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Expanding Horizons: Feminist Perspectives and Approaches in Contemporary Gender and Entrepreneurship Research

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Despite its significant aims to reduce and ultimately eradicate sexist inequality and oppression (Bell *et al.*, 2020: 177), feminism remains a relatively underdeveloped driver within gender and entrepreneurship research. Much extant scholarship either neglects to adopt a feminist lens or, when it does, employs this perspective implicitly rather than explicitly as a theoretical or methodological framework (Henry *et al.,* 2016). Feminism itself is not monolithic; it encompasses diverse traditions such as Islamic feminism, Black feminism, post-colonial feminism, materialist feminism, and socialist feminism. Each feminist stance prioritises different dimensions of women's lived experiences, yet they share common epistemological concerns: namely, how gender shapes conceptions of knowledge, knowers, and the practices of inquiry and justification (Anderson, 2024). These epistemological challenges are critical for advancing gender and entrepreneurship research. They allow us to interrogate and critique normative assumptions about entrepreneurial activities and behaviours (Marlow, 2012), and move beyond the persistence of neoliberal assumptions, the privileging of masculinised entrepreneurial archetypes (Ogbor, 2000), and the marginalisation of diverse, contextually embedded experiences (Calás *et al.,* 2009). This special issue offers a pivotal step towards addressing these gaps, and features contributions that engage deeply with feminist philosophies and epistemologies, to enrich gender and entrepreneurship research.

In the *call for papers* for this special issue, we welcomed both conceptual and empirical studies that explicitly foreground feminist theories as drivers for research design and analysis, particularly those that challenge and reframe normative understandings of entrepreneurial activities. Recognising the importance of methodological innovation, we invited papers outlining feminist-driven methodologies and approaches that reflect the multiplicities of gender in contemporary societies. We were especially keen on studies applying intersectional feminist perspectives to examine the interplay of gender with other social dimensions, as well as research rooted in non-Western feminist philosophies that interrogate and advance knowledge from the Global South. Additionally, we encouraged contributions employing non-traditional research methods to achieve feminist aims and critical studies that question and offer alternatives to hegemonic feminist approaches in gender and entrepreneurship scholarship. Through this call, we aimed to highlight the diversity of feminist thought and its capacity to generate novel insights and perspectives in the field. As such, this special issue seeks to foreground the potential of feminist-informed entrepreneurship research to ask novel questions that critique the gendered contours of entrepreneurship globally. By embracing the plurality of feminist traditions and philosophies, the contributions in this issue aim to push the boundaries of how we understand entrepreneurship and to offer diverse perspectives and methodologies.

In line with our own feminist values and methodologies centred around collaborative knowledge-building, emphasising intersectionality, and disrupting traditional, hierarchical approaches to academic research, we designed and facilitated two in-person professional development workshops (PDWs) and one live online PDW for potential contributors to the special issue. Their purpose was to enhance the robustness of potential contributors' theoretical contributions in gender and entrepreneurship research, and to deepen understanding of the implications of gender when conceptualised as a social construction in entrepreneurship research. The PDWs provided participants with critical insights into feminist and gender theories, exploring diverse perspectives such as performativity, intersectionality, and gender as

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a form of capital or discourse. The PDWs also addressed key challenges in the field, including critiques of essentialism and the overreliance on traditional methodologies. Overall, participants were guided to situate their research within existing knowledge, articulate its significance, and align it with broader theoretical conversations, thereby strengthening their academic contributions and expanding publication potential. We are grateful for the 29 submissions received for this special issue. Although only six articles could be included, we sincerely hope that the remaining 23 submissions, enriched and refined through the PDWs and reviewer feedback, will continue to be developed and find publication opportunities beyond this volume.

We now briefly present the evolution of feminist research approaches in entrepreneurship research and then discuss and reflect upon how feminist theories and approaches offer transformative contributions to entrepreneurship research. Following this, we showcase the six articles featured in this special issue, and finally, we share our recommendations for how future gender and entrepreneurship research can continue to challenge conventional paradigms, traditional epistemologies, methodologies, and assumptions, and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of entrepreneurship.

Evolution of Feminist Approaches in Entrepreneurship Research

Feminist-informed entrepreneurship research challenges established conventional paradigms and offers comprehensive ways of analysing and understanding entrepreneurship. Feminist approaches to entrepreneurship research have evolved significantly since Schwartz's (1976) foundational work. Early contributions, predominantly rooted in white Western perspectives, drew on liberal feminism, which emphasised equal opportunities for men and women, focusing on removing systemic barriers to entrepreneurial participation. Feminist concerns were further developed through social feminist approaches, which highlighted the importance of relational and contextual influences, particularly how gendered social expectations shape entrepreneurial experiences. Poststructuralist feminism further advanced the field by deconstructing gender norms and narratives, exposing how entrenched discourses often perpetuate male-centric definitions of entrepreneurship. More recently, intersectional feminism has brought critical attention to the multiple, intersecting layers of oppression influencing entrepreneurial opportunities and outcomes. However, while all these frameworks have significantly enriched the field, they predominantly centre on experiences and contexts from the Global North, leaving a notable gap in feminist perspectives from the Global South. The absence of these perspectives limits the field's inclusivity and hinders the development of a truly global understanding of gendered entrepreneurship.

