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Is it time to rethink the gender agenda in entrepreneurship research?

Abstract.

This article develops a critique of contemporary approaches to analysing the impact of gender upon entrepreneurial propensity and activity. Since the 1990s, increasing attention has been afforded to the influence of gender upon women's entrepreneurial behaviour; such analyses have highlighted an embedded masculinity within the entrepreneurial discourse which privileges men as normative entrepreneurial actors. Whilst invaluable in revealing a prevailing masculine bias within entrepreneurship, this critique is bounded by positioning women as a proxy for the gendered subject. This is a potentially limiting analysis that does not fully recognise gender as a human property with myriad articulations enacted throughout entrepreneurial activity. To progress debate, we engage more deeply with the notion of gender as a multiplicity exploring the implications of such for future studies of entrepreneurial activity.

Key Words: entrepreneurship, gender, multiplicities, normativity, research

Introduction.

Some time ago, Holmquist and Sundin (1988:1) observed that entrepreneurship research was 'about men, by men and for men'. This prejudicial approach has been critiqued in the intervening years with a growing body of work focused upon the influence of gendered ascriptions upon women's entrepreneurial activity which has developed in scope and sophistication (Ahl, 2006; McAdam, 2012; Martinez Dy and Marlow, 2017). Focusing solely upon women's entrepreneurial activity, however, suggests that the gender critique is predominantly about women - whilst scrutiny of the literature suggests it is also largely written by women. So we have an emergent critique about women and by women that is in turn, assumed to be for women. In effect, women as a category have become a generic proxy for the gendered subject. This leads to an untenable transposition where women, as a substantive category, are conflated with – or at the least, representative of – gender, a complex theoretical construct with numerous iterations and interpretations (Butler, 2004; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Schippers, 2009; Kelan, 2010; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Additionally, there are implicit assumptions of

heteronormativity (Marlow et al., 2017), whiteness (Ogbor, 2000) and place [Global North] (Carter et al., 2015) embedded into the prevailing critique. Consequently, we have a maturing debate analysing women's entrepreneurial behaviour (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Henry et al., 2016) which, although invaluable in recognising sexist and misogynist gender bias, is in danger of partiality in presenting gender as a one dimensional property of women alone, rather than recognising it as a multiplicity enacted by all human subjects in a diverse range of contexts.

Drawing upon examples from more established disciplines within the social sciences that have developed a broad critical engagement with notions of gender, a number of informative debates can usefully be incorporated into current analyses of gender and entrepreneurship¹. Such views argue that gender is related to, but distinctly not coterminous with, biological sex (Oakley, 1972; Fasto-Sterling, 2000). For example, the historical progress of knowledge creation from disciplines such as sociology (Anthias, 2008; McDowell, 2014), law and critical race studies (Crenshaw, 1991), feminist economics (McKay et al., 2014) and gender studies (Acker, 2006) has resulted in a conceptualisation of gender that is neither the property of women, nor a simple male-female variable, but instead an overarching, dynamic yet durable social structure with complex dimensions and effects (Risman, 2004; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Bowden and Mummery, 2010). Structural notions of gender manifest as socially constructed ascriptions upon the human body, which generate individual and group identification practices and performances (such as femininity, masculinity, and their confluences, and a range of LGBT and queer gender identities, including androgeneity) (Fine, 2017; Risman, 2004). As a complex social construct therefore, gender manifests itself as an identity through which we recognise ourselves and others, a process by which we all 'do gender' as a set of behaviours and assumptions and as a performative whereby we perform and are performed by gender (West and Zimmerman, 1989; Butler, 1993; 2004; Risman, 2004).

Yet, such a complex notion of gender, and related implications, remain somewhat under-developed within explorations of entrepreneurial activity where the gender critique still tends to dwell upon the generic 'female entrepreneur'. This not only limits our understanding of gender in all its diverse forms (Risman, 2004; Linstead and Pullen, 2006) but also ensures that, when gender is considered, the symbolic category of women and their activities becomes the focus, thus shepherding all things related to women into specialist, separate categories. Siphoning off

¹ We are grateful to a referee for drawing our attention to this argument.

women and issues related to them in this way then ensures that alleged 'mainstream' debate regarding 'core' entrepreneurial activities and processes (opportunity recognition, start-up, effectuation, growth, exit processes) are positioned as gender *neutral* whereas in fact, they are gender *blind* (Jones, 2014). Creating a separate women=gender niche facilitates the persistence of such assumptions; it is not disputed that creating separate spaces which position women and their priorities, views and needs as central is invaluable to generate voice and visibility. But if such spaces are used to side-line and corral challenging ideas and uncomfortable arguments which disrupt normative analyses, we risk channelling critical voices inwards to confirm the views of the converted. Rather, similar to somewhat more mature disciplines, we should be confronting and so, disrupting assumptions regarding the role and position of gender into mainstream entrepreneurship debate. We need to find pathways to explore how gender in all its iterations impacts upon all entrepreneurial activities, rather than only focusing upon how gendered ascriptions position women in this debate.

A further reason for the tendency to take women entrepreneurs (either as a discrete category or as individuals) as typical gendered research subjects is potentially problematic is that it may generate a reified, fictive construct of the female entrepreneur, with empirical examples removed from context. Examining the motivations, activities, and accomplishments of female entrepreneurs, absented from the relations within which they 'do' and enact gender (Bruni et al., 2004; West and Zimmerman, 1987), will unduly limit the scope of any analysis. Evidence indicates that most entrepreneurial activity occurs within families and households (Carter et al., 2017; Klotz, 2014); team led ventures are common (Wright and Vanaelst, 2009) whilst even sole proprietors cannot create and operate ventures in a vacuum (Yang and Aldrich, 2014). Thus, how gendered ascriptions shape the availability, accrual and flow of entrepreneurial ideas, resources and competencies between those involved with, or operating, a venture is pivotal whether at the level of the family, household, team or stakeholder group. Within current debate, however, the dominant focus remains upon a mythologised female entrepreneur – isolated by her sex and defined by her gender.

