

A legacy of attention to embeddedness in gendered institutions

Embeddedness
in gendered
institutions

Reflections on a key contribution of women's entrepreneurship research

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine how scholarship on women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship has contributed to understandings of the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity. The authors review studies from the past four decades (1975-2018) to assess the extent to which research has examined the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in two key institutions – the family and the labour market – that remain pervasively and persistently gendered.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors blend a systematic quantitative analysis of scholarly publications with qualitative analysis, identifying key themes and contributions. The corpus of material comprises over 1,300 scholarly publications, including both empirical and theoretical contributions.

Findings – This analysis shows that attention to the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in gendered social institutions is a clear legacy of women's entrepreneurship research. The systematic quantitative review found that over one-third (36.6 per cent) of scholarly publications examines questions of family and/or labour market embeddedness in some way. The qualitative analysis identifies a rich array of themes over the past four decades and a growing global reach of scholarship in recent years.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to knowledge about the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity. It offers a comprehensive review of how entrepreneurship is shaped by the embedding of such activity in two predominant (and gendered) social institutions – families and labour markets. It will be of use to scholars seeking an overview of this topic and considering new research questions to pursue.

Keywords Family, Women's entrepreneurship, Embeddedness, Feminist scholarship, Labour markets, Gender and entrepreneurship, Political economy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

After receiving separate invitations to contribute to this special legacy issue, it took each of us very little time to conclude that it would be much more fun and rewarding to work on a reflective essay together. Upon obtaining a quick “go-ahead” of our proposed collaborative approach from Editor-in-Chief Colette Henry, it also took us barely any time to decide upon

The authors wish to thank Colette Henry and others involved in inviting contributors to this special issue for the much-appreciated recognition of their commitment and contributions to research on gender and entrepreneurship over the course of our academic careers. The authors would also like to thank Amanda Kraus, Kurtis Letwin, Jessica Ng, Emily Cliff, Christopher Cliff and Alexa Place for their invaluable research assistance. The names of the authors are listed in alphabetical order to denote their equal contributions to this reflective essay.



the essay's substantive focus. Indeed, our recollection is that it was determined after a brief exchange along the following lines:

Karen: "Given our background and interests, it would be great to focus on the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in gendered social institutions such as the family and labour market".

Jennifer: "That's exactly what I was thinking!"

Although we decided upon our paper's scope in an almost instinctive manner, further reflection suggested that this topic is especially well suited for this special issue. This is because work attentive to the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in gendered social institutions has generated distinctive contributions that can arguably be construed as key "legacies" of research on women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship (WEGE). Consider that on family embeddedness. While significant evidence has now accumulated in the general entrepreneurship literature on how family impacts entrepreneurial beliefs, activity and outcomes, it is primarily WEGE scholars who have illuminated how the *gendering* of family structures, roles, responsibilities and interaction patterns contribute to men's and women's experiences of entrepreneurship. Likewise, while we now understand a great deal about how prior labour market experiences shape entrepreneurial activity and attitudes, it is research attentive to the *gendering* of work and careers that has revealed distinct insights that might have otherwise gone undetected.

Our goal in this essay is to summarize and reflect upon the increasingly rich scholarship on the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in two gendered institutions – the family and the labour market. Our approach involves reviewing empirical and theoretical contributions within "women's entrepreneurship" and "gender and entrepreneurship" research. We use both terms (denoted by the WEGE acronym) to acknowledge the ways in which attention has shifted from an early interest in female entrepreneurs to a broader interest in how entrepreneurial phenomena intersect with gender. Likewise, our use of the term "embeddedness" deserves brief comment, given not only the growing usage of this term within entrepreneurship studies, but also the distinct traditions of thought which inform it.

Defined as the "quality of being firmly or deeply ingrained, or fixed in place" (Oxford English Dictionary), the concept of "embeddedness" signals recognition that entrepreneurship occurs "in context" – whether social/relational, spatial, institutional, or societal (Welter, 2011). Though often used in a generic fashion, embeddedness is in fact an umbrella concept, embracing distinct approaches and traditions (Welter, 2011; Krippner and Alvarez, 2007)[1]. For instance, social/*relational approaches* focus on social relations as a basis for action in economic contexts (Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1997). Studies in this tradition examine, for example, how an entrepreneur's social networks might aid them in accessing key resources, such as financing, knowledge, mentoring, or emotional support (Welter, 2011, pp. 168-169). *Institutional approaches*, in contrast, focus on the formal (e.g. laws, regulations) and informal (e.g. norms and attitudes) institutions that shape economic activity (Bruton *et al.*, 2010; Elam, 2014; Tolbert *et al.*, 2011). *Spatial approaches* explore the influence of geographic and community locales on enterprise, while *societal approaches* explore the reciprocal link between society and entrepreneurship, illuminating how society influences entrepreneurship, and how entrepreneurship, in turn, is a force of social change (Welter, 2011, pp. 170-173).

Given that our goal in this review paper is to identify research that has been attentive to the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in the gendered institutions of the family and labour market, we anticipate a certain affinity with institutional and social/relational

approaches. However, we deliberately work with an expansive definition of “embeddedness” to capture the full spectrum of approaches that have been used to date. We also discuss how understandings of embeddedness have shifted in “women’s entrepreneurship” and “gender and entrepreneurship” research over the years.

The remainder of our article is structured as follows. In the next section, we lay the foundation for our overarching thesis regarding the “legacy-like” status of research attentive to the family and labour market embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity, by presenting the methods, quantitative findings, and personal reflections associated with our initial bibliographic analysis of the WEGE literature. We then elaborate and reflect upon the substantive contributions of extant research, which we present in the form of qualitative historical summaries for each form of embeddedness. We conclude by imagining where work with either emphasis might head in the future, followed by some final reflexive observations. Our overarching goal is to encourage continued attention to how entrepreneurship is shaped by the embedding of such activity in two predominant social institutions – families and labour markets – that remain pervasively and persistently gendered.

