

I Introduction

In recent years, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship have become an important topic of conversation in established organizations, academia, policy circles, and popular media. The seemingly exponential growth and success of startups (despite evidence that the rate of startups has gone down) coupled with the importance of entrepreneurship for job creation have fueled the rise of scholarly research as well as public and private support for entrepreneurs. Influential foundations, think tanks, and institutions, such as the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the World Bank among others, have put up millions of dollars to support entrepreneurship in terms of scholarly work, practical solutions, and startup training in the United States (US) and around the world. Over the same time period, the popularity of US-based shows featuring entrepreneurial activity, such as *Shark Tank*, growing social media attention toward (and notoriety of) founders (e.g. Elon Musk, Elizabeth Holmes, Adam Neumann, etc.), and celebrity-founded companies (such as Goop by Gwyneth Paltrow and Fenty Beauty by Rihanna) have allowed entrepreneurs and startups to capture social imaginaries across the globe. Books by well-known and respected entrepreneurs, such as Brad Feld's (2012) *Startup Community*, have become popular in creating a sense of hope, optimism, and opportunity through intentional efforts to create entrepreneurial communities. In this sense, entrepreneurs have come to occupy a central place in people's imaginations as individuals who have achieved success through their business ventures as much as through their personalities and personal antics.

Such individuals have become "influencers" in their ability to shape conversations around business and related topics and to

influence behaviors in society. This has been possible through their online platforms and the social media attention related to their ventures, often garnering millions of followers through a combination of their celebrity status, their companies, and their personal behaviors. While celebrities may live more public lives – to the extent that they are used to media and fan attention, both in its positive and negative iterations – the scrutiny and attention that has been bestowed on business founders and leaders is unique in its blending of the personal, social, and political in the context of business. As Davis and White (2015) suggest, this could be seen as a new era of corporate activism whereby business leaders are expected to take political stances and engage in activist behavior on social and other issues. These expectations and behaviors stand in stark contrast to previous decades, when such behavior was considered outside the domain of business and organizational boundaries. Entrepreneurs are also taking on more activist positions related to social, environmental, and political issues through their platforms and engaged audiences. It seems that in times of economic difficulty, entrepreneurs and the practice of entrepreneurship have been called on to engage conversations around individual success “despite the odds” and, at times, seem to embody an individualistic hero narrative (Hamilton et al., 2009). As Anderson and Warren (2011) suggest, the spectacle of entrepreneurship and the ways in which entrepreneurial identity takes shape in public spaces plays an important part in bringing together the rational and the emotional to create strategic advantages for entrepreneurs.

1.1 THE GROWTH OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Importantly, these trends have ignited discussions around the infinite possibilities for success that can come about from one’s business ventures. Popular publications, such as *Entrepreneur* magazine, coupled with mainstream books by entrepreneurs, academics, and celebrities aimed at providing guidance for entrepreneurs and those aspiring to have their own startups have helped fuel an entrepreneur revolution. In this context, extensive social media rhetoric has come

to associate entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial action, and entrepreneurship with success, and being entrepreneurial has now become a badge of empowerment, agency, and innovation. A cursory search on LinkedIn, a professional networking platform, yields many individuals who now self-identify as “entrepreneur,” “founder,” “thought leader,” “influencer,” and so forth. This way of presenting oneself on a professional platform has emerged only recently as a way of identifying and differentiating individuals, contrasting with traditional occupational descriptors such as “manager” or “business leader.”

Within the domain of established organizations, entrepreneurial thinking, innovation, and creativity are now seen as valuable ways of ensuring competitive success and differentiating one’s brand and company from others. In the last two decades, intrapreneurship has become an important asset within established organizations (Antonicic & Hisrich, 2001). Generally understood as the practice of adopting “innovative activities and orientations such as development of new products, services, technologies, administrative techniques, strategies, and competitive postures” (Antonicic & Hisrich, 2003: 9) in established businesses guided generally by hierarchy and coordinating and control mechanisms, intrapreneurship provides new ideas and directions for organizations operating in a global context.

