepreneurial potential. Consequently, cultural context significantly shapes entrepreneurial action (Shinnar et al., 2012, Santos, Roomi & Liñán, 2014), which has been shown in a global comparison demonstrating differences in entrepreneurial action between various countries (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2017). For instance, compared to the Netherlands which is ranked 6th in the European gender equality index with a score of 29.3% of women in the board of directors, Greece, ranked last (28th), with only 13% of women being in the board of directors (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Based on this cultural discrepancy, the current study has investigated individuals with entrepreneurial aspirations from Greek and Dutch backgrounds.

Especially in Greece, women are an understudied group of entrepreneurs (Fafaliou & Salamouris, 2014). Due to the Great Recession in 2007, the unemployment rate decreased rapidly, which predominantly affected Greek women (Kalaitzi et al., 2019). Being a collectivistic culture, Greek society highly values the family unit. Especially for women in the Greek culture, the ensuing social and economic constraints can force them to make the culturally expected choice to prioritize family care over pursuit of career advancement (Kalaitzi et al., 2019). Consequently, women were less willing to take the risks that come with self-employment and entrepreneurial action (Tubadji et al., 2019). This contrasts with the Dutch culture which, with its individualistic focus, offers a more favourable environment for entrepreneurship.

Concluding, female students' entrepreneurial activity is a complex and multifaceted process. In this, the decision-making to follow entrepreneurial intentions is embedded in societal, individual, and cultural factors (Shinnar et al., 2012). In line with this, the current study aims to better understand which factors promote or prevent international, female students in becoming an entrepreneur, whereby the importance of their personal experiences is emphasized. As previous research set a great focus on socioeconomic factors to explain the phenomenon, this study aims at investigating the psychological component.

Theory of Planned Behaviour as Predictor of Entrepreneurial Intent

In order to understand the gender gap as well as cultural differences among students' entrepreneurial activity, it is important to consider the complex process of becoming an entrepreneur. In literature, entrepreneurship is described as "a process that evolves over time and includes different phases from forming an intention, to starting-up, scaling-up, stabilising and managing the business, exit, and potential re-entry" (Gorgievski & Stepan, 2016, p. 440). Within this process the university plays a functional role in influencing students' entrepreneurial action. By providing students with entrepreneurship education, the university ideally shapes an environment that teaches students how to think and behave entrepreneurially (Keat et al., 2011). Although the University of Twente has been named the most entrepreneurial university in the Netherlands and offers a multidimensional support system for upcoming student entrepreneurs (*Support for Startups / Business & Innovation*, 2021), research on students' underlying cognitive processes will possibly help adapting the system to the specific needs of female international students. Looking into cognitive psychology, intention-based models are commonly used to explore students' underlying cognitive processes of entrepreneurial action. Such models give insight into peoples' cognition, perception, motivation, and intention in order to understand the essence of entrepreneurial action (Al-Jubari, 2019). 2016). Within this process the university plays a functional role in influencing students' entrepreneurial action. By providing students with entrepreneurship education, the university ideally shapes an environment that teaches students how to think and behave entrepreneurially (Keat et al., 2011). Although the University of Twente has been named the most entrepreneurial university in the Netherlands and is offering a multidimensional support system for upcoming student entrepreneurs, research on students' underlying cognitive processes will possibly help adapting the system to the specific needs of female, international students. Looking into cognitive psychology, intention-based models are commonly used to explore students' underlying cognitive processes of entrepreneurial action. Such models give insight into peoples' cognition, perception, motivation, and intention in order to understand the essence of entrepreneurial action (Al-Jubari, 2019).

In entrepreneurial research, one of the most used intention-based models is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). This theory suggests that the intention to form a specific behaviour is influenced by three main factors: subjective norm (SN), perceived behavioural control (PBC), and attitude towards the behaviour (A) (Sieger et al., 2019; Krueger et

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al., 1993). Thereby, the SN and A reflect the perceived desirability of a performed behaviour, in this case entrepreneurial action (Krueger et al., 2000). The third component, PBC, reflects the perceived feasibility of performing the behaviour, and is thus, related to one's perceived competence (self-efficacy). According to the TPB, intentions are formed through cognitive processes that are mediated by these three aspects. The stronger the intention is formed after this cognitive evaluation, the more likely is the subsequent action itself (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). In the case of student entrepreneurship, prior research showed that intention-based models like TPB offer valuable insight into venture initiation as well as the overall cognitive processes of entrepreneurial activity (Krueger et al., 1993; Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015). For this reason, the TPB is implemented in this study to investigate the process of entrepreneurial activity.

Preventing and Promoting Factors of Women Entrepreneurship

Alongside the TPB, other gender-specific factors are relevant when it comes to understanding female students' perceived entrepreneurial process. On an individual level, female entrepreneurs are commonly confronted with the perception of certain barriers. Thereby, three types of barriers are called to be especially important for women who want to become an entrepreneur: lack of support, fear of failure, and lack of competency (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012). Firstly, the lack of support can involve different aspects such as not receiving family support, difficulties in obtaining institutional support for aspiring entrepreneurs, securing financial support, or building a relationship with suppliers (Shinnar et al., 2012). A study by Lüthje and Franke (2003) investigated the relationship between attitude and entrepreneurial intentions among engineering students in several nations and discovered a direct relationship between students' perceived availability of support, perceived barriers to entrepreneurship and the intention to pursue entrepreneurship. The findings showed that students that perceived an antagonistic environment are less likely to become entrepreneurs (Lüthje & Franke, 2003).

Second, the fear of failure can often influence the intention and performance of entrepreneurial action and has been found to vary between men and women. Compared to men, women experience more fear of failure since founding a company is socially more acceptable for men (Shinnar et al., 2012). Additionally, women have been found to be more risk averse with regard to self-employment (Wagner, 2007) and financial debt (Shinnar et al., 2012). Such fear of failure has been negatively associated with entrepreneurial activity (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007).

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Specifically, prior research gives evidence that fear of failure is related to the intention to pursue entrepreneurship (Wagner, 2007).

Lastly, women's perceived lack of competency can negatively affect entrepreneurial action. While it is commonly perceived that many jobs can be performed equally well by both sexes, some jobs are perceived as more suitable for men or women. With regard to entrepreneurship, women were found to perceive themselves as less capable of performing entrepreneurial activities (Santos, Roomi & Liñán, 2014). Here, it is important to consider that individuals tend to strive towards jobs that are socially accepted for their gender (Thebaud, 2010; Shinnar et al., 2012). In the case of entrepreneurship, qualities that are perceived essential like aggressiveness, competitiveness, and risk-taking behaviour also tend to be seen as more masculine (Shinnar et al., 2012; Stedham & Wieland, 2017). As a consequence, women tend to see themselves as less competent and perceive their entrepreneurial environment as inadequate or challenging (Shinnar et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2014). From this insight, women can feel less capable to perform entrepreneurial actions that they perceive as essential. In the literature, this phenomenon is also described as entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and is seen as one important factor influencing entrepreneurial process (Santos et al., 2014).

Regarding the perception of competency, it is important to emphasize that women are seen to be especially vulnerable to the influence of gender stereotypes. This can be particularly challenging for female student entrepreneurs in a more masculine entrepreneurial environment (Santos et al., 2014). The impact of gender stereotypes on female entrepreneurship is also shown by the fact that start-ups run by women are seen as less credible and legitimate (Lock & Smith, 2016). To sum up, female students who would like to start a business are faced with multiple gender specific barriers that can make the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career more difficult. Importantly, women are not born with lower entrepreneurial intentions than men, but rather perceive the entrepreneurial role being less suitable for them (Santos, Roomi & Liñán, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to better understand the range of barriers and how they hinder women's entrepreneurial potential in order to enforce them accordingly.