If we acknowledge that women, as a category, are designated as 'other' within the entrepreneurial discourse, exploring how the prototypical entrepreneur is constructed from hegemonic notions of masculinity seems desirable. As Connell (2005:848) notes, 'gender is always relational and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some

model [whether real or imaginary] of femininity'. Thus, revealing the nature and veracity of the gendered assumptions which reproduce the normative entrepreneurial actor as a heterosexual [white] male, afforded privilege and visibility through his gender, becomes essential to a thorough understanding of the field. Men, particularly white Western men, become exemplar entrepreneurial subjects legitimated by their racialized gender which paradoxically, despite its power to bestow such legitimacy, has remained largely invisible and so, immune from scrutiny (Ogbor, 2000; Swail and Marlow, 2017). We are not way arguing for comparative analyses which reproduce women in deficit, but rather encourage interrogation of the hegemonic representation of the idealised entrepreneur in order to critically analyse how male authority is produced and reproduced within the entrepreneurial discourse. Furthermore, how entrepreneurial activity is motivated or affected by disruptions to the gender binary, such as in the case of LGBT entrepreneurs, has also received scant attention (Galloway, 2012; Marlow et al., 2016). Such observations suggest that to advance debate regarding the influence of gender upon entrepreneurial behaviour, we need to cast our net wider and revisit the construct itself, analysing it as a multiplicity enacted by all human actors in iterative performance.

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to pursue these arguments regarding how we study the influence of gender upon entrepreneurial activity; it is categorically *not* a literature review of extant work². Rather, we aim to offer a constructive critique of current debate by recognising that as a social ascription, gender is a fundamental characterisation of all human actors whether men, women (cis and trans), intersex or gender non-conforming. As such, how it influences behaviours, including entrepreneurial activity, will have an effect upon the manner in which it is performed by the subject under consideration. In addition, we question the value of privileging gender as an isolated analytical tool. Ignoring the influence of other critical social characteristics [for example, class, race/ethnicity, age] and how they intersect with gender, a notion captured by the black feminist construct of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000) risks a partial explanation for social positionality and its effects (Anthias, 2001; Essers and Benschop, 2009). Our core argument is that a more sophisticated engagement with gender within the context of entrepreneurship is necessary, and can be accomplished by studying how other disciplines have addressed gender biased gaps in theorising over time. This enables and encourages learning (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) to ensure that within entrepreneurship,

² For such reviews see work by Carter and Shaw, 2006; Neergaard et al., 2011; Jennings and Brush, 2013.

we analyse gender as a multiplicity that transcends the male-female binary whilst acknowledging the importance of intersectionality and context.

To expand upon these arguments in the context of entrepreneurial behaviour, this article is structured as follows: the first section offers a brief conceptual overview of sex and gender. This is followed by a critique of how gender theory has been articulated in contemporary entrepreneurship theory, noting the implications of such. We then consider how this debate might develop in the future and the opportunities this presents for future research and finally, conclude by drawing these arguments together.

Sex and Gender.

In her pioneering work, Oakley (1972) analytically critiqued the difference between sex and gender, noting the dangers of confusing the two. Whereas sex is a biological categorisation applicable to a diverse range of living organisms, encompassing male, female, intersex, hermaphrodite, and neuter – human gendered ascriptions are complex, socially constructed assumptions which are stereotypically associated with sex categories. Simplistic biological categorisations have been subject to some critique regarding the constraints of equating sex hormones with the functions of bodies such that the ‘one sex - one hormone’ model has been discredited (Fasto-Sterling, 2000; Milne, 2011). So sex categories are numerous, complex and subject to interpretation but do relate to markers such as genes, hormones, and physicality.

Gender, however, is a social structure that has no substantive category markers; as a socially constructed conceptual notion, it consists of a multiplicity of fluid social ascriptions with related designated characterisations of complex masculinities and femininities crudely mapped back to sex categories of males and females (Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Schippers, 2009; Bowden and Mummery, 2010; Fine, 2017). Analyses of gender, and the manner in which it fundamentally shapes human behaviour, have progressed from designating gender as a property possessed by individuals – the position we critique throughout this paper – to a social structure which humans enact through doing (West and Zimmerman, 1987), manifested through performativity (Butler, 1993; Gherardi, 1995). As one of the most fundamental human identity markers, gender makes us comprehensible as social actors (Butler, 2004).

Whilst gender is typically categorised into a binary of feminine and masculine, in contemporary feminist thinking, this represents a continuum of behaviours rather than a discrete dichotomy. In effect, individuals adopt shifting and realigning expressions of masculinity and femininity within the self such that as a construct, gender is *'a kind of masquerade with no substance'* (Holmes; 2007: 60). Thus, there is no essential femininity or masculinity unique to the biological identities of men and women (Bradley, 2007; Fine, 2017), they are something both women and men *do* or perform in differing guises and to differing extents as a socially constructed enactment (West and Zimmerman, 1989; Butler, 1990; 1993). Nonetheless, gendered ascriptions are crucial to establish cultural intelligibility; as social actors we make sense of others in terms of their ascribed gender (Butler, 2004). Even those who exhibit contradictory gender/sexual identities, such as effeminate men or masculine women, are still enacting gender, reinforcing the centrality of gender as a constructed, but persistent and fundamental sense making device.