Entrepreneurial aspirations have also grown in the context of academic institutions. Classes on subjects such as “design thinking,” “creativity,” “entrepreneurship,” and “starting your business” are now readily available in the curriculums of many schools, ranging from middle schools to postgraduate programs in higher education. Many university students now aspire to be entrepreneurs rather than managers, an emergent trend based on the seeming opportunities reflected in entrepreneurship as a practice and as a way of thinking. To address this new wave of professional aspiration and, at the same time, fuel it, entrepreneurship centers have been established across universities in the US and in many other countries around the world, with the idea that entrepreneurship can be taught (see Rideout & Gray, 2013; Winkel et al., 2013). In particular, entrepreneurial

education and training has become an important area of investment in universities (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2005a, b). These new additions to educational curricula reflect the changing times, as the role of entrepreneurs and their ability to think beyond existing resources have developed into an aspiration, something that students want to emulate. As such, the growth of student-centric entrepreneurship activities across institutes of higher learning has created a new dynamism around jobs and the potential for making one's own decisions about careers rather than being beholden to bosses, corporations, or organizations. Yet within academia, entrepreneurial thinking isn't reserved only for students.

Administrators, generally seen as adhering to bureaucracy, are now aiming to do more with less as they pivot their ways of addressing resource constraints in creative ways. While certainly associated with cost-cutting measures, entrepreneurial thinking is seen as an important skill set to possess even at administrative levels. There have also been increased calls to create better and more synergies between universities and industry through technology transfer centers, research and industry collaborations on innovation projects, and commercialization of faculty research and work (Markman et al., 2005) while, at the same, questioning the role and effectiveness of intermediaries between industry and university research (Villani, Rasmussen, & Grimaldi, 2017). Fueled by a sense of choice, economic opportunity, and authenticity to live a meaningful and purposeful life, entrepreneurial dreams are now supported by many different stakeholders, ranging from educational institutions to nonprofit organizations to entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs) to government actors. Even supranational organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank have come to recognize the ways in which entrepreneurship can provide good job options when governments and the private sector are unable or unwilling to provide living wage opportunities. Thus, beyond the individual hero-mythology associated with entrepreneurs, there are economic narratives that dominate conversations around the value and role of entrepreneurship for economies.

I.2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

There is long-standing research that points to the ways entrepreneurs and startups are important contributors to economic growth and development (Acs & Storey, 2004; Acs & Szerb, 2007; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999; Wong, Ho & Autio, 2005), a discussion that is now being taken seriously by policymakers (Thurik, 2009). The relevance of entrepreneurship and startups for the economy has resulted in increased focus on them through national policy initiatives undertaken by private sector organizations and the public sector as well as global institutions. For example, in the US, Venture for America is an organization that offers paid fellowships for recent college graduates to work in startups across the nation. The aim is for individuals to gain a set of business and leadership skills that can be used to start their own companies, thereby creating opportunities for economic growth and employment. In the European Union (EU), the European Commission has an explicit goal of supporting entrepreneurship as a key driver of growth across member countries. Their mission on this front is stated as:

The European Commission's objective is to encourage more people to become entrepreneurs, set up their own companies and create jobs in the EU. To help them do so, the Commission runs an exchange programme Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and supports [the] introduction of entrepreneurship education in schools in all EU countries.

European Commission (2020)

Globally, the World Bank¹ recognizes the ways in which innovation and entrepreneurship can drive economic growth and has created a division focusing specifically on these issues across regions and countries. This division advises on and provides insights on policies that can be beneficial to individual countries as well as

¹ See www.worldbank.org/en/topic/innovation-entrepreneurship

regions aiming to create jobs for millions of citizens. Across the globe, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor² (GEM) provides insights into different policies, support mechanisms, attitudes, and cultural/social norms among other dimensions, creating a broad overview of how different nations are engaging with and supporting entrepreneurship efforts among their citizens. To this end, data-driven approaches to entrepreneurship policies are gaining traction across many nations (see GEM, 2020).

I.3 ENTREPRENEURSHIP MEETS PANDEMIC MEETS BLACKS LIVES MATTER

The growing attention toward entrepreneurship across a range of domains has come at a time when, globally, economic and political uncertainty have impacted job opportunities in many nations. Most recently, a global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has upended business as usual across the globe, as interconnected and interdependent supply chains, human labor, and financial markets have come to the brink of collapse. While the long-term impact on economies and societies around the world is yet to be known, what has become clear in the short term is the fragility of various economic, sociocultural, and political structures in addressing the associated challenges of the pandemic. During this time, businesses across all industries, sectors, and geographies, and those of all sizes, are being impacted financially and socially. As the scale and scope of the impact unfolds, it is likely that business owners, particularly of small businesses and startups, will face additional struggles related to financial solvency, hiring, and workforce availability due to health concerns and cash flow among many other challenges.³