The prevalence of prior research attentive to family and/or labour market embeddedness

Methodology for our bibliographic analysis

For the quantitative component of our retrospective analysis, we relied primarily upon a comprehensive database that we have been assembling of scholarly WEGE articles since the earliest publication by [Schwartz \(1976\)](#). A key resource underlying several of our synthetic pieces ([Hughes et al., 2012](#); [Hughes and Jennings, 2015](#); [Jennings and Brush, 2013](#)), for this essay we used a version that had been updated through September 2018 inclusive. The additional articles appearing in the updated database were determined through the same procedures previously specified within [Jennings and Brush \(2013\)](#). Given that all of the entries are limited to articles published in scholarly journals, it is important to note that our quantitative analysis is based on an extensive – but not exhaustive – compilation of WEGE research. We address this issue within our subsequent qualitative summaries by incorporating relevant forthcoming work, as well as prior research published in book chapters or monographs.

The analytic technique for the quantitative component of our review involved reading and coding each of the 1336 articles included in the database to determine whether family and/or labour market embeddedness was a stated feature of the study[2]. Prior to coding, we discussed our protocol, identifying key criteria for coding decisions. For family embeddedness, articles were coded as FAM = 1 if they examined family considerations in an explicit and sustained manner, or as a core contextual consideration (e.g. work–family interface, mompreneurs/copreneurs, or involvement in a family business). All other articles received a code of FAM = 0. Likewise, for labour market embeddedness, articles were coded as LAB = 1 if they examined labour market issues in an explicit and sustained manner, or as a core contextual consideration (e.g. accumulation of human capital or social capital through prior wage-and-salary employment; sex/gender-based discrimination or unemployment as motivation for entrepreneurship). All other articles received a code of LAB = 0.

Given the large number of articles involved, each of us reviewed approximately one half of the articles, (Hughes coding even years; Jennings coding odd years). We then cross-checked our coding by comparing results for four different years, selecting the specific years using a random number generator. Our initial coding decisions exhibited an overall inter-rater agreement level of 86.4 per cent. Through discussion, we reached a consensus on the classification of those that had initially been coded in divergent ways, further refining our coding protocol.

Quantitative findings

The above-noted process resulted in 489 WEGE articles being coded as attentive to family and/or labour market embeddedness. Notably, this number represents a sizeable 36.6 per cent of the 1336 scholarly articles catalogued within our dataset. Figure 1 presents the disaggregated counts, by decade, for each type of embeddedness code[3]. As indicated, the number of WEGE articles classified into either category has grown dramatically from one decade to the next. Since the 1980s, for instance, those coded into the family embeddedness category ballooned by a multiple of 38.8, whereas those classified as attentive to labour market embeddedness increased by a multiple of 22.1. Moreover, over the prior decade alone, the numbers coded into these categories have grown by factors of 4.4 and 3.3, respectively (and these values are likely to be even higher once the database has been updated through 2019).

Figure 2 depicts the over-time trends in the *proportion* of WEGE articles reflecting either family embeddedness and/or labour market embeddedness considerations. As illustrated, the latter tended to be quite prominent within research conducted in the 1980s, with 37 per cent of the small number of articles published in this decade attentive to labour market

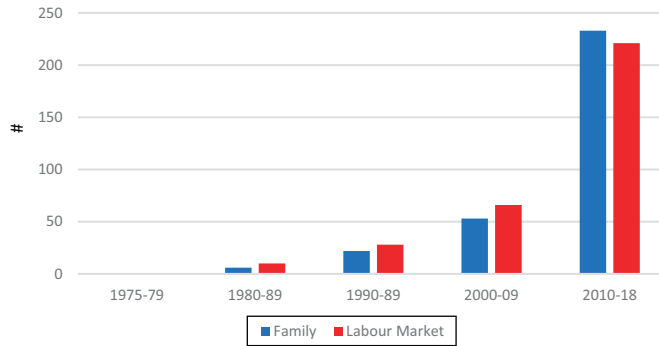


Figure 1.
Number of WEGE articles addressing “family” or “labour market” embeddedness, by decade

Note: WEGE = women’s entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship



Figure 2.
Proportion of WEGE articles addressing “family” or “labour market” embeddedness, by decade

Note: WEGE = women’s entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship

considerations. The proportion coded into this category has subsequently decreased, plateauing at 24.0 per cent in the 2010-2018 period. In contrast, the proportion of articles coded into the family embeddedness category hovered around 20 per cent from the 1980s through the 2000s, but then increased to 25.4 per cent in the most recent decade (surpassing the proportion coded into the labour market embeddedness category for the first time).

Personal reflections

Mindful of the fact that we had been invited to contribute a *reflexive* piece for this special legacy issue, we offer some brief personal reflections on the above-noted quantitative findings prior to presenting those from our qualitative analysis. The fact that 36.6 per cent of WEGE articles published through September of 2018 were attentive to family and/or labour market considerations strikes us as particularly noteworthy. In our view, this sizeable proportion offers clear evidence of the area's legacy of attention to an entrepreneur's embeddedness in these broader (and gendered) social institutions. Indeed, although we have not conducted a comparative analysis of the general entrepreneurship literature, we would be highly surprised if such an assessment would result in a proportion anywhere close to the 36.6 per cent discovered through our bibliographic analysis of WEGE research.

Another quantitative finding strikes us as providing additional support for our claim regarding the "legacy-like" nature of WEGE research attentive to family and labour market considerations. We are referring here to the fact that approximately one-quarter of all WEGE articles published during the *current* decade *continue* to be attentive to the embeddedness of entrepreneurship in these gendered institutions. In our view, this finding suggests that such an emphasis constitutes not just a distinctive – but also an enduring – focus of WEGE scholarship. This is noteworthy considering that such scholarship has become both increasingly differentiated and much more global in scope over the decades. These trends are apparent within the more focused summaries below, which we present in the form of historical narratives for each type of embeddedness.

Substantive contributions of women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship research attentive to family embeddedness

Foundational work in the 1980s

Although our systematic review did not unearth any academic journal articles published during the 1970s that we could classify as being attentive to the family embeddedness of women's entrepreneurial activity, 6 of the 27 articles published in the 1980s reflected such an emphasis. Listed chronologically, these include [Bowen and Hisrich \(1986\)](#), [Scott \(1986\)](#), [Wong \(1986\)](#), [Cromie \(1987\)](#), [Birley \(1989\)](#) and [Carter \(1989\)](#). The early book by [Goffee and Scase \(1985\)](#) is also notable in this regard.