Significantly, although the abstract notion of gender incorporates multiplicities of difference, how these differences are articulated are subject to social proscription and policed. Those who defy gender conventions risk hostility and threat, resulting in homophobic and/or transphobic reactions to individuals who demonstrate non-normative or seemingly contradictory gendered characterisations (Butler, 2004; Colgan and Wright, 2011; Bridges, 2014). A recent survey by Stonewall (2017), the UK pressure group to challenge discrimination against the LGBQ and gender non conforming community, found 40% of those identifying as trans had experienced physical violence associated with their gender³. As Linstead and Pullen (2006: 1301) argue, *'anthropological evidence suggests that the binary simply does not do justice to human experience, yet it powerfully constrains social life and possibility, often violently'*. Subscribing to, or defying gendered ascriptions, is not only expected for social order, but crucially, gender also acts as a valorisation device (Clarson, 2014) that affords privilege and power to masculinity when enacted by the male body.

Thus, women are subordinated by ascriptions of femininity whilst masculinity affords power to men who enact it. As Risman (2004: 430) argues, gender operates as a universal sorting device *'used to justify stratification'* and as such, provides a *'foundation upon which inequality rests'*. Herein lies the crux of this debate – gender subordinates one category of humans based upon

³ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf

constructed social ascription (Fine, 2010; 2017), and those attempting to transgress norms beyond that which is deemed contextually acceptable risk social sanctions. Put simply, women cannot claim male privilege by adopting masculine behaviours; such behaviours become 'pariah femininities' (Schippers, 2009) that are afforded negative connotations and so work to maintain women's hierarchical subordination: for example, the [admirable] aggressive competitive male becomes the [unlikable] 'bitch' in female form.

The gender debate pertaining to bias and valorisation has been effectively illustrated within the field of entrepreneurship where invaluable critiques (Ahl, 2006; Calás et al., 2009; Jennings and Brush, 2013) illustrate how notions of masculinity are coterminous with the normative entrepreneur. Developing and exploring this debate has exposed how such assumptions subordinate women as a feminised category in contrast to the tendency to privilege men and masculinity. We now briefly explore these foundations with the aim of suggesting how they might act as a springboard to advance more complex arguments regarding the dynamic and fluid nature of gender as it is enacted in the context of entrepreneurship.

Gendering Entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship has been described as a maturing strand of enquiry (Jennings and Brush, 2013) in that it has demonstrated progressive development, analytical complexity and critical reflexivity since it appeared as a discrete research agenda in the 1980s (McAdam, 2012). The growing focus upon entrepreneurial activity and behaviour became possible given an iterative and sympathetic synthesis with the emerging neo-liberal turn of that era (du Gay, 2004). With a focus upon individuality, actor efficacy and personal achievement, entrepreneurship now occupies a dominant space in contemporary political and socio-economic discourse, posited as a solution to a diverse range of global challenges (Mole and Ram, 2012).

In the early stages of this debate, gender neutrality was assumed. This may have arisen given that as an allegedly open, meritocratic field of action, it was assumed that the possibilities of entrepreneurship transgressed gender considerations. Alternatively, it may be that, in keeping with Holmquist and Sundin's (1988:1) observation, since the research field was 'by men, for men and about men', such dominance fuelled a masculine discourse which, in a circular fashion, prioritised men as the natural foci of normative practice. Thus, men as subjects were researching men as objects. Interest in women as a gendered research category within

entrepreneurship developed little traction until the late 1980s (McAdam, 2012). This body of literature has grown further in recent years, with Jennings and Brush (2013) demonstrating the increasing incidence of top rated journals publishing work focused upon women's business ownership from gendered and feminist perspectives.

Attention to the masculinised discourse around entrepreneurship has helped to generate a much more nuanced debate, in which gendered ascriptions are central in positioning the entrepreneurial activities of women in deficit and disadvantage. In her powerful gender critique, Ahl (2006) developed a theoretical exposé of the stereotypical masculinised discourse of contemporary entrepreneurship which, drawing upon gendered ascriptions, positions women as 'other', compares them to men, and draws conclusions regarding their inadequacy as entrepreneurs on flimsy and unconvincing evidence. In effect, as normative masculinity is so pervasive within entrepreneurship, collectively, men are afforded privilege merely by the virtue of their sex. This, Ahl (2006) argues, is a *gendered* discourse in which those who are associated with masculinity [men] are privileged above those who are associated with femininity [women]. Consequently, as debate regarding the influence of gender upon women's entrepreneurial engagement and activity has matured, it has delved into increasingly sophisticated and complex analyses (Henry et al., 2015; Stead, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017). By using feminist arguments to examine how and why gender shapes the interpretation of the activities and experiences of women business owners, the roots of the deficit discourse are revealed. As such, progress is evident as current debate cogently argues that through gendered prescriptions women are designated as an oppositional category within entrepreneurship, and attributed 'outsider status' given their transgressions from the alleged masculine norm.

This critique, and the subsequent empirical work it has inspired, has been pivotal to exploring the detrimental influence of gendered ascriptions, discrimination and related stereotypes upon women's entrepreneurial propensity and competencies. Yet, we now consider how to move forward from this position: we suggest it is time to widen the focus beyond women as a homogenised category, with assumptions of heterosexuality, as representative of the gendered subject [for exceptions see work on masculinity and entrepreneurship by Hamilton (2014) and Giazitzoglu and Down (2015), and on sexual orientation by Galloway (2012) and Marlow et al., (2017)]. Furthermore, learning from contemporary feminist debates (May, 2015), we argue that it is essential to acknowledge intersectional diversity and so progress the emergent analysis of

marginal or non-normative social positionality. So, in addition to understanding how men enact gender in entrepreneurship, we wish to call attention to the ways that women of colour, immigrant and refugee women, poor and working-class women, women of the Global South, LGBTQIA women and gender non-conforming people – as well as the many people at the intersections of these categories – engage with and experience entrepreneurial activities.