² www.gemconsortium.org

³ See www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/technology/virus-start-ups-pummeled-layoffs-unwinding.html

At the same time, the pandemic has shown that massive disruptions in economies and societies have gendered consequences,⁴ often exacerbating gendered inequities in the domains of health, economics, education, and society, as many white-collar workers have started to work from home. The brunt of childcare, eldercare, and pastoral care still continues to be taken up by women in the global context despite the new ways in which work is being reorganized to address health concerns related to the pandemic (Care.org, 2020). Already, research shows a gender gap in working hours of between 20 percent and 50 percent as women have reduced their work hours due to home demands, likely resulting in decreased opportunities for advancement and promotion post-pandemic (Collins et al., 2021). As organizations move to contain further outbreaks related to the virus, remote working, learning, and teaching have become the new normal in many sectors, but only for the privileged workers who are not considered essential workers or who have jobs that can be done remotely. Within this context, social distancing is a privilege exercised predominantly by the wealthy or those with teleworking-amenable jobs in developed nations (Ayyub, 2020).

While some governments struggle to mitigate the economic consequences of the pandemic as best they can, others have been quicker to provide relief for small businesses and, specifically, women entrepreneurs. For example, Canada's Women Entrepreneur Knowledge Hub has already assembled a list of resources for women entrepreneurs, which are now available through national and regional governments as well as public and private organizations.⁵ In the US, the national response has been much slower and has generally taken shape piecemeal at the state and even city levels. While a historic \$2 trillion stimulus package was passed on March 25, 2020, the ability of women-led businesses to sustain themselves during this time is being tested. The new Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security

⁴ www.care.org/sites/default/files/gendered_implications_of_covid-19_-_full_paper.pdf

⁵ See <https://wekh.ca/covid-19-resources-for-women-entrepreneurs/>

Act is part of the massive relief bill.⁶ The bill provides financial support for various sectors and industries, including around \$44 billion for education, around \$154 billion for hospitals and public health groups, around \$340 billion for local and state governments, \$377 billion for small businesses, \$500 billion for large corporations, and around \$560 billion for individuals. For small businesses, where the majority of startups would likely go under, there are various programs, including emergency grants up to \$10,000 to cover costs associated with running the business (operation costs), forgivable loans of up to \$10 million per business, and six months of relief for businesses who already have Small Business Administration (SBA) loans. Yet despite these initial measures, the allocation for SBA loans for small businesses had already been depleted as of April 16, 2020, triggering conversations about additional support and funding for small businesses struggling to survive in the midst of the pandemic – conversations and bipartisan wrangling that is currently taking place (midsummer 2020). In all likelihood, many small businesses, including those owned by women, will not survive the economic impact associated with the measures taken to mitigate public health considerations.

Already, emerging data suggest the devastating effects on the economy and specifically on businesses that are owned by women or minorities. Fairlie finds that

the number of active business owners in the United States plummeted by 3.3 million or 22 percent over the crucial two-month window from February to April 2020. The drop in business owners was the largest on record, and losses were felt across nearly all industries and even for incorporated businesses. African-American businesses were hit especially hard experiencing a 41 percent drop. Latinx business owners fell by 32 percent, and Asian business

⁶ See <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6819239/FINAL-FINAL-CARES-ACT.pdf>

owners dropped by 26 percent. Simulations indicate that industry compositions partly placed these groups at a higher risk of losses. Immigrant business owners experienced substantial losses of 36 percent. Female-owned businesses were also disproportionately hit by 25 percent.

(2020: 1)

While some businesses have rebounded, more recent research finds that the decline in Black business ownership is three times that of other groups and that Black women-owned businesses have had the biggest losses.⁷ These findings suggest that recovery from the pandemic will be much more difficult for businesses owned by minority and immigrant women over the long run. Such considerations are quite important in the context of the pandemic but also the ongoing social unrest and the movement against racial injustice, including through Black Lives Matter.