Liberal and Social Feminisms in Entrepreneurship Scholarship

Initially focused on addressing gender biases within the field, feminist scholarship has grown to embrace a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of entrepreneurship, positioning it within complex social structures and intersecting systems of power. This evolution began with feminist theories including liberal feminism (1970's-1990's) and social feminism (1990's-2000's), each contributing distinct perspectives to the study of gender and entrepreneurship. At this time, entrepreneurship research had neglected gender as a critical factor, reflecting broader societal biases. Male entrepreneurs were considered the norm, while women entrepreneurs were treated as exceptions or anomalies within a male-dominated field (Ahl, 2006). This androcentric framing not only marginalised women's entrepreneurial activities but also

perpetuated stereotypes that portrayed women as less ambitious, less innovative, and less capable of entrepreneurial success (Marlow and McAdam, 2013).

Liberal feminism, which advocates for equal opportunities for women in entrepreneurship is exemplified by Schwartz (1976), who was the first to explicitly focus on women's entrepreneurship. She argued that societal norms and institutional structures systematically marginalised women in business, and highlighted how discriminatory practices in access to credit, training, and professional networks perpetuated gender inequalities, framing women's entrepreneurial efforts as secondary to men's. Her analysis laid the groundwork for later feminist research by emphasising the need to redefine entrepreneurship in more inclusive and equitable terms. Studies rooted in liberal feminism often focused on removing structural barriers, such as access to funding, mentorship, and networks (Brush *et al.*, 2009), and the undervaluing of sectors where women were overrepresented, such as retail and caregiving industries (Brush *et al.*, 2009). These critiques marked the beginning of a shift from individualistic explanations of women's underrepresentation to a broader analysis of systemic inequalities, and extensively documented the *liability of newness* compounded by gender biases in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Carter *et al.*, 2015).

While liberal feminism successfully highlighted systemic disparities, its individualistic focus was critiqued for overlooking broader societal and cultural dynamics affecting women collectively. As Ahl (2006) argues, liberal feminist approaches often risk reinforcing stereotypes by framing women entrepreneurs as exceptions who succeed despite systemic challenges. This narrow focus limits the exploration of how deeply embedded gender norms influence entrepreneurial opportunities and behaviours. As a result, women's entrepreneurship researchers moved beyond treating women entrepreneurs as isolated exceptions and started to examine entrepreneurship as embedded in gendered social structures, giving rise to social feminist theory.

Social feminist entrepreneurship research enriched the discourse by emphasising the critical role of relational and contextual factors in shaping entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Jones, 2014). It recognised gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by cultural norms, institutions, and power dynamics. In doing so, it distinguished gender from sex (West and Zimmerman, 1989). Rather than focusing solely on women, and gender as a binary variable, social feminism considers how entrepreneurial opportunities and practices are shaped by deeply ingrained gender norms and systemic inequalities. Research adopting a social feminist lens explores how gendered social expectations influence entrepreneurial motivations and outcomes (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Jennings and Brush 2013; Ahl and Nelson, 2015). A gap persists however, in longitudinal studies that explore how these dynamics evolve over time and intersect with other social identities, such as race and class.

Similarly, societal perceptions of risk and innovation are often skewed to favour masculine-typified behaviours, marginalising entrepreneurial models that prioritise collaboration, sustainability, or community impact - values more frequently associated with women (Al-Dajani, 2022). This broader understanding of entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon has been central to developing more inclusive and critical approaches to the field. In this regard, poststructuralist feminism has interrogated these assumptions and broadened the definition of entrepreneurship to include diverse practices and motivations that extend beyond the narrow scope of economic gain.

Poststructuralist Feminism in Entrepreneurship Scholarship

Poststructuralist feminism has provided a critical lens for deconstructing dominant entrepreneurial narratives, questioning the traditional masculinisation of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). It argues that gender is deeply intertwined with power dynamics, shaping how individuals experience and are perceived within entrepreneurial contexts (Treanor, *et al.*, 2021). Within poststructuralist feminism, gender operates as both a structural and performative construct, influencing access to resources, networks, and opportunities (Marlow and Patton, 2005). Additionally, poststructural feminist scholars have examined how language, discourse, and power shape the construction of entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon. For example, Ahl (2006) argues that the entrepreneurship literature often reinforces masculine norms by valorising traits such as risk-taking and independence while marginalising collaborative and nurturing approaches often associated with women. Marlow and McAdam (2013) and Hubert and Brindley (2015) for example, also argue that the persistent stereotype of male entrepreneurs as risk-takers and innovators reinforces biases against women and non-binary individuals, often portraying them as less capable or ambitious. Poststructural feminist studies have also critiqued the portrayal of women entrepreneurs in media and policy as inherently transformative agents, burdening them with unrealistic expectations (Gill and Ganesh, 2007; Nadin *et al.*, 2020). While poststructuralist feminism has deepened the theoretical understanding of how entrepreneurship is gendered, it remains underutilised in empirical studies. The challenge lies in operationalising this perspective in research designs that produce actionable insights for policy and practice.

Intersectional Feminism in Entrepreneurship Scholarship

Intersectionality, a concept popularised by Crenshaw (1989), has gained increasing traction in gender and entrepreneurship research, providing a nuanced framework to examine how multiple, intersecting identities shape entrepreneurial experiences. By exploring the interplay of gender with other dimensions such as race, class, ethnicity, and migration status, intersectional analyses illuminate the complex and often compounding forms of oppression that affect entrepreneurs in diverse ways. This approach has enriched our understanding of entrepreneurship by highlighting the heterogeneity of women's experiences and challenging monolithic representations of women entrepreneurs.

One of the key contributions of intersectional research is its focus on how overlapping identities influence entrepreneurial identities and practices. For instance, Essers and Benschop (2007) examined the experiences of Moroccan and Turkish women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, revealing how their entrepreneurial identities were shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion. These women often navigated conflicting cultural expectations, using entrepreneurship as a space to negotiate and assert their identities. Such studies underscore the importance of considering multiple identity dimensions to avoid simplistic portrayals of women entrepreneurs as a homogeneous group.