Cultural Barriers to Female Entrepreneurial Action

Next to gender specific factors, international female students can also face cultural barriers, impeding the entrepreneurial process. In fact, more women are becoming entrepreneurs in countries that are characterized by a more individualistic than collectivist culture (Shinnar et al.,

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2012; Tiessen, 1997). Similarly, levels of female entrepreneurship are higher in countries of more gender equality (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). Given this diversity between countries, it is necessary for future research on female entrepreneurship to integrate the influence of national differences to obtain a more substantial picture of the phenomena and assist women more individually.

When comparing factors of entrepreneurship across various countries, one of the most examined aspects are the national cultures of people. A national culture consists of the underlying value systems that are specific to a group or society and motivates individuals to behave in a certain way (Krüger, Linan & Nabi, 2013). In the case of entrepreneurship, such a cultural value system can often have opposing views on what makes a successful entrepreneur. In general, the archetypical entrepreneur is usually described as someone who is creative, innovative, has an urge for achievement and autonomy, and exhibits risk-taking behaviour (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). While this conception is, to some extent, shared by people from different international backgrounds, the degree to which these values are enacted and perceived as acceptable within a culture can differ more strongly. Interestingly, the view of an entrepreneurial prototype who combines the above-mentioned attributes is contested by the finding that successful entrepreneurs from different cultural backgrounds score differently on these conventionally accepted entrepreneurial traits (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Based on this, it becomes clear that individuals can become successful entrepreneurs independently of their match with perceived entrepreneurial norms and their cultural background. At the same time, it becomes also clear that the cultural perception and identification with certain qualities influences individuals' entrepreneurial intentions and actions.

Besides this conception of a successful entrepreneur, there are also cultural differences in the belief whether an entrepreneurial career is desirable. For example, the normative assumption that entrepreneurship is a beneficial economic activity is less shared in most developing countries, and as a consequence, the pursuit of entrepreneurial action can be more difficult for upcoming entrepreneurs (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). In this regard, studies have examined differences among individualistic and collectivist cultures (Shinnar et al., 2012; Tiessen, 1997). As a matter of fact, individualistic cultures are seen as more supportive when it comes to entrepreneurial activities because of their focus on materialistic achievement and wealth (Shinnar et al., 2012). In sum, national cultures hold different values about the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career and thereby influence the positional for individuals to this career path.

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Lastly, different countries often have varying cultural norms about suitability of different genders for entrepreneurship. It has been found that the most favorable environment for entrepreneurship is shaped by more culture that highly values attributes such as assertiveness or competitiveness (Busenitz & Lau, 1996; Hofstede, 2003). Importantly, these attributes are also often perceived as masculine (Busenitz & Lau, 1996; Hofstede, 2003). Therefore, cultural norms also influence the perceived fit of individuals with entrepreneurial potential based on gender. This also applies to women's financial and social support, since they are supposed to have fewer financial, human, and network resources (Santos et al., 2014). Based on such cultural views, women can be hindered from pursuing an entrepreneurial career. On the contrary, more equal gender perceptions can help to tackle these barriers and enable women's entrepreneurial activity. In line with this, countries' levels of gender equality are positively related to the normative support for female entrepreneurship (Lock & Smith, 2016). Importantly, this progressive development appears to function bidirectionally. That is, as a country's proportion of female entrepreneurs rises, the normative support for female entrepreneurship increases, too (Lock & Smith, 2016). After all, these findings show the potential benefits that the progression of cultural norms can have on people's possibility to become an entrepreneur and emphasize the need for a more comprehensive understanding of these aspects.

The Present Study

In the past, much research has been done from a business administration and entrepreneurial view that discusses the phenomenon of gender equality in the entrepreneurial field (Sarfraz, Faghih & Majd, 2014; Warnecke, 2013, Minniti, 2009). However, there is less literature that highlights the problem situation from a psychological perspective. In addition, most studies have focused on theoretical models in order to explain gender and culture related differences within entrepreneurial activity but paid little attention to individual experiences (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen; 2012; George & Zahra, 2002). Building up on existing studies, this study uses semi-structured interviews to qualitatively examine how international female students experience the process of becoming an entrepreneur. Gaining in-depth information about women's personal experiences and finding out about their psychological processes, barriers and promoters that might lead to lower entrepreneurial activity can contribute to existing policy guidelines to promote necessary change.

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Research Questions

This qualitative study aimed to investigate differences between men versus women, and Dutch versus Greek students in their experiences of barriers and promoters during the process of becoming an entrepreneur. Based on the previous literature, the main question of this thesis is: *Which factors prevent or promote entrepreneurial process among female international UT students?*

With regard to this main research question, one sub-question has been developed to guide the analysis and to gain a deeper understanding of perceived differences between genders and Greek and Dutch cultures. Previous research on the factors that impact individual entrepreneurial action highlights the need for an investigation of the role of gender and culture in this process. To be able to answer the main research question, it is therefore crucial to examine the association between these factors and entrepreneurial action. For this reason, the following sub-question was posed: *Are there gender and cultural differences in perceived barriers and promoters?*

Method

Study Design

The current study used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. The interviews were conducted at the University of Twente, in the Netherlands. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually. Beforehand, all participants were thoroughly informed about their rights and the aim of the study. Subsequently, participants were provided with an informed consent that was verbally provided. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente (No. 210528).

Participants

Aiming to obtain a holistic image of the phenomenon, the present study compared similarities and differences between men versus women, and Greek women versus Dutch women on their experiences of barriers and promoters in the process to becoming an entrepreneur. Based on these different criteria, participants were approached directly to find one representative participant per combined category. Next, for this study students who pursued entrepreneurship and those who did not were recruited. Except for one Dutch woman who did not become an

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entrepreneur, and one Greek woman who became an entrepreneur, one participant from each group was interviewed, making a total of six participants ($N=6$). Participants' ages ranged between 19 to 29 years (see Table 1). All participants have been assigned an abbreviation, which is used in the following tables and in the text to identify whose data is reported. Each abbreviation is composed of the cultural background, gender, and entrepreneurial status of the participant (e.g. D, M entr.).

Table 1
Demographics of the participants (N=6)

Participant	Age	Gender	Culture	Study program	Entrepreneurial Status
D, M, entr.	19	male	Dutch	Mechanical Engineering	entrepreneur
D, M, no entr.	19	male	Dutch	Mechanical Engineering	wanted to but did not pursue
D, F, entr.	24	female	Dutch	Mechanical Engineering	entrepreneur
G, F, no entr.	29	female	Greek	Biomedical Engineering	wanted to but did not pursue
G, M, entr.	22	male	Greek	International Business Administration	entrepreneur
G, M, entr.	22	male	Greek	Industrial Design Engineering	wanted to but did not pursue

Data Collection

The participants were asked to answer several questions regarding their perceived process of becoming an entrepreneur. To lower the risk of response bias but encourage participants to freely describe their thoughts, the questions were formulated in a broad manner. The interview scheme (see Appendix A) consisted of ten questions that focused on different barriers and promoters the participants may perceive.

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Interview Scheme

The interview scheme (see Appendix A) was developed on the basis of a study by Shinnar, Giacomini, and Janssen (2012) that used the TBP as well as the barriers *perceived fear of failure*, *perceived lack of support*, and *perceived lack of competency* to examine the differences between gender and cultural background on entrepreneurial perception and intention. As already described, individuals usually experience different steps before becoming an entrepreneur. Thus, the TPB was used as a broad guideline for this interview scheme. The three antecedents to intentions of the TPB, *attitude*, *perceived behaviour control*, and *perceived social norm* were examined (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000).

