

# 1. Gender and entrepreneurial activity: an overview

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Entrepreneurship, from a gender perspective, is not only an academic topic of growing interest but also a topic of policy importance across many nations. Regarding the policy importance of the topic first, consider the following European initiatives and policy directives.

From the perspective of the European Union (EU) countries, the European Commission (EC) noted:<sup>1</sup>

Gender equality has been a key principle of the EU ever since the Treaty of Rome introduced the principle of equal pay for men and women in 1957. Using the legal basis provided by the Treaties, the Union has adopted thirteen directives on gender equality since the 1970s. These have ensured, among other things, equal treatment concerning access to work, training, promotions and working conditions, including equal pay and social security benefits, as well as guaranteed rights to parental leave.

Attention to gender issues might be dated as far back as the EC's equal pay directive in 1975. Gender issues, especially with regard to women entrepreneurs, have remained a centerpiece in European dialogues. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted (2004, p.6):

[It is critically important to] improve the factual and analytical underpinnings of the role of women entrepreneurs in the [EU] economy . . . [as] women entrepreneurs play an important role in the entrepreneurial economy, both in their ability to create jobs for themselves and to create jobs for others.

The World Bank recently echoed the sentiments of the OECD in this regard (Sattar, 2002, p.63):

Entrepreneurship . . . is important from the perspective of job creation, private sector development, and wealth creation [in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia]. Women's participation in entrepreneurship can enhance the expansion of these economic goods and simultaneously lead to less inequality in the two largest subgroups in the population: men and women.

In addition, the OECD recently offered the following policy statements about women entrepreneurs (Adema et al., 2014, p. 21):

Policy makers wishing to strengthen the economic impact of women entrepreneurs need a better understanding of the factors contributing to the growth and success of female-owned firms . . . Policies that foster female entrepreneurship often come under the umbrella of programmes for small enterprises. However, they are likely to impact relatively strongly on women entrepreneurs, since most run small businesses. A mix of general policies for SMEs and instruments explicitly targeting women can be effective in prompting interest and entry into entrepreneurship.

From the perspective of the United States, President Barack Obama recently acknowledged, in *A Strategy for American Innovation* (The White House, 2015), the importance for the federal government to invest in the building blocks of innovation, to fuel the engine of private-sector innovation, and to empower a nation of innovators. Therein, he emphasized that one vehicle for empowering a nation of innovators is to ensure opportunities for underrepresented minorities and women in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Over the previous decades, the academic and professional literatures on gender and entrepreneurial activity have grown significantly both in terms of numbers and in terms of scope. In this introductory chapter, I attempt to summarize trends in this literature.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the criteria for this overview, I first began with two of the older foundational papers in this area—Birley (1989) and Brush (1992)—and then considered those scholarly efforts in those reviews based on the criterion that each have 25 or more citations to date in Google Scholar. Second, I searched for all publications that referenced Birley (1989) and Brush (1992), and I also identified the journals listed in these two reviews. Regarding the former, I included in my summary figures below each of those articles; regarding the latter, I searched each journal and included each relevant article in print to date. To supplement this search process, I imposed two additional “checks” in an effort for completeness. I searched both the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and OECD websites for reports on the topic of gender and entrepreneurship, and I included in our bibliography any references that had not previously been identified. The end result is 563 scholarly contributions.

Sixteen descriptive categories were developed on the basis of key phrases published in either the abstract of a journal article/report, the article’s/report’s statement of its purpose, or the article’s/report’s summary.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of the literature, in percentages, by these subjectively determined categories. Clearly, scholars have focused on some