As historic racial inequities continue to plague US society in the domains of housing, health, education, government/political representation, and labor markets/employment among other areas, Black Lives Matter has become a large social movement highlighting these ongoing racial injustices that are evident across all manners of organization and institution. As such, understanding these inequalities as they are manifest in entrepreneurship and opportunities for business success requires a dedicated analysis – a point raised in our discussion in Chapter 7, where we take an intersectional approach to understanding the ways identities, interactions, and institutions intersect to create opportunities for some but not other entrepreneurs. In all, we recognize that the pandemic and Black Lives Matter are defining moments of our time and relevant for our analyses moving forward, particularly in relation to gender and business ownership.

⁷ <https://cdn.advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/31083212/Black-Business-Owners-Hit-Hard-By-Pandemic.pdf>

I.4 ON GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

To this end, at the state level, some cautious optimism is warranted, as governors are putting together resources to support small business owners, including specific funds for women business owners. For example, in the state of Connecticut, the lieutenant governor is providing information and resources for women-owned businesses. Across the US, private, public, and nonprofit groups are each providing different resources for women-owned/led businesses.⁸ Despite the array of attention being given to female entrepreneurs, sectoral effects of stay-at-home orders, contracting global demand, and lack of available childcare and in-person schooling options are threatening to reverse the past decades' progress by aggravating the gender gap in entrepreneurship (Clark Muntean, 2021).

Weaknesses in governance structures that have resulted in chronic unemployment or underemployment have also provided incentive for individuals to engage in entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of developing nations. Coupled with growing concerns over environmental degradation, climate change, and sustainability, entrepreneurship has become a solution to the many ills plaguing societies and businesses globally. Ranging from microfinance to urban farming, from fintech accelerators to drones for predicting weather patterns impacting crops in developing nations, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship have become the *de facto* focus in conversations around creative solutions, innovation, and jobs.

Within this context, the ways in which gender, race, and other relations of difference impact who can become a successful entrepreneur and, equally importantly, how entrepreneurship gets studied have yet to be examined fully. Moreover, the opportunities and resources that are available toward entrepreneurship are not necessarily readily accessible by everyone who aspires toward starting their own business. From a scholarly perspective, understanding the

⁸ See www.thehelm.co/emergency-funding-female-founders/

assumptions driving research on entrepreneurship and the policies supporting entrepreneurship can offer novel insights into blind spots, in particular for those groups who may have traditionally been marginalized in academic research and in policy considerations. For example, based on research by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020a), around 72 percent of all chief executives and senior officials and legislators around the world are men. Given that women are not represented in senior positions, these numbers indicate that decision-making and resource allocation toward entrepreneurial activities in organizations and by governments can potentially be biased against women. Further to this consideration, the gender gap in labor force participation globally is 43 percent: 95 percent of men between the ages of 25 and 54 participate in the labor force compared to just 52 percent of women (ILO, 2020b). The main explanation for this gap is childcare responsibilities, which, globally, still fall disproportionately on women. As a consequence, women in general and mothers in particular face additional challenges related to entrepreneurship in the form of decreased mentorship and networking opportunities, access to capital, and biases related to their ability to be successful (Krause & Fetsch, 2016).

Toward this end, a growing number of scholars have called attention to and critiqued the foundational assumptions of mainstream entrepreneurship research, including its epistemological and methodological approaches rooted in positivism (Essers et al., 2017; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Generally under the umbrella of critical entrepreneurship studies, such work has focused on conversations and approaches generally not examined within the broader domain of entrepreneurship. These critical works join others from feminist traditions that question the underlying male-centric foundation of entrepreneurship research and reorient existing frameworks by making central the role of gender in theorizing entrepreneurship (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009; Greer & Greene, 2003). Currently, the study of women in the context of entrepreneurship is often guided by gender binary notions of male versus female (Brush, de

Bruin, & Welter, 2009) rather than gender relations and gendering of entrepreneurship practices and activities (see, for example, the work of Ahl, 2002; also Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004a, b). More recently, scholars have focused on the impact of gender nonconforming behavior in entrepreneurship leadership, exposing how binary notions of gender do not reflect the complexity of lived experiences (Patterson, Mavin, & Turner, 2012). In fact, new research highlighting liminal gender, or the ways in which individuals can be between or “betwixt” stereotypical male and female normative frameworks, in the context of entrepreneurship based on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) sheds much needed light on the complexity of lived gender experiences (Birkner, 2020). In highlighting and expanding on these existing frameworks, our approach is to deploy gender as a multidimensional concept and understand it as an organizing principle of societies globally. To understand the ways in which gender can be brought to bear on entrepreneurship as a field of academic inquiry, as a field of practice, and as an economic policy, we focus explicitly on the arena of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