To get insight into participants' attitude toward becoming an entrepreneur, the question “*What exactly motivates you to pursue entrepreneurship?*” was used as well as the question “*What did you hope to achieve?*”. In order to learn about individuals' perceived social norms and their perceived support from family and friends, the interview scheme included the following questions: “*How did your social environment react to your idea? For example, your fellow students, friends, family or teachers?*” and “*What particular reactions from your social environment did you experience as helpful or as barriers? What kind of support did you get? From whom?*”. Another question was added to find out about perceived university support: “*How did your education/university motivate and support you in your entrepreneurial process? For instance, in terms of receiving information or funding/resources or marketing? Could you think of point of improvement?*”. To assess students' perceived behaviour control, the question “*Did you find the entrepreneurial process easy/difficult? Why?*” was asked. To avoid misunderstanding and clarify what entrepreneurial process involves, the questions “*Was it easy or difficult to find an idea for a start-up/company?*” and “*Was it easy or difficult to implement your ideas/plans? What about your first sale? Finding clients? Opening your business?*” were added. Participants who perceived the process as easy were then asked: “*What helped you in the process?*”. Contrary, participants who perceived it as difficult were asked the following question: “*What risks and barriers did you perceive and experience? Were you afraid of failure?*”.

As previous literature suggests, perceived *self-competence* as well as *perceived fit with a masculine environment of entrepreneurship* are relevant predictors of female entrepreneurship. To examine both components, the questions “*What skills, knowledge, and experience do you think are important as an entrepreneur? How do you perceive yourself regarding these attributes?*” and

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“Do you perceive that in the entrepreneurial environment, certain attributes such as assertiveness, competitiveness, risk-taking behavior (traits that can be considered masculine) are important? Do you perceive yourself as having these traits/attributes” were asked.

Moreover, the literature review proved the existence of additional barriers and promoters that contribute to women's' lower entrepreneurial action (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012; Santos, 2014). To explore these patterns, the barrier/promoter *financial support* was incorporated in the interview scheme. Here, the question *“Did you feel like having enough financial support?”* was chosen. For those participants who wanted to become an entrepreneur but left in an initial stage, the question *“Do you think there could have been enough financial support?”* was added. To determine the most important promoting and preventing factors, the interview scheme included the question *“You mentioned a couple of barriers that you faced in becoming an entrepreneur. Could you tell me in your own words what were the most important barriers that you experienced?”* for students who did not become an entrepreneur. For those who became an entrepreneur, the question *“You mentioned a couple of factors that helped you in becoming an entrepreneur. Could you tell me in your own words what were the most important factors that helped in your experience?”* was asked. After this final question, the interview ended.

Data Analysis

The interview schemes as well as participants' answers were subsequently uploaded and coded in the program *Atlas.ti*. The coding process aimed to identify common topics in the interviews that help to answer the research questions and consequently discover patterns that could be used for future research. The process of becoming an entrepreneur is determined through personal experiences, which provides a broad basis to conduct a thematic-analysis. From a thematic-analysis it can be derived, which themes and concepts are embedded throughout the interview (Clarke & Brown, 2014). The thematic analysis consists of a data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven approach (deductive approach) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The deductive approach was applied to test identified barriers and promoters of previous literature and investigate their relevance for Greek and Dutch students at the UT. Further, the inductive method aimed at exploring additional barriers and promoters. Therefore, a thematic-analysis is an appropriate method to obtain an in-depth understanding about (perceived) barriers and promoters within the process of becoming an entrepreneur and identify underlying systems of meaning.

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Starting with the deductive approach, the researchers used the TPB, as well as barriers and promoters that were discovered in previous literature, as a broad basis for the analysis (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000; Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012; Santos et al., 2014). Thus, the three main concepts of the TPB were chosen, that the researchers used to substantiate their analysis: “attitude towards the behaviour”, “subjective norm”, and “perceived behaviour control” (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000). Additionally, the barriers/promoters “family support”, “organizational support”, “perceived competency”, “fear of failure” and “financial resources” were added to explore the different dimensions within the process of becoming an entrepreneur.

For this, all answers were read carefully to get an impression of the content, the structure, and the context. First impressions were conserved by taking notes. Following, the answers were then read again, and more considerate notes were made. Using all answers as a bases, a preliminary coding scheme was created. For this, the data was screened and deductively subdivided according to the predefined barriers/promoters. As it became apparent that not all data would fit within the deductive codes, this method was complemented with an inductive approach. In this, the code “Drive for autonomy” was identified. The coding scheme was developed by one researcher. The data was screened several times before the final coding scheme was developed. To control the reliability of the codes, the data was coded twice by the researcher. Lastly, all new codes were screened again for conceptual similarities and, where possible, combined into single codes. To limit the number of codes, the code descriptions of family, friends, and co-worker support were extended. The extended description was given the name “Supportive Social Network”. Besides, the code “Self-competence” was divided into the sub-codes “Perceived need for competences” and “Perceived fit with competences” in order to elaborate the theme. For an extensive overview of the identified codes and example quotations, see Table 2.

Table 2

Description of the codes deductive, inductive, related example quotes

Deductive and Inductive Codes	Definition	Example Quote of Dutch female entrepreneur	Example Quote of Greek female that wanted to but did not pursue	Example Quote of Greek male entrepreneur	Example Quote of Dutch male entrepreneur	Example Quote of Dutch male that wanted to but did not pursue	Example Quote of Greek male that wanted to but did not pursue
<p>Perceived behavioural control</p> <p>Self-competence:</p>	<p>Perceived competencies that are considered to be essential in the entrepreneurial environment</p>	<p>“Part of it is to not be afraid to take that risk. So if you're too cautious it will not work out. So you have to be proactive!” (D, F, entr.)</p>	<p>“I don't know how I can explain this, but how to start things up, how legal works and stuff like that. Well, you should be able to know how to interact with other people because you're not going to be alone forever if you want your thing to succeed.” (G, F, no entr.)</p>	<p>“For me it would be maybe the right decision or knowing what you what you want essentially.” (G, M, entr.)</p>	<p>“I don't know, just being able to connect with the right people and people that can actually just stick with you throughout the entire process. I think that's that's the main point.” (D, M, entr.)</p>	<p>“Obviously, you need some form of creativity to come up with an initial idea to work on? And you need to have some persistence to keep working on that and keep developing it further.” (D, M, no entr.)</p>	<p>“As an entrepreneur in general, I would say communication would be number one as a skill. I would say patience, but that's like a value. But I would also say business have a good understanding about how business work in terms of economy, investments,</p>

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							everything like the whole world and the language of business.”
Perceived fit competence	Perceived identification with entrepreneurial skills	“I don't think I have it. I also think I developed it during the last years. So it's something you can train and can get better. It's also something that comes with more self-confidence, I think. And that's also something you you get when “you do it more often” (D, F, entr.)	“Well, for me personally, I think it would be not being so confident in my idea. Even if I had an idea, I would probably think that this is not so important or nobody would want this or something.” (G, F, no entr.)	“I must be honest. I have to say I can't really say yes and I can't say no. So even if I'm not pushing it, in the end of course I want to do the best and to be as good as I can. So I guess yes.” (G, M, entr.)	“I wouldn't say I am great at it but I think I'm getting there. Just trying to make it and do a step forward” (D, M, entr.)	“This also follows quite a bit from what a friend of mine has told me about his daily life. Next to his study, he's working pretty much full time on the startups. And I can understand that that's rewarding for him, but I don't think I could manage that, to be honest.” (D, M, no entr.)	“Yeah, I have the communication. I have the patience. I have all these things.” (G, M, no entr.)