Intersectional research has also highlighted how systemic inequalities are compounded for individuals occupying multiple marginalised identities. For example, Martinez Dy *et al.*, (2017) explored how race and class intersect with gender to constrain entrepreneurial opportunities. Their study found that women of colour often face intersecting structural barriers, including racialised stereotypes, limited access to funding, and exclusion from entrepreneurial networks. Similarly, studies on immigrant and refugee women entrepreneurs emphasise how intersecting challenges, such as legal restrictions, language barriers or

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disability, exacerbate the gendered disadvantages these groups face (Adeeko and Treanor, 2022; Marlow and Swail, 2021; Althalathini *et al.*, 2021; Ramadani *et al.*, 2023).

Additionally, intersectional perspectives have further contributed to understanding how entrepreneurial ecosystems perpetuate or mitigate intersecting inequalities (Pickernell *et al.*, 2022). Ozkazanc-Pan, and Muntean, (2022) argue that policies and support structures often fail to address the specific needs of entrepreneurs with intersecting identities. For instance, programs designed to support women entrepreneurs may inadvertently exclude migrant women by not accounting for their unique legal or social constraints (Aman *et al.*, 2022)

Intersectionality has significantly enriched gender and entrepreneurship research by challenging essentialist notions of women entrepreneurs and illuminating the complex interplay of multiple identities. It has advanced the field's understanding of how systemic inequalities shape entrepreneurial experiences, practices, and ecosystems. However, the adoption of intersectionality remains uneven, with most studies focusing on gender in isolation. As McCall (2005) notes, intersectional analyses often face methodological challenges, such as disentangling the effects of overlapping identities. Addressing these challenges requires innovative methodological approaches that capture the complexity of lived experiences. Furthermore, to fully realise its potential, intersectional feminist research must address the underrepresentation of marginalised women in the Global North and, the underrepresentation of Global South perspectives. By doing so, intersectional analyses can contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship.

Reframing Entrepreneurship: A Path to Inclusion and Equity through Contemporary Feminist Perspectives

The integration of feminist lenses into gender and entrepreneurship research has significantly enriched the field by challenging traditional assumptions and broadening the scope of inquiry. Contributions from liberal, social, poststructuralist, and intersectional feminist perspectives have revealed the structural and cultural dynamics that shape entrepreneurial experiences. Feminist scholarship has broadened the definition of entrepreneurship, moving beyond economic success to incorporate social and community impacts. For example, studies of home-based businesses demonstrate how women leverage business ventures in family and community spaces to address spatial and gender inequalities (Ekinsmyth, 2013). Similarly, feminist critiques have exposed male-centric biases in entrepreneurship theories, advancing the recognition of informal entrepreneurship and home-based businesses that traditional metrics often overlook (Henry *et al.*, 2016; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2019). However, despite such advancements, significant gaps persist in the diversity of feminist perspectives, the representation of marginalised voices, and the limited methodological approaches adopted in this body of research.

The literature continues to be dominated by liberal feminist perspectives, which focus on achieving equality by addressing structural barriers. While valuable, this approach often overlooks the deeper cultural and historical dynamics that influence entrepreneurship. For instance, the integration of post-colonial feminist frameworks can provide critical insights into how colonial histories and global inequalities have shaped entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly for women in the Global South (Syed and Ali, 2021). By exploring these dynamics, post-colonial feminism will help to deconstruct the Western-centric narratives that dominate the field and illuminate the specific challenges faced by entrepreneurs in historically marginalised contexts. Additionally, postmodern feminist theories reject stable and universal

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categories such as *woman* or *gender,* arguing instead for fluid, performative conceptions of identity (Butler, 1990). This perspective destabilises binary understandings and foregrounds the role of discourse and repeated acts in constituting gendered identities. Similarly, standpoint epistemology (Hartsock, 2016) challenges the presumed neutrality of traditional research paradigms, positing that marginalised groups possess unique epistemic privilege due to their lived experiences of oppression.

With regards to the underrepresentation of marginalised voices, the majority of existing research focuses on white, heterosexual, middle-class women, limiting the generalizability of findings and overlooking the unique experiences of groups such as LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, indigenous women, and women of colour. The entrepreneurial journeys of these groups are shaped by intersecting systems of oppression that remain largely underexplored. Addressing this gap requires more inclusive sampling strategies and participatory research methods that capture the diversity of entrepreneurial experiences. Indeed, feminist research generally emphasises the importance of reflexivity, collaboration, and empowerment in research methodologies. By integrating lived experiences and participatory approaches, feminist scholars challenge hierarchical researcher-researched relationships and redefine the boundaries of credible knowledge (Smith, 1987). Emerging methodologies such as arts-based approaches (New, 2019), autoethnography (Martinez Dy, 2021), and intersectional analyses (Martinez Dy and Jayawarna, 2020) illustrate the potential of feminist lenses to address the complexities of gendered entrepreneurial experiences. Furthermore, feminist scholarship advocates for policies and institutional reforms that dismantle structural barriers, creating a more inclusive entrepreneurial landscape (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Hillenkamp and dos Santos, 2019; Treanor and Marlow, 2024).

Significantly, methodological limitations further constrain the field (Henry *et al.,* 2016). Many studies rely on cross-sectional designs and self-reported data, which can introduce biases and fail to capture the evolving nature of gendered entrepreneurial experiences. To address these issues, longitudinal and mixed-method approaches can provide deeper insights into how entrepreneurial journeys unfold over time and across different contexts. Such methodologies can also support the exploration of intersectional dynamics, allowing researchers to better understand how overlapping identities influence entrepreneurial outcomes.