Recent work has emerged recognising and exploring these issues (Essers and Benschopp, 2009; Blackburn et al., 2015; Carter et al., 2016; Martinez-Dy, 2016). However, rather than positioning this as an adjunct to mainstream debate, there is a need to question fundamental assumptions of the normativity of the white heterosexual woman entrepreneur in the Global North, so her gendered profile is deemed as distinctive and contextually influenced as that of, for instance, a refugee entrepreneur in Jordan (Al-Dajani et al., 2015).

In summary, within entrepreneurship research, the articulation of a theory of social behaviour – gender – has become transposed upon the substantive bodies of a single category of people: women. This informs a fundamental fallacy where theory becomes filtered into substance. When women are conceptualised as the personification of gender itself, they are no longer visible as subject beings who exhibit performances of gendered behaviours and, in so doing, demonstrate the multiplicity of possibilities afforded by the contexts in which they are articulated. To recognise how gender is performed as a diverse multiplicity and so, progress and challenge the gender dichotomy, we must also challenge the notion that only women have a gender.

Moving on.

Exploring the nuances and diversity of gendered performances and how they shape entrepreneurial activity is essential to advance debate. The point of this constructive critique, however, is absolutely not to suggest that drawing upon women to expose the gendered nature of entrepreneurship is a redundant or worthless project – far from it. This particular debate has been pivotal in revealing the ontological partiality of the foundations of entrepreneurship research, yet to make further progress, the relationship between gender, women and entrepreneurial activity must be recognised as but a starting point. We cannot explore all the potential pathways offered to advance debate when recognising gender as a contextualised multiplicity within one short article. Hence, to illustrate our critique, we outline some potential

research directions which build upon the conceptual themes we have suggested above. In this way, we hope to illustrate how our theoretical analysis of current thinking can be articulated through substantive themes and support empirical work that perceives gender as a multiplicity with a plethora of influences upon entrepreneurial behaviour.

Consequently, we focus upon three future research directions: highlighting masculinities as a means by which entrepreneurship is enacted, exploring gender as an entrepreneurial resource, and accounting for context through incorporating critiques from contemporary feminism, with influences from intersectionality, decolonial and queer theory. We emphasise that these directions are by no means exhaustive; they are mere indications of the untapped potential of regendering the gender agenda in the context of entrepreneurship. Future research, as noted above, would do well to engage with other disciplines within the social sciences as exemplars of developing a gendered agenda: for example, critical management studies (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Hearn, 2014), development studies (Chant, 2000), labour process theory (Meiksins, 1994) and economic geography (Domosh, 1998) have developed increasingly complex analyses of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation since the 1960s. Entrepreneurship is a maturing field of enquiry, in which the gender perspective in particular has advanced rapidly in a short period of time (Jennings and Brush, 2013), establishing a solid foundation for debate focused upon women and their entrepreneurial activities. Just as in other disciplines, we argue this can be used to progress the field; to that end, we outline a few possible directions with the codicil that these are purely illustrative of the variety of research opportunities.

Making Masculinities Visible

Within current debate, the relationship between men, masculinities and entrepreneurship is sparse. As men are the normative subject within entrepreneurial discourse, they are seen as 'genderless' (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow, 2014). Accordingly, the nature and veracity of the gendered assumptions which reproduce the normative entrepreneurial actor as a heterosexual [white] male, remains under-explored. Men therefore become exemplar entrepreneurial subjects, afforded legitimacy, privilege and visibility by their gender. Yet, despite the power of gender to bestow such authority, this has paradoxically remained largely invisible and immune from scrutiny (Ogbor, 2000; Swail and Marlow, 2017). Given that the entrepreneurial discourse is premised upon hegemonic forms of masculinity, diverse and discrete articulations

of masculinity and how they are performed and reproduced by male entrepreneurial actors demand greater consideration. Those who have considered this perspective (Hamilton, 2014, Smith, 2010, 2013; Giartzoglu and Down, 2015) explore the nuanced nature of masculinity represented as a narrative, identity and/or performance within an entrepreneurial context. Giartzoglu and Down (2015), for example, explore how male entrepreneurs enact specific forms of macho masculinity using the mechanism of business success to enhance their status within their social group. Smith (2012) explores the 'Essex Boy' figure whose petty criminal machismo is transposed via entrepreneurial venturing. These analyses map on to what Hamilton (2012) explores regarding masculine identities; she notes in particular the epistemological implications of drawing upon narrow notions of gender and masculinity. Thus, a nascent thread of critical masculinity studies (Hearn, 2014) is emerging within entrepreneurship that does not presume upon a universal, and thus, unremarkable enactment of masculinity by the male subject. Instead, it seeks to deconstruct and study the performance of masculinity within the context of entrepreneurship.

