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Extending Women's Entrepreneurship Research in New Directions

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The dramatic expansion of scholarly interest and activity in the field of women's entrepreneurship within recent years has done much to correct the historical inattention paid to female entrepreneurs and their initiatives. Yet, as the field continues to develop and mature, there are increasingly strong calls for scholars to take their research in new directions. Within this introduction to the special issue, we expand upon the reasons for this call, describe who responded, and summarize the new frontiers explored within the work appearing in this and another related collection. We conclude by delineating new territories for researchers to explore, arguing that such endeavors will join those in this volume in not only addressing the criticisms raised to date, but also in generating a richer and more robust understanding of women's entrepreneurship.

Why the Call for New Directions?

Over 5 years have elapsed since *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (ET&P)* published its first ever special issue on women's entrepreneurship research. At that time, the guest editors characterized the field as being "at the early childhood stage" of development (de Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006). This characterization stemmed, at least in part, from prior literature reviews documenting the relative paucity (Brush, 1992; Gatewood, Carter, Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2003; Terjesen, 2004)—if not outright invisibility (Baker, Aldrich, & Liou, 1997)—of research on female business owners and their endeavors published within both scholarly outlets as well as the general media.

By 2012, it already seems more appropriate to characterize women's entrepreneurship research as being at the brink of adolescence. Key indicators of the field's rapid expansion include the increasingly large number of conferences, special issues, specialty journals,

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Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reports (e.g., Allen, Elam, Langowitz, & Dean, 2007; Kelley, Brush, Greene, & Litovsky, 2010; Minniti, Allen, & Langowitz, 2005), edited volumes (e.g., Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006; Brush, de Bruin, Gatewood, & Henry, 2010; Fielden & Davidson, 2010; Hughes & Jennings, 2012; Welter, Smallbone, & Isakova, 2006), and books (e.g., Elam, 2008; Hughes, 2005) focused specifically on female entrepreneurs. This outpouring of scholarly interest has done much to correct the historical inattention to women's entrepreneurial activity. It has also stimulated other indicators of a research domain's maturation; notably, the emergence of field chronologies (e.g., Brush, 2012) and stock-taking efforts (e.g., Brush, de Bruin, & Welter, 2009; de Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2007; Goduscheit & Norn, 2011; Terjesen, 2004), specialized journals (e.g., *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*), as well as critiques and reflections aimed at sparking new questions and approaches that can move the field ahead (e.g., Ahl, 2006; Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009).

Indeed, it was Ahl's (2006) much cited critical commentary, entitled "Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions," that provided a great deal of initial inspiration for this special issue. Observing the myriad ways in which her provocative exposition seems to have resonated with researchers, we felt it was timely to assemble a special issue that could showcase some of the new frontiers currently being explored within the field. But we did not want a collection that represented exploits into unexplored territories for the thrill of investigating uncharted regions alone; rather, we hoped that they would collectively address some of the concerns raised about extant research on female entrepreneurs. Our goal was to demonstrate that the critiques articulated by Ahl and her predecessors (e.g., Birley, 1989; Chell & Baines, 1998; Marlow, 1997; Mirchandani, 1999; Stevenson, 1990) had not only *not* been ignored—but had, in fact, been heard, reflected upon, considered valid, and thus deemed worthy of addressing.

So what were the primary criticisms of the women's entrepreneurship literature that had accumulated through to the mid-2000s? Three struck us as particularly salient and capable of being addressed within subsequent individual pieces of research¹. The first pertains to the questions that were asked to that point in time. Our understanding of Ahl's (2006) critique in this regard is that, by invoking the argument that female entrepreneurs represent a significant yet hitherto unrecognized engine of economic growth as the primary justification for their work, women's entrepreneurship scholars (inadvertently) privileged certain research questions while silencing others. As a result, much of the extant work in the field had focused upon documenting and attempting to explain the financial performance and growth of women's businesses. In so doing, other important and potentially informative lines of enquiry received comparatively little attention. This critique is echoed within other recent critical reflections upon the entrepreneurship literature in general. Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen (2009), for instance, offered a provocative glimpse into the exciting new terrain that could be opened up if scholars were to broaden their relatively narrow view of entrepreneurship as an economic act of wealth creation to the more encompassing view of entrepreneurship as an emancipatory act of change creation. Similarly, Calás, Smircich, and Bourne asked: "What would happen, theoretically and

1. A fourth criticism was certainly important but unlikely to be addressed within individual research studies alone; i.e., institutional norms regarding doctoral training, research funding, and academic publication and promotion practices that either dissuade scholars from choosing women's entrepreneurship as their primary research line and/or foster the production of a relatively narrow type of study (Ahl, 2006; de Bruin et al., 2006, 2007). In this regard, it is useful to note events such as the 2009 Academy of Management Professional Development Workshop aimed at mentoring doctoral students and junior scholars interested in the field of women's entrepreneurship research.

analytically, if the focus of the literature were reframed from entrepreneurship as an economic activity with possible social change outcomes to entrepreneurship as a social change activity with a variety of possible outcomes?” (2009, p. 553).

