

ICSB Gazette

The Global Leader Supporting Micro-, Small and Medium Enterprises

Monday, August 24, 2020. Issue 79

Gender & Entrepreneurship – A Decade On

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What is the Relationship between Gender and Entrepreneurship?

In my 2013 study on “[Sex in the kitchen: changing gender roles in a female-dominated occupation](#),” I sought to provide a gender entrepreneurship slant to the revolving landscape in the ‘[culinary underbelly](#)’– i.e. chef life and cooking in general. The conceptual study was primarily geared towards extending the boundaries of the identified female-dominated occupations beyond the usual suspects – social work, nursing, elementary school teacher – to the kitchen, as the identity of chef life is unpacked. While the study arguably heeds the call to explore occupational segregation in the light of gender and ethnicity, its main emphasis was on building upon prior studies on occupational sex-segregation rather than the ethnicity dimension. Looking back on that study, I still refrain from exploring ethnicity, but gender and perhaps nationality, speak volumes on the need for “[humane entrepreneurship](#).”

Taking a step back from that decade long desk research, I would like to highlight some key elements in what I tag the “dirty dozen” post-publication review.

First, without realizing it at the time, I moved away from the glass ceiling to the glass escalator. For example, I mentioned that “...[one of the key highlights of ‘The Glass Escalator’, was that negative stereotypes about men who were employed in ‘women’s work’ being pushed out of specific jobs in a non-discriminatory manner as such prejudices can actually add to the ‘glass escalator effect’ by pressuring men to move out of the most female-identified... areas, and up to those regarded as more legitimate and prestigious for men.](#)”

Second, in my discussion or interrogation of “[Occupational sex segregation](#),” I sought to suggest a third stream beyond the vertical and horizontal – i.e. diagonal.

Third, I pointed out, “in an attempt to neutralize the gender stereotypes of these occupations [...] men would be attracted to nursing if, instead of emphasizing care work, the field was promoted as a profession characterized by technical sophistication”. I also acknowledged consistency with [prior studies](#) that being a chef is more than just a job, it is sacred work involving sacrifice and pain leaving a physical imprint on the individual in the form of burns, cuts, and scalds. Such marks are the physical manifestation of chef culture. Indeed, such lack of appreciation stems from a misunderstanding in the wider society – outside of the occupations in question. Hence, the need to communicate the insider’s views to this outside sub-group.

I am not a chef by any definition, but I can feel the heat even from outside of the Kitchen.

Fourth, the study was exploratory in nature having been based on personal observations of changing landscapes in a traditionally women dominated sector – the kitchen. Three cases are drawn from the British catering sector and are all male celebrity chefs. Gordon Ramsey of *Hell’s Kitchen*; Jamie Oliver, the face of UK supermarket giant, Sainsbury’s; and ‘home-grown’ Ainslie Harriott, renowned for the BBC 2 TV program [Ready Steady Cook](#).

Fifth, I pointed out propositions for future research suggesting the need for “widening the focus [...] to encompass different groups of chefs and specifically issues of gender and ethnicity would add much to the understanding of the role of culture in the formation of chef identity.” However, while ethnicity is clearly not the focus of this study/conceptual paper, the changing gender landscape in the kitchen is a novel attempt as advancing the sex roles in the industry.

Sixth, we need to address the social and cultural sanctions applied to men who do ‘women’s work’ which keep men from even considering these occupations. Some of these sanctions may include a lack of understanding of the nature of the job beneath the surface – a prejudice that tends to be held mostly by those on the outside rather than insiders in the occupation in question. In the catering, cooking, or kitchen industry, one study used a worthy title, [‘culinary underbelly’](#) to highlight some of the shared identities inside the kitchen as opposed to that perceived by outsiders.

Seventh, I also talked about celebrity chefs being role models and/or opinion leaders. In that proposition, I mentioned that the term ‘celebrity’ is used to describe those chefs who have a media profile generated by activities such as presenting televised food programs, writing newspaper columns, publishing books, or whose views are sought by the media due to their activities in the industry. While Michelin-starred chefs may be a small group within the restaurant sector they are highly influential, playing a key role in “*trendsetting, image building and in setting standards for the industry as a whole.*”

Eighth, celebrity chefs are an important group because their media-generated visibility provides them with opportunities to communicate attitudes and opinions to a wide, general audience.

Ninth, appreciation for chefs is not just giving those on the outside an insider’s view, but also creating a sense of self-appreciation and self-worth for those on the inside. Popular interest in the world of the chef has grown

considerably in recent years, as evidenced by the plethora of television programs dedicated to food preparation. The world of professional chefs and their kitchens remained largely secluded until the emergence of the phenomenon of celebrity chefs whose open kitchens revealed the previously secret ‘backstage’ of professional cooking. While this media-generated interest has been accompanied by fascinating biographical accounts of being a chef and of the restaurant business it has not translated into a significant body of academic literature on and studies of chefs.

Tenth, in my conclusions, I pointed out, “the changing dynamics of the stereotypical gender roles have long dominated the entrepreneurship discourse.” An initial search on the subject revealed that two [PhD studies](#) have been undertaken in the area three decades apart. However, such roles have not been accorded much scrutiny adorning the entrepreneurship lens, which makes this exploratory study a pioneering effort in the field. In addition to having discussed the *vertical* versus *horizontal* sex discrimination debate in the workplace, this study on chef life suggests that there may yet be a third element to investigate, diagonal sex segregation – i.e., moving from other fields into the kitchen.

Eleventh, I also called for future research to explore the limitations of my article, which was primarily based on men in women-dominated occupations such as the kitchen business, it is worth noting that any holistic analysis would need to recognize the role of equally established women in this sector.

Twelfth, and finally, I argued that the study should have implications for society at large as men begin to realize that the kitchen could also be ‘cool’ – considering how these individuals have glamorized the art of cooking. I also posited that the implications are limitless as even in today’s *patriarchal* geographic spaces, male celebrity chefs have become a popular sight and most cafes are now being owned and managed by men as the kitchen gradually embraces a gender-neutral occupation pursuit for the coveted white apron.

Overall, the article speaks to the conversation on misplaced gender stereotypes and the changing dynamics in the social workforce. It also highlights subtle elements of occupational segregation, safety in the workplace, and the empathy of the collective in occupations. These issues, in addition to several others, have prompted both scholarly and policy intervention across unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral levels.

Article News:

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How to Cite:

Madichie, N. O. (2013). Sex in the kitchen: changing gender roles in a female-dominated occupation. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 18(1), 90-102.

<https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2013.050754>



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This ICSB Gazette issue is featuring an article written by Dr. Nnamdi O. Madichie Professor of Marketing & Entrepreneurship at the UNIZIK Business School, Awka, Nigeria.

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