In our view, these foundational pieces extended the frontier of entrepreneurship research by raising awareness of the role played by an individual's *current* family situation for decisions, processes, and outcomes relevant to entrepreneurial activity. The italicization of the word "current" in the preceding sentence is meant to signify that family embeddedness considerations were not completely absent from extant work at the time. Indeed, as noted in the career development perspective delineated by [Bowen and Hisrich \(1986\)](#), some scholars had begun to investigate the nature of entrepreneurs' families of origin, examining, in particular, the socio-economic status and/or occupations (including self-employment) of these individuals' parents. Arguably, however, it was emergent research on the entrepreneurial activity undertaken by *females* that initiated attention to the influence of an entrepreneur's spouse and/or children. To quote from Bowen and Hisrich: "Analogous data

for male entrepreneurs [was] apparently considered irrelevant” prior to this point in the field’s development (1986: p. 402).

Of the empirical findings reported in this early work, one stands out as especially salient. With respect to their motivations for becoming entrepreneurs, a sizeable proportion of the women studied indicated that they had launched their own businesses because they believed that doing so would enable them to attend more easily to family responsibilities (particularly childcare) than they could in a traditional job/career (Carter, 1989; Cromie, 1987; Goffee and Scase, 1985; Scott, 1986). On this note, it is worth mentioning that some of the additional qualitative data shared by Goffee and Scase (1985) foreshadowed a theme that became predominant within later research; namely, the work–family conflict experienced by female entrepreneurs who are also mothers[4].

Budding research in the 1990s

The seeds planted by the above-noted foundational work led to a budding sub-area of scholarship in the 1990s. A key quantitative indicator is that 24 of the 108 articles published during this decade – an average of just over two per year – reflected an interest in the family embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurial activity. Such an emphasis is evident within the key conceptual framework introduced in the 1990s: Brush’s (1992) “integrated perspective”. Conceptualizing female-owned businesses as “cooperative network[s] of relationships”, Brush explicitly described such entities as being “integrated into a woman’s life along with her family and community relationships” (1992, p. 17).

As for the empirical work attentive to family embeddedness considerations, the vast majority corroborated the key finding from the prior decade’s research: i.e. that women’s entrepreneurial career decisions are strongly influenced by (actual or anticipated) responsibilities associated with being mothers of young children (Boden, 1999; Buttner and Moore, 1997; Caputo and Dolinsky, 1998; Carr, 1996; Connelly, 1992; Jurik, 1998; Marlow, 1997; Presser and Bamberger, 1993)[5]. Notably, another set of empirical studies elaborated upon the previously raised topic of work–family conflict. Stoner *et al.* (1990), for instance, observed that work–family conflict was highest for female business owners who were recently married, while Marlow (1997) found that female entrepreneurs were more likely than male entrepreneurs to report work–family conflict. Parasuraman *et al.* (1996) further showed how differences in the time that male versus female entrepreneurs committed to either work or family could help account for observed differentials in the degree of conflict experienced. Finally, Jurik (1998) documented how work–family conflict was not only prevalent amongst the home-based, self-employed women in her study – but also led them to re-create some of the exploitative work practices they sought to escape by opting out of traditional employment in the first place.

Other studies extended the frontiers of WEGE research in two new directions. Adopting a social capital perspective, some called attention to the possibility that family members are likely to feature more prominently in the social network of females than males, which might possess substantive implications for entrepreneurial phenomena. Although Renzulli *et al.*’s (1998) findings lent support for this conjecture, revealing that the higher proportion of kin within women’s business discussion networks contributed to their lower likelihood of starting a business, it is important to note that Cromie and Birley (1992) did not find that the female entrepreneurs in their study were more likely than their male counterparts to include family members in their discussion networks.

The second new direction with a genesis in the budding empirical research conducted during the 1990s called attention to family considerations as potential explanations for the documented tendency for firms led by female entrepreneurs to be smaller in size and to

generate lower levels of revenue/income than those led by male entrepreneurs. Early in the decade, [Loscocco et al. \(1991\)](#) found that while industry location, business size, and experience were key contributors to the lower success of firms led by women than men, self-reported strain between family and work was also a significant factor. Similarly, towards the end of the decade, [Cliff \(1998\)](#) presented qualitative data which suggested that the desire to balance work and family is a key reason why female entrepreneurs are more likely than their male counterparts to establish “maximum size thresholds” for their firms.

Blossoming work in the 2000s

Academic research attentive to the family embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurial activity blossomed in the first decade of the new millennium, with 53 of the 282 scholarly articles published during this period coded as reflecting this theme. Given this fairly large number, and our desire to be respectful of the recommended length for this essay, we had to restrict our review to a subset of journals[6]. As such, the following summary of core contributions is not as inclusive as in the preceding subsections. That being said, we nevertheless continue our practice of incorporating relevant monographs; in this case, those by [Ahl \(2004\)](#) and [Hughes \(2005\)](#).

Of the three conceptual articles in the focal subset, two raised new directions for research at the intersection of entrepreneurship and the work–family interface. [Shelton \(2006\)](#) elucidated various strategies for managing work and family conflict, proposing that female entrepreneurs who head fast-growing firms are more likely to enact the strategy of “role-sharing” in particular. Relatedly, [Jennings and McDougald \(2007\)](#) suggested that the different work–family interface experiences and coping strategies of male versus female entrepreneurs can help account for the observed performance differentials between their respective firms. The third conceptual article, by [Brush et al. \(2009\)](#), offered the field an even broader “gender-aware framework”, with the notion of family/household embeddedness (as captured by the term “motherhood”) deliberately positioned at the model’s centre. The positioning of this construct highlighted a key proposition raised by these scholars: that female entrepreneurs are more strongly influenced by the (gendered) social institution of the family than are male entrepreneurs.