Attitude towards the behaviour

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Drive for autonomy	Participants motive to pursue entrepreneurship and their perceived need for autonomy	“ To do your own thing, I guess, and not to do something that the company wants from you so you can make them money but do something that's truly efficient for you.” (D, F, entr.)	<i>Participant did not mention this code</i>	“But I also felt like I wanted to do it more by myself, because I like challenging myself a lot.” (G, M, entr.)	“Mainly being more flexible, but also making environmental stuff that's less polluting (...)” (D, M, entr.)	“And of course, the idea of being your own boss is quite interesting (...)” (D, M, no entr.)	“Because I found myself that I, I work on my best when I kind of take lead into the project.” (G, M, no entr.)
Fear of failure	Being anxious about not succeeding, disappointing family and friends, loosing money	”Like, of course, I'm afraid! It's scary what I'm doing, but that's kind of why you're doing it.” (D, F, entr.)	“I guess because of the market and because of the funding. So if something went wrong in Greece, then I wouldn't be able to continue and I would lose basically my job.” (G, F, no entr.)	“But I'm not afraid of not succeeding and failing because I think in the worst case friends would be disappointed.” (G, M, entr.)	“No, not really, of course if you have this feeling. But it didn't hold me back to do anything.” (D, M, entr.)	”But I did not indeed. Mostly because of time reasons. So next to my study, I wouldn't have a lot of time left for hobbies and such” (D, M, no entr.)	“I think everybody is afraid of failure (...) but I've learned that whatever you do initially, you're going to fail. And I've heard that a lot of times, so I kind of got used to it and I'm kind of expecting it. I do not want it to come, but I'm

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expecting it. And you don't have a prepared emotionally.” (G, M, no entr.)

Perceived Social Norms

Supportive Social Network	Perceived support from family, friends as well as people within the company	“So they were quite helpful and wanted to listen.” (D, F, entr.)	“Yes, they told me not to do it because it's super hard, is not stable, of course you would have to take a risk, but they said is too much and it's not worth it is too much work for what you get.” (G, F, no entr.)	“And people, and also my parents, when they went to hear that I want to make something new. So they wouldn't say something, but it would be more surprising to them and they might be more hesitant.” (G, M, entr.)	“Which I have to be honest, a lot of this is wouldn't have been possible without his connections” (D, M, entr.)	“My father mostly said that he thinks that I there wouldn't be time left for myself next to study and being an entrepreneur.” (D, M, no entr.)	“And my dad, for example, is an important person, a powerful person in my life. So if I have an idea, I'm going to first work it out and then present it to the full extent to him. I'm not just going to throw, you know, childish
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							stuff at him.” (G, M, no entr.)
University support	Perceived support from the university in terms of receiving information/funding or marketing	“Yes a bit, we had a lot of help from NovelT but for a lot of stuff we had to really fight against the bureaucratic machine of the university sometimes. “ (D, F, entr.)	“In Greece, I saw that, for example, the professors didn't want to promote us or when I was doing my internship, they didn't want to promote me to do something more or they didn't basically see my value. So this is how it changed here. I see that people appreciate what I do.” (G, F, no entr.)	“There's a lot of organizations, so that helps, you but I didn't seek that support or didn't seek that support at all.” (G, M, entr.)	“There are some teachers that really open to help out and to do something new. But there are also some people that just mainly bring us the trouble.” (D, M, entr.)	“But when we talked about that with our our tutor that we're doing the project, so the person that was the link between us and the company. He was kind of protecting the company and making sure that the company had the option to to buy it from us if they wanted to, even if we rather wanted to continue ourselves” (D, M, no entr.)	“No, but they open mind they opened my eyes into how the industry works and how many options are there and kind of what are the limits and onto what extent you can work as an industrial designer” (G, M, no entr.)

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Financial support	Perceived financial support in terms of having enough financial resources that help to implement ideas	“You never have enough financial support.” (D, F, entr.)	“In Greece wouldn't have the money. No one would fund you to do something like that. You would have to do it on your own.” (G, F, no entr.)	“ I think it was mainly from everyone's pockets. So we didn't really get any financial support.” (G, M, entr.)	“So that's of course, if you can't find a good investor it's going to be a big barrier. So trying to find someone with money or someone who wants to support your cause just because he is interested or something like that. I think that's a big barrier.” (D, M, entr.)	“I think a very important factor in that would be communicative skills and being able to to convey your ideas in a clear way so that it makes people think that it is a good idea and that they want to go ahead with it because you have to get investors that invest in your idea most of the time because you don't have the financial means yourself to get it off the ground” (D, M, no entr.)	“ I think it's a struggle for everybody. And I think that you have to work out what you want to do first and then go with a very precise and very well thought out proposition.” (G, M, no entr.)
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Results and Discussion

From the interviews, six main codes emerged that were structured along the three components of the TPB. These main codes are identified as *self-competence*, *fear of failure*, *supportive social network*, *drive for autonomy*, *university support* and *financial support* (see Table 3). As illustrated in Table 2, each code was linked to one of the three components of the TPB. The interviews revealed that *self-competence* and *fear of failure* were related to participants' perceived behavioural control, *drive for autonomy* was related to participants' attitude to entrepreneurship and their motives, and *supportive social network*, *university support* and *financial support* were connected to perceived social norms (see Table 2). The similarities and differences between men versus women, and Greek women versus Dutch women on their experiences of barriers and promoters in the process to becoming an entrepreneur were investigated. Additionally, differences between those who wanted to pursue versus those who did not pursue entrepreneurial career were explored. In order to explore the multifaceted research question, namely: *Which factors prevent or promote entrepreneurial process among female international UT students?* The results section is structured around the most relevant findings for the following comparisons: Gender differences, cultural differences, and comparison between Greek women and Dutch women. Given that not every code is relevant for the respective comparison, only the most important codes are discussed in each comparison.

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Table 3

Frequencies of codes per participant (N=6)

Codes	Frequencies per Participant during Interview						Total
	D, M, entr.	D, M, no entr.	D, F, entr.	G, F, no entr.	G, M, entr.	G, M, no entr.	
Self-competence	9	5	9	7	7	6	43
Fear of failure	3	2	3	5	5	3	21
Drive for autonomy	3	3	4		4	5	19
Supportive social network	5	3	5	6	6	3	28
University support	4	4	4	5	4	4	25
Financial support	3	4	3	5	3	4	22

Gender Differences

Self-Competences

In order to answer the main research question, gender and cultural differences were examined first. Beginning with gender differences, the experiences of two women and four men were compared. One of the most prominent codes throughout the interviews was self-competence. Hereby, it became apparent that both men and women perceived certain competences as necessary to become an entrepreneur but that they evaluated differently whether they possessed these competences. For this reason, both of these aspects are considered separately in the following.

Perceived Need for Competences. Concerning the perception of essential competences of an entrepreneur, no large discrepancies between men and women were visible. In fact, there was a large overlap in the attributes that men and women found to be important. The most frequently mentioned competence were communication skills. For example, a Greek male

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entrepreneur said: *“As an entrepreneur in general, I think communication would be number one as a skill.”*

And a Greek woman who did not become an entrepreneur mentioned: *“Well, you should be able how to interact with other people because you’re not going to be alone if you want your thing to succeed, sell yourself, or your product”*. Overall, many interviewees perceived that communication is an important aspect in order to present your business ideas to other people, to receive financing, or other help. Additionally, communication skills were also perceived as essential to be able to successfully participate in group work.