1.5 ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS: BRIEF OVERVIEW AND GENDER-LENS APPROACH

Using entrepreneurial ecosystems as a framework allows examination and consideration of the multiple actors and stakeholders involved in entrepreneurship. In general, these ecosystems can be defined as a community of entrepreneurs engaged in reciprocal social and economic exchanges in the context of intermediary organizations, other actors, and institutions. As an emergent theoretical framework within the broader entrepreneurship field, entrepreneurial ecosystems have gained traction for conceptualizing the various networked actors engaged in entrepreneurship in and across different contexts. The entrepreneurial ecosystem framework provides insights into the networked, relational, and processual elements of entrepreneurial activities, focusing explicitly on the ways actors engage with each other, with organizations, and with institutions. The dynamic

examination of actors within the context of entrepreneurship has proved to be quite popular with academics, as it has brought focus to the agentic ways individuals engage with, access, and navigate the various resources required for successful startups. Similarly, entrepreneurial ecosystems have also found resonance with policymakers; and given that entrepreneurship is often heralded as a path of economic development and job creation (Harper, 2003), creating robust entrepreneurial ecosystems through institutions has become an important policy tool (Acs, Desai, & Hessels, 2008).

With the development and popularity of this approach to the study of entrepreneurship, there has also been a robust and critical perspective questioning the boundaries and spatial focus of the concept and a concern over the lack of clarity on exactly which actors are connected to each other, how, and why (see Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017). Moreover, questions about the boundaries of ecosystems vis-à-vis cities and other geographic considerations have also grown – where are the boundaries of ecosystems and who decides what they are? These and many other questions remain to be debated and researched within the entrepreneurship field. At the same time, emerging scholarship within the entrepreneurial ecosystem framework has emphasized that ecosystem diversity and coherence are important considerations, particularly in explaining resilience of some entrepreneurial ecosystems over others, suggesting that differentiation between ecosystems is a key element that should be examined (Roundy, Brockman, & Bradshaw, 2017). Thus, while the concept remains popular, it has also come under scrutiny for its lack of precision and focus on providing clarity in relation to the dynamics of entrepreneurial relationships, activities, and actors (Brown & Mason, 2017). In fact, some scholarship seems to include just about every actor and institution possible when considering the ways entrepreneurial ecosystems take shape and function (Spigel, 2017), making it difficult to understand how and why certain relationships form, how particular actors may occupy different power positions in relation

to others, and why certain institutional factors matter more than others.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF BOOK AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM SCHOLARSHIP

We contribute to these conversations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem literature through a critical gender perspective and provide insights as to the ways in which gender makes a difference for the conceptualization and study of entrepreneurial ecosystems. In doing so, our aim is to highlight that rather than being a binary formation or a variable, gender is a complex lived experience drawing from a range of male, female, and nonconforming dimensions that are manifest in obvious as well as more subtle ways. That is, gender is not necessarily just about categories of women and men, but rather a set of socially constructed relationships and differences that manifest in visible and invisible ways in social interactions, activities, and practices. In the case of entrepreneurship, gender makes a difference in terms of how activities are defined, how resources assembled and accessed, and how success and identity factors come into play in the course of engaging in business ventures (see Clark Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). These dimensions of gender are relevant for understanding and analyzing ecosystem identity, a concept we create and examine to underscore the ways ecosystems are organized and function based on informal and formal institutional factors, highlighting, in particular, how different identities may be more open to gender inclusion.

Our goal is to demonstrate, through the concept of ecosystem identity, the multifaceted, various ways gender contributes to a richer understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems and in doing so, show that by bringing gender in only as a variable to compare male and female entrepreneurs, much nuance and complexity is missed in the ways gender becomes enacted in entrepreneurship and ecosystems. Based on institutional factors, we provide a typology of four ecosystem identities by categorizing informal and formal systems as strong or weak and/or emergent or established. We label these identities as

“nascent” (weak informal and emergent formal institutional factors), “communal” (strong informal and emergent formal institutional factors), “bureaucratic” (weak informal and established formal institutional factors), and “stable” (strong informal and established formal institutional factors). Based on these identities, our approach is to categorize entrepreneurial ecosystems, highlighting how some might be more amenable and organized toward gender inclusion and change in general, while others may be much more difficult to change and/or reorganize and restructure. In other words, gender is not simply a property of an individual, but an important organizing principle of society which is reflected in institutions, both in terms of formal economic, political, and legal systems as well as informal ones comprising belief systems, norms, and values.