The translation of feminist insights into actionable policies and practices also remains limited. While feminist perspectives have advanced the conceptual understanding of gender and entrepreneurship, their application to real-world contexts has been uneven. Feminist-informed initiatives, such as gender-sensitive support systems, women-focused incubators, and mentorship programs, have facilitated advances in improving the gender gap in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Treanor and Burkinshaw, 2023; Ekinsmyth and Treanor, 2024) but highlight further progress is required in destabilising the normative masculine entrepreneurial construction within business support provision and spaces (Treanor and Marlow, 2024). Similarly, around the world, there is still a long way to go before welfare policies (Jones and Nadin, 2024) and family policies (Ekinsmyth, 2022) support equitable access to secure self-employment and entrepreneurship. Stronger collaborations between academics, policymakers, and practitioners are necessary to ensure that feminist research leads to meaningful and sustainable change.

Feminist scholarship has also influenced the development of, or at least attempts to achieve, inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems, emphasising the need for policies and practices that challenge the gendered contours of entrepreneurship (Ozkazanc-Pan, and Muntean, 2022). For

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instance, feminist critiques have brought attention to the value of collective entrepreneurial efforts, which are often overlooked in individualistic frameworks (de Bruin and Swail, Yousafzai and Aljanova in this special issue). By emphasising solidarity and collaboration, feminist perspectives can inform the design of entrepreneurship ecosystems that empower entire communities.

This special issue seeks to build on these achievements and bridge these gaps by showcasing contemporary feminist-informed research that asks new questions and critiques the gendered dimensions of entrepreneurship worldwide. By integrating diverse feminist frameworks, the contributions in this special issue challenge dominant narratives and offer new insights into the entrepreneurial experiences of women and other marginalised groups. Through these efforts, the special issue aims to advance a more inclusive and equitable understanding of entrepreneurship, fostering a global dialogue that moves the field forward.

Showcasing Feminist Approaches in the Gender and Entrepreneurship Scholarship in this Special Issue

Reflecting the diversity of feminist theories and approaches, the six articles in this special issue employ a broad spectrum of feminist perspectives, each offering distinct contributions to understanding the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship across varied international contexts and sectors. Collectively, these works deepen the field by providing multidimensional insights into the systemic dynamics shaping entrepreneurial opportunities and practices. By interrogating existing theories, practices, and policies, they illuminate overlooked complexities and propose alternative frameworks. Drawing on feminist perspectives such as standpoint theory, poststructuralism, and post-colonialism, these studies critically examine entrenched norms within entrepreneurship research. Each article contributes to ongoing efforts to foster inclusivity and drive transformative change in this evolving discipline.

Anne de Bruin and Janine Swail offer a conceptual article that holds special value and innovation in its theoretical framing, notably drawing upon both constructionism and poststructuralist feminist approaches to place attention on both the *doing* and *undoing* of gender. In adopting this feminist perspective their paper highlights how existing entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) are shaped by unacknowledged gender dynamics. The value of feminist research generally, is the identification and interrogation of often unacknowledged assumptions and practices. This recognition is the fundamental starting point to enable change, and de Bruin and Swail identify potential avenues to enhance the inclusivity of entrepreneurial ecosystems. They argue that EEs need to embrace the possibility of new 'path creation' (an agentic concept) rather than accepting 'path dependence' (i.e. believing the current state of being is inevitable as it results, non-agentically, from historical trajectories with their in-built biases). In doing so, they challenge feminist researchers to move beyond identification and interrogation of the unacknowledged and to simultaneously seek proposed pathways to enable (gender-) system change – to undo current gender regimes and set processes and systems on new, gender-equitable paths (path creation). This powerful model of undoing and creation offers a framework through which feminist research can proceed for transformative potential.

The authors demonstrate the power of this approach through an empirical focus on changing the gendered EE discourse (a poststructuralist approach), using the example of feminist entrepreneur funding venture *Coralus*. This 'window study' offers practical insights on the transformative potential of undoing and re-writing the rules of engagement, illustrating the

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construction of new social processes within an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Coralus is a multi-national, multi-actor feminist enterprise-funding organisation for women and non-binary entrepreneurs, purposely named as a metaphor for the regenerative and gender variable/non-binary (hermaphrodite, single sex individuals) nature of coral colonies. The authors subsequently show how mindsets can be changed, and thinking shifted, to create more inclusive EEs, and argue that these changes require a constructionist-poststructuralist approach from both scholars and EE agents.

The future research directions suggested by this article are fourfold. First, the authors suggest that their underlying premise, that new path creation is a prerequisite for the evolution of EEs towards inclusivity, should be explored further. Second, they argue that future research should broaden empirical foci, drawing on new examples and exploring the relationship between traditional EEs and alternative EEs. For example, they suggest, alongside others, that we should explore whether alternative EEs are needed, to support disadvantaged groups or different forms of entrepreneurship. They also suggest further study of both the discursive construction and reconstruction of EEs. Finally, they argue for further research that broadens the consideration of inclusivity beyond gender to other disadvantaged groups and intersectional identities. Overall, the authors offer a feminist conceptual contribution that advances the understanding of evolution of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) by examining potential pathways to make gendered EEs more inclusive.

The extended literature review by **Persephone de Magdalene and Kai Green** contributes to the evolving feminist and gender-aware literature on social entrepreneurship (SE), emphasising its developing role in challenging exclusionary norms in traditional entrepreneurship research. It portrays this shift as a journey through 'turbulent waters' symbolising the complexities of addressing marginalisation while fostering egalitarianism, freedom, and self-expression. These 'turbulent waters', they argue, reflect the tensions arising from the ongoing struggles of marginalised groups, including Indigenous, non-white populations, and Global South scholars, as they seek recognition within neo-colonial and Global North-dominated institutions. In their paper, the authors utilise a five-stage literature review process, which aims to develop a 'theoretically-informed gender-aware framework for future SE research'.

