
Guest editorial: Celebration of our outstanding contributors: sharing their insights and recommendations

Guest editorial

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1. Introduction

Research on the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship across different contexts has attracted considerable scholarly attention in the past few decades (Neergaard and Thrane, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2022; Simarasl *et al.*, 2022). We are delighted that the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship (IJGE)* has led these efforts in the last 14 years, publishing the most prominent research on gender and entrepreneurship (Lewis and Henry, 2021; Marlow, 2019; Ashe and Treanor, 2011). What sets IJGE apart from other entrepreneurship journals is that it provides a quality platform for junior and senior scholars and practitioners from different environments and contexts to share their findings about how gender informs entrepreneurial antecedents, processes and outcomes. We encourage research that uses various research methods and makes interesting theoretical and practical contributions to the field. In addition, we have found the Ambassador Issues critical in furthering the productive and impactful dialogue in gender and entrepreneurship scholarship. These issues celebrate scholars who have made a significant impact in the field of gender and entrepreneurship through sharing their outstanding research in IJGE and providing consistent support in various roles, such as serving as high-quality reviewers and special issue editors (For example, see Smith, 2014; Althalathini *et al.*, 2020; Ashe and Treanor, 2011).

For this Ambassador Issue, we invited six renowned scholars with extensive experience in researching and publishing research in gender and entrepreneurship from various perspectives to offer their unique insights about the most pressing research areas, methods, and considerations that can help to streamline related future research efforts. Ultimately, four of these scholars accepted our invitation. Below, we provide a synopsis of their wisdom. We hope these insights help shed light on a few important but unchallenged assumptions and underexplored topics in gender and entrepreneurship research.

2. The Ambassador Issue papers

The first piece is authored by Professor Robert Smith, one of the few men who has actually published several pieces in IJGE. He consistently attends the gender track in various entrepreneurship conferences and is known in the community for his courageous and adventurous takes on gender issues. In this piece, Professor Smith reflects on his research journey as a man who has studied gendered entrepreneurship and raises significant points that have been easily overlooked. For example, he points out that men's role in shaping gendered entrepreneurship is understudied and that men often represent the "silent" or "silenced" perspectives in the canon. This has arisen as "woman" has become a proxy for "gendered." Dr. Smith argues that gender is a human property, shared between both genders and constructed in different ways in different societies. In the literature, men have been normative – the site of theory development – while women have been studied as the "other" – from the perspective of difference. There are many versions of masculinity and femininity, and gender is a much nuanced concept. This nuance and potential for scope within the field are suppressed using "women" as the proxy for "gender," and this narrows the field and what might be considered



relevant to it. Neither all masculinities, for example, are dominant nor privileged – as often pointed out in the literature, nor the normative “male entrepreneur” is the norm for all the men entrepreneurs! Hegemonic forms of masculinity are linked to the dominant economic order (capitalism). They emphasize competitiveness, aggression and non-articulation of emotion. Professor Smith notes, “I understand masculinity as a pre-existing proto-entrepreneurial narrative shaping how we (as men) tell and enact entrepreneur stories.” (pp. 457-467) To break away from stereotypes and expand gender conceptualizations in the field, Dr. Smith encourages new understandings of gender and entrepreneurship through open debate, with a particular focus on masculinities. By doing so, he helps to reposition the debate on how to do gender studies in the future. He calls for a recasting of gender from stereotypes to allow a more comprehensive consideration of how each gender engages in entrepreneurship across different and within the same context(s).

The second article is authored by Professor Barbara Orser, who has written extensively on women’s entrepreneurship policies. Her work has contributed significantly to our understanding of what needs to be achieved in the field. Her various advisory roles and positions and interest in feminine capital have provided her with a unique platform to advocate women’s entrepreneurship policy in Canada and globally.

Professor Orser’s article in the Ambassador Issue is not only informative but also provocative in terms of her advice to policymakers to stop perpetuating decades of failing entrepreneurship policies, and start listening to what women need and want to achieve social change. In this, she is voicing a concern of many gender scholars who are frustrated with how policymakers continue to address the challenges that women entrepreneurs face. Dr. Orser introduces *entrepreneurial feminism* as a yellow brick road to forging future policy frameworks, as it encompasses a focus on “*multiple social, economic- and perceptual changes*” (pp. 468-488). Based on a thematic analysis of three different feminist pandemic recovery plans, Dr. Orser explores the role of entrepreneurial feminism. She highlights that policymakers regularly repeat past mistakes by treating women as one homogenous group and often fail to ask women what they want and need. This is particularly important because women are heterogenous and engage in many forms of new venture creation, both for and non-profit. Indeed, throughout the article, she stresses the need to understand women entrepreneurs as a diverse group and that intersectionality plays an important role in a renewed understanding of women entrepreneurs’ needs and wants. The principles and measures of policy suggestions to amend the current situation are manifold, as outlined in Figure 1 of this article (p. 481). Dr. Orser concludes the article by voicing hope that it will “inform women’s entrepreneurship policy frameworks and measures to construct more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems” (p. 469), so do we.