The second overarching criticism of existing research on female entrepreneurs also resonates with an increasingly voiced critique of entrepreneurship research in general: the highly individualistic orientation (see, for example, Dimov, 2007; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). Ahl (2006) argued that this orientation is manifest in theoretical and methodological practices that have further restricted the scope of women’s entrepreneurship research in particular. In terms of theory, for instance, the individualist focus has not only meant that “contextual and historical variables . . . such as legislation, culture, or politics are seldom discussed” (Ahl, 2006, p. 605), but also that feminist perspectives, especially, are rarely invoked explicitly. By excluding explicit discussion of gendered power structures, the apparent “shortcomings” of female entrepreneurs have tended to be “attributed to individual women and not to social arrangements” (p. 606). With respect to methods, Ahl further asserted that prevailing analytic techniques such as correlation analyses, *t*-tests, and multiple regression not only entice researchers to “look for mean differences” between male and female entrepreneurs (p. 607) but also “reinforce the idea that explanations are to be found in the individual rather than on a social or institutional level” (p. 608). One unintended consequence of this is policy prescriptions that suggest women must change (e.g., through education, networking skills, etc.) in order to improve their entrepreneurial success.

The third overarching criticism articulated by Ahl (2006) pertains to the dominant objectivist ontological and epistemological position behind most women’s entrepreneurship scholarship published up until the mid-2000s. Once again, this critique resonates with recent debates within the broader literature regarding the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities and how these come to be known by entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship scholars (e.g., Alvarez & Barney, 2010; Venkataraman, Sarasvathy, Dew, & Forster, 2012). Our reading of Ahl’s arguments *vis-à-vis* women’s entrepreneurship research is that an objectivist stance—which presumes not only the existence of something inherently “male” or “female” but also the measurability of such “essential” characteristics—contributes to the production of gender differences “by the very search for them” (p. 608). Compounded by publication practices that favor studies revealing statistically significant results, the accumulated research on female entrepreneurs conducted from an objectivist stance thereby conveys the (potentially false) impression that crucial differences exist between male and female business owners. Moreover, when the measurement instruments utilized by objectivist researchers are themselves gendered, female entrepreneurs inevitably appear to “not measure up.”

Fortunately, Ahl (2006) took care to end her critique by delineating some potential new directions for the field. These involve “expanding the research object” and “shifting the epistemological position.” With respect to the former, we interpret Ahl as asking for a broadening of both the questions that are asked as well as the potential explanatory factors that are investigated. These echo other calls for greater attention to questions pertaining to the remarkable *heterogeneity* evident among female entrepreneurs (de Bruin et al., 2006, 2007; Hughes, 2005; Hughes & Jennings, 2012; Jennings & Provorny Cash, 2006) and to explanations emphasizing the different *contexts* in which these women are embedded (Brush et al., 2009; 2010; Hughes & Jennings; Welter et al., 2006). In terms of shifting the epistemological position, Ahl is clear in envisioning constructionist research that does not use sex “as an explanatory variable” but instead examines “how gender is *accomplished*”; that is, studies that do not view gender as “something as *is*” but rather as “something that is *done*” (p. 612; italics in original). This additional new direction resonates with other

Figure 1

Illustrative Women’s Entrepreneurship Studies Suggested by Expanding Questions and Explanations as Well as Shifting Approaches

| Explanations/Approaches | Traditional questions | Nontraditional questions |
|---|---|--|
| Individualistic explanation & objectivist approach | Studies comparing the performance of firms headed by men versus women | Studies comparing whether male and female entrepreneurs engage differentially in strategies such as bricolage and effectuation |
| Contextual explanation & objectivist approach | Studies examining whether the proportion of women engaging in entrepreneurial activity differs across countries | Studies examining whether the work-family experiences of female entrepreneurs change across the life course |
| Individualistic explanation & constructionist approach | Studies comparing how men and women construct notions of ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘growth’ | Studies comparing how male and female entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial opportunities |
| Contextual explanation & constructionist approach | Studies exploring the processes by which resource acquisition is gendered within different contexts | Studies exploring how gender-role identities are reconstructed in time and space through entrepreneurship as emancipation |

recent calls for more process-oriented research within work on female entrepreneurs (e.g., Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; de Bruin et al., 2007) and the general entrepreneurship literature alike (e.g., Rindova et al., 2009; Venkataraman et al., 2012). In Figure 1, we illustrate the types of studies that might be imagined if one or more of these proposed new directions were adopted by women’s entrepreneurship scholars.