Another competence that was frequently mentioned was specific knowledge about the working field. The Greek male student who did not become an entrepreneur pointed out that having a proper understanding of how a business functions as well as having the necessary knowledge about the context in which one would try to implement his or her ideas is crucial for succeeding in the entrepreneurial environment. This statement got supported by the Dutch male entrepreneur who said *“Of course, professionally you have to be the thing you’re working on. So, for example, for me it’s mechanical engineering and a lot of the projects would not have been possible without the study”*.

Moreover, men and women mostly agreed about the need of competences that are often considered to be more masculine by people, namely risk-taking behavior, competitiveness, and assertiveness. For example, a Dutch male entrepreneur said: *“At least for me, it’s always a bit this competitive feeling which does help improving the quality.”* Although women also perceived this to be an important quality, they also mention that being too competitive can have negative effects on interpersonal relationships. A Greek, male student who did not become an entrepreneur also indicated that competitiveness could have unwanted consequences but was more focused on personal aspects: *“I think it’s good as long as it doesn’t fall your mind. So, sometimes when you’re too competitive, you’re getting biased and not listening to others. A healthy competition is important.”*

Likewise, men and women profoundly perceived risk taking as crucial for entrepreneurship: *“Part of it is not to be afraid to take that risk. So, if you’re too cautious it will not work out”* (D, F, entr.) The Dutch, male entrepreneur remarked that many people he knows have stopped to pursue an entrepreneurial career because they were not willing to take risks. This

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statement got supported by the Dutch, male entrepreneur who was not willing to take the risk of having less time for his hobbies when pursuing a career as an entrepreneur.

Perceived Fit with Competencies. In comparison, more gender differences have been found in regard to participants' perceived fit with the competencies they have considered to be important. Interestingly, both women could only partly agree with the competencies and pointed out that they do not naturally possess these skills but that they can be learned over time. This discrepancy was even more significant regarding skills that are considered to be more masculine. For example, a Dutch, female entrepreneur spoke about being assertive in the entrepreneurial environment: *"I don't think I have it. I also think I developed it. So, it's something you can train and get better at. And that's also something you get when you do it more often. (...) Yeah, I think it isn't something that's a core part of your personality, but you can train it. So, even if you're not that good at it, you just have to try."* (**D, F, entr.**)

The woman's quotation demonstrates that she did not have the feeling that she naturally possesses these skills, but that she developed them during the process of becoming an entrepreneur. This is in line with prior research suggesting women to be less likely to perceive themselves as having the necessary skills for entrepreneurship (Théoud, 2010). As women's self-perception is often shaped around societal gender roles and stereotypes, women are less likely to correspond with certain attributes that are typed as masculine (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012, Marques, 2018). Even though the results of the study show that women have less compliance with entrepreneurial skills, later findings from this study also showed that this self-perception can be changed and that women can feel as competent in these areas as men. Giving women the opportunity to make experiences that strengthen their self-perception in relation to these attributes is therefore very important.

Building upon these findings, male participants perceived much more compliance with the general competencies that they perceived to be important. Although they explained that it was not necessarily something they were seeking, competitiveness, assertiveness, and risk-taking behavior were attributes they did often identify with. Only the Dutch, male student who did not become an entrepreneur could not identify himself with these attributes: *"I think they aren't necessarily the attributes that come natural to me. I have to work on them and develop them consciously. It's not something that I naturally possess"* (**D, M, entr.**)

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In sum, the results show that, compared to men, women experienced less overlap with entrepreneurial competencies. In addition, almost all participants who did not become entrepreneurs perceived low self-competence and those who pursued entrepreneurship perceived high self-competence, corresponding with perceived behaviour control. This finding is consistent with prior research that found out that men usually perceived themselves as having the necessary skills and knowledge to be an entrepreneur, letting them be more successful in entrepreneurship (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen, 2012). In line with this, it might be possible that the Dutch, male student (D, M, no entr) who perceived a mismatch with the entrepreneurial attributes did not pursue an entrepreneurial career for this reason.

Drive for Autonomy

Participants generally represented different motives for their entrepreneurial activity. In most cases, the participants indicated a sense of autonomy that drove them to pursue a career as an entrepreneur. They explained that in the first place, they were mostly interested in being able to implement their ideas and not to be bound to certain rules or to be dependent on a superordinate person.

Differences between men and women were particularly apparent in the intensity of the drive for autonomy and self-reliance. Although the Dutch woman also expressed that she wanted to do her own thing instead of relying on another company, men were much clearer in their need for self-reliance. Quotes like “I wanted to do it by myself “ were more often mentioned by the male participants.

Generally, the findings show that many of the participants are driven by an urge for autonomy. Gender differences are reflected in the intensity in which the need for self-reliance is expressed. The findings are consistent with prior studies, suggesting that autonomy is one of five components driving people to pursue entrepreneurship (Marques, 2018). Especially for men, job autonomy is seen to promote entrepreneurial intention (Zhang & Schøtt, 2017).

Fear of Failure

Another prominent theme that came up in the gender comparison was the “fear of failure”. Participants talked profusely about the aspects they were afraid of. Their perceived risks ranged from promoting the wrong people, to disappointing themselves as well as their family and friends. Besides, participants expressed their concern of having existential risks, and being afraid to lose large amounts of money and time. Still, men expressed their fear less dominant compared to

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women. For instance, the Dutch male entrepreneur explained “*No, not really, of course if you have this feeling. But it didn't hold me back to do anything.*”. In contrast, the Dutch, female student answered “*Like, of course I'm afraid! It's scary what I'm doing (...) you don't want to disappoint people when you're developing something.*”

In summary, both genders expressed their fear of failure, but it was expressed more strongly in women. Interestingly, fear of failure was also higher in non-entrepreneurs than in entrepreneurs. Based on that it can be assumed that fear of failure is to some extent related to participants' perceived behavioural control. Prior research found similar findings reporting that fear of failure is not only higher for non-entrepreneurs, but also higher among women compared to men (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2014). Discussing the role of fear of failure in the light of entrepreneurship, the findings of this study are consistent with other findings, suggesting that women's higher degree of fear of failure may be an explanatory factor for the gender discrepancies in entrepreneurship (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2014; Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). In fact, especially Greek women face many restrictions in terms of social support, access to funding et alia (Fafaliou & Salamouris, 2014), which may contribute to a stronger fear of failure.

Cultural Differences

Supportive Social Network

For the cultural comparison three Dutch students' were contrasted with Greek students' on their perceived entrepreneurial process. When comparing Greek and Dutch participants, different themes became more apparent. In fact, all participants spoke on how important a stable and “supportive social network” is in order to be successful in the entrepreneurial environment. A supportive social network was commonly described as people who would support you and your ideas. In the first place, participants were talking about their family and friends, and how much it has helped them to have people around them who support their ideas and encourage them to fulfill their dreams. Such support from family and friends was mostly received in the form of emotional backing. For instance, the Dutch, female entrepreneur indicated “*So they were quite helpful and wanted to listen. Also if I have trouble.*” (**D, F, entr.**) Besides family support, men and women as well as Dutch and Greek students also pointed out that they perceived support from their friends as particularly helpful when it comes to pursuing their career. In this case, it is frequently mentioned that sharing one's own ideas with friends who are also interested in entrepreneurship or

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share the same interests in the study field has helped them to stay motivated. The Greek, male student who did not become an entrepreneur explained the exchange of ideas with his friends:

”And then we kind of like, oh, we can work on this together sometime in the future. And we kind of a day dream about it together. But definitely like the most details about, you know, certain entrepreneur ideas that I have, I shared with my friends.” **(G, M, no entr.)**

Next to the above-mentioned similarities, the interviews also revealed a few differences between Greek and Dutch participants. The Dutch participants spoke profoundly on how much support they got from their families and that they perceived this as one major cornerstone of their success. For instance, one Dutch male entrepreneur expressed that he perceives his family as the biggest part when it comes to gaining the confidence to implement his projects. Also the Dutch, female entrepreneur pointed out that her family helped her a lot as she could always go to them and ask for advice or to exchange ideas. *Mostly because I could just go to them and talk to them, if I was not sure about something.”* **(D, F, entr.)**

In comparison, Greek participants were much less vocal about the influence of their families. Both, the Greek female and male entrepreneur, remarked that their families had discouraged them from pursuing the career of an entrepreneur.