The third contribution is by Professor Haya Al-Dajani. She has made a significant mark on the field through her research on cultural heritage entrepreneurship that promotes the inclusion of migrant workers and refugee women in society. At IJGE, we also know her as one of our best reviewers. Her article in this issue provides an overview of her research journey since 1998 and offers insights about moving this topic forward. Dr. Al-Dajani reviews the contributing fields to refugee women’s entrepreneurship research, such as refugee studies, economics and development. According to her, women respondents are often treated monolithically as a homogenous population, with little to no proper attention being paid to contextualizing their differences (e.g. type and circumstances). For example, individuals become refugees in different ways, representing a set of different circumstances – some are internally displaced with the benefits of citizenship, language fluency and “belonging”; many are without any prospect of citizenship and may hold none of the elements which could be expected to ease their transition – shared language, ethnicity, religion and family connections. In her research on the empowerment of refugee women, Dr. Al-Dajani has found that while “individual empowerment through entrepreneurship is possible, emancipation from the

boundaries of being refugee women was not possible through entrepreneurship” (489-498). She has found empowerment must come first and allow entrepreneurship to follow. There are several research opportunities in this field. For instance, it is possible to research the potential of entrepreneurship to empower women across the social, economic and political spectrum. Another path is to explore how gender roles change in families or respond to changes due to displacement. Also, it is noteworthy to examine how refugee women’s entrepreneurial activities alleviate poverty, lead to business growth and create personal and community wealth. For this research to be useful and applicable, researchers should focus on the long-term and engage women refugees and the organizations that work with them across the gamut of their experiences – nascent and experienced, and other boundary conditions, such as the businesses’ legal status and the entrepreneurs’ citizenship status. Professor Al-Dajani calls researchers to embark on engaged scholarship on this wide-ranging topic to contribute to theory and the communities under study.

Finally, the fourth article is authored by Dr. Lorna Treanor. Dr. Treanor has regularly contributed to *IJGE* as a scholar and special issue editor. She has been one of the pioneers to focus on the significant gender skewness we find in entrepreneurial activities in STEM contexts. Her work in this issue offers a thoughtful review of women (academic) entrepreneurs in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine (STEMM). She points out that the study of women in STEMM is important because, according to the existing evidence, certain fields remain gendered even when women’s contributions surpass men’s. Dr. Treanor’s much-needed historical overview of this emerging research area is limited to a short range of years (2018–2022). However, she shows that even though women are so few in these fields that it is difficult to identify and engage them in research, there has been a noticeable increase in relevant research efforts within this short period.

Dr. Treanor divides the literature into two parts, addressing women entrepreneurs who are active in STEMM in and outside academia. She shows that there are similarities in researchers’ topics of interest, for example, support measures but differences in the type of feminist analysis they undertake. In terms of methods, quantitative research still dominates this field to examine the factors that promote entrepreneurial activity or performance outcomes. In contrast, qualitative research focuses on critical feminist analyses. Using quantitative methods requires cross-country collaborations to collect sufficient data; therefore, there is room for more gender-informed quantitative research to broaden our understanding of women’s entrepreneurship across different countries. The intersectional analysis provides an opportunity for researchers based on Dr. Treanor’s review. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the study of context matters because institutions differ across countries, and most countries have policies that are particularly focused on technological innovation.

In conclusion, Dr. Treanor encourages future research to focus on women’s and men’s identity building in STEMM contexts. We are thrilled that *IJGE* leads the research conversation on this topic and hope we will continue to be the journal of choice.

3. Conclusion

The four papers reviewed in this Ambassador Issue seek to provide novel insights into the commonly held assumptions and practices in gender and entrepreneurship research. Even though the issue did not intend to address a specific topic, one overarching theme that connects the four papers is questioning the assumption of homogeneity or classifying entrepreneurs in broad categories and making blanket generalizations. Such attempts prevent us from gaining a deep understanding of different entrepreneurial experiences. For instance, in two of the papers, Robert Smith and Barbara Orser have uniquely but similarly challenged the assumption of equating “gender” with “womanhood.” In doing so, Professor Robert Smith has encouraged researchers to examine the experiences of men entrepreneurs and their nuances. Along similar

lines, Professor Barbara Orser invites us to go beyond blaming the “failure” of current entrepreneurship policies in supporting women’s entrepreneurship. Instead, she encourages us to capture what women entrepreneurs need and want to prosper. In another piece, Professor Al-Dajani shows that even in refugee women’s entrepreneurship research, boundary conditions such as refugees’ legal and citizenship status can make a tremendous difference in their entrepreneurial experiences. She invites scholars to embark on “engaged” research to capture the depth of entrepreneurial experiences in under-studied populations. Finally, professor Treanor’s piece invites us to look more closely at the industry context, STEMM vs. non-STEMM, and how it differentially impacts men and women entrepreneurs’ identity construction, further impacting their entrepreneurial processes and outcomes.

Even though we would like to raise some concerns about how researchers may unnecessarily restrict themselves in research designs by thinking too narrowly about this field, the Ambassador Issue’s contributors highlight extensive opportunities for future research, which is engaged, contributory and impactful.

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