Whilst this is an encouraging trend, we have yet to challenge the association between traditional heteronormative masculinity and entrepreneurial activity. This association is buoyed by patriarchal power relations that privilege men through the ascription of masculinity articulated through roles such as fathers, heads of families and households (Hamilton, 2006; 2013), which extends to the realm of work, employment and self-employment. How patriarchal power shapes entrepreneurial activity offers much scope for exploration particularly within the context of the family firm given associations between family authority and patriarchy (Bruni, 2014). Exploring, for example, how some men might map a family provider form of masculinity onto their entrepreneurial motivations and ambitions – perhaps terming this 'dadpreneurship' – would be a useful move away from the dominant assumptions of the risk-taking adventurer, and recognise the gendering of entrepreneurial activity that is more 'ordinary' and commonplace.

Pursuing this theme could also offer insight into how gendered power hierarchies within the family influence entrepreneurial activity more widely, and support the emergent debate around matriarchal families and gendered succession issues (Hytti et al., 2017; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017). As a dynamic, descriptive construct (Walby, 2013), the importance of patriarchal processes upon women owned ventures in transitional, developing and disrupted economies is now being recognised (Welter, 2011; Scott et al., 2012; Al-Dajani et al., 2015) but

much scope for further analyses remains. In particular, given the global focus upon entrepreneurial activity as an allegedly promising pathway to individual and collective empowerment for women, how cultural and institutional patriarchal subordination constrains such possibilities must be recognised more clearly. For example, claims by some Middle Eastern governments such as Saudi Arabia, that encouraging women to create new ventures in segregated societies is empowering requires critical evaluation (Zamberi Ahmed, 2011). Identifying and accounting for the mechanisms by which patriarchal authority is claimed and retained by men, and internalised and perpetuated by women, can help us to understand how gender positions women and men in entrepreneurial relations. Some promising threads are emergent within the literature, for example, greater awareness of corruption related to micro-financing schemes involving patriarchal families coercing women into taking loans (Karim, 2011). Nonetheless, the effects of persistent institutional patriarchy on enterprise activity have yet to be thoroughly interrogated.

This issue is likely to become even more pressing given the contemporary levels of conflict and disruption within the global economy. As populations are displaced by conflict that disrupts established forms of economic participation, micro enterprising will become more important. Given the pressing need to generate income under circumstances in which traditional economic activities for male heads of households are volatile, it may be expected that where employment opportunities are poor, more women will turn to self-employment to supplement or replace lost income streams. There is already some evidence that such activity challenges embedded patriarchal ordering as necessity challenges tradition (Al-Dajani et al., 2015) which has some empowerment potential but also, can lead to increasing gender based violence as accepted orders are challenged (Kim et al., 2007; Ritchie, 2016). Again, this suggests the need to consider disruptions within gendered orders in household authority if more opportunities are afforded to women in relation to external constraints upon traditional male roles. Only by focusing more clearly on the diversity of contextualised masculinities and how these are enacted by men in relation to women, and vice versa, can we more fully understand how individuals are enabled or constrained within their entrepreneurial activities.

Gender as a resource in entrepreneurial households

Analysing the household as a context to explore gendered entrepreneurial activities offers much promise to explore gender as an iterative resource exchange mechanism. Evidence indicates that the majority of enterprises are family firms, copreneurial ventures or team led/managed (Klotz et al., 2014; McAdam and Marlow, 2013). Yet, how gender shapes the authority and interaction of women and men in such joint ventures remains under-explored; the process of deciphering subtle gendered engagements in complex environments is challenging, yet ignoring such is to ignore the prevalent mode of entrepreneurial engagement. One way forward here is to recognise the importance of the entrepreneurial household whereby couples, families, kin relatives, other household members [lodgers, girlfriends/boyfriends, friends] engage with the venture (Carter et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship is not undertaken in isolation – rather, it is an intensely social and relational process revolving around and through networks, engagement, interaction and stakeholder support involving men and women developing gendered entrepreneurial relationships.

The household is a key site of entrepreneurial activity within which gendered resources are exchanged; we know, for example, that within entrepreneurial households, members not directly involved with the firm will contribute various forms of capital ranging from substantive financial investment to more tacit aspects such as time, advice, emotional support and labour (Mason et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2017). Such resource flows are intrinsically gendered; evidence suggests that women contribute substantive time and labour to spousal firms, even when in full time employment (Hamilton, 2006) reflecting an expectation of feminised support for male economic activity. This is less likely to be reciprocated for women business owners by male partners (Yang and Aldrich, 2014). Jayawarna et al. (2017), however, argue that given typically higher levels of employment income for men, male partners may transfer greater amounts of financial capital into their female partner's venture. Household entrepreneurial role models are also influential; Greene et al. (2013) found that daughters with self-employed mothers were more likely to consider self-employment as a viable future career given the challenge presented to normative entrepreneurial stereotypes. Thus, analysing how gender is enacted within entrepreneurial households, which in turn influence resource flows between members subject to gendered power hierarchies, is critical to advance understanding how firms, and their owners, 'work'. Importantly, how those who ostensibly appear to be removed from the entrepreneurial venture by having no formal owner/manager role but are in fact, central to its

success can be revealed through household analyses which will capture embedded but nuanced gender relationships.