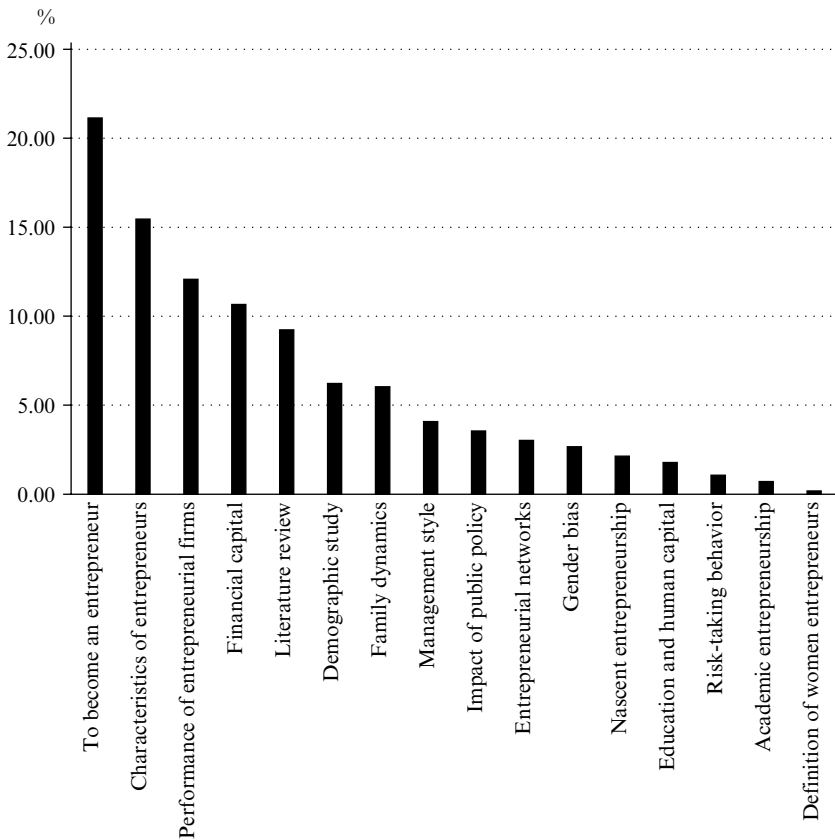


Figure 1.1 Distribution of the literature, by category

broadly defined topics more than others. The largest number of articles/reports (21%) deals with the topic that I call: *To become an entrepreneur*. Entries in this category are followed by what I call: *Characteristics of entrepreneurs* (15%) and *Performance of entrepreneurial firms* (12%). Of course, any given contribution to the literature will likely address several topics, but I have imposed my personal judgment as to the broadest categorical fit.<sup>4</sup>

I urge the reader to refrain from interpreting the relative topic emphasis in Figure 1.1 to mean that some topics are more important than others; on the contrary, the distribution might simply reflect the fact that data are more readily available on some topics than other. The distribution might also reflect the tastes and preferences of journal editors.

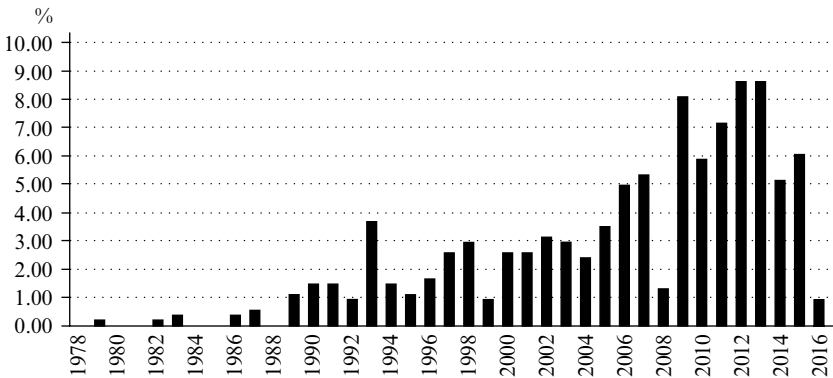


Figure 1.2 Distribution of the literature, by publication year

Regarding the growing interest in the topic of gender and entrepreneurial activity, consider Figure 1.2. In that figure, I illustrate how the volume of this body of literature has increased over time. I show the percentage of the literature considered herein by year of publication. Statistical analysis aside, the trend is visually positive. Keeping in mind that only a portion of publications in 2016 are shown in the figure, one might generalize that this body of literature has approximately doubled during the current decade.

There are a number of possibilities why this increasing trend in the number of publications on gender and entrepreneurial activity might exist. The possibilities include, but are not limited to, the establishments of new journals focused on the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup> as well as the growth of special issues of existing journals on this topic. Regardless of the reason, the growth of the literature on gender and entrepreneurship is a phenomenon of the current decade.

The eminent scholars who graciously contributed to this edited volume have expanded the extant literature as defined by the categories in Figure 1.1. Regarding the category of *Characteristics of entrepreneurs* are chapters by Bengtsson, Sanandaji, and Johannesson; Audretsch, Lehmann, and Wirsching; and Goel, Göktepe-Hultén, and Ram. Regarding the category of *Performance of entrepreneurial firms* are chapters by Hodges, Watchravesringkan, Williams, Yurchisin, Karpova, Marcketti, Hegland, and Yan; Parker, Hayter, Lynch, and Mohammed; Leahey and Blume; Trentini and Koparanova; Cunningham, O'Reilly, Dolan, O'Kane, and Mangematin; and Blume-Kohout. Finally, regarding the category of *Financial capital* are papers by Coleman and Robb; and Vismara, Benarioio, and Carne.

## NOTES

1. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-07-426\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-07-426_en.htm).
2. This summary draws directly from Link and Strong (2016).
3. Some may disagree with my categories, and if so, I hope that those who do so will offer competing taxonomies to better characterize the current and future literatures.
4. Reflecting on the policy statements at the beginning of this chapter, it would not be surprising to me, and perhaps to others, to see a greater percentage of future research fitting in the category of *impact of public policy*.
5. To the extent to which this trend does reflect the establishments of new journals, and to the extent that a portion of the new journals have not yet gained the full attention of scholars in this field, our selection criteria might have caused us to miss unintentionally what could become foundation articles in this body of thought.

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