Preface

The number of women entering small business ownership has increased significantly across the world. These women make a crucial contribution to the economic growth and development of local, national and global economies. Yet, despite their increasing numbers, they have received little attention from the academic community and research into the experiences of women small business owners is confined to a handful of countries. The work on women entrepreneurs is far more extensive and generally eclipses the area of small business ownership. In entrepreneurial research, the emphasis has tended to be on the experiences of women originally from senior corporate management backgrounds, whereas small business research encompasses women from a wide range of social, economic and educational backgrounds.

It is suggested that entrepreneurs demonstrate inventive tactics that are employed to achieve long-term growth and profitability, whereas small business owners are motivated towards their own goals rather than expansion and profitability (e.g. Carland et al., 1984). As women tend to be classed as small business owners rather than entrepreneurs does this mean that they are less ambitious or motivated than their male counterparts? Past research suggests that it is not the degree of ambition or motivation that differs but the form that ambition takes, with women using personally defined intrinsic measures of success as opposed to extrinsic, financial measures (Buttner and Moore, 1997). If entrepreneurial success is based on a male-defined model of success that women do not conform to, does this make women less successful?

Given that women still have to balance work and home responsibilities, small business ownership is an attractive alternative to paid employment. Research indicates that women frequently enter into new enterprises because employment does not provide them with the flexibility, control or challenge that is offered by business ownership (e.g. Fielden et al., 2000). Many women do not have the skill base or experience of their male counterparts and this may not only inhibit the progress of these women, but may also act as an effective barrier to the entry of other women into business ownership. This lack of business background is not accidental, rather it is fostered by the educational system and is enhanced by employment practices that seek to keep women out of the management positions that would give them the opportunity to acquire and develop relevant skills and experience. Moreover, the evidence would suggest that women do not lack the motivation to enter business ownership and indeed, they often need to be even more highly motivated than their male counterparts if they are to overcome the barriers to business start-up that they inevitably encounter (Shaw et al., 2001; Walker, 2000).

This book is divided into five parts and presents an up-to-date, theoretical review as well as practical initiatives and strategies relating to the experiences of women entering small business ownership in the twenty-first century. The first part explores the personality characteristics and behaviour of new and established women small business owners, along with the factors that drive women into entrepreneurship. Part II examines the constraints that serve to inhibit women's success along with the strategies they use to achieve

success, as defined by women themselves. The third part explores the experiences of women small business owners from different ethnic backgrounds, followed by Part IV which provides a global perspective on women entrepreneurs. The final part considers the future perspectives of research into women and small business ownership and, in the last chapter, we draw together the main issues and themes presented throughout this book and propose new research directions and ways forward for women into enterprise.

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