” Yes, they told me not to do it because it's super hard and is not stable. Of course, you would have to take a risk, but they said it's too much and it's not worth it because it's too much work for what you get.” **(G, F, no entr.)**

“And people, and also my parents, when they hear that I want to make something new. So they wouldn't say something, but it would be more surprising to them and they might be more hesitant” **(G, M, entr.)**

As the findings of this study indicate, students perceived support from their social environment differently. Specifically, the findings suggest that the culture is an influencing factor when it comes to perceiving social support, and especially family support. These findings are not unexpected, as also previous studies indicated, that social support needs to be discussed on the basis of cultural norms. Thus, it was found that, based on the unstable economic system, Greek people are generally confronted with higher risks when it comes to starting their own business (Tubadji et al., 2019) In the context of perceived social support from family and friends, it is notable that Greek people in general are less willing to take the risks that come with entrepreneurship since their fear of failure is based on years of experience with the financial crisis

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in Greece (Tubadji et al., 2019). Therefore, it is plausible that the families of students who have entrepreneurial intentions are more sceptical and less supportive

Financial Support

The second theme that became apparent during the interviews, and which highlights differences between the participants of the two cultural backgrounds is “financial support”. Participants mainly spoke on financial support in terms of finding investors and getting founded. Overall, this was a recurring theme that every participant mentioned during the interviews. Finding founders and gaining money to invest into patenting was a topic that preoccupied especially those participants who had already become an entrepreneur. The Dutch, female entrepreneur explained that finding financial backing is something that one would always have to deal with in entrepreneurship due to continuous expenditures:

“So you never have enough money and you will always try to find more and if you think you have enough, you'll find something else to spend it on.” (D, F, entr.)

Here, differences between Greek and Dutch participants occurred mainly in respect to their perceived risk of lacking this financial support. Thus, all three participants from Greece spoke on limited financial resources that are provided for entrepreneurs in Greece. Specifically, fewer people are investing their money in companies because of the worsened economic situation. *“Simply because of the more amount of people that are willing to give money into new projects. I definitely think that that is kind of that relates to the economic side of things, because Greece, you know, is a country that is struggling with money.” (G, M, no entr.)*

Prior studies examined similar findings. As already described above, due to the Great Recession 2007, people from Greece were confronted with higher risks concerning financial support from the governance and private investors (Tubadji et al., 2019). Therefore, it is possible that financial fears are by now embedded in the Greek culture and thus influence the basic attitude of Greeks towards financially precarious professions. Other research suggests that cultures share different normative assumptions in regards to entrepreneurship. Hence, another plausible explanation for the Greek students perceived lack of social support may lie in the cultures belief that entrepreneurship is not a ‘desirable’ economic activity (Verduijn & Essers, 2013).

University Support

The participants mentioned that the university offered them support on different levels and substantially supported them in their process of becoming an entrepreneur. For example, the

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students perceived support from individual teachers who helped them discuss specific issues. Additionally, the participants profoundly mentioned that they received much relevant information in terms of running a business or about subject-specific topics. One Greek student who did not become an entrepreneur spoke about his experiences within a workshop:

“But we did have some very interesting projects. So, for example, we had a project where we had a partner with six people, and we had to create a business startup that we were later going to present in front of investors. Obviously, the whole thing was a simulation. In the end, nobody got any money or investments, but it was an actual, like, simulation that we had to make everything. And that was a very nice process that made you think about, you know, things that you wouldn't have thought of before.” (G, M, no entr.)

Nevertheless, students' experiences were not exclusively positive. They explained that the strict regulations as well as the bureaucratic system of the university sometimes made it more difficult for them to implement one's own ideas. One student spoke on his negative experience when implementing his bachelor thesis:

“But to be honest, I almost feel like within our study, we're almost a bit discouraged to do something like this. For example, I also tried to make sure my bachelor's thesis is about caterpillars. But they were really against going out of the box and going out of, like, this frame. They said that we have certain places where you can do your thesis and then you go outside, it's just going to be inefficient for us.” (D, M, entr.)

Such differences in the experience of university support were particularly evident in the cultural comparison. The Greek students emphasized that in Greece, they never got introduced to the opportunity of starting their own business. *“The difference here was that even in courses the professors would talk about students from this university that started their own startup. And they would present the results of that company to us. You already know that someone else has done it and that it is possible. In Greece, this was not in the discussion.” (G, F, no entr.)*

Especially the Greek woman who did not become an entrepreneur explained that this was one of the main reasons why she never thought about becoming an entrepreneur. From this, it becomes apparent that the support from universities plays a major role in encouraging students to make the step into entrepreneurship. On the contrary, it seems that missing this assistance can demotivate future entrepreneurs and prevent from following founding an own business.

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In line with previous studies on entrepreneurship, the university played a fundamental role when it comes to fostering entrepreneurial behavior among students (Marques, 2018). These findings are comparable to prior research that found that people have increased belief in their ability to accomplish entrepreneurial tasks, when they are educated and trained in entrepreneurship (Marques, 2018). Other than that, all three participants from Greece mentioned that they perceived significant differences between Greek and Dutch universities in terms of receiving sufficient education on how to build a company, general information on the global economy, and funding possibilities. The importance of the university as one component within the process of becoming an entrepreneur becomes clear as the Greek students have all explained the benefits that the provision of knowledge has given them. They pointed out that it not only helped them to consider a career as an entrepreneur, but has also given them confidence in being able to implement their plans.

Comparison between Greek Women and Dutch Women

After the comparisons of important factors as they are perceived by different genders and cultures, a stronger emphasis was set onto the experience of women. Thereby, one Greek woman, and one Dutch woman were compared. This way, it was possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the varying barriers and challenges that women from different cultural backgrounds could face.

Supportive Social Network

The Dutch woman described the support she got from her family. As described above, she mainly experienced receiving support in the form of emotional support.” *I think. So they were quite helpful and wanted to listen. Also, if you have trouble.*” (D, F, entr.) Additionally, there was another aspect that emerged as she talked about friends and family. She explained that they trusted in her abilities and that they were happy that she has found a passion that she wants to realise. “*I think they quite liked that I did something I'm passionate about. I've always done some kind of special projects so I think they maybe saw it and that wasn't a big surprise for them. So starting your own company is quite a new challenge, but it wasn't that uncharacteristic I think*” (D, F, entr.)

