Everything to Offer or Something to Prove?

A Discourse of Women Entrepreneurship Policy in Canada

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Abstract

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The aim of this research is to explore how government policies position female entrepreneurs in Canada in order to understand and positively impact inclusive women entrepreneurship policy reform in Canada. By using discourse analysis with a post-structuralist feminist theory theoretical framework, I consider how language is formed in such a way that the discourse of women's entrepreneurship, in the context of the Government of Canada women entrepreneurship policy, is reinforcing traditional gender roles. As a data source, I used the publicly available, website-based text from the WES Ecosystem Fund as well as the website-based text of the 53 funded programs/agencies of the WES Ecosystem Fund. Three main discourses emerged from my research. In analyzing the various texts, I conclude that the women entrepreneurship strategy aligns with the classic liberal feminist approach whereas other branches of the government have evolved to a more social feminist approach. I suggest that the post structuralist stance has been critical to developing feminist advancements, which challenge the notion of female essentialism and assumptions of shared subordination arising from a homogeneous biological identity and socio-economic positioning. I have shown that the focus on performance and growth ignores issues on gender equality and gender/power relations even in a country that refers to itself as a feminist government. My research supports the theoretical finding by other researchers that the dogged focus on providing entrepreneurship training to women with the hope that more women will become entrepreneurs is inadvertently creating bigger barriers by "othering" a woman as someone that needs to be fixed before she can become an entrepreneur. The wording found in the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund and the corresponding funded programs, from a post structuralist feminist theory lens, put women in a subordinate position to men and thereby risk sustaining a male norm.

Dedication

To my mother and my grandmother. Entrepreneurs ahead of your time. You both inspire me to live entrepreneurially and with passion.

To my mother-in-law. We share the joy of learning and educating and for that I am so grateful.

To my father. I know you would be so proud. You inspire me to lead with compassion and kindness.

To my children. You are a constant source of inspiration and optimism. May the world you grow up in know no boundaries, may you fall in love with the gift of learning and may you always be part of the solution.

And foremost to my husband, my best friend, my life partner. The gift of time, space and encouragement to do my Ph.D. reaffirms just how selfless, uplifting and steadfast you are. I am grateful for you. Every. Single. Day.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Aim of Dissertation

The aim of my dissertation is to deconstruct how government policies position women entrepreneurs in Canada in order to understand and positively impact inclusive women entrepreneurship policy reform in Canada. In following the call from leading gender and entrepreneurship scholars (Ahl, 2006; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016), I apply a constructivist framework (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2014) to the context of women entrepreneurship policy in Canada, I then seek to understand if the current entrepreneurship policy in Canada is inadvertently "othering" (Ahl, 2004, 2006) women entrepreneurs as those that need fixing, in order to "do" entrepreneurship. My research question is: what is the discourse of women's entrepreneurship and how does that discourse on women's entrepreneurship in Canadian Federal policy position women and their entrepreneurship? This is important because despite large Government investments into women entrepreneurs, women still only represent 15.6% of majority-owned SMEs with employees in Canada (Cukier, Gagnon, Hodson, Saba, Grandy, Morton, Elmi, Stolarick & Chavoushi, 2021). This research may help understand why the investment is not resulting in more women starting businesses.

Objectives of Research

The objectives of this research project are as follows:

- Answer and contribute to the call for action from leading women's entrepreneurship researchers to employ a gender lens (Rankin, Vickers & Field, 2001) to women entrepreneurship policy.

- Explore how obstacles to women's full participation in entrepreneurship can be removed at the policy level.

- Expand on the research done by Orser (2017) on Canadian women entrepreneurship policy by using a feminist perspective.

- Employ discourse analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) to explore Canadian government policy texts, to examine the nature of the discourses produced and reproduced that may have power implications for or against women.

Motivation for this Topic: The Story

This thesis topic was in part inspired by work I have done over the last 20 years with women entrepreneurs across Canada. Being a female entrepreneur, I have felt the impact of biases in entrepreneurship support, financing, and education. One company I owned, momcafé Network, was a national organization whose purpose was to support mothers trying to maintain their career or entrepreneurial endeavors while also raising a family. I heard directly from hundreds of women within the network that the systemic biases in Canada relating to society's view of the roles of women held them back from achieving *their* personal view of success. A second business I founded, a co-working space, ultimately closed because of the gender bias and discrimination I experienced with several banks and lending institutions. These experiences ultimately became the motivating factor in pursuing a PhD with a focus on gender and entrepreneurship research. As a researcher, I am cognizant of not allowing my experiences to impact the integrity of the research I am undertaking but have been deeply curious and driven to understand how we can make things better for Canadian women entrepreneurs.