Much of the empirical research attentive to family embeddedness that was published in the focal subset of journals during the first decade of the 2000s offered further insight into pre-existing themes. One subgroup, for instance, deepened understanding of the family-related factors that influence the decision to become an entrepreneur ([De Martino and Barbato, 2003](#); [Henley, 2004](#); [Hughes, 2005](#)). Likewise, another subgroup added greater nuance regarding the implications of such considerations for female entrepreneurs’ time-use patterns ([Gurley-Calvez et al., 2009](#)), work–family balance/conflict ([Hughes, 2005](#)), attitudes towards growth ([Morris et al., 2006](#)), and earnings ([Budig, 2006](#)). Other studies staked out new territory for research on the family embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurial activity. [Baines and Wheelock \(2000\)](#) did so by shifting the focal unit of analysis from the individual entrepreneur to the individuals (including husbands and wives) who jointly operate small businesses, documenting how gendered work and family roles tend to be reproduced in such entities. [Schindehutte et al. \(2003\)](#) also engaged in a conceptual shift but by “reversing the arrow” of much prior work: that is, rather than focusing on how family considerations impact women’s entrepreneurial activity, they examined how such activity affects the children of female entrepreneurs. Finally, [Ahl \(2004\)](#) charted new directions for future research on the family embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurship by offering a critique of predominant approaches.

Widespread research in the 2010s

During the second decade of the new millennium, WEGE research attentive to family embeddedness considerations not only continued to bloom but did so in a noticeably more widespread manner. Specifically, while prior research had predominantly been conducted in North America or Western Europe, one of the most distinctive features of that conducted in the 2010s is its global reach, with studies set in South America (e.g. [Brazil Alperstedt et al., 2014](#); [Chile Fernández Robin et al., 2017](#)), Eastern Europe (e.g. [Serbia Stošić, 2016](#); [Russia, Wegren et al., 2017](#)), Asia (e.g. [Japan Billore et al., 2010](#); [Malaysia Alam et al., 2011](#); [India Desai and Temsah, 2014](#); [China Chen et al., 2015](#)), Africa (e.g. [Nigeria Halkias et al., 2011](#); [South Africa Scott et al., 2012](#); [Botswana Moswete and Lacey, 2015](#)), or the Middle East (e.g. [Jordan Al-Alak and Al-Haddad, 2010](#); [United Arab Emirates Goby and Eroglu, 2011](#)). Given that 233 articles in total reflected a family embeddedness theme, the ensuing summary of key contributions is again based primarily upon those published in the subset of scholarly journals specified in endnote[6].

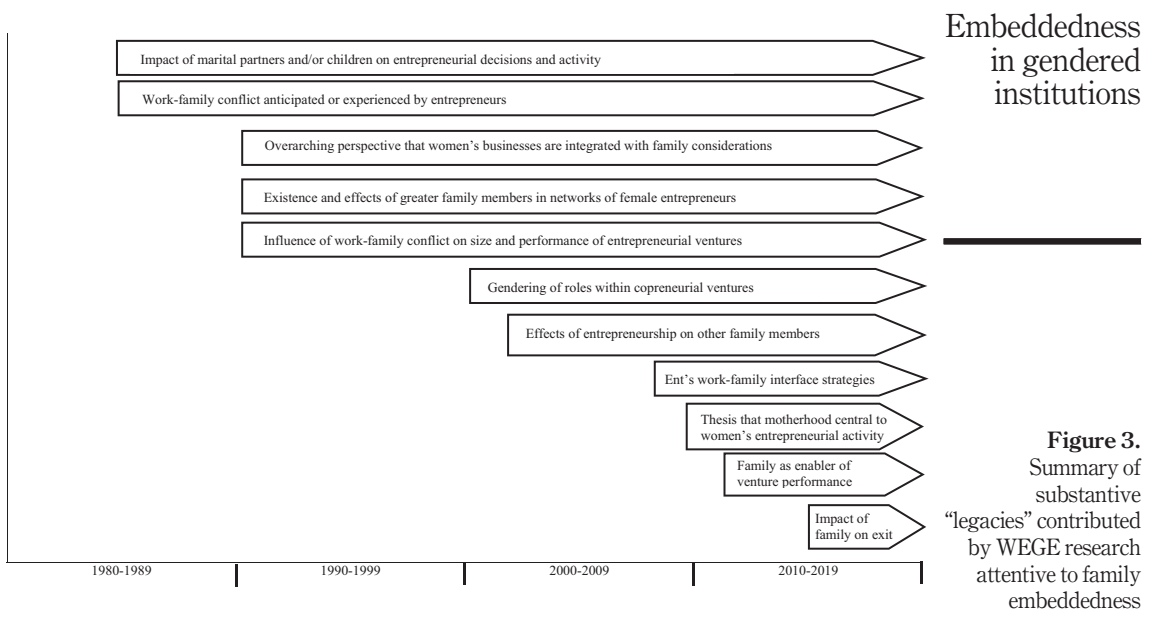
From a conceptual standpoint, several articles addressed issues in need of attention, while others offered valuable reviews. Of the former, [Azmat \(2013\)](#) proposed a conceptual framework for studying migrant women's entrepreneurship, theorizing the relationship between immigration, ethnicity, and gender, and highlighting the "family" as both a potential barrier and enabler of women's venturing. A second contribution, by [Barrett \(2014\)](#), introduced a "radical subjectivist economic" approach to family firms, blending theorizing and case studies to identify new questions around imagination, empathy, shared leadership, and innovation in family business contexts. The following two overview articles also underlined the importance of family considerations. Introducing a special issue on institutional theory in *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, [Ahl and Nelson \(2010\)](#) noted the importance of family as one of several key institutions. Likewise, [Jennings and Brush's \(2013\)](#) wide-ranging review of women's entrepreneurship research identified "family embeddedness" as a central theme, noting well-studied topics such as work-family conflict and work-family motivations, as well as less studied questions concerning power, gender, and family dynamics.

Just as striking as the increased global reach of studies in the 2010s is the breadth of topics covered. Research on how family-related factors influence the entrepreneurial career decision continued ([Adachi and Hisada, 2017](#); [Franck, 2012](#); [Hoffmann et al., 2015](#); [Humbert and Drew, 2010](#); [McKie et al., 2013](#); [Noseleit, 2014](#); [Patrick et al., 2016](#)), as did that on how such factors affect varied performance outcomes ([Aterido and Hallward-Driemeier, 2011](#); [Davis and Shaver, 2012](#); [Fleck et al., 2011](#)). However, several new themes are evident with respect to the role of family support as an enabler of business venturing ([Abbasian and Yazdanfar, 2013](#); [Eddleston and Powell, 2012](#); [Greene et al., 2013](#); [Leung, 2011](#); [Powell and Eddleston, 2013](#); [Venkatesh et al., 2017](#)) and the relationship between family and the venture exit decision ([Justo et al., 2015](#)).