Who Responded to the Call?

To help encourage these envisioned new directions for research on female entrepreneurs, we developed a Call for Papers that encouraged submissions that built creatively on key debates, puzzles, and emerging critiques to build a richer and more robust understanding of the field. In particular, we were interested in research that: (1) reframed *old questions* in fresh and innovative ways, thereby generating new insights to long-standing theoretical and empirical debates; (2) posited entirely *new questions* that had not been examined before, particularly with respect to the heterogeneity of women’s entrepreneurship; (3) studied *new sites* of entrepreneurship, especially new regions, national contexts, and industries; and (4) utilized *new methodological approaches* that would help to build and improve upon the rigor and creativity of empirical research.

The Call for Papers was announced at the 2010 Diana International Conference on Women’s Entrepreneurship Research, which was held in Banff, Canada and attracted over 80 delegates from 20 countries around the world. In keeping with the spirit of an “open call” aimed at capturing as many new directions as possible, we also circulated it to related conferences, online postings, and newsletters (such as that for the Academy of

Table 1

Description of Submissions

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|----|
| Number of submissions | | | | 40 |
| Number of authors | | | | 90 |
| Number of countries of authors | | | | 14 |
| Countries of submissions: | | | | |
| Belgium | France | Saudi Arabia | Taiwan | |
| Canada | Germany | Spain | United Kingdom | |
| China | Netherlands | Sweden | United States | |
| Finland | | | | |

Management Entrepreneurship Division). We were delighted when the special issue received a total of 40 submissions—a response we view as testimony to the vibrant, active research community that has developed among women’s entrepreneurship scholars. This response level is particularly notable in light of the fact that other related calls were circulating at the same time; notably, for a special issue within the niche journal *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* as well as an Edward Elgar edited volume (Hughes & Jennings, 2012).

As Table 1 shows, the submissions for the *ET&P* special issue came from a total of 90 authors located in 14 different countries. As in previous special issues, the strength of research capacity in North America and Europe was evident; but we were also encouraged to see interest emerging from other countries as well. For each submission, at least two of the special editors read the articles independently and made a decision on whether to send the article out for a more detailed review. Of the original 40 submissions, 18 articles were sent out to at least two reviewers who were acknowledged experts on the topic. After an extensive review process, involving several revise/resubmit/review cycles, we are thrilled to accept six articles for this special issue. We are enormously thankful to the reviewers whose hard work and generous sharing of expertise and insights have contributed so much to making this collection possible (see Reviewers for the Special Issue at the end of this article).

How Has the Call Been Answered Thus Far?

In our view, the six articles accepted into this special issue collectively do an admirable job of illustrating the new directions in which women’s entrepreneurship research is now headed. Figure 2 supports this claim visually, by arraying the articles (identified in bold) according to whether they “expand the research project” by either asking new questions or offering new explanations and/or “shift the epistemological position” by adopting nontraditional methodological approaches. We deliberately used dotted lines within this figure to signify that, in practice, the boundaries between the cells are more permeable than what we had previously conveyed by the solid lines in Figure 1. In other words, some of the studies, such as that by Wu and Chua in particular, could arguably be classified as straddling two cells.

A quick glance at the placement of the six special issue articles within Figure 2 reveals that four addressed nontraditional rather than traditional questions related to women’s entrepreneurship (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Davis & Shaver, 2012; Eddleston & Powell,

