

## Exploring the legacy of gender and entrepreneurship scholars

### Introduction

The original concept for the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship (IJGE)* was created in recognition of the increased interest in women's entrepreneurship research and the need for an appropriate academic *platform* where such work could be presented. The platform would seek to offer a publication outlet in the form of an academic journal dedicated to the dissemination of conceptual and empirical scholarly research on gender and entrepreneurship. Alongside a strong international dimension, and the aim of capturing excellent scholarship in the field, studies in under-researched contexts, novel perspectives and new opportunities for theory building were of particular of interest – as was the publication of work by early-career scholars embarking on exciting avenues of research or uncovering new sub-fields.

Launched in 2008 at the Diana International Research Conference in Belfast, *IJGE* published its first (three-issue) volume in 2009. We remain grateful to the scholars who supported the *IJGE* concept when it was still in its infancy[1], and who generously shared their work by contributing to the inaugural issue[2]. We note that papers from that issue are still being widely cited today, not least amongst them, the iconic “A Gender-Aware Framework for Women's Entrepreneurship” by Brush *et al.* (2009, pp. 8-24). Since then, *IJGE* has grown steadily, moving from three to four issues per volume and now publishing an average of 20 academic papers every year. We have also published a number of thematic special issues on topics as diverse as Institutional Perspectives, International Contexts, Innovation, Knowledge-based Entrepreneurship, and Family Business and have included special issues with specific geographical foci on Nordic and Gulf Co-operation Council countries. In 2019, it was our honor to publish a special issue (led by Professor Sara Carter) dedicated to the work of the late Julie Weeks. We remember Julie not just because she was a tireless advocate for women's economic empowerment but also because she was the recipient of our very first *IJGE* Research Award.

We are proud of *IJGE's* achievements. We are the only journal within the entrepreneurship field dedicated to gender and entrepreneurship research, and the research we publish has been placed in the top 4 per cent of most-cited research in the Gender Studies field by Scopus. *IJGE* is ranked by AIDEA (Italy), the American Sociological Association, the Australian Business Deans Council Quality Journal List, the Australian Research Council (ERA Journal List) and Scopus. In 2018, we were accepted into both the CNRS listing (National Centre for Scientific Research) France, and the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide, the latter ranking us at 2\*, an impressive achievement for a niche and still relatively new journal. Finally, in 2019, we were proud to consolidate our very special association with the Diana International Research Project (now headquartered at Babson College), which involves special issues of *IJGE* organized around the Diana conference and provides preferential access arrangements for Diana members. We acknowledge that none of this could have been achieved without the continued support of the now extensive community of gender and entrepreneurship research scholars, the growing body of young and emerging scholars, our Editorial Advisory Board, our expert team of reviewers and our dedicated publisher Helen Beddow. We are grateful to all of you.

And so to the special issue at hand, *Celebrating a Decade of Research in the International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship: The Legacy Special Issue*. The idea for this emerged



---

from one of our Editorial Meetings in London when we were discussing how we might mark our first decade and, at the same time, lay the foundation for several more. The special issue vehicle seemed appropriate for what we wanted to achieve, but credit for operationalizing the specific concept of a legacy project must go to Kate Lewis who insightfully realized its potential as a way of not only platforming eminent research scholars in the field but also reaching out to the next generation of excellent scholars. Accordingly, we have invited the scholars published in this special issue to nominate young talented scholars whose work we will platform in next year's special issue, thus establishing a legacy beyond their own scholarship and emphasizing the importance of mentorship and leadership in advancing a field. The names of next year's invited legacy scholars will be announced shortly – so, watch this space!

### *The contributions*

For this special legacy issue, we invited the authors of the seven articles to reflect on their own specific areas of expertise relative to the field as a whole. It is therefore appropriate that the first paper documents the evolution and success of the Diana Project and the Diana International Research Conference. Brush, Greene and Welter remind us of a time when research on women entrepreneurs was scarce, despite women starting, owning and growing businesses. Policymakers, women entrepreneurs and other constituencies began to care about the growth of women-led businesses. The focus on venture capital – where the disparity was greatest, most visible and critical for innovation and job creation – suddenly became important. The team of five female scholars – the “Dianas” – with their different disciplinary approaches and social capital networks, raised funding from the US and Sweden to conduct research and develop partnerships. The Diana organization was and continues to be an international collaborative endeavor, focused on rigorous research to inform the growth of women's enterprise.

*Welter's* article documents how early discussions on gender and entrepreneurship focused on contextualizing gender, but then shifted to focus on the gendering of contexts. The first wave of studies understood contexts as external conditions, environments and situations, analyzing the impact of social, spatial and institutional contexts on both the development and understanding of women's entrepreneurship. Welter highlights how context and entrepreneurial actions are interdependent, and how, as a consequence, scholars began to recognize how entrepreneurs construct their contexts. The value of this type of research was to understand context as both a constraint and an enabler of women's entrepreneurship. This second wave of research in relation to context sought to move the focus toward that of “gender as a lens” to enable scholars to study how contexts are constructed and enacted. Differences between female- and male-owned firms in terms of, for example, size, industry focus, enterprise development and entrepreneurial goals are indicative of gendered contexts. Finally, gendered contexts are heterogeneous across geography, culture, region and other contextual dimensions. In this current third wave, research studies illustrate how contexts are constructed through actions, social relations, cognitions, words and images.

