ABSTRACT

Recent studies find that evaluators penalize female-led ventures, often because they perceive a “lack of fit” between female gender roles and their cultural images of entrepreneurs. We propose that this gender penalty is diminished when a new venture is framed in such a way that it shares common stereotype content with an entrepreneur’s gender stereotypes. Specifically, we examine the use of a social impact frame, framing that emphasizes benefits of the venture and its activities for social-environmental welfare, which research shows elicits attributions of warmth – a quality more often linked to women than men. We investigate this proposition in a field study of evaluations of early-stage ventures, and find evidence that female-led ventures avert gender penalties when presented using a social impact frame. In a second study, we validate these findings through experimental manipulation of entrepreneurial pitch presentations, and further show the mediating effect of perceived warmth. Together, these studies show that social impact framing leads to increased attributions of warmth – but the impact of this on venture evaluations is specifically notable for female-led ventures, for whom greater warmth attenuates gender role incongruity. Taken together, these findings suggest that social impact framing can accentuate warmth without diminishing perceptions of competence, thus helping women overcome a key challenge they face in entrepreneurship.