The article acknowledges the progress that has been made by feminist scholars in moving SE away from Anglo-American norms, but find the mainstream literature remains far from fully embracing of the diversity of cultures, languages, and perspectives required for truly inclusive research. They argue that, meta-theoretically, SE offers a crucial opportunity to break away from the trajectory of traditional entrepreneurship research; concluding that feminist approaches encourage the development of more nuanced theories, which address the systemic challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, other marginalised groups, and their intersections.

Feminist theory shapes their research questions and methodology. They critically reflect on their positionality as Global North scholars striving to normalise the inclusion of historically underrepresented perspectives. They are also explicit in their political aim to foster societal transformation through allyship, collective visioning, and values-driven action. They highlight the value of feminist epistemological perspectives within SE research and critique the dominance in the mainstream literature of male-centred and 'heroic' visions of entrepreneurship, calling instead for theory-building grounded in the lived experiences of women, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQI+ individuals.

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The literature review finds that feminist and gender-informed research on social entrepreneurship is rich in relational and embedded accounts of the economy, providing an important corrective to discourse that discounts Indigenous and other marginalised forms of SE. Indeed, they find critical perspectives that question the androcentric positioning of the social entrepreneur as a heroic figure (Teasdale *et al.*, 2023), gendered assumptions about non-economic motivations (Byrne *et al.*, 2019), de-contextualised accounts of SE (de Bruin *et al.*, 2023) and the domination of white, western theorising that renders mute minority voices and experiences (Jurado and Mika, 2023) (their citations).

To address these challenges in future research, the authors advocate for more transdisciplinary research that integrates diverse disciplinary perspectives and worldviews. While the methodological approach underpinning this paper is not innovative, their robust approach contributes a 'state-of-play' account of the epistemological approaches, themes, and knowledge gaps in social entrepreneurship studies, highlighting the innovations within this literature and suggesting future pathways for strengthening feminist work in social entrepreneurship involving researching subordinated groups engaging in SE. The article ultimately underscores the importance of challenging dominant norms in entrepreneurship research to create a more inclusive and equitable field, specifically calling for scholars to engage in transdisciplinary research as feminist practice to support transformational societal change.

Beverly Best, Paul Lasalle and Katerina Nicolopoulou explore how women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean leverage digital technologies for business transformation, framed through a post-colonial feminist perspective. This approach showcases the influence of context and embeddedness upon women's entrepreneurial activity. Their study highlights the opportunities and challenges that digitalisation brings to women-owned businesses in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS), highlighting the patriarchal paradox in this context, where many households are headed by women. Its post-colonial feminist perspective emphasises unique historical, cultural, and economic dynamics and identifies how colonial legacies and societal structures shape women's entrepreneurial activities in this context. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with women digital entrepreneurs from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados, covering various sectors. Drawing upon this data, the article develops a feminist informed theoretical 'SHERO' framework - Sustainability, Hope, Empowerment, Resilience, and Optimism. This framework reimagines entrepreneurship as a multidimensional process that prioritises community impact and inclusivity over profit-driven objectives. This challenges traditional entrepreneurial frameworks, which emphasise individualism and financial growth. The authors also highlight the importance of community and resilience in overcoming socio-cultural constraints. For instance, these women leverage digital tools to transcend the limitations of *islandness*, such as restricted market access, geographical barriers and infrastructural gaps. Their strategies include building online communities, engaging with global audiences, and utilising digital platforms to amplify their visibility and agency, to help them navigate systemic structural barriers.

In using post-colonial feminism, the authors seek to challenge generalisations of Caribbean women and emphasise the intersecting experiences of women in post-colonial settings, along with their specific contexts and positions. Participants emphasised the importance of social responsibility and creating sustainable ventures in their use of digital technologies, rather than solely focusing on profit. That said, digitalisation does provide new avenues for growth, helping balance profit-making with a desire to address societal challenges. Opportunities for building resilience emerge, with digital technologies serving as tools for adaptation and

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continuity, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the article argues that women entrepreneurs in this context navigate dual spaces as leaders and innovators in male-dominated fields, using digital tools to assert their agency. However, they still face challenges, such as persistent gender biases and cultural stereotypes.

This article offers a critical, intersectional analysis of gender, race, class and historical, politico-socio-economic approach, to understand the social positioning and experiences of women entrepreneurs. The use of post-colonial, feminist theory disrupts Western-centric paradigms, focusing on a historically marginalised context, and giving voice to women who are often overlooked and unheard, a basic tenet of feminist research. However, their analysis moves beyond a single-axis focus on gender to incorporate multiple intersecting factors such as education, cultural norms and digital access to explore entrepreneurial opportunities, experiences and outcomes. The authors acknowledge their own positionality, an important aspect of feminist-informed research, and importantly, they frame female entrepreneurs as agents of change who navigate and reshape digital spaces to overcome patriarchal barriers, aligning with broader feminist principles of empowerment and resistance. This study, as so many feminist analyses do, challenges traditional male-centric entrepreneurial narratives to highlight the positive and unique contributions of women, which remain frequently overlooked. The authors recommend that future studies should further explore the nuanced experiences of women entrepreneurs in diverse non-Western contexts to advance feminist theoretical insights into digital entrepreneurship.