Early in my Ph.D. journey, I read "Strategies to Redress Entrepreneurship Gender Gaps in Canada" (Orser, 2017). Orser is a leading entrepreneurship scholar and the gender gap she

outlined in her work (Orser, 2017) was very troubling to me because the research done on this topic in Canada appeared not to be actioned upon by the federal government, thus motivating me to pursue this thesis topic. In 2011 the *Canadian Taskforce for Women's Business Growth* released *The Canadian Task Force Roundtable Report: Action Strategies to Support Canadian Women Owned Enterprises*. Summary recommendations included a national strategy to facilitate women's enterprise growth, female focused programs on financial and technology literacy, increased access to growth capital grants and related resources, and reporting on the economic contributions of women to the Canadian economy (Orser, 2017). By 2015, none of the task force recommendations had been implemented (Orser, 2017). As a follow-up, Orser published a study in 2017 that examined the failure of the task force to have an impact on changing the discursive structure of the women's entrepreneurship policies of the Canadian Federal Government. Orser (2017) expressed disappointment that women entrepreneurship policy in Canada had not evolved despite the academic body of research showing the gendering of entrepreneurship. In 2018, the Government of Canada launched the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, a multi-pronged, multimillion dollar policy that includes funding for both support organizations across Canada as well as funding for women entrepreneurs. I was eager to explore if any of the recommendations put forth by the task force had finally been acted upon and if the recommendations were visible through the regional programs funded by the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy.

Around the same time, Ahl and Nelson (2014) compared the positioning of women entrepreneurs through entrepreneurship policy over two decades (1989–2012), in Sweden and the United States using a post-structuralist approach. They found that in both countries there was a legacy of discourse subordinating women's entrepreneurship to other goals (i.e., economic growth) and a positioning of women as 'other'. This reinforces a dialogue of women's

inadequacy or extraordinariness without taking full account of the conditions shaping women's work experience (Ahl & Nelson, 2014). Ahl and Nelson's (2014) research serves as an inspiration for my chosen theoretical perspective and methodology of discourse analysis using a post-structuralist feminist approach (Weedon, 1997) to investigate the discourse of language and power in the Government of Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy. I hoped that using a post positivist methodology in a Canadian context may provide new insights into improving entrepreneurship policy, given that existing research on women entrepreneurs in Canada is limited by the dominating positivist epistemology (Yadav & Unmi, 2016). No major study has been done using discourse analysis on women entrepreneurs in Canada; approaching this research from a different epistemological and ontological perspective may offer new insights and practical guidelines into the evolution of currently stagnated Canadian women entrepreneurship public policy.

Essers, Dey, Tedmanson, and Verduyn (2017) postulate that research on entrepreneurship remains highly functionalist in nature and is focused predominantly on entrepreneurship as a market-based phenomenon towards economic growth. Though the work featured in their book is predominantly critical in nature and my research is constructivist in nature, I draw inspiration from the critical perspectives offered as a way to examine issues in entrepreneurship from new and novel perspectives to elicit potentially new and novel ways of designing entrepreneurship policy that is inclusive. My interest, though challenging, is to contribute to a cross-paradigmatic dialogue, finding research implications from each paradigm to share and inspire the other. Organizations that are encouraging more research on gender and entrepreneurship policy (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD) are largely positivist, objectivist and seemingly unreflexive with their language use (Delaune, 2019),

determined by the focus on economic outcomes and I propose, through the research in this thesis, that this leads them to reproduce the problem they are trying to resolve.

What's in a Name?

Research in this area use a variety of words and definitions that I think are important to define and discuss early in the thesis to understand how I am treating the terms. Entrepreneurship is one word that takes on different meanings in research. An early issue that emerged with this field of academic inquiry is the interchanging use of the small/medium enterprise (SME) and the term entrepreneurship (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020). In the early days, SME's were seen as an empirical concept, insinuating smallness of the enterprise with no clear definition of how small was small. Mainstream (positivist) research on entrepreneurship focused on the start of a new business, defining entrepreneurship as the start (and growth) of a new business (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020). Many new businesses are by nature small to begin with, which is thought to be the reason for the common association between entrepreneurship and SMEs. The focus of early SME research was on the business itself while early entrepreneurship research focused on the entrepreneur, and we can still see evidence of confusion and interchangeable use of these two words both in academic inquiry and industry (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020).