Summary and personal reflections on the sub-area's evolution

Given the diversity of contributions unearthed through our review of WEGE research with a family embeddedness emphasis, we thought that readers might appreciate a one-page summary of these substantive "legacies"[7]. [Figure 3](#) contains such a summary in the form of a timeline. Although each reader is bound to draw his or her own conclusions from this figure, the following captures the essence of our personal reflections on the sub-area's evolution.

One observation that really stands out to us is how the proverbial "pendulum" of WEGE research on the family embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity has swung along more than



one axis over the decades. For instance, while early work tended to focus on how family considerations influence entrepreneurship, we noticed that recent work has started to examine how such activity *affects* an entrepreneur’s family members. Likewise, while initial research primarily portrayed family-related factors as a source of conflict (or at least a hindrance) for female entrepreneurs, later research has begun to investigate how such factors can act as enablers of women’s entrepreneurial activity. Finally, we couldn’t help but notice how the area’s early interest in how family considerations affect an individual’s initial motivation to pursue entrepreneurship has broadened over time so as to now include what is often the final decision made by a business owner: whether and how to exit the venture.

In reflecting upon these swings, we are reminded of the guidance offered in two essays on how researchers can design and promulgate scholarship that is likely to be viewed as advancing the frontier of research within a particular domain. The first is the classic essay by [Davis \(1971\)](#), which provides advice on the conceptualization of research questions that a field’s gatekeepers are likely to find “interesting”. The second is a recent essay by [Lange and Pfarrer \(2017\)](#), which explicates how scholars can effectively position the outcomes of such research within ongoing conversations. We wonder whether the work summarized within the following qualitative review of WEGE scholarship attentive to *labour market* embeddedness will be similarly resonant with the guidance provided in these essays – and thus exhibit parallel swings in emphasis over the decades.

Substantive contributions of women’s entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship research attentive to labour market embeddedness

Foundational work in the 1980s

Echoing trends in family embeddedness, our review found scant evidence of attention to labour market embeddedness in publications from the 1970s. However, a notable proportion

of articles in the 1980s (10 of 27) situated women's enterprise in the context of the labour market and broader economy. Listed chronologically these articles are: Cuba *et al.* (1983), Goffee and Scase (1983), Moore (1983), Hisrich and Brush (1984), Bowen and Hisrich (1986), Scott (1986), Symons (1986), Birley *et al.* (1987), Birley (1989), and Wharton (1989). Together these studies confirmed the important role of the labour market in shaping entrepreneurial activity – whether by honing motivations, facilitating the acquisition of human capital, or incubating business ideas. We see this as an important early contribution, though we would hasten to add that attention was firmly fixed at this time on a handful of high-income nations – primarily the USA, England, France and Canada – where the rise of second-wave feminism was reshaping women's economic activity in a significant manner.

Although some researchers viewed women's entrepreneurship as an "important change in the sexual division of labor in post-industrial societies" (Symons, 1986: p. 61), others took a more measured view. Generally speaking, three key insights emerged from early work. The first concerns the Janus-faced nature of the labour market itself. Illustrating this point, classic work by Goffee and Scase (1983) and others (Birley, 1989; Moore, 1983; Scott, 1986) demonstrated the positive force of women's rising labour force participation, human capital, and career aspirations for spurring women's business ownership, while at the same time showing how gender-based barriers in traditional employment radically limited women's opportunities, by pushing them into independent enterprise. A second insight served to challenge a purely "emancipatory" view of women's entrepreneurship, finding evidence of significant gender-based pay gaps and occupational segregation within self-employment itself (Moore, 1983; Wharton, 1989). A final insight, which has garnered growing attention over time, concerned the limitations of male-centred theoretical frameworks, and the need for approaches attuned to women's experiences of work, labour markets, and careers (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Symons, 1986).

Budding research in the 1990s

Amidst growing interest in women's entrepreneurship in this decade, the 1990s saw continued attention to labour market embeddedness, though slightly tempered from the previous decade. As Figure 1 shows, roughly one-quarter (25.9 per cent) of articles in the 1990s addressed such issues. Reviewing this work, four themes stand out. First, there was ongoing interest in understanding how labour market experiences shape entrepreneurial motivations, with studies highlighting the role of human capital accumulation (Bates, 1995; Devine, 1994; Dolinsky *et al.*, 1993; Robinson and Sexton, 1994) and gender-based employment barriers (Evans and Leighton, 1990; Marlow, 1997). Second, there was strong interest in business outcomes and success, laying the foundation for what would become known as the debate over the "gender performance gap" (Brush and Hisrich, 1991; Fischer *et al.*, 1993; Jurik, 1998; Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991). Third, we see stirrings of interest towards the end of the decade in a broader range of economic contexts, with studies set within non-OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries such as Israel and Turkey (Hisrich and Öztürk, 1999; Lerner, Brush, and Hisrich, 1997). Finally, much-needed theoretical contributions drawing from the rapidly growing area of feminist/gender theory were introduced, which sparked important debate about the challenges of studying "women entrepreneurs" (Fischer *et al.*, 1993; Mirchandani, 1999).

Together these studies confirmed the importance of women's rising education, experience, and aspirations for shaping entry into entrepreneurship. That being said, they offered mixed evidence on questions of business success and outcomes, with some studies finding poorer performance amongst women entrepreneurs (Fischer *et al.*, 1993; Loscocco *et al.*, 1991) and others finding no gender-based gaps (Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991). We also

see competing approaches and ideas about how best to study the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship'. In a now highly cited contribution, [Mirchandani \(1999\)](#) critiqued existing research on several fronts, noting the tendency to conflate sex and gender, treat gender as a "variable" and focus on male-female comparisons. She also showed how studies ignored other axes of stratification, such as ethnicity, class and citizenship, applying an essentialized notion of "women entrepreneurs" based on studies of well-educated, white women in industrialized economies (see also [Jurik, 1998](#)). While seeing value in early contributions, [Mirchandani \(1999\)](#) advocated for a stronger use of feminist theory, and theories of gender, work and organizations, to focus research on the "gendering of entrepreneurship", rather than the category of "women entrepreneurs".