In her paper, *Marlow* discusses how feminist theory can advance the contemporary gendered critique of women's entrepreneurship. She argues that a more fundamental, politically informed challenge regarding assumptions of the benefits of entrepreneurship is lacking. Rather than questioning how entrepreneurship might *fit* women, we still look for how women *fit* entrepreneurship. Marlow calls for the next generation of researchers to generate more diverse, informed and challenging critiques in order to advance our knowledge. This may involve working with colleagues with a diverse international profile to

---

help broaden the multiplicity of gender as enactment; or exploring the criticality of intersectionality and how this positions women in society. Marlow's concluding question offers a key takeaway for future scholars: "If we question its capacity to enhance social and economic well-being, might this provoke politically inspired collective feminist theories to inform this critique – can we generate a politically informed feminist critique of entrepreneurship?"

In *Hughes and Jennings's* paper, the authors examine how scholarship on women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship has contributed to a better understanding of the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity within both the family and the labor market. By combining a systematic quantitative analysis of scholarly publications with a qualitative analysis that identified key themes and contributions, the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in gendered social institutions can be seen as a clear legacy of women's entrepreneurship: Over 1/3 of the 1,300 publications referred to examine family and/or labor market embeddedness. This evolution reflects:

- How the increasingly global orientation of research and attention to diverse contexts has expanded thinking about the nature of entrepreneurship and its links to other forms of economic activity;
- The influence of intersectional approaches, which shifted attention to related nodes of social difference, i.e. ethnicity, nationality, class, religion and race; and
- A more explicit attention to a broader range of entrepreneurial outcomes, such as emancipation, economic empowerment and social/community impact.

*Watson's* contribution traces his work in "Exposing and Correcting the 'Underperformance' Myths of SMEs". The literature presents an overall picture of SMEs being associated with very poor performance outcomes and research did not reflect the true performance outcomes for the majority of SMEs. This, therefore, exaggerated mortality rates within the SME sector as being excessively high. Further, he was concerned that reliable statistics on the rate of small business failure were scarce, and in many cases had been derived/inferred from databases designed for other purposes. *Watson* subsequently conducted his own study of SME failure rates, using focus groups and surveys. The majority of SME owners are aware of the various risks associated with business ownership and, therefore, keep this in mind when they consider the merits of external funding. Related to this notion of risk is the issue of control, the second major theme of all his focus group participants. The results from the survey suggest that female SME owners were not "discouraged" from applying for bank funding by perceptions of bank discrimination against women. Twelve per cent of SME owners had their application for funding denied; there were no differences between females and males. The findings from the focus groups and subsequent survey suggest that because female owners, on average, are more risk averse and have greater need to feel in control of their business, they are likely to seek lower amounts of external funding compared to their male counterparts. Thus, women seem to be rationing themselves in the credit market rather than being discriminated against by banks.

In *Holmquist and Sundin's* paper, the authors reflect on their extensive research journey in the field of women's entrepreneurship. They began by studying women's place in the economy in the 1980s, conducting a large-scale study based on secondary data on all female entrepreneurs in Sweden, as well as a significant survey of female and male entrepreneurs. Watertight blocks between the fields of SME research and women's studies existed, with both fields failing to acknowledge a richer understanding of women's entrepreneurship; understanding the functioning of entrepreneurship as well as understanding how women

form their working lives. Holmquist and Sundin's first book revealed that invisibility, diversity and adaptation characterized Swedish female entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship research accepted that "woman" is a category to be used in empirical studies, but gender research did not embrace entrepreneurship as a topic. The authors noted signs of some integration between the two fields, however, gender in entrepreneurship research was mainly still restricted to the add-on of 'gender as variable', while there was no place for entrepreneurship in gender research. The divide between entrepreneurship research and gender research has not been bridged since the 80s, but its character has changed.

In our final paper, *Nelson* reviews IJGE's ten years of published research to capture the essence of the body of work and explore ways to strengthen the contribution of scholarship to gender equity in practice – both for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. She uses the four waves of feminism framework to examine the conceptual domain, and interviews selected practitioners in the field of gender and entrepreneurship. She analyzes the various conceptual streams within *IJGE*, and finds that a significant portion of articles focus on women engaged with entrepreneurship in the context of different practices and in different world geographies. This research compares women's experience to men's experience; the former is judged to be lacking because the systems in place – formed to and through patriarchy - disfavors women's economic participation globally. This constitutes two substantial contributions of *IJGE*'s published research in its first decade:

- (1) The systemic discrimination narrative delivers important data on the state of equity, and provides an understanding of disadvantage and under-representation of women in entrepreneurship practice;
- (2) *IJGE*'s welcome to scholars beyond the Global North provides an important resource for everyone interested in entrepreneurship practice beyond their own locale.