The impact of neoliberalism as a dominant political position of Western countries has also rooted current positioning of entrepreneurship as a form of desired economic growth for nations (Couldry, 2010). Couldry (2010) traces neoliberalism back to its roots within an economic theory of market functioning developed in the 1920s, infusing ways of being and understanding throughout society that "upholds the individual as responsible for their own social and economic status" (DeBenedictis & Gill, 2016, p.2). Contemporary neoliberalism constructs a new, agentic citizen who, having absorbed the individualized market logic of neoliberalism as a normative

way of being (Couldry, 2010; Jessop, 2002) embraces "self-governmentality" (Rose, 1993; Ahl & Marlow, 2021). Ahl (2006) suggests that because entrepreneurship is seen as good for economic growth, women's entrepreneurship is discursively positioned as economically useful and in further research Ahl & Marlow (2021) argue entrepreneurship can be considered a negative pursuit for women. Other researchers (Gibson-Graham, 1997; Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 2018) fundamentally disagree that all economic growth is a positive and product outcome of entrepreneurship and can be detrimental for society and Shepard (2019) argues that entrepreneurship can be bad for individuals. Calás et al. (2009) use a feminist post-structuralist lens to move us away from entrepreneurship as positive economic activity towards a different definition of entrepreneurship as social change.

The position I am taking in this thesis recognizes that there are many outcomes of entrepreneurship. I am not making judgement on which outcomes are more important that others nor am I arguing that entrepreneurship is good or bad for an individual, a society or a country. Rather, my position is that inclusivity in general and in entrepreneurship policy/programming specifically allows for the greatest opportunity for all to decide if entrepreneurship is good for them to pursue, based on *their* personal definition of good. By exposing systemic biases, if any, in entrepreneurship policy creation, I believe we can make course corrections to future policy and programming to allow these individual choices to be made uninhibited by gender biases which may lead to increased participation in entrepreneurship. This is important in Canada because the federal government is trying to increase the number of women starting businesses (Government of Canada, 2019) by investing millions of dollars into women specific programming and could potentially be doing more damage than good if there are underlying issues with how the policies are positioning and reinforcing gender biases.

This leads to a second set of words that are used, somewhat inconsistently and interchangeably in the literature: Gender, women and female. As Ahl (2004) points out, telling ourselves that men and women are fundamentally different is one of the problematic discourses influencing entrepreneurship policy and research with the majority of the research assuming gender to be a dichotomous variable, making the assumption all women are essentially the same. It is important, then, to consider who is included in the definition of women. Consider the quote from Simone de Beauvoir (2011, p.283) "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." The idea of women and men is a social construction, a characterization that our culture uses to organize how we collectively see the world, sometimes defined by the male and female bodies alone. Women and men, however, can also be seen as "political designations, because these social constructions reflect who's in charge and thus who gets to set, use, and benefit from distinctions made between people" (Harquail, 2020, p. 38). "If we understand that "woman" is a political category and not a biological category" (Harquail, 2020, p. 38), then we can widen the criteria that produces the label woman beyond biological to include relational, social and even arbitrary. This ongoing discussion over who can consider herself a woman and be part of the group for whom feminism advocates should have the authority to define themselves rather than to have political identities opposed upon them. When we recognize women as a political category, we can welcome in anyone who experiences the world as a woman or as a female and ask them to work together to liberate all women and people (Harquail, 2020).

Feminist scholars introduced the word gender to make a distinction between social practices and representations associated with femininity, masculinity, and biological sex, such as human bodies with male or female reproductive organs (Acker, 1992). I use the word women entrepreneurship throughout the thesis so as to reflect the terminology used by the Government

of Canada given that their policies are the data source. That being said, applying a social constructivist feminist perspective in research for my dissertation implies that entrepreneurship, and thus entrepreneurs, are understood as gendered in both concept and practice (Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Brush, Anne & Welter, 2009; Petterson, 2004).

Does Context Matter?

Contextualization of entrepreneurship research has received increased scrutiny and attention over the last decade with scholars calling for increased contextualized research. Welter, Baker and Wirsching (2018) argue that entrepreneurship demands contextualization more than other fields because of the breadth and depth of its scope and its inherent creation of difference (in product and service development). They further propose that entrepreneurship historically took place mostly in western contexts, it was done by people acting the way men were assumed to behave, it was motivated exclusively by pursuit of growing profits, and it was celebrated as valuable for an economy to generate profits and wealth. Context is important for understanding when, how and why entrepreneurship happens and who becomes involved (Welter, 2011) with Aldrich (2009) lamenting that extreme de-contextualization results from our repeated tendency to study entrepreneurs and their ventures with an assumption that all are alike. Research by Bird and Brush (2002), Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter and Welter (2012), Jennings and Brush (2013) and Yousafzai, Fayolle, Saeed, Henry and Lindgreen (2018) has demonstrated that contexts for entrepreneurship are consistently gendered in ways that disadvantage women relative to men across geographies, cultures, religions, class, and many other dimensions of context. Thus, while taking inspiration from Ahl and Nelson (2014) in their comparison of the positioning of women entrepreneurs through entrepreneurship policy in Sweden and the United States, recent research on the contextualization of entrepreneurship research demonstrates the

importance and relevance of this thesis research in the Canadian context when considering implications for Canadian policy specifically.