Blossoming work in the 2000s

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw continued interest in labour market embeddedness, both with respect to perennial topics and new questions of interest. Scanning across the more than 60 studies that consider labour market issues, we noted more complex consideration of questions of motivation and entry, coupled with an interest in a broader range of "capitals" – not just human capital, but social capital, managerial capital, and leadership capital – as they relate to business entry and success (see for example [Anna et al., 2000](#); [Budig, 2006](#); [Taniguchi, 2002](#); [Terjesen, 2005](#); [Shaw et al., 2009](#)). Also evident is a more concentrated effort to untangle the relationship between gender and business performance. Indeed, the so-called "gendered performance gap" was one of the most examined topics of the decade, with studies using more precise analytical techniques and a richer mix of outcomes (see for example, [Anna et al., 2000](#); [Boden and Nucci, 2000](#); [Coleman, 2007](#); [Shaw et al., 2009](#)). Influenced by broader developments in gender studies and feminist theory ([Ely and Padavic, 2007](#); [Harding and Norberg, 2005](#); [Tong, 2013](#)), there was also greater interest in issues of difference and intersectionality, with attention to ethnicity, class, age, and citizenship in particular. Relatedly, as previously mentioned in our discussion of family embeddedness, we observed interest in a wider range of contexts, especially with respect to "transitional" and "emerging economies".

From a theoretical standpoint, several influential contributions appeared in the 2000s concerning the gendered analysis of entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on the socially constructed, contextualized, and embedded nature of entrepreneurial activity ([Ahl, 2006](#); [Brush et al., 2009](#)). In this respect, the 2000s ushered in a more explicit attention to embeddedness. A critical contribution, one of the most cited in the literature, is [Ahl's \(2006\)](#) discursive analysis of women's entrepreneurship research, which extended [Mirchandani's \(1999\)](#) earlier work, highlighting problems of sex/gender conflation, the search for assumed essential differences between women and men, and the use of a narrow objectivist lens. Of particular value, Ahl provided not only an encompassing critique, but a positive future-oriented agenda, suggesting "new directions" for research through a constructivist lens and an expanded scope of inquiry that considers, amongst other things, the labour market and broader economy. Laying further conceptual ground, in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, [Brush et al. \(2009\)](#) constructed a detailed template for a "gender-aware framework" of entrepreneurship. Drawing on institutional theory, their 5M framework adds "motherhood" and "macro/meso" factors to the traditional 3Ms of "money", "market" and "management". From the standpoint of labour market embeddedness, this contribution is very important, raising questions about "hidden institutional constraints", including labour market institutions, which they place at the meso level of analysis.

Widespread research in the 2010s

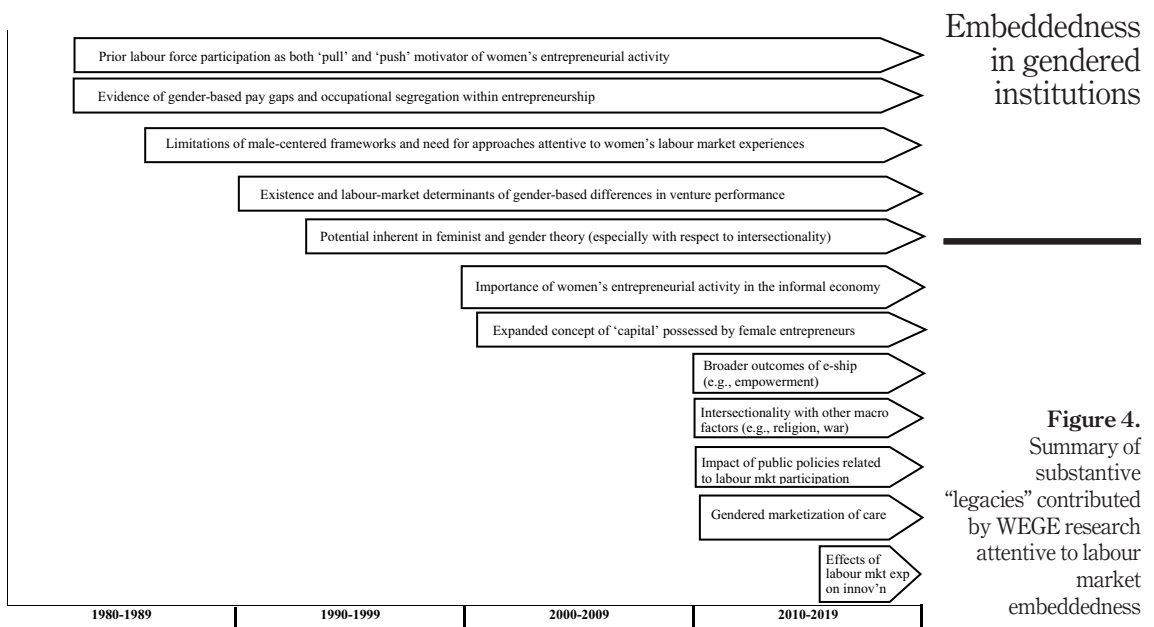
With the current decade not quite complete at the time of writing, this review remains provisional. However, a distinguishing feature of research conducted in the 2010s is certainly its global reach, as noted in our discussion of family embeddedness. With respect to labour market embeddedness, we see an especially welcome proliferation of research in many important but understudied contexts: e.g. India (Field *et al.*, 2010; Williams and Gurtoo, 2011; Datta and Gailey, 2012), Japan (Griffy-Brown, 2011), Pakistan (Roomi and Harrison, 2010) and South Africa (Scott *et al.*, 2012). This is important given that high-income nations have been widely studied, but account for just 1.2 billion of the world's population, compared to 6.2 billion in low- and medium-income nations (World Bank, 2019). With 221 articles in this decade attending to labour market embeddedness, our commentary is limited to the subset of scholarly journals identified in endnote 6. We also note several books of relevance, including: Brush *et al.* (2011), Hughes and Jennings (2012), Lewis *et al.* (2015), Orser and Elliott (2015), Manolova *et al.* (2017) and Yousafzai *et al.* (2018).