The institutional consideration is important because in many metrics, scales, and questionnaires, women are seen as a type of entrepreneur without consideration of how the very institutions of society are gendered. For example, one of the most widely used data sets comes from GEM, which considers women entrepreneurs as a “special topic” in the broader entrepreneurship research they undertake globally.⁹ While this in itself is not necessarily unhelpful, it does signify that the category of women is seen as distinct from entrepreneurs, which are assumed to be male. Without voicing or uncovering these assumptions, conversations around inclusion in scholarship attending to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems generally focus on what women can be doing differently; for example, telling women to pitch differently in the face of gendered questions (Kanze et al., 2018). This “fix the women” approach focuses on individual behavior changes women should enact, rather than examining the related and interconnected ways individuals factors, organizational practices, and institutionalized sociocultural norms are gendered. It also leaves out ecosystem identity as an important aspect for understanding the context in which many of these lived

⁹ See www.gemconsortium.org/report

experiences and relationships take shape – some ecosystems are simply better suited to adapt and change toward gender inclusion.

In many ways, when research is guided by the assumption that gender can be equated with biological sex and, thus, treated as a variable, comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs are then assumed to yield insights about differences in behavior, attitudes, practices, and so forth that are based on gender. This tautological approach confounds the socially constructed and relational aspects of differences with those that are biological or genetics-based – a consideration that is probably best left to biological sciences than social science scholarship. Our approach is to highlight further the ways in which gender gets done and the ways in which gender organizes activities and possibilities for action and connection in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Without a multidimensional analysis that considers individuals, interactions, and institutions, gender inclusion cannot come about only by changing behaviors. Ecosystem identity allows us to provide a set of institutional concepts and language to understand how these elements may play out and, in turn, may influence how gender gets done (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004b) and how changes toward gender equality might take shape.

Yet there is much more work to be done to realize how gender underscores the ways in which entrepreneurial ecosystems are organized and replicated through social interactions, economic exchanges, and community building. Looking at the existing literature at the intersections of gender and entrepreneurship (Jennings & Brush, 2013) or gender and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Brush et al., 2019; McAdam, Harrison, & Leitch, 2019; Manolova et al., 2017), we find that critical and feminist iterations are still quite rare, with some notable exceptions (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2007, 2009; Henry, Foss, & Ahl, 2016; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). Based on feminist insights, we build a new understanding of entrepreneurial ecosystems as a gendered phenomenon with implications for concerns around inclusion and inclusive economic growth. By considering the centrality of gender as an organizing principle of entrepreneurial ecosystems, we

highlight shortcomings of existing approaches and also expand on them to demonstrate the role and complexity of individual, organizational, and institutional factors working in concert to create and maintain gendered inequities. But beyond this, we also highlight ways to expand current entrepreneurship scholarship to recognize the role of gender as a dimension of theory and theorizing, an epistemological concern around how we know and theorize ecosystems, rather than gender being viewed as a static variable based on biology or even genetics. We offer insights around effective organizational practices and policies aimed at remedying gendered inequalities associated with entrepreneurship and economic growth, a hallmark consideration for many ESOs, supranational institutions, government leaders, and policymakers across the globe. In all, this book provides insights into the relevance of gender for understanding entrepreneurial ecosystems and for supporting inclusive economic development.

In order to accomplish these aims, the book brings together insights from fieldwork carried out by the authors between 2014 and 2019 across multiple cities in the US, including Boston, St. Louis, and Asheville. Beyond this introductory chapter, the book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a foundation for the different streams of research and concepts in entrepreneurial ecosystem literature. Chapter 3 then provides a gender perspective arriving from different theoretical traditions, thus expanding our understanding of gender beyond sex and making relevant how inclusion can be understood from these various perspectives in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystem research. Chapter 3 focuses on aspects of gender inclusion in entrepreneurial ecosystems and includes insights and key ideas from feminist scholarship in the domain of gender and gender relations. Chapters 4–6 each provide insights focusing on a single level of the multidimensional and interrelated elements that simultaneously can yield inclusion or, conversely, continued exclusion of particular groups from entrepreneurial ecosystems. These include, respectively, the level of individuals, organizations, and institutions, and the chapters provide insights from each of the three cities when

applicable. Chapter 7 provides an intersectionality analysis, focusing on Boston as a case study, to underscore the multiple and intersecting ways gender, race, and immigrant status impact identities, interactions, and institutions in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Chapter 8, the final chapter, provides a holistic framework for moving forward with inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems and economic growth policies. Below, additional details about each chapter provide more nuanced insights for readers who may be interested in understanding the structure and organization of the book.