Women Entrepreneurship in Canada: The Numbers

What do the numbers tell us about women's entrepreneurship in Canada? Women have been starting businesses at a faster rate than men for several decades, however, women still only represent 15.6% of majority-owned SMEs with employees in Canada (Cukier et al., 2021). Consider the following statistics from *The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada 2021* (Cukier et al., 2021, p.10):

- Women-owned SMEs, compared to men-owned, are more likely to be in service industries, information and cultural industries, accommodation, and food services.
- Women are less likely to have incorporated businesses and constitute the majority of those self-employed within the health care and social assistance sectors (69.7%), educational services sector (66%), and other services (55.2%).
- Women entrepreneurs generally have higher education levels and tend to be younger than men entrepreneurs.
- The large majority of women-owned SMEs (92.7%) have fewer than 20 employees.
- While an increasing proportion of businesses are growing more than 10% over three years, women's businesses are still less likely to be classified as high growth (more than 20% over three years).
- The majority of women-owned businesses are more likely to be found in urban areas than rural areas.

Canada scored second only to the US in the 2015 Global Women Entrepreneur Leaders Scorecard of 31 countries in terms of support for high-impact women's entrepreneurship. In contrast, while it has been found that gender equity legislation has narrowed the gender wage gap in Canada, the impact of this legislation is not extending to women's entrepreneurial engagement (Golla, Malhotra, Nanda & Mehra, 2011; Kabeer, 2012; Orser, 2017). What is apparent is that women entrepreneurs are being positioned as the new mainstay in government policy as a proposed catalyst to strengthen the Canadian economy. A recent McKinsey study reports that the power of parity estimates that advancing women's equality in Canada and participation in entrepreneurship can add $12 trillion to global growth (McKinsey & Company, 2015, p.3). In Canada, entrepreneurship policies are delivered through a wide array of business programs, training centers, loans, websites, portals, webinars, incubators, sector associations, training materials, newsletters, and other resources. There is an overlap at the federal provincial and regional level (Orser, 2017). The backbone of Canadian entrepreneurship policy is comprised of mainstream national programs as well as regional, and occasionally gender specific, small business support services.

Gender and Entrepreneurship Research

Gender and entrepreneurship research is an established area of research, gathering momentum in the late 1990's, concurrent with governments' increased interest in promoting entrepreneurial activity among women. Given that governments see entrepreneurial activity as a means of transforming the GDP of a nation (Stel, Carree & Thurik, 2005), there is strong motivation in understanding why the gender gap exists in entrepreneurial activity. The Diana Project™, as an example of the depth of academic research happening in this domain, is an international yearly conference that engages in research activities, forums and scholarship

focusing on women entrepreneurs. The Diana International Research Conference provides a platform for researchers to develop, conduct and share a global research agenda. Founding members of the Diana Project, Brush, Greene, Kelley and Ali (2017) demonstrated that, while the implicit assumption underlying an entrepreneurship ecosystem is that all entrepreneurs have equal access to support, resources and participation, women are indeed at a disadvantage with respect to many aspects of an entrepreneurship ecosystem. "Think successful entrepreneur- think male" continues to endure around the globe given the masculine context of entrepreneurship (Eddleston, Ladge, Mitteness & Balachandra, 2016; Marlow & Swail, 2014). Interestingly, McAdam, Harrison and Leitch (2018) found that women-only networks can also be problematic, restricting the ability of female entrepreneurs to access sufficient economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. In 2018, the Government of Canada increased its investment behind women-focused entrepreneurship strategies. However, this leads to a question of what impact is this having on women's entrepreneurship?

Gender and Entrepreneurship Public Policy Research

Based on a perceived theoretical gap in research, entrepreneurship scholars have called for increased research to understand how institutions (including governments and academia), influence the construction of gender and entrepreneurship policy (GEM, 2013, Ahl, 2006; Orser, 2017). Ahl (2006) conducted a discourse analysis of 81 research articles on women's entrepreneurship to explore if any practices re-create the idea of women entrepreneurs as being secondary to men. She found women become a variable in the growth equation of an economy in which they are rendered inadequate and contribute to the positioning of women as secondary. She specifically calls for future research on women's entrepreneurship to consider a shift in epistemological positioning away from an objectivist epistemology to a constructionist

epistemology as a means of researching women entrepreneurs without reproducing their secondary position (Ahl, 2006).

A review of the gender and entrepreneurship literature by Jennings & Brush (2013) reveals that research on women's entrepreneurship remains empiricist (making comparisons between men and women) as opposed to challenging gender practices. A study by Henry, Foss and Ahl (2016) proposes that studies