In line with ***Anne de Bruin and Janine Swail*** in this special issue, this article demonstrates that newer or specific forms of entrepreneurship, in this case - digital entrepreneurship, represent a frontier of opportunity and challenge for gender and entrepreneurship scholars, as feminist theory and analyses can play a transformative role in such domains (Dy *et al*., 2017). Digital technologies have reshaped the entrepreneurial landscape, creating new opportunities for connection, innovation, and market access. For women and other marginalised groups, digital platforms have the potential to overcome systemic barriers and marginalisation, including geographic isolation, limited resources, and exclusion from traditional networks. However, these technologies are not neutral; they operate within structures that often replicate or amplify existing inequalities (Martinez Dy *et al*, 2018). While digital platforms create pathways for inclusion, they also expose women to new forms of marginalisation, such as online harassment, algorithmic biases, and the difficulties of accessing digital tools in the Global South (Henry, *et al*., 2022). Digital entrepreneurship's potential to introduce new pathways to exclusion highlights the need for future critical focus on the design and use of digital technologies (Shivers-McNair *et al.,* 2019).

Caroline Essers, Maura McAdam and Carolin Ossenkop, explore the identity work undertaken by ten Dutch women entrepreneurs working in masculinised industries, while seeking to establish their entrepreneurial legitimacy. Establishing entrepreneurial legitimacy within such gendered contexts represents a process requiring women to fit in, while simultaneously standing out (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009).

The authors employ a postfeminist lens in their analysis. Postfeminism, the gendered relation of neoliberalism, is a constellation of gendered narratives and beliefs that informs the thinking, subjectivities, behaviours and expectations of women, such that women are expected to be agentic, enterprising and capable of attaining success if they expend sufficient effort (Treanor and Marlow, 2021). This requires self-regulation of their subjectivities, effort and emotions to

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maximise their fit with the ideal neoliberal citizen (Gill *et al*., 2017; Treanor *et al*., 2021). As Lewis (2014) highlights, postfeminism is most useful when used as an analytical lens to highlight the influence of such gendered discourses and beliefs upon individual thinking, behaviours and subjectivities. In deploying a postfeminist lens within their study, the authors investigate how their respondents discursively and subjectively make sense of their gendered contexts and, in so doing, illustrate how local gender regimes and individual actions may constrain and/or promote their entrepreneurial endeavours of these women. Their analysis identifies three forms of identity work that underpin the quest to establish legitimacy: knowledge, situatedness and positionality.

The women sought legitimacy through, for example, undertaking extensive preparation because competence for women is never assumed (Treanor *et al*., 2021); thus, knowledge was used as proof of fit, as the women entrepreneurs were regularly questioned on their specific knowledge and expertise by (often male) stakeholders. In what Gill *et al*. (2017) might regard as an acceptance of '*just the way it is'*, these women undertook additional labour to be prepared and attain legitimacy despite, and potentially unaware of the contradiction with, the postfeminist fallacy of meritocracy and equality. In terms of 'situatedness' the authors consider how the women must balance a more masculine approach of doing business with societal expectations related to being a woman. The authors identify several aspects within their theme of 'positionality' in categorising the women's identity work. They conclude that, within the context of Dutch, male-dominated industries, postfeminism interpellated women entrepreneurs to constitute a masculine, individualised, entrepreneurial subjectivity, while simultaneously enacting highly feminised performances through physical appearance and images of motherhood.

The deployment of a postfeminist lens in their analyses reveals how the women portrayed entrepreneurship positively with self-improvement, reinvention and happiness presented as being available to any woman expending sufficient effort, while simultaneously minimising tensions or difficulties to maintain the positive and upbeat disposition expected of the ideal postfeminist woman. Importantly, the postfeminist perspective also provides insights into how gendered, neoliberal and entrepreneurial narratives impact upon the psychic lives of women, regulating behaviours and what is acceptable or not. Again, when we consider the findings of this study through a postfeminist lens, we see how postfeminism reproduces and maintains traditional forms of femininity and gender norms, despite its associated discourse of meritocracy and unfettered potential. So too then, the women in this study distance themselves from other women and seek to bolster their entrepreneurial capital and legitimacy by associating with 'real' male entrepreneurs. In doing so, they contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of the masculinised gendering of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial discourses.

Nicola Patterson and Sharon Mavin adopt a social constructionist and feminist standpoint approach to support their aim of providing space for women to voice and contextualise their lived experiences. Their study comprises five cases of women entrepreneurs in IT, law, construction, beauty, and childcare. Using a two-stage semi-structured interview process, and through discourse analysis, they provide new insights into the entrenched patriarchal socio-cultural context for women entrepreneurial leaders in the UK.

Patriarchy has been less studied in recent years because it was regarded as monolithic and unchanging, however, from a social constructionist perspective the doing, undoing and re-doing of gender and patriarchy can be highlighted. As the operationalisation of gender and gender regimes change according to time and context, so too does patriarchy and its

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manifestations. The focus on patriarchy, therefore, renders this a novel and timely study, which not only explores patriarchy in contemporary society, but does so in the context of the Global North, where frequently gender equality is assumed, given the existence of various legislative provisions.