Comparably, the Greek woman shared a different experience with her family. She explained that her parents advised against becoming an entrepreneur because they saw too many risks. “*Yes, they told me not to do it because it's super hard, is not stable, of course you would*

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have to take a risk, but they said it is too much and it's not worth it. It is too much work for what you get.” (G, F, no entr.) Besides, she remarked upon how her parents' attitude shaped her own decision on pursuing entrepreneurship and prevented her from considering this career path. *“Oh yeah. This is I think why I never thought about it (...). I never thought there was a possibility because I knew how difficult it was.” (G, F, no entr.)*

Prior research give evidence that especially for Greek women, a lack in receiving social support is influencing women's entrepreneurial action (Fafaliou & Salamouris, 2014). Being a collectivistic culture, Greek society values the family unit, which is especially important for women (Kalaitzi et al., 2019). In regards to societal gender roles, the ensuring of societal and economic constraints direct women to make more culturally expected choices that prioritize family care, formal or informal, over pursuit of career advancement (Kalaitzi et al., 2019). Greek women may therefore be confronted with higher expectations of starting their own family and thus be hindered in their decision to pursue a vocation that requires them to take fundamental financial risks and invest a lot of time and effort.

Self-Competence

Differences between Greek and Dutch women were also found in their perceived “self-competence”. Both women showed diametrically opposed views on their own competences. Although the Dutch women noted that she first had to learn several important competences and that she doesn't perceive them as coming natural to her, she still showed a positive view on her self-competence in regards to the entrepreneurial environment: *“Yeah I think it isn't something that's such a core part of your personality but you can train it. So even if you're not that good you just have to try and see there you fail and try again.” (D, F, entr.)* It became apparent that she also perceived having sufficient self-confidence in regards to your competences is crucial for success in the profession: *“And making clear what your idea is and that it's a nice idea. (...) you have to sell your product and don't be too afraid to show it.” (D, F, entr.)*

In comparison, the Greek women that did not become an entrepreneur expressed more fundamental insecurities in regards to her perceived skills. Specifically, she perceived herself as being not competent enough to come up with an idea that was worth implementing. *“Well for me personally, I think it would be not being so confident in my idea. Even if I had an idea, I would probably think that this is not so important, or nobody would want this or something.” (G, F, no entr.)*

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To begin with, the findings of the present study are consistent with prior research which found out that women are less likely to perceive themselves as having the necessary competences for entrepreneurship than men (Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). In addition, previous studies demonstrated the beneficial impact of social support on self-confidence (Rees & Freeman, 2007). As the Greek women perceived little support from her family and friends, it is plausible that the comparably lessened support that she has experienced would be related to her self-perception of her competences and confidence. In that case, it seems that economic situation and its influence on social support does also shape the self-understanding of Greek women in regard to their entrepreneurial actions. Besides this, differences between both women could also be embedded more deeply in cultural differences. Previous research found out that cultural norms are strongly intertwined with ones perceived self-competence (Jambunathan & Burts, 2003). Consequently, behaviors that are considered to be appropriate and positive in the Netherlands may be viewed as being inappropriate and negative in Greece, which may explain why the Greek woman identified less with attributes of entrepreneurial action (Jambunathan & Burts, 2003).

Fear of Failure

The last theme that illustrated significant differences between Greek and Dutch women is “fear of failure”. To begin with, the Greek woman demonstrated a distinctive fear of failure. She pointed out that she is certain that she would not be able to start business in Greece: *“If I would try to do it in Greece, I wouldn't be afraid, I would be certain that it would fail!”* (**G, F, no entr.**) Concerning the question what made her certain that she will not be able to start a company, she explained that she perceived the financial situation to be too riskful in Greece *“I guess because of the market and because of the funding. So, if something went wrong in Greece, then I wouldn't be able to continue and I would lose basically my job.”* (**G, F, no entr.**). However, starting a company in the Netherlands seemed much more achievable for her, as she perceived less financial risks: *“I really don't know. But I see that it would probably be easier here for the financial support.”* (**G, F, no entr.**)

The Dutch woman also expressed to fear failure, but she also highlighted that she perceives this feeling as part of her job. Additionally, she made clear that having this feelings of fear also attracts her to pursue entrepreneurship: *“Like, of course, I'm afraid! It's scary what I'm doing, but that's kind of why you're doing it.”* (**D, F, entr.**)

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As previous research suggests, due to the much more unstable economic system, Greeks have to deal with much stronger financial fears than Dutch people that grew up in a more economically stable country (Tubadji et al., 2019). Besides, as the interview showed, Greek women face much more barriers in regards to social support and perceived fit with competencies that are considered to be important for entrepreneurship. Thus, it can be expected that the Greek women's fear of failure is stronger as she lacks much more resources.

Summary of the Findings

The main research question was aiming to find barriers and promoters that are perceived by international (Greek) female UT students within the entrepreneurial process. For this, qualitative responses of the Greek and Dutch students were compared. The findings revealed that the most relevant barriers/promoters for Greek female students are *fear of failure*, *self-competence* and a *supportive social network*. In fact, it became apparent that the Greek female student who did not become an entrepreneur (G, F, no entr.) showed less self-competence and was much more frightened about failing. Besides, it became apparent that, compared to the female Dutch student entrepreneur, this student (G, F, no entr.) received significantly less support from her social environment.

The sub-question “*Are there gender and cultural differences in perceived barriers and promoters?*” aimed at exploring the different dimensions of the phenomenon. Hence, all codes could be traced back to either cultural or gender related differences. Thus, gender differences were mainly visible in participants' *perceived fit with competencies* which indicated that women and failed entrepreneurs perceive themselves less competent for the entrepreneurial environment. Next, women also showed a much more pronounced *fear of failure* compared to men. Moreover, *fear of failure* was more present among participants who intended but failed an entrepreneur. Therefore, it can be assumed that students with a high fear of failure are more restricted in pursuing their plans. Lastly, men and women differed in their *drive for autonomy*, with men being more driven to pursue a career that allows them to be independent than women.

Cultural differences were especially apparent in all codes related to perceived *social norms*. Hence, Greek students were much more confronted with a lack of both a *supportive social network* and *university support*. Additionally, Greek participants illustrated higher risks concerning *financial support* compared to Dutch students

Theoretical and Practical Implication

Generally, most findings could be supported by previous literature. Thus, all themes somehow appeared to be relevant in literature about female entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, prior studies suggest that women are more likely to face a lack of social and financial support compared to men (Shinnar et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2014). Both barriers could not be supported by the findings of this study. Nevertheless, a lack of a social and financial support system appeared to be a cultural barrier. Next, much stronger gender differences in regards to participants' fear of failure were expected on the basis of previous literature (Shinnar et al., 2012). Although women expressed a greater fear of failure, differences were particularly evident between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, less so between men and women. Interestingly, all identified codes could be assigned to one of the components of the TPB. Interestingly, women perceived barriers in two of the three components of the TPB: perceived behavioural control, and attitude towards the behaviour. As theory suggests, this could indicate why less women pursue an entrepreneurial career because they do not fulfill all necessary components. With regards to cultural differences, the findings show that Greek and Dutch students only different in codes that were assigned to SN. This finding is consistent with prior research that found that cultural values strongly impact individuals' entrepreneurial intention (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Lastly, Greek and Dutch women different in PBC and SN. Here it becomes apparent that cultural and individual factors explain why one woman pursued entrepreneurship and the other did not. Santos et al., 2014). Both barriers could not be supported by the findings of this study. Nevertheless, a lack of a social and financial support system appeared to be a cultural barrier. Next, much stronger gender differences in regards to participants' fear of failure were expected on the basis of previous literature (Shinnar et al., 2012). Although women expressed a greater fear of failure, differences were particularly evident between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, less so between men and women. Interestingly, all identified codes could be assigned to one of the components of the TPB. Interestingly, women perceived barriers in two of the three components of the TPB: perceived behavioural control, and attitude towards the behaviour. As theory suggests, this could indicate why less women pursue an entrepreneurial career because they do not fulfill all necessary components. With regards to cultural differences, the findings show that Greek and Dutch students only different in codes that were assigned to SN. This finding is consistent with prior research that found that cultural values strongly impact

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individuals' entrepreneurial intention (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Lastly, Greek and Dutch women differ in PBC and SN. Here it gets apparent that cultural and individual factors explain why one woman pursued entrepreneurship and the other did not.