1.6.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter provides an overview of the rise and popularity of entrepreneurship as a practice and as a scholarly field of research. It notes how entrepreneurship has been shown to contribute positively to economic development and indicates that scholarship related to promoting and supporting entrepreneurs through building robust entrepreneurial ecosystems is on the rise. In general, entrepreneurial ecosystems can be defined as a community of entrepreneurs engaged in reciprocal social and economic exchanges in the context of intermediary organizations, other actors, and institutions. The popularity of the entrepreneurial ecosystems concept is evident in the growth of research dedicated to the topic in the last decade across several academic disciplines. Such research has focused on theory refinement as well as the development of metrics and “playbooks” for communities that want to foster entrepreneurship. At the same time, policymakers are increasingly supporting the building of successful entrepreneurial ecosystems in their cities and states through public funding. Despite the greater attention to entrepreneurial ecosystems in both the academic and policy world, there continues to be a dearth of research that addresses the relevance of gender for understanding and supporting entrepreneurial ecosystems. This chapter emphasizes the relevance and importance of a gender perspective for understanding how and why entrepreneurial ecosystems may not benefit female entrepreneurs in the same ways that they benefit male entrepreneurs.

It provides insights into the ways a gender perspective can contribute to a new conceptual model of entrepreneurial ecosystems and eventually lead to effective policies for inclusive economic development.

1.6.2 Chapter 2: Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: An Overview

The second chapter concentrates on the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Auerswald, 2015; Bosma & Holvoet, 2015; Spigel, 2017), providing various ways to conceptualize and define it and then moving on to discuss its importance for supporting economic development. Given the growing body of work on entrepreneurial ecosystems, the chapter first outlines how the field of entrepreneurial ecosystems evolved from existing work on clusters (Motoyama, 2008) and carries much of its assumptions around homogeneity of actors while being firmly rooted in place-based analysis (see O'Connor et al., 2017). In contrast to these assumptions, we demonstrate that actors are not homogenous but heterogeneous and that existing concepts of entrepreneurial ecosystems do not differentiate among entrepreneurs as actors within ecosystems. These arguments are further elaborated on with evidence in the chapters that follow.

1.6.3 Chapter 3: Understanding Gender and Inclusion in Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

The third chapter focuses explicitly on the relevance of gender for entrepreneurial ecosystems. The chapter first discusses the differences between sex, gender, and gender relations to lay the foundation for a dynamic understanding of actors and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Guided by feminist perspectives in entrepreneurship (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2007, 2009; Clark Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016) and sociology (Acker, 1992, 2006), the chapter provides theoretical insights, derived from the various ways in which gender is studied, on how gender can be conceptualized and how inclusion is a multifaceted concept and practice. The chapter then offers a guiding definition of gender inclusion in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystems and moves on to provide insights about

how to study it in relation to individuals, organizations, and sociocultural norms at the same time. In doing so, this chapter provides a multifactor and multilevel gender framework for understanding economic inclusion in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystems.

1.6.4 Chapter 4: Individual-Level Dynamics: Beyond Motivation, Identity, and Networks

This chapter focuses on individual-level aspects of inclusion in entrepreneurial ecosystems, using examples from gender-focused ecosystems research in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of broader research carried out by the authors between 2014 and 2017 (Knowlton et al., 2015; Ozkazanc-Pan, Knowlton, & Clark Muntean, 2017). Using data from fieldwork carried out in Boston, we outline how individual-level gender biases operate in entrepreneurial ecosystems and how they impact women entrepreneurs differently than male entrepreneurs. Our focus is explicitly on the gendering of social capital and trust within entrepreneurial ecosystems, as we highlight their gendered dimensions which lead to exclusion for women, even if “unintentionally.”