Figure 2

Arraying the Contributions to this Special Issue (and Another Recent Collection) by Questions, Explanations, and Approaches^a

| Explanations/Approaches | Traditional questions | Nontraditional questions |
|---|--|---|
| Individualistic explanation & objectivist approach | (Coleman & Robb, 2012) (Riebe, 2012) Wu & Chua, 2012 | (Hechavarria, Ingram, Justo, & Terjesen, 2012) |
| Contextual explanation & objectivist approach | Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012 (García, 2012) (Klyver, Nielsen, & Ewald, 2012) (Zohir & Greene, 2012) | Davis & Shaver, 2012 Eddleston & Powell, 2012 (Sharifian, Jennings, & Jennings, 2012) |
| Individualistic explanation & constructionist approach | | (James, 2012) |
| Contextual explanation & constructionist approach | (Fairclough, 2012) (Humbert & Essers, 2012) | Datta & Gailey, 2012 Scott, Dolan, Johnstone-Louis, Sugden, & Wu, 2012 (Fuentes-Fuentes, Cooper, & Bojica, 2012) (McAdam & Marlow, 2012) |

^aEntries in bold refer to articles appearing within this special issue; those in brackets refer to chapters published within Hughes and Jennings (2012) *Global Women's Entrepreneurship Research*.

2012; Scott, Dolan, Johnstone-Louis, Sugden, & Wu, 2012), five adopted primarily contextual rather than individualistic explanations (Datta & Gailey; Davis & Shaver; Scott et al.; Eddleston & Powell; and, Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012), and two utilized constructionist rather than objectivist approaches (Datta & Gailey and Scott et al.). We preview each of the six articles separately later. Following these individual summaries, we briefly describe the work published within another recent collection (Hughes & Jennings, 2012) in order to provide a broader sense of the new directions in women's entrepreneurship scholarship at this point in the history of the Diana International Project.

The first article in the special issue, by Zhenyu Wu and Jess Chua, presents an innovative methodological twist in response to a traditional and much debated question about whether female and male entrepreneurs are treated differently in the process of small business borrowing. Working from the premise that *overt* discrimination in lending practices is now rare or nonexistent—due to legal restrictions and greater awareness—the authors probe whether more *subtle* gender differences in treatment may persist, utilizing an approach that isolates “second-order” effects. Drawing on the U.S. National Survey of Small Business Finances, and honing in on sole proprietorships where one can more easily identify the “gender” of a business, their results show modest but significant gender differences. These do not pertain to success in securing a loan, however, but relate to the

terms of the loan itself, with female sole proprietors bearing notably higher borrowing costs. Placing their results into ongoing debates over lending and borrowing practices, Wu and Chua make both technical and substantive contributions, noting importantly that their analysis supports a “gendering of structure” viewpoint (which is why it could be seen as leaning toward a contextual explanation). Their contribution is also an example of innovation within established approaches that helps to improve the rigor of empirical research.

Taking up another well-established question, this time on gendered perceptions and entrepreneurial intentions, our second article by Rachel Shinnar, Olivier Giacomin, and Frank Janssen forges new directions by engaging in a comparative analysis that provides insight into the role played by culture and context. Such contributions mark a constructive response to the critiques raised by Ahl (2006) and others who have highlighted the great unrealized potential of cross-national research (de Bruin et al., 2007). More specifically, the authors examine entrepreneurial intentions within three national contexts (China, United States, and Belgium) that correspond to the three distinct cultural clusters in Hofstede’s well-known classification scheme: Confucian-Asian, Anglo, and European. Drawing on survey data, and utilizing sophisticated structural equation modeling techniques, the authors explore the relationship between entrepreneurial intentions and the perceived importance of three commonly investigated barriers (i.e., lack of support, fear of failure, and lack of competency), making both gender and cross-cultural comparisons. Overall, their analysis confirms the value of comparative analysis, revealing distinct ways in which gender and culture moderate the perception of barriers and their impact on entrepreneurial intentions. Although traditionally objectivist in approach, Shinnar, Giacomin, and Janssen’s attention to context sheds light on the heterogeneity evident among even *potential* female entrepreneurs in distinct regions around the globe.

The next two articles in this special issue explore some of the new and emerging questions related to the family embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurial activities that are starting to receive growing attention (de Bruin et al., 2007). Offering a fresh approach to work–family issues, as well as questions regarding business growth, Amy Davis and Kelly Shaver draw on life course theory to examine how gender, career stage, and family status jointly shape growth aspirations. Noting the keen interest, and high stakes, in understanding the growth of women-led business, the authors contend that life course theory has the capacity to move research beyond the static capture of “gendered performance gaps,” toward a more dynamic and nuanced understanding that illuminates whether, and how, growth intentions shift and develop through the course of an entrepreneur’s life and biography. Analyzing survey data from the U.S. Panel of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSEDs I and II), their study generates valuable insights, showing that while female entrepreneurs are less likely than male entrepreneurs to express high growth intentions on average, there is also important variation across the life course that is dependent on gender, career stage, and relationships with significant others. Notably, while some of Davis and Shaver’s findings confirm our commonly held understandings about the relationship between work, family, and growth, others run contrary, raising doubts about some of our long-held assumptions and thus, in turn, prompting new questions for future exploration.