The current study investigated barriers and promoters students may experience in the process of becoming an entrepreneur. Hereby it became apparent that universities are of great relevance when it comes to supporting students in their entrepreneurial activity. Practical implementations could therefore put a focus on empowering women to gain more self-confidence in regards to skills that are seen to be important for entrepreneurship. For example, this could be in the form of female role models that have already pursued this career path and are willing to talk about their experiences within the process of becoming an entrepreneur. The findings of the study indicate that this might strengthen women's perceived feasibility of entrepreneurial action and possibly reduce perceived barriers including perceived lack of competency and fear of failure. The University of Twente could therefore reach out to female student entrepreneurs and ask them to share their experiences with other students to help them take the leap. The career opportunity of entrepreneurship could be incorporated into the university curriculum by offering guest lectures, workshops, as well as individual consultation hours, especially for female entrepreneurs-to-be. Through elective courses and voluntary seminars on entrepreneurship, necessary skill sets can be obtained and ideas developed. Moreover, on Career Days, the University of Twente can connect students and entrepreneurs that have already started their business and thereby enable internships, connections and cooperations. Student associations that focus on the topic can serve as a community of like-minded people.

Strength, Limitations and Future Research

To begin with, a strength of this study was its qualitative nature, wherein participants shared their individual experience of the entrepreneurial process. Participants were able to direct the course of the conversation as all questions were asked in a flexible semi-structured style. Besides, the participants were able to share topics that they perceived to be relevant in the context of entrepreneurial action. Another strength was that the study compared male vs. female students, Greek vs. Dutch students, as well as entrepreneurs and those who wanted to become but did not pursue the career. By analyzing the cultural as well as the gender component and their interaction with each other in relation to women of different origins, it was possible to holistically explore the phenomenon.

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As only the Greek and Dutch culture was included in this study, the exact scope of the problem could not be fully captured. Therefore, it is important that future studies build on these findings and further investigate different cultural and socio-economic aspects. Another limitation lies in the unmatched demographics of the two female participants. Thus, the women from Greece and the female student from the Netherlands did not match in their status regarding entrepreneurship. To sufficiently answer the main research question both women should match in their entrepreneurial status.

Building up on this study, it is recommended to especially focus on women's perceived self-competence, fear of failure as well as their perceived social support. Hereby, it could also be interesting to investigate different methods that are specialized in strengthening women's perceived self-competence. For instance, this could be an a basis of a study conducted among newly enrolled students which implemented a complex, strengths-based, and resilience-orientated program to increase competency, and self-confidence (Geiger, Cheung, Hanrahan, Lietz, & Carpenter, 2017)

Moreover, more men than women were interviewed for this study. Therefore, it is possible that the results of the study would have been different if both genders had been equally represented. As all students came from the University of Twente, the participants may have different experiences compared to students from other Universities in the Netherlands. Therefore, it may be advisable to investigate similar studies at other universities in the Netherlands that are less focused on entrepreneurship and find out if experiences from students of other universities might differ. In addition, it can be assumed that university support would be weaker in universities that do not specifically focus on developing an entrepreneurial culture like the University of Twente.

Conclusion

In sum, the study found that for international female students at the University of Twente self-competence, fear of failure and a supportive social network are most relevant in the process of becoming an entrepreneur. It can be concluded that especially these women need to be supported by the university in their process towards entrepreneurship. Such support could for example consist of offering guest lectures, encouraging female entrepreneurs as role models to share their experiences, and offering internships in the entrepreneurial field so that women can learn important skills and increase their perceived self-competence. Future research can focus on

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testing specific interventions that are tailored on the specific needs of international female women.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview Scheme

DEMOGRAPHICS

Nationality:

- Dutch
- Greek
- Other

Gender: I identify as...

- Women
- Man
- Other _____

Age: I am _____ years old.

Major: My field of study is _____

Which of the following statement do you identify with the most?

1. I would describe myself as an entrepreneur
2. I wanted to become an entrepreneur but did not

I am a...

Bachelor student (which year?)

Master's student (which year?)

PhD student/researcher (which year?)

SET 1 (Initial motivation and attitude toward entrepreneurship)

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- 1) **What motivated you to pursue entrepreneurship?**
- 2) **What did you hope to achieve?**

Note: If these questions are difficult to answer for participants who wanted to become entrepreneurs but didn't pursue and left in an initial stage, ask this way: **What attracted you to the career path of an entrepreneur?**

SET 2 (perceived self-efficacy)

- 3) **Did you find the entrepreneurial process easy/difficult? Why?** To make it easier for participants and if they don't know what entrepreneurial process involves, follow it up with: **Was it easy or difficult to find an idea for a start-up/company? Was it easy or difficult to implement your ideas/plans? What about your first sale? Finding your clients? Opening your business?**

If they say, it was easy, follow it up with: **What helped you in this process?**

If they say difficult, follow it up with: **What risks and barriers did you perceive and experience? Were you afraid of failure?**

SET 3 (Social environment / Perceived social norms)

- 4) **How did your social environment react to your idea? For example, your fellow students, friends, family, or teachers.**
- 5) **What particular reactions from your social environment did you experience as helpful or as barriers? What kind of support did you get? From whom?**
- 6) **How did your education/university motivate and support you in your entrepreneurial process? For instance, in terms of receiving information or funding/resources or marketing? Could you think of points of improvement?**

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SET 4 (Perceived self-competence and perceived fit and perceived masculine culture of entrepreneurship)

- 7) **What skills, knowledge, and experience do you think are important as an entrepreneur? How do you perceive yourself regarding these attributes?**
- 8) **Do you perceive that in the entrepreneurial environment, certain attributes such as assertiveness, competitiveness, risk-taking behavior (traits that can be considered masculine) are important? Do you perceive yourself as having these traits/attributes?**

SET 5 (Financial barriers)

- 9) **Do you feel like having enough financial support?** Note: If this question is difficult to answer for participants who wanted to become entrepreneurs but didn't pursue and left in an initial stage, ask this way: **Do you think they could have been enough financial support?**

FINAL SET (WRAP UP):

- 10) **For participants who failed to become an entrepreneur: You mentioned a couple of barriers that you faced in becoming an entrepreneur. Could you tell me in your own words what were the most important barriers that you experienced?**

For participants who succeeded in becoming an entrepreneur: **You mentioned a couple of factors that helped you in becoming an entrepreneur. Could you tell me in your own words what were the most important factors that helped in your experience?**

Finally, ask if participants have anything more to add and how they perceived the interview (for feedback).

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated [DD/MM/YYYY], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent **voluntarily to be a participant** in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can **withdraw** from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

I understand that taking part in the study involves an audio-recorded interview. The audio recording is transcribed as text later on and will be destroyed after the analysis.

Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for a bachelor thesis

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as [e.g. my name or where I live], will not be shared beyond the study team.

I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs

Consent to be Audio/video Recorded

I agree to be audio/video recorded

If you have any questions regarding the ethical site of this study you can always contact the ethical committee of the UT to ask them