From an empirical standpoint, research during the current decade shows a continuing interest in perennial topics, especially the role of the labour market in shaping motivations, human and other capitals, and eventual business success. Not only are these issues being studied in new contexts, but we see new approaches to how these questions are taken up. For instance, recent studies examine entrepreneurial motivations through the lens of organizational-level opportunity structures (Sørensen and Sharkey, 2014), the expansion of precarious work (Lofstrom, 2013), and the backdrop of economic recession (Biehl *et al.*, 2014). There is also an emphasis on comparative analysis, most often using *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* data, to examine how labour market and public policy (e.g. paid leave, childcare), and economic and political factors, shape entrepreneurial behaviours (Brush *et al.*, 2017; Elam and Terjesen, 2010; Klyver *et al.*, 2013; Thébaud, 2015). Finally, many new questions have been examined concerning the gendering of entrepreneurship and creation of gendered organizations. Though impossible to capture all of these, salient topics include: gender stereotypes and the positioning of women and men in non-traditional leadership contexts (Aggestam and Wigren-Kristoferson, 2017; Ezzedeen and Zikic, 2012; Marlow and McAdam, 2012; Treanor and Henry, 2010; Yang and Aldrich, 2014); gender and the marketization of care (Bourne, 2010; Anderson and Hughes, 2010; Sundin and Tillmar, 2010); gendered practices of innovation (Alsos *et al.*, 2013; Strohmeyer *et al.*, 2017); and, the effects of gender-based labour market segregation on the acquisition of entrepreneurship-relevant skills and perceived ease of business start-up (Tonoyan *et al.*, 2019).

From a theoretical standpoint, contributions in the current decade also serve to extend and challenge thinking around the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in labour markets. Greater attention to understudied contexts, in particular transitional economies and emerging economies in the Global South, highlights the importance of informal economic activity, economic and political instability, and labour market exclusion – thus challenging Western assumptions of well-developed, formally regulated labour markets (Krahn *et al.*, 2020). Recent research also expands conventional thinking about entrepreneurial “outcomes”, to include issues of poverty alleviation, empowerment, and emancipation (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Roomi and Harrison, 2010; Strier, 2010; Williams and Gurtoo, 2011). Finally, studies direct attention to crucial and overlooked factors that shape labour markets and entrepreneurship; most notably, religion (Yousafzai *et al.*, 2018), globalization, and war, conflict, and displacement (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2015; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2018; Welter and Smallbone, 2011).

Summary and personal reflections on the sub-area's evolution

Figure 4 condenses the preceding historical narratives into a one-page timeline. When reflecting upon this figure, three observations stand out with respect to the evolution of



WEGE research with a labour market embeddedness focus. The first concerns how the increasingly global orientation of research, and related attention to diverse contexts (e.g. transitional economies, emerging economies), has pushed and expanded thinking about the nature of entrepreneurship, and its linkages to other forms of economic activity. Whereas early studies, which focused on high-income nations, assumed well-regulated labour markets, women’s access to education, and the “legal right to work”, recent studies paint a more complex portrait of entrepreneurship as it unfolds in contexts where such elements are not always in place. Second, and related to the growing recognition of diverse contexts, is the influence of intersectional approaches, which has helpfully shifted attention to related nodes of social difference, such as ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, and age. Here the influence of broader debates within feminist scholarship is evident, encouraging a more multifaceted and critical understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurship and labour markets than in earlier periods. Finally, and relatedly, we see more explicit attention to a broader range of entrepreneurial outcomes – not just “business performance” as measured by standard metrics of profitability, size and growth, but alternative outcomes, such as emancipation, economic empowerment, and social/community impact. Of interest, these broad trends mirror recent debates in mainstream entrepreneurship research – particularly the emphasis on context and everyday entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011; Zahra, 2014; Welter *et al.*, 2017).

Suggested future directions and concluding reflexive comments

Although our analysis of WEGE research revealed a strong level of interest in the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in family and labour market institutions, we hope that our findings and reflections pertaining to the substantive legacies of such work will encourage even greater attention to these topics. To that end, we conclude by suggesting

some potential directions for future research and offering some final reflections about our joint endeavours as WEGE scholars.

Suggestions for future women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship research attentive to family embeddedness

With respect to future research attentive to the family embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity, one area of especial interest concerns the impact of women's entrepreneurship on the division of labour within their households. For example, do the partners/spouses of women entrepreneurs tend to hold more egalitarian (or at least less gendered) views of how to share family responsibilities than those of non-entrepreneurs? Do such responsibilities tend to be distributed more equally in practice in the households of female entrepreneurs? And what about the attitudes of children within such households? Will women's entrepreneurship play a contributing role in changing (and possibly de-gendering) family relationships over time? Finally, how does the growing diversity of households and families (e.g. same-sex, multigenerational, blended) factor into any emerging patterns?

A second promising direction concerns the need for more systematic and comprehensive sense-making of findings from different countries. Our review identified a plethora of research being conducted around the globe. Most research to this point, however, consists of single-country studies. Comparative studies can help sharpen insights and generate frameworks for making sense of ongoing research. Here future comparative work could potentially shed light, for instance, on whether family-related considerations are more important in some countries than in others. It could also illuminate whether, why, and how entrepreneurial activities impact families – either positively or negatively – more so in some regions than others.

Finally, we know quite a bit about the embeddedness of female entrepreneurs in their immediate family situation, but far less about the impact of their families of origin. Were certain childhood experiences – such as growing up in a family with an entrepreneurial parent or one who experienced a job loss and/or was economically dependent on the other – particularly impactful for the later entrepreneurial behaviour of such women? Were their decisions to become entrepreneurs influenced at all by the (potentially gendered) division of labour and/or distribution of decision-making power within their families of origin? And to what extent do any of these relationships intersect with other considerations, such as a female entrepreneur's ethnicity, cultural background, religion, social class, age, and/or life course stage?

Suggestions for future women's entrepreneurship/gender and entrepreneurship research attentive to labour market embeddedness

With respect to potential directions for future research on the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity in the labour market, one of the most interesting questions – in light of the #timesup and #MeToo movements – concerns current perceptions of entrepreneurship as a route to gender equity. Historically, in many countries, education and the professions have been touted as key routes for women to improve their economic opportunities. Has the rise of women's entrepreneurship (and copreneurship) in various countries shifted this view? For example, has greater awareness of women's entrepreneurship, and prominent role models, altered young women's career aspirations? Has it shifted their ideas about the relative merits of wage-and-salary employment versus entrepreneurship?

