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A Research Agenda for Women and Entrepreneurship: Identity through Aspirations, Behaviors, and Confidence by Patricia G. Greene and Candida G. Brush

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In *A research agenda for women and entrepreneurship: Identity through aspirations, behaviors and confidence*, Patricia G. Green and Candida G. Brush have compiled a collection of contemporary research that explores the complexity of women's entrepreneurship from a variety of perspectives, methodological approaches, and compelling challenges. This book is a "sandbox," where researchers are able to play with untrodden ideas and explore new frontiers related to the concept of identity—specifically, how entrepreneurial identity informs women, their businesses, ventures, and experiences. The editors organize the scholarship through a framework divided into three areas: aspirations (i.e., what women want to create or achieve), behaviors (i.e., how women create and grow businesses), and confidence (i.e., the degree of trust and self-assurance that entrepreneurial women possess). Green and Brush argue that these interrelated concepts "shape and enhance a woman's identity in the entrepreneurial process" (p. 2).

The purpose of this book is to provide new insights into women's entrepreneurship in order to lay the groundwork for an increased focus on gendered research. The literature explored within the book inspires new research questions about provisional and enduring identities and the contextual factors that influence them as well as about credibility-building behaviors, identity validation, and self-efficacy. In this collection of geographically diverse studies, Green and Brush accomplish three outcomes. First, they propose an ambitious research agenda for current and emerging scholars in the entrepreneurial space. Next, they inform policymakers concerned with supporting women entrepreneurs. Finally, they inspire practitioners to map a direction for future scholarship.

This body of work is especially compelling in its attempt to accelerate the feminine perspective in entrepreneurial research, the vast majority of which has historically been conducted using male populations relying on expected masculine behaviors. In response, the research featured

in this book focuses on qualitative and quantitative research conducted with women and men, but primarily focuses on outcomes related to women, using examples from around the world.

In the introductory chapter by Green and Brush, the concept of identity is explored using research from social science disciplines. The editors present a robust review of identity theory, setting the stage for the nine studies included in the book. These studies range from founder decision-making to motherhood as a springboard for entrepreneurial action to crowdfunding performance by women. First, they describe what identity is, how it is constructed, and how it is linked to aspirations, behaviors, and confidence. Personal identity, social identity theory, and identity theory are outlined. Research on identity construction, saliency, durability, and conscious identity is also briefly discussed. Next, entrepreneurial identity construction is explored, with a focus on role identity and organizational identity and its manifestation through the “culture of the emerging venture” (p. 5). Then, identity is explored through a gendered lens. Finally, the editors propose entrepreneurial identity typologies and identity as the root drivers of entrepreneurial behaviors. The first chapter concludes with a discussion of confidence and self-efficacy and how related skills and traits differ for women and men.

Chapters 2, 4, and 6 feature qualitative studies on women entrepreneurs in Chile (using a study with an n of 8), India (using a study with an n of 15), and Canada (using a study with an n of 134), respectively. Interviews and document analysis are the primary data collection methods used in these chapters. Chapter 3 (which focuses on a study using an n of 1,234) and chapter 8 (which focuses on a study using an n of 2,038) are quantitative studies that analyze survey data. Chapter 7 is a single case study using ethnographic techniques that takes place over an 18 month period. Finally, chapters 5 and 9 utilize extant literature to propose new thinking around entrepreneurial identity and the role of motherhood on entrepreneurial behavior.

In total, the studies in this book illuminate the need to increase critical discourse around women entrepreneurs and their identities, specifically and uniquely related to the intersection of their aspirations, behavior, and confidence. Given the wide array of topics covered in the featured studies, this book should be of particular significance for burgeoning researchers looking for innovative approaches and new ideas to explore issues related to identity in women entrepreneurs. Those interested in entrepreneurial education, the practice of entrepreneurship, how identity is constructed and shaped through the entrepreneurial process, and the formation of policies that support women entrepreneurs will also find this book to be an informative and valuable resource.

The editors use the “ABC framework” (aspirations, behavior, and confidence) to group and present the research contained within this book. Fundamentally, the ABC framework is a tidy organizational approach, but does it ultimately work for a book about gendered identity within the context of entrepreneurial research? The framework has somewhat limiting effects on the overall presentation, as it only loosely connects aspirations, behaviors, and confidence within different contexts. Thus, it at times neglects to convey the complexity of women’s entrepreneurial leadership across these three dimensions. Readers may find themselves asking, “How do aspirations influence behavior? How does confidence emerge and how does confidence inform one’s aspirations?”

There are many words beginning with “C” that could have informed this framework, potentially providing a more cohesive overall picture. Context, for instance. Or, perhaps culture. For example, given a particular context, women’s aspirations may change. This change will likely have an effect on behavior. The problem is not the use of confidence in the framework—it does. One can question, however, whether context would work better. Is not the context, or even the culture of women’s entrepreneurship, even more connected to aspirations and behaviors than an individual’s confidence?

Ultimately, the book achieves its purpose in laying out an agenda for entrepreneurial research that has historically neglected women. It provides new and exciting potentialities in a field that has been understudied. While it takes into account the unique experiences of women entrepreneurs, in its attempt to convey the ideas through a simple framework, complexity is at times sacrificed.

Author Biography

Lauren H. Ramers is a leadership studies doctoral student at the University of San Diego. Her research interests include education reform, social justice in K-12 education, servant leadership, and women in leadership. She aspires to inspire educators to become resident researchers who investigate innovative solutions that remove barriers to learning.