In common with *Essers, Mcadam and Ossenkop* in this special issue, this article highlights how women entrepreneurial leaders manage the competing discourses of patriarchy and individualism, provoking a discursive paradox that actively shapes their individual experiences, while serving to subjugate women more broadly. The authors explain this management as a process, which they term discursive blending, which involves the blurring and merging of contradictory discursive expectations. The women use the individualism discourse to obscure patriarchy's domination *and* as a resource to resist patriarchal gender power relations. To blend the discourses, the women use specific tactics, for example, engaging in patriarchal bargains, such as 'dressing *not* to impress'; they also highlight how they can sidestep and manoeuvre these bargains and utilise 'patriarchal advantages' to turn gender oppression into benefits by 'working it positively'. The article, in common with others in this special issue, ultimately reinforces the importance of, and need for, feminism and feminist research to disrupt the ever-increasing power of patriarchy and its influence upon women, and by default others, in the context of entrepreneurial activity and indeed more widely. It ultimately challenges scholars to (re)consider patriarchy in entrepreneurship research, as a vehicle to expose and contest gender-neutral assumptions. Their use of a feminist standpoint approach is crucial to legitimising women's lived experiences as a basis for knowledge production, helping to expose hidden power structures whilst providing a feminist critique of neoliberal individualism.

The final article in this special issue, by *Shumaila Yousafzai and Nurlykhan Aljanova*, examines the role of feminist solidarity in driving women's empowerment within Kyrgyzstan's distinctive socio-cultural and economic landscape. Employing a post-colonial feminist lens and based on thirty-two in-depth interviews with Kyrgyz women entrepreneurs, the authors explore how traditional practices, such as *Ashar* (collective work) and *Gap* (community gatherings), are adapted to intersect with feminist principles. These practices foster both individual empowerment and community transformation, providing a unique lens through which to view women's entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan. The authors introduce a spiral model of women's empowerment, illustrating a cyclical process where personal agency, mentorship, and collective solidarity mutually reinforce socio-economic change.

The article highlights feminist solidarity as a transformative force, extending individual empowerment into collective socio-economic progress. Here, solidarity manifests in the form of community support, cultural preservation, and mentorship, which collectively drive sustainable development. Within Kyrgyzstan's community-based tourism (CBT) sector, this solidarity enables women to utilise local resources for entrepreneurship while preserving cultural identity. The authors consider how women-led cooperatives emphasise skills development, shared profits, and mentorship, fostering inclusive economic participation and creating a ripple effect of empowerment across communities. Through blending feminist principles with local traditions, these initiatives address socio-economic inequalities while safeguarding cultural heritage.

Despite the positive impact, the authors acknowledge the complexities inherent in feminist solidarity, such as tensions within community dynamics, unequal access to resources, and the

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challenge of balancing cultural authenticity with innovation. They advocate for culturally sensitive policies and active local stakeholder involvement, cautioning against oversimplified interventions that fail to respect specific socio-cultural contexts. In critiquing the dominance of Western-centric feminist frameworks, *Yousfzai and Aljanova* provide a localised perspective on empowerment, highlighting how Kyrgyz women entrepreneurs navigate systemic inequalities through grassroots approaches.

This article makes a significant contribution to the special issue by advancing a context-specific understanding of feminist solidarity and its role in women's empowerment. It demonstrates how entrepreneurship, when informed by feminist principles, can serve as a powerful tool not only for economic growth but also for addressing systemic inequalities and preserving cultural traditions. The authors combine feminist theory with grassroots practices, enriching the discourse on collective action, gender equality, and sustainable development. In framing feminist solidarity within local cultural traditions, the study bridges global feminist discourse and localised practices, demonstrating how cultural heritage can be mobilised for empowerment. Their work provides valuable insights for scholars and policymakers, highlighting the importance of context in shaping entrepreneurship and empowerment practices. The article underscores the transformative potential of feminist solidarity and shows how blending traditional practices with modern entrepreneurial approaches, helps Kyrgyz women entrepreneurs challenge gender norms, enhance cultural heritage, and achieve sustainable development.

We see how a feminist perspective informs the methodological approach and data analysis in this study. Methodologically, they employ strategies (such as snowballing) to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices within the Kyrgyzstan Community-Based Tourism (CBT), offering a contextually grounded richness to their findings. The authors also incorporate feminist ethical concerns through active collaboration with women entrepreneurs, empowering them to take ownership of their narratives. Additionally, conducting interviews in multiple languages (Russian, Kyrgyz, Uzbek), facilitated open and culturally sensitive communication, while reflecting their feminist commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. Like others in this special issue, the authors adopt a reflexive approach, acknowledging their own positionalities and biases, ensuring that interpretations remain authentic and grounded in participants' realities. This is also evident in the incorporation of indigenous practices such as 'Ashar,' 'Gap,' and 'Sogum,' highlighting their significance in fostering feminist solidarity and empowerment in the CBT sector. Their analysis is multi-level, linking the macro, meso and the micro; progressing from personal narratives to community solidarity, and finally to broader socio-economic impacts. This approach aligns with feminist research principles in emphasising a holistic and relational understanding of empowerment and its complexities.

This article, along with that of *Best, Lassalle and Nicolopoulou* in this special issue, enriches feminist scholarship by offering a nuanced, post-colonial perspective on gender and entrepreneurship that challenges and critiques Western-centric paradigms and highlights the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in the global south.

Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the advances made in gender and entrepreneurship scholarship thus far, feminist theories remain underutilised in entrepreneurship research. This special issue addresses this

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gap by highlighting the potential of feminist-informed research to challenge and critique the gendered contours of entrepreneurship globally. By integrating diverse feminist perspectives, the articles in this special issue offer new insights into the systemic forces shaping entrepreneurship, while advancing the field toward greater inclusivity and equity. To this extent, we build on the recommendations made in the six featured articles and offer the following future research avenues.