A second important question, not only for WEGE research but also for entrepreneurship studies more generally, concerns globalization and ongoing transformations in the economies of the Global North and Global South. In high-income nations, for instance, the

rise of AI, robotics, and platform capitalism/gig economies promise to have enduring effects. In the Global South, new technologies, global supply chains, and the fusing of entrepreneurship with development initiatives will continue to shape economic growth trajectories, and the gendering of opportunities and constraints for would-be entrepreneurs, in profound ways. Gender-based intersectional analysis has strong potential to illuminate the changing nature of traditional labour market opportunities and entrepreneurial pathways, the connections between the two, and the ways in which rewards and risk are being redistributed.

Finally, intriguing questions raised in early studies, still to be systematically explored, ask whether women's growing participation in entrepreneurship might lead to positive change in work and organizational practices, and the opportunities offered in the labour market, as women scale their business and become employers themselves. Are female entrepreneurs able to enact meaningful changes to the organizational environments in which their employees conduct their work? Has the increased entrepreneurial activity of women led to changes in the traditional gendering of wage-and-salary employment? Here again, studies in varied industrial and national contexts, using gender-based intersectional analysis, could greatly enhance knowledge about the types of workplaces that are being created by female entrepreneurs.

Concluding personal reflections

Writing this reflective essay for the tenth anniversary special issue of *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* has been an honour and an exciting learning experience. In spite of many years of working in the field (at least 20 in each of our cases), we have often felt like students as we reviewed and discussed the past four decades of scholarship – amazed at the sheer breadth and richness of research being done, and excited by its growing sophistication and global reach. Though we have often sensed that attention to embeddedness is a key legacy of this research, it has been satisfying to see the strong imprint that has been made. We hope our review encourages ongoing interest in the embedding of entrepreneurial activity in two key social institutions – families and labour markets – that remain pervasively and persistently gendered.

We also hope that emerging and established scholars will continue what is arguably another key legacy of WEGE research: its highly collaborative and inclusive nature. Here we offer some brief reflections in response to a reviewer's question about how it is that we have been able to collaborate so effectively over the years[8]. We do so from the perspective of co-authors on several academic publications (Hughes and Jennings, 2012, 2015; Hughes *et al.*, 2012; Jennings *et al.*, 2010), as well as co-organizers of the 2010 Diana International conference in Banff, Canada (which to this day remains a "career highlight" for both of us). We also do so as frequent attendees of the Diana International conferences, since the inaugural event in Stockholm in 1999. We share fond memories of travels to Stockholm, Belfast, Madrid, Boston, Bodo and other locales, and the camaraderie and spirited debate amongst colleagues from whom we have learned so much. Of special note here, we recall toasting the launch of the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* at the Diana Conference in Belfast in 2008.

Our collaboration has certainly benefited from being part of such a vibrant community of WEGE scholars. We are also fortunate to work at the same university, making it easy to stay in touch, brainstorm, and exchange ideas. Although we come from different disciplinary backgrounds (sociology in the case of Hughes and business in the case of Jennings), we often seem to possess a highly-similar overarching vision of what we would like to accomplish with a certain undertaking. On a related note, we also seem to agree instinctively on which endeavours would be especially fun and rewarding to pursue in the

first place. We have compatible working styles, often launching new projects by developing detailed outlines for the various subcomponents, and then meeting to share our “big picture” ideas. We also share a love of “to do” lists for staying on track. We have a high level of trust, dividing work as equally as possible and having faith that items will be executed in a manner very close to that which we had discussed (the fact that we appreciate one another’s writing styles is extremely helpful in this regard). Flexibility is also key, with a willingness to pitch in for each other when life’s inevitable delays or emergencies intervene – and knowing that gesture will be reciprocated at some point in the future, either on the same project or another. Being flexible also means that we are willing to make concessions if a certain approach to a subcomponent’s execution is particularly important to one or the other of us for whatever reason. Interestingly, we engaged in every one of these practices while completing this particular project.

Most important, we share a passion and curiosity for understanding the puzzles of gender and entrepreneurship, so that as we complete one project we are inevitably left with new questions and ideas that we want to explore. Such has been the case with this project as well, where reviewing the rich scholarship has sparked so many new insights and queries related to the embeddedness of entrepreneurial phenomena in the gendered institutions of family and the labour market. Indeed, as we completed this essay, we recall a brief exchange along the following lines:

Jennifer: “I don’t know about you but working on this paper has given me tons of new ideas that I can’t wait to investigate.”

Karen: “That’s exactly what I was thinking!”

Where the next ten years will take the field of WEGE scholarship, no one can be sure. We fully expect, however, that the process of getting there will be as exciting, productive, collaborative, and inclusive as ever. We look forward to continuing to contribute to the field’s legacy.

Notes

1. We thank one of our reviewers for suggesting elaboration on this point. For valuable overviews, see [Krippner and Alvarez \(2007\)](#) and [Welter \(2011\)](#).
2. Our coding process began with a review of the abstract to determine whether the article considered embeddedness in the family or labour market. In cases where the abstract did not provide sufficient detail, we then reviewed the article in full.
3. The disaggregated counts do not sum to 489 because the two coding categories were not mutually exclusive. Specifically, 150 articles were coded as being attentive to both the family and labour market embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurial activity.
3. This theme is especially evident within the chapter dedicated to what [Goffee and Scase \(1985\)](#) term “innovative” female entrepreneurs.
4. Other studies of women’s self-employment decisions that examined family embeddedness considerations focused upon either the occupations of female entrepreneurs’ parents ([Belcourt, 1990](#); [Matthews and Moser, 1996](#)) or the self-employment experience of their husbands ([Bruce, 1999](#)).
5. The following journals were included: the *International Journal of Gender & Entrepreneurship*; the top two entrepreneurship journals (*Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice* and *Journal of Business Venturing*); two key small business journals (*Journal of Small Business Management* and *Small*

Business Economics); the top general management journals (*Administrative Science Quarterly* and the *Academy of Management* publications); two dedicated gender journals (*Gender & Society* and *Gender, Work & Organization*); and, three prestigious economics/sociology journals (*American Economic Review*, *American Journal of Sociology* and *American Sociological Review*).

7. We thank one of our reviewers for suggesting such a visual summary, which ended up being very helpful indeed.
8. We thank another reviewer for encouraging us to include some reflections on “how & why [we] have collaborated so successfully”.

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