The downside, according to *Nelson*, is that this discrimination narrative shields us from a direct view of women's lived experiences without the burden of the shadow of comparison. Secondly, it retains the narrative within a "woman" and "gender" synonym box, which equates gender study with the study of women.

#### *Future research directions*

The authors have embedded within their papers a diverse range of possibilities in terms of advancing gendered entrepreneurship research. These coalesce around some key themes, yet also take account of the individual and idiosyncratic, bases of experience and expertise represented by each author.

The DIANA team (*Brush, Greene and Welter's* paper) advocate for a strong commitment on the part of researchers to consign 'gender as variable' approaches to the history books, and to take forward approaches that embed considerations of gender within the milieu of cultural, political and social issues that influence enterprise ecosystems. They also argue strongly for the use of intersectionality as a construct of empirical and theoretical leverage (as do *Hughes and Jennings*). Scholars are also encouraged to give thought to what knowledge of gender and entrepreneurship might offer other disciplines and inter-disciplinary perspectives - and like *Holmquist and Sundin*, encourage the generation of domain-specific theories for the field, if not the creation of further specific sub-fields of scholarship.

*Brush et al.* argue for more ambitious research questions that incorporate the potential role of female entrepreneurs in addressing global challenges. Whilst *Watson* argues it is also important not to lose sight of the importance of the motivation of the individual entrepreneur. The concerns of both converge, along with *Nelson*, in their reinforcement of the need for a policy imperative to run parallel with robust programmes of research (and

---

acknowledge the key role the Global Women's Enterprise Policy Research Project – Global WEP – led by Professor Colette Henry) is already playing in this respect).

Marlow frames a number of germane, and hopefully, provocative questions within her paper, which asks: What would the field look like if a feminist critique were deployed to epistemologically challenge what constitutes knowledge? How can we subvert yearning discourses that perpetuate the subtext: “*if only* women would create as many firms as men, *if only* they would grow their ventures – then they would be productive members of society”? She asserts that more is not necessarily good in terms of female participation in firm creation, nor is research that reinforces such positions in the absence of a critical gaze (and voice) – and especially not if it perpetuates the false promise of entrepreneurship as a site of pure opportunity and absents the introduction of considerations of reciprocal benefit.

Increasing methodological diversity is urged by the Holmquist and Sundin, Watson and Welter (who suggests visual methodologies specifically, such as fine art and photography). Along with Hughes and Jennings, these scholars also urge consideration of the broader evolution of work contexts in general and the implications of these for patterns of entrepreneurial behavior. This coincides with Welter's detailed advocacy for the consistent amplification context offers female entrepreneurship scholarship. She furthers this claim with a plea for scholars to examine how female entrepreneurship “do context” not just “do gender” – and to interrogate the agency involved in those processes; to examine the intentional and involuntary dimensions to both, and to devalorize the gendering of context. The geographic context, and the need to shift it to a comparative basis (from single nation only approaches), is a point made by Jennings and Hughes.

As the editorial team of IJGE, we support the claims of the authors in terms of orienting the future of gendered entrepreneurship research. We also suggest that in addition to this topic-driven approach to considering the future we take a more holistic view and commit to working towards three objectives. First, as individuals and communities to explore the benefits of collaborative, rather than competitive, approaches to engaging with theory, policy and practice – and, like Nelson in her paper, urge that this take place in spaces and via means that include male as well as female scholars. Second, that now we have established legitimacy as a field we move to securing the characteristics of diversity and distinctiveness. Finally, that we join up our thinking to form united, empirically informed narratives that capture the past, the present and the future of gendered entrepreneurship research in an integrated fashion. As we celebrate a decade of being the only journal dedicated to publishing solely in this area, we feel humbled to have had the opportunity to disseminate such a volume of quality scholarship, and we look forward to continuing this mission.

**Colette Henry**

*Department of Business Studies, Dundalk Institute of Technology,  
UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway*

**Lene Foss**

*School of Education and Communication, Jönköping University, Jönköping, Sweden  
and School of Business and Economics, UiT The Arctic University of Norway,  
Tromsø, Norway, and*

**Kate V. Lewis**

*Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK and Department of People and  
Performance, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK*

**Notes**

1. Here, we must mention those individuals who supported us when *IJGE* was all but a few scribbles on the back of an envelope, eventually developed into a formal publishing proposal and subsequently brought to life: Rob Edwards (during his time at Emerald), Mark Hart, Harry Matlay, Dinah Bennett, Jackie Brierton and Susan Marlow.
2. Candida Brush, Anne de Bruin, Fredericke Welter, Eleanor Shaw, Susan Marlow, Wing Lam, Sara Carter, John Watson, Rick Newby, Annie Mahuka, Teresa Nelson, Sylvia Maxfield, Deborah Kolb, Julie Weeks.

**Reference**

- Brush, C.G., de Bruin, A.M. and Welter, F. (2009), "A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship", *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 8-24.