Pushing further into less-explored terrain on the work–family front, Kimberly Eddleston and Gary Powell observe that much of the emerging research on this topic has focused on the negative side of the equation, asking how family conflicts with, or intrudes upon, entrepreneurial success. Reframing work–family questions in a novel, more positive, fashion, the authors examine how family relationships and dynamics might also *nurture* female and male entrepreneurs in their endeavors. Their analysis draws on U.S. survey data, focusing on entrepreneurs’ satisfaction with work–family balance. Findings

suggest that family does play a significant role in nurturing satisfaction, but in gendered and competing ways. In particular, women's work–family satisfaction is significantly buoyed by a higher level of instrumental family-to-business enrichment, which Eddleston and Powell suggest may be due to processes of gendered socialization that lead women to develop a more holistic, synergistic approach to family and work. In contrast, male entrepreneurs appear to benefit more from receiving higher levels of instrumental support at home. Although rooted firmly in a traditional survey-based approach, this article tackles new questions that enhance our understanding of the work–family dynamics shaping women's entrepreneurship. It also demonstrates an admirable sensitivity to context, linking its findings to gendering process that operate in the broader culture it studies.

Our last two articles in this special issue push further afield, focusing on important new questions and sites that have rarely been explored. In our fifth article, Linda Scott, Catherine Dolan, Mary Johnstone-Louis, Kimberly Sugden, and Maryalice Wu examine the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship for women, drawing on a case study of Avon's entry into South Africa. Using a multimethod, constructivist approach, and the less utilized perspective of pragmatist feminist theory, the authors provide a fascinating empirical response to a very significant question that has been raised within recent writing in feminist economics, women's entrepreneurship and the general entrepreneurship literature (Ahl, 2006; Calás et al., 2009). This concerns whether, and how, entrepreneurship and market-based activity might offer the means for empowering women in the broadest sense of the word. In this study, rich qualitative and quantitative data are used to shed light on both the *means* and *ends* of women's entrepreneurship, illustrating how the Avon system provides support for South African women through training, networking, mentoring, and capitalization, which in turn fosters empowerment through improved earnings and poverty alleviation, altered family dynamics, and improved self-perceptions. By tackling less studied questions and sites of entrepreneurship, Scott and her colleagues add significantly to our existing understanding of female entrepreneurs, offering valuable empirical insights as well as intriguing theoretical and methodological approaches that will undoubtedly enrich future work in the field.

We conclude this special issue with a research note by Punita Datta and Robert Gailey that explores another less-studied context, India—a country, like China, that, by virtue of its huge population, rising economic clout, and rich culture and history, should certainly garner growing attention from women's entrepreneurship scholars in the future. Combining this site with newly emerging questions about the potential for entrepreneurship to contribute to women's empowerment and social inclusion, Datta and Gailey offer a focused case study of Lijjat, a successful, for-profit, social entrepreneurial venture aimed at creating social and economic change for women in this region. Their analysis is framed by writings on women's empowerment that highlight contextual issues and raises questions about women's access to resources and agency. Placing women into the Indian context, and noting the significant, system-wide discrimination that they face therein, the study illustrates how elements of empowerment are embedded into the social venture, through the Gandhian principles of cooperation, collective ownership, and profit-sharing. Connecting context, organizational structure, and individual outcomes, they conclude that women are significantly empowered through their entrepreneurial activity, achieving greater economic security, developing entrepreneurial expertise, and making significant contributions to their families' well-being. Although small scale in nature, this qualitative case study leaves a lasting impression, reminding us of the diverse ways that gender and entrepreneurial behavior are culturally constructed and experienced around the globe.

An even greater sense of this diversity is achieved by considering the studies constituting this special issue alongside those appearing within another recent volume of

collected work produced by scholars affiliated with the Diana International Project. These chapters, published within Hughes and Jennings's (2012) *Global Women's Entrepreneurship Research: Diverse Settings, Questions, and Approaches*, are identified in parentheses within the various cells of Figure 2. Those examining different twists on *traditional questions through objectivist approaches* include Coleman and Robb's econometric analysis of gender-based firm performance differentials; Riebe's survey of highly accomplished female entrepreneurs' attitudes toward success; García's factor-analytic findings regarding gender and entrepreneurial self-efficacy; Klyver, Nielsen, and Evald's multi-country investigation into the impact of gender equality on self-employment; and Zohir and Greene's documentation of institutional challenges to women-owned small- and medium-sized enterprises in Bangladesh. Those continuing in the *objectivist tradition but exploring less traditional questions* include Hechavarria, Ingram, Justo, and Terjesen's analysis of whether women are more likely to pursue social and environmental entrepreneurship as well as Sharifian, Jennings, and Jennings's exploration of whether women should go into business with their family partner.