Integrating Feminist Theories

While the articles in this special issue incorporate perspectives such as post-colonial feminism, feminist standpoint theory, and postfeminism, other feminist frameworks remain underexplored in gender and entrepreneurship research. For example, Islamic feminism offers a valuable lens for examining the intersection of gender, religion, and entrepreneurship in Muslim-majority societies. Rooted in principles of justice, equity, and empowerment within an Islamic framework (Althalathini *et al*., 2020, 2021), this perspective could be used to investigate how Islamic values shape entrepreneurial activities and redefine women's agency in patriarchal contexts. Similarly, ecofeminism critiques the dual exploitation of women and nature, creating opportunities to explore how women entrepreneurs address ecological challenges and promote sustainable practices (Stephenson and Furman, 2024). Transfeminist approaches (Friedman and Rodriguez Gustá, 2023) could illuminate the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse entrepreneurs, challenging the binary assumptions often embedded in gender and entrepreneurship research. Finally, queer feminism provides an avenue to investigate the entrepreneurial experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and the ways they navigate gendered and heteronormative business environments (Friedrich and Steyaert, 2024). Incorporating these diverse feminist perspectives and others will expand the scope of research, fostering a more inclusive, intersectional and comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship and its nuanced implications for different individuals in different contexts.

Expanding Contextual Diversity

This special issue's inclusion of research on underexplored non-Western contexts such as Kyrgyzstan and the Caribbean, underscores the importance of exploring underrepresented regions and socio-cultural dynamics in entrepreneurship. These foci challenge dominant narratives and amplify voices that are seldom heard within the gender and entrepreneurship literature. These studies, along with the article by ***de Bruin and Swail***, reframe entrepreneurship as, not just a means of economic gain and profit, but as a form of collective social transformation, challenging patriarchal structures and fostering community resilience within these contexts. Ultimately the articles in this special issue provide insights into how broad feminist principles, and specific theories such as postcolonial feminism, postfeminism, constructionism, poststructuralism or feminist standpoint theory as examples, can be applied within diverse cultural contexts to analyse and illuminate the influence of gender upon entrepreneurship and create the possibility of change to advance the social positioning and improve the experiences of women. Diverse contexts challenge the dominance of white Western-centric narratives and highlight the rich diversity of entrepreneurial practices globally. Future studies can continue prioritising non-White, non-Western perspectives to uncover the unique challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs in these regions, thereby broadening the field's understanding of how entrepreneurship operates across varied cultural and institutional settings.

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Challenging Masculinised Narratives

Continuing to challenge the traditionally masculinised framing of entrepreneurship, which has historically excluded or marginalised non-dominant groups, remains an important research direction. This involves questioning the gendered language, imagery, and values that underpin entrepreneurship discourse and reimagining entrepreneurship as an inclusive and multifaceted phenomenon (Ahl and Nelson, 2015). By dismantling the hegemonic *heroic entrepreneur* archetype, feminist scholarship creates space for alternative narratives that celebrate diverse entrepreneurial practices. Interestingly, in this volume Essers, McAdam and Ossenkop, and Patterson and Mavin, adopt different feminist theoretical perspectives and tools (postfeminism and standpoint feminist research respectively) to analyse gendered entrepreneurship discourses and highlight how women are disadvantaged within prevailing gender regimes. For early career researchers. embarking upon gender and entrepreneurship research, this should offer comfort that often there is not a single best way to approach a research topic. Feminism and feminist research theories are a broad church wherein their common core objective is to illuminate inequality in the hope of advancing not just knowledge but the material situation of women.

Centring Diversity: Valuing Underrepresented Entrepreneurial Experiences

Future research should prioritise recognising and valuing the diverse experiences of entrepreneurs, particularly those from underrepresented and marginalised communities. Traditional studies have often focused on male-dominated industries or highly visible entrepreneurial success stories, neglecting the unique challenges and contributions of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and entrepreneurs from racialised or marginalised backgrounds (Brush *et al*., 2009). An intersectional feminist approach (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1989) is essential to understanding how overlapping systems of oppression—such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation—shape these entrepreneurial experiences. By adopting inclusive methodologies and expanding the scope of inquiry, future research can amplify the voices of those often excluded from mainstream narratives, fostering a more equitable and comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship that can inform policy and practice.

Focusing on Collectivism

Gender and entrepreneurship research often emphasises individualistic frameworks, which can obscure the collective dimensions of entrepreneurial activities. Future research can explore the ways in which collectivist approaches drive entrepreneurial practices and outcomes. By focusing on collective action and shared responsibility, researchers can reveal how entrepreneurship contributes to community resilience and sustainable development (Al-Dajani, 2022).

Addressing Structural Inequities

A critical area for future feminist research lies in addressing the structural barriers that women entrepreneurs face. These barriers, perpetuated by patriarchal and neoliberal systems, significantly limit entrepreneurial opportunities and reinforce gender inequities. Scholars can critically engage with these systemic challenges to uncover how they intersect with race, class, and other social identities. Research that exposes and interrogates these structural inequities

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will not only contribute to feminist theoretical advancements but also inform policies and interventions aimed at creating more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

By integrating underexplored feminist theories, prioritising diverse contexts, examining collective approaches, and addressing structural inequities, future research can advance the field of gender and entrepreneurship in more inclusive and transformative directions.

Conclusion

This volume lays a robust foundation for reimagining gender and entrepreneurship research through feminist perspectives. By integrating diverse theoretical and empirical insights, it challenges dominant paradigms and opens new avenues for inquiry. The six featured articles not only enrich our understanding of gendered entrepreneurial experiences but also offer actionable pathways for promoting inclusivity and empowerment. As researchers, policymakers, and practitioners engage with these insights, we encourage them to adopt contemporary feminist-informed approaches that prioritise systemic change and amplify the voices of marginalised entrepreneurs worldwide. We hope this issue serves as a catalyst for advancing the field towards greater inclusivity, diversity, and equity.

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