Attending to context through centring the margins: incorporating intersectionality, decolonial, queer theory and postfeminist critiques

Attention to context is now understood to be a critical element of entrepreneurial analyses per se (Welter et al., 2012). To this end, we must acknowledge and address the embedded and discriminatory white Western/Global North norm within mainstream entrepreneurship research (Bruton et al., 2010; Al-Dajani et al., 2015). Reflecting upon how this contextual bias intertwines with gendered analyses upon women's entrepreneurship suggests a considerable lacuna in contemporary evidence (Welter, 2011). Given gender is a universal but socially diverse performative, how it shapes context not only offers great scope to advance current understanding of women's entrepreneurial activity but can also create links with parallel intersectional feminist critiques (Essers et al., 2010; Knight, 2016; Martinez Dy et al., 2017) that highlight, alongside gender, the simultaneous enabling and/or constraining functions of race/ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability and age, amongst other dimensions. Such critiques suggest populist feminist debate remains focused upon 'first world' issues; thus, critically questioning the potential of entrepreneurship as an empowering device for women in contexts of deprivation, displacement and conflict is key. Moreover, the sheer scope of refugee movement from conflict areas in Northern Africa and the Middle East to the Global North where again, entrepreneurship will inevitably be an important pathway to labour market activity, suggests the need for research to explore, for example, potential gendered tensions between traditional and host nation culture and values, as well as within refugee populations themselves. Consequently, investigating how gender, as a dynamic construct, poses a threat or disruption to normative roles for both men and women in the context of entrepreneurship offers considerable scope for novel analyses and empirical enquiry.

The occurrence of gendered tensions as a result of entrepreneurial activities brings to light another facet of debate, centred upon widespread assumptions of the positive benefits of the phenomenon. Contemporary discourse heralds an almost evangelical approach to entrepreneurship as an economic driver and universally '*good thing*' (Calás et al., 2009; Wright and Zahra, 2011): this assumed positivity is further enhanced by contemporary notions that we

have entered a postfeminist era. The conceptual basis of postfeminism suggests that the twenty-first century Western woman no longer needs feminism as gender equality has been enshrined in law, so she can achieve her personal desires and fulfil her career potential through agency and opportunity (McRobbie, 2009; Lewis, 2014). Taken together, these themes reflect the contemporary neo-liberal turn (Ahl and Marlow, 2017) which made the current global phenomenon of entrepreneurship desirable and possible. The concept of an atomistic, agential female entrepreneur also aligns well with an emergent neo-liberal version of feminism in which individual women are encouraged to 'lean in', strictly manage their time and regulate their and their families' lives in order to succeed as high-achieving working mothers (Fraser, 2013; hooks, 2013; Sandberg, 2013). When neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives are combined, the female subject is conceptually removed from context and structural constraints; the effect is that she is urged to seize the opportunities offered by entrepreneurship while at the same time still disproportionately constrained by gendered structural challenges impeding her agency (Ahl and Marlow, 2017). This friction is then articulated as feminised deficits, exit and failure issues, risk aversion accusations and in particular, is transposed to the policy debate regarding how to 'encourage' women to exploit their agency (Marlow et al., 2008). Thus, critical evaluations of the potential promise of entrepreneurship as a pathway to postfeminist freedoms hold significant scope to inform a much wider critique of the benefits and welfare functions of entrepreneurial behaviour in society.

Carefully attending to context complicates uncritical oversimplifications of the relationship between entrepreneurship and value creation, and brings into relief the various possible outcomes of entrepreneurial activity. For example, the advantages of entrepreneurial activity to women within developed social welfare economies, such as Scandinavia, is questionable (Klyver et al., 2013). If, in a context of regulated equality, women gain extensive benefits from good quality employment, self employment may be a poor career choice given the associated lack of welfare and holiday provision, market uncertainty and lower incomes. Indeed, generic evidence suggests that median returns to self-employment per se –are poorer than equivalent waged work (Lamabrecht and Beens, 2005; Astebro and Chen, 2015;– Luzzi and Sasson, 2016) with longer working hours–. In addition, working hours amongst the self-employed– are skewed between below and above average commitment (Gindling and Newhouse, 2014; ONS, 2014) suggesting a surfeit of part-time or long hours commitment which measures poorly against salaried employment. For these reasons, some have raised the issue that suggesting micro-

enterprise as a pathway to economic participation and autonomy for women may actually offer a 'false promise' of autonomy (Marlow, 2006; Norris et al., 2013), given the volatility of self employment and the detrimental impact this may have upon family security.

Such debates regarding the vulnerability and uncertainty arising from entrepreneurial activity must undergo not only a gendered analysis, but should also work to acknowledge wider contexts. At present, the types of entrepreneurship enacted by people in the Global South, and non-normative women in the Global North, from various racial, ethnic, cultural and class backgrounds, are still challenging for mainstream analyses to adequately comprehend. Regarding the poorest and most marginalised people of the Global South in particular, accounts of the entrepreneurial activities in which they engage as part of their daily survival strategies highlight their extreme economic and social vulnerability, as well as their agential navigation of such structural constraint (Imas et al., 2011). Yet, their subaltern status (Spivak, 2010) means that their stories are continually silenced through a tacit refusal to meaningfully engage with the social conditions and contexts in which their entrepreneurship occurs. If acknowledged at all, their activities tend to be judged and valued against white, Western, middle class, patriarchal standards, and not on their own terms. Furthermore, mainstream entrepreneurship literature simply fails to address the ways that centuries of activity by the Western male heroic capitalist entrepreneur, from the age of colonization until the present, have produced the social conditions within which subordinated men and women can exert limited agency (Jones and Murtola, 2012).

Going beyond a gendered analysis to acknowledge the importance of context, place and social positionality emphasises the centrality of intersectionality for entrepreneurial resource accrual and strategising (Essers et al., 2010; Knight, 2016; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Arising from black feminist critiques (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981) that feminist theory, in its focus upon middle-class white Western women, was at best, naïve, and at worst, racist and classist, intersectionality conceives of subjectivity as 'constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality' (Nash, 2011: 2). Intersectional theorists argue that using gender alone as a conceptual framework for subjectivity homogenises and essentialises women, as well as men, as categories; it becomes a blunt instrument which loses effect and blurs diverse markers of social identity. As the debate has progressed, not only gender, race/ethnicity, and class, but also sexual orientation, religion, migration, age and

disability, amongst others, have been acknowledged as central to locations within social hierarchies and subsequent resource allocation (Anthias, 2001; 2008; Mehrotra, 2010).