Those applying a *constructionist approach to traditional questions* include Fairclough's essay on how social welfare and support systems are likely to shape patterns of women's entrepreneurship, primarily with respect to start-up and success, as well as Humbert and Esser's life history approach to understanding how the intersections of gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and national context shape the identities and daily business practices of female entrepreneurs. Finally, those adopting a *constructionist approach to less traditional questions* include the call by James for a greater appreciation of the potential advantages inherent in being a female entrepreneur; Fuentes-Fuentes, Cooper, and Bojica's multilevel comparison of female-led spin-offs in two countries; and McAdam and Marlow's case study revealing how gender is collectively constructed, performed, and reified by business and marital partners in a female-dominated industry. We invite interested readers to dip into any relevant studies appearing within our associated edited collection while perusing those contained within this outlet.

What New Directions Remain?

We also invite readers to draw their own conclusions as to whether women's entrepreneurship research has developed in sufficiently new directions since the prior special issues of *ET&P*, which appeared in September 2006 and May 2007. That said, we certainly feel encouraged by the growing breadth of scholarly activity evident not only within this and other collections with which we have been involved as editors (Brush et al., 2010; Hughes & Jennings, 2012), but also within those recently assembled by other scholars (e.g., Fielden & Davidson, 2010). We see advances in terms of the questions that are asked, the explanations that are offered, and the methodologies with which these questions and explanations are investigated. Even more importantly, we view these advances as demonstrating both an awareness of—and an appreciation for—the critiques of prior work on female entrepreneurs.

This is not to say, however, that the criticisms have been fully addressed and thus warrant no further attention. A more reflective stance toward the studies noted in Figure 2, for instance, reveals that although they are evenly distributed in terms of addressing traditional versus nontraditional questions, the majority (11 out of 18) still adopt an objectivist approach. Moreover, as indicated by the sparse cells within the third row of this figure, combinations of constructionist approaches and individualistic explanations are particularly rare, thereby representing a path yet to be explored. We note, however, that the

relative dearth of studies at this intersection—as well as those examining nontraditional questions from an individualistic and objectivist approach—may be more reflective of scholars' especial embracing of the call for a highly contextualized approach to women's entrepreneurship research. Notably, 13 of the 18 studies arrayed in Figure 2 featured a contextual rather than individualistic explanation. Thus, another remaining direction for future work in the field lies not in populating the sparser cells within this summary figure but in adding to those that are already less empty. A glance back at the illustrative yet hypothetical studies presented earlier in Figure 1, for example, indicates substantially little overlap with the actual research investigations reported in Figure 2. While we hope that both figures provide a source of inspiration for furthering the frontiers of women's entrepreneurship research, it is important to note that they represent (of course) just one of many possible “signposts” for the field's continued development.

Given the commitment we sense among women's entrepreneurship scholars to being inclusive of diverse voices, we are confident that future researchers will produce even richer and more robust understandings of female entrepreneurs and their endeavors. This is especially so given the growing maturation of the field, noted earlier, that offers a growing array of questions, tools, and frameworks with which to work. So too we hope that the Diana International Conferences on Women's Entrepreneurship Research (meeting most recently in January 2012 in Perth, Australia), will continue to play a vital role in nurturing new directions, facilitating as they do both global exchange while also mentoring the next generation of scholars. On this point, we certainly echo Brush (2012) on the value of the “transgenerational” development of scholars, an ongoing process that is vital to moving the field ahead. Additionally, in editing this special issue, we have become all the more aware of the need for enhanced transnational exchange, especially given the rise of newly emerging economic regions and the powerful role that globalization will continue to play as an economic, social, and cultural force. On this latter point, we conclude by noting that while this special issue attracted submissions from many countries, a great deal of research collaboration remains firmly rooted within national boundaries. Hopefully, the future will see growing and deepening networks of transnational collaboration and exchange, as we believe this is a “new direction” and “road less travelled” that can immeasurably enrich our collective work.

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