1.6.5 Chapter 5: Organization-Level Dynamics: Practices and Policies

This chapter shares examples of organization-level barriers to full participation of women in entrepreneurial ecosystems by way of the three cities that were the sites of our fieldwork – Boston, Massachusetts, St. Louis, Missouri, and Asheville, North Carolina. Here, the focus is on the ways in which intermediary organizations, such as incubators, accelerators, coworking spaces, and investors among others, can act as gatekeepers to the resources of the ecosystem. The chapter focuses specifically on access to networks, outreach, selection, support mechanisms (ESOs) available in the ecosystem, and ecosystem culture. In speaking to these issues, the chapter focuses on the role of meso-level organizational actors and how their norms,

values, and practices differentially impact entrepreneurs and lead to inclusion or exclusion from the ecosystem.

1.6.6 Chapter 6: Institution-Level Dynamics: Institutions and Sociocultural Gender Norms

This chapter outlines the importance and role of institutional factors in the analysis of entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in relation to gender. We focus explicitly on informal and formal factors – that is, belief systems as well as economic, political, and legal systems – as important considerations in how entrepreneurial ecosystems are organized and replicated. We conclude this chapter by introducing the concept of “ecosystem identity” as a framework that offers a typology of ecosystems and thereby expands how scholarship attending to entrepreneurial ecosystems can conceptualize and categorize different types of ecosystem. Our goal here is to offer suggestions as to how the institutional organization and identity of an ecosystem can offer different mechanisms and drivers of change toward gender inclusion. We point out that ecosystem identity impacts the possibilities for change, and, on this basis, we offer insights as to challenges as well as opportunities for institutional shifts.

1.6.7 Chapter 7: Intersectional Analysis

This chapter focuses on the city of Boston and delves into how intersectional differences (Acker, 2012) among women entrepreneurs result in additional and different biasing forces for women of color and immigrant women entrepreneurs compared to White women engaging in entrepreneurship. As such, the chapter provides a holistic consideration of how gender, race, and other relations of difference may play out in experiences of entrepreneurship within entrepreneurial ecosystems. The chapter aims to provide a complex and holistic picture of how entrepreneurial ecosystems essentially provide very different experiences, interactions, and institutional support for actors

in ecosystems, thereby supporting our argument that actors, even if in the same category, are indeed heterogeneous and not homogeneous.

1.6.8 Chapter 8: Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Economic Development

This chapter examines all three levels to present a holistic framework for understanding gender in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystems and policies for supporting inclusive economic development. It builds off the authors' previous research in this area within the technology startup sector (Ozkazanc-Pan & Clark Muntean, 2018). The chapter provides effective approaches for building inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems that range from individual approaches to organizational ones and, finally, to approaches by policymakers at local, state, and country levels. The chapter also outlines how gender should be an important dimension of policy efforts aimed at helping cities, states, and nations combat rising economic inequality in the midst of economic development efforts. More urgently, the impact of the ongoing pandemic is also examined given the gendered outcomes it will likely have on entrepreneurial success.

Readers will find that the book offers a combination of new theoretical insights derived from critical epistemological traditions, such as feminist work and intersectionality, and empirical research to push existing approaches and ideas within the entrepreneurship field, specifically in relation to entrepreneurial ecosystem scholarship. By doing so, our goal is to make gender relevant to theorizing of entrepreneurial ecosystems such that we call into question taken-for-granted assumptions about the homogeneity and identity of ecosystem actors, the relationships among them, and the institutionalized norms and values associated with supporting entrepreneurial success. We believe that this approach will make scholarship on and about entrepreneurial ecosystems richer in addressing concerns around inclusion, equity, and economic growth – considerations that are being addressed by cities, states, and supranational organizations globally. By providing the field with a new set of conceptual tools that

are explicitly based on gender and what is essentially a new concept, ecosystem identity, to speak about inclusion through a gender lens, we hope to move entrepreneurship scholarship beyond its current state. We believe this will provide important new directions for research that aspires to create equitable entrepreneurship opportunities. As scholars, we know that research can bring important insights and influence organizations and policymakers by demonstrating the value of inclusion and the cost of exclusion for economic growth. Thus, we see our efforts as yielding positive contributions not only to academic research but also to new conversations that can impact practice as well as popular media opinions about gender, inclusion, and success in entrepreneurship – an equally important aspect of influencing the influencers and decision makers through rigorous research and scholarship.

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