As a construct, intersectionality can be difficult to operationalise as it describes how individuals are subject to a confluence of social forces. Anthias (2006) analyses the implications of this confluence suggesting it informs particular forms of *positionality*, which she defines as ‘the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice)’ (2001: 635). Thus, a conception of positionality moves away from given or fixed categories of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, focusing instead upon the conceptual space generated by their intersections and how this positions actors within social hierarchies. Social positionality holds an array of implications for the accrual of a range of socio-economic resources; given resource accrual and utilisation are central to entrepreneurial activity and new venture creation, this has obvious consequences for how opportunities are recognised and enacted. Accordingly, how intersectional positionality, drawing upon gender as well as other social ascriptions, shapes entrepreneurial propensity and potential offers much scope for further interrogation. Moreover, this debate can extend to, and include, diverse articulations of gender – it is not restricted to women/femininity but rather, considers how a multiplicity of social constructs mapped onto the subject being of the individual positions them within the entrepreneurial context. Thus, the privileges afforded to white, heterosexual, middle class men become visible through this analysis, rather than being deemed normative and as such, invisible, as is presently the case (Marlow, et al., 2016).

What our suggestions for the advancement of the entrepreneurial conversation hold in common is the push to ground theory on the phenomenon of entrepreneurship more clearly in the complex landscape of the social world. Streams of literature are emerging in each of these areas, as well as explicit calls for further work on intersectionality, positionality, masculinities, households and context. However, a key aspect of the contemporary social world that has yet to be fully engaged, especially when considering partners and household resource flows, is the relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the embedding of academic analyses within the cis-normative and heteronormative binary. As such, there is an assumption that entrepreneurial actors are cis-identified (gender matches that assigned at birth) heterosexuals who conform to a stereotypical gender binary. This is somewhat puzzling given the prevalence and acceptance of same-sex preferences in many nations, the potential for contradictory or

non-normative gender performances (Smith, 2011), and the growing visibility of transgender people (Gira Grant, 2016). However, despite recent social and institutional shifts, homophobic and transphobic discrimination persists in the socio-economic strata (Badgett et al., 2007; Priola et al., 2014; Tilcsik et al., 2015). The outcome of tensions between the greater social visibility/acceptance of LGBTQIA (an umbrella term including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual as well as non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals) people and the existence of discrimination are of importance for entrepreneurship studies if such discrimination motivates entrepreneurial activity (Galloway, 2012; Marlow et al., 2016). The term 'queer' is a construct critical of dominant binary models of gender and sexuality so rejects divisions into homo/heterosexual, gay/lesbian focusing instead upon diverse and shifting gender identities (Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 2008). This reflects arguments by Linstead and Pullen (2006) who argue for gender as a multiplicity with no fixed point of articulation but as an ongoing performance which draws upon diverse and nuanced articulations. As such, 'queer', a historically derogatory word that has now been reclaimed, is another umbrella term, similar to LGBTQIA, but in general more explicitly politicized due to its history (Halperin, 2008).

It has been demonstrated that individuals seek to create their own employment as a response to employment related socio-economic discrimination, arising from social ascriptions related to race, ethnicity or sex (Clark and Drinkwater, 1998; 2000; Galloway, 2012). Whilst, given the ubiquity of discrimination beyond the constraints of employment, the efficacy of such avoidance strategies as a solution to organisational prejudices is limited, the extent to which LGBTQIA people of various demographic backgrounds and social circumstances might engage in entrepreneurial activities to counter employment discrimination remains under-explored. In addition to discriminatory influences in employment, adopting contradictory gender performances could have negative implications for resource accumulation and stakeholder support. To counter such homophobic influences, these entrepreneurial actors may retreat to so-called 'pink ghettos' (Smith, 2014) and create specific market niches. As the purpose of this article is to draw upon gender theory to consider various possibilities for future research exploration, these are largely speculative reflections; thus, whilst there is some evidence from small scale studies suggesting discrimination flight from employment to self-employment by gay men, this is by no means clear cut (Galloway, 2012). Moreover, amongst LGBTQIA people themselves, further experiences of marginality can be found. Whilst the field of gay and lesbian

entrepreneurship has attracted some attention, class stratification, male domination and white supremacy has still guided investigations, making middle-class white gay men the normative subject of investigations into queer populations (Halperin, 2008). Meanwhile, we have very little evidence regarding lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming people and whether stereotype contradiction and related discrimination influences entrepreneurial propensity.

Accordingly, we know the least about queer entrepreneurs who are not white gay cis men or lesbian cis women – for example, the entrepreneurial activities of trans women of colour, who are often disproportionately active in the beauty industries, entertainment and sex work (Mock, 2014). This is likely due to the heightened marginality of their identities (although collectively, they make up a significant portion of queer populations), general lack of mainstream social acceptance, and the vulnerability this precludes (Gira Grant, 2016). This means that their businesses may be particularly economically constrained and relatively hidden, situated in grey economies and outside markets where the bulk of research is conducted. Again, we raise issues of potential interest but can only supply primarily anecdotal, not empirical evidence as we know so little about these issues.

From this very short overview we have suggested several gendered themes for future exploration and analysis; these not only offer research opportunities but also, indicate the complexity and multiplicity of gender as a social structure, bodily ascription, and everyday enactment. At present, the gendering of entrepreneurship focuses almost exclusively upon (assumed) heterosexual women as gendered subjects; this fails to capture the diversity of gender as a construct and so, informs a limited and partial ontological foundation for the contemporary understanding of its influence upon entrepreneurial activity.

Conclusion.

The purpose of this critique is to advance knowledge of how gendered ascriptions influence entrepreneurial propensity and activity. Like every social activity, entrepreneurship is fundamentally gendered – it is acknowledged that for human actors, gendered ascriptions are universal applications which enable us to make sense of each other and, so engage in meaningful communications and exchange (Butler, 1993; Kelan, 2009; Fine, 2017). Thus, as an outcome of human interaction, entrepreneurship has always been a gendered activity; however,

until the 1990s the gender bias within this process was largely unnoticed – the masculinity imbuing the discourse reflected the normative privilege and visibility afforded to men per se (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Critical evaluations of this bias emerging since the 1990s have informed the ‘gendering’ of entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006) which positions women as gendered subjects within this discourse (Jennings and Brush, 2013; Henry et al., 2015). Such critiques have revealed the manner in which women are disadvantaged by gendered ascriptions both within theoretical analyses of entrepreneurial activity and practical applications of such (McAdam, 2012). The privileges afforded to masculinity create a hierarchy which, in turn, positions women in deficit. As such, the entrepreneurial activities they perform are more likely to be deemed less effective and of lower value merely because they are undertaken by women (Ahl and Marlow, 2012) despite evidence of marginal differences in the entrepreneurial effectiveness of men and women business owners (Robb and Watson, 2012).

Gendering entrepreneurship to reveal the embedded masculine bias has been absolutely essential to challenge normative ontological assumptions, to advance theoretical development and reveal the conceptual detriment under which women labour as entrepreneurial actors. As a foundational social ascription, gender really matters; it is a hierarchal valorisation construct which privileges masculinity over femininity, and manifests in a wide variety of ways. Revealing how this process has shaped the development of the entrepreneurial discourse placing women as disadvantaged subjects has been critical to advancing debate. Within this article, however, we argue that this initial feminist gendered critique, although important and insightful with scope for further development, represents but one thread of the debate. It is time to generate a broader discussion which acknowledges the diversity and complexity of gendered performances and ascriptions. Consequently, analysing the multiplicity of gender effects found in entrepreneurial activity is essential if knowledge is to progress.

We have argued against the danger of a circular argument resulting from a retained focus solely on women as gendered subjects; creating a niche discipline of ‘women’s entrepreneurship’ is potentially detrimental if it continues to isolate women removed from context, rather than exploring how gender *positions* women in relation to others with whom they interact. The importance and centrality of this debate is acknowledged in this article where we recognise potential areas for exploration regarding women’s experiences of entrepreneurship such as the post-feminist debate, context and intersectionality. However, the emerging agenda of ‘by

women, for women and about women', while necessary to correct the balance which for so long, has been 'by men, for men and about men', should be cautious so as not to permit analyses of men and masculinity to remain normative. By confining women's entrepreneurship to a separate sphere, we risk leaving the masculine discourse intact and creating a parallel feminine discourse which, by virtue of a gender binary valorisation, commands less interest, credibility and status. As noted, the need for separate and secure spaces where issues specific and pertinent to women as a subordinated category can be debated are invaluable, but they should be part of the conversation, not seen as a problematic representation of the whole conversation.

To advance this debate, we must recognise that gendering entrepreneurship requires a more expansive conceptual engagement with the construct and how it shapes entrepreneurial activity. For instance, in this discussion the need to recognise masculinity as a diverse construct and how it is enacted through entrepreneurial activity is noted, but so are the simplistic assumptions of heteronormativity, or 'the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon' (Kitzinger, 2005: 478). As a social ascription, gender is performed by everyone – but it is a dynamic construct, so how it is enacted in time, space and place is crucial to analysing its impact. Thus, how gender positions a Palestinian women micro entrepreneur in Jordan navigating her status as a displaced person operating in an overtly patriarchal social order (Al-Dajani et al., 2015) will differ from how gay partners in the Global North turn to entrepreneurship to avoid employment discrimination (Marlow et al., 2017). Moreover, we must move away from conceptualizing any individual entrepreneur as representative of a category or gendered subjecthood, and axiomatically acknowledge that entrepreneurial activity is nested in social interaction between teams, couples, families and households. So our analyses incorporate the complex and differentiated gender performances manifest therein (Carter, et al., 2017). We believe that considering gender as a pathway to resource accumulation and as an exchange mechanism will be fruitful in helping us to apprehend more fully how entrepreneurial actors initiate and enact their ventures.

It is time to broaden the scope of gender capture. Given the prevalence of assumptions of deficit and marginality, a focus upon women and femininity are still pivotal elements of this

debate. However, we argue for a need to generate a more complex analysis in order to progress. Gender must not be seen as just something women do or have, which distorts the debate into a 'woman's problem'. This is not to suggest that every line of enquiry has to be *about* gender but that this construct requires greater recognition within mainstream debate. So for example, in her thesis on gender and risk, using an approach combining neuroscience, history and psychology, Fine (2017) deconstructs accepted notions about women and risk aversity exposing the fragility of such arguments. Given the centrality of risk issues to entrepreneurship, learning from other disciplines to challenge gendered assumptions around this debate is of some importance. Taken for granted assumptions require greater engagement with gender theory by all involved with researching entrepreneurship, not just those working in the field of women's business ownership. In this way, perhaps women will no longer occupy the position of scrutinized subject; instead, how gender positions, benefits and disadvantages all social actors can be revealed. Gender really matters – and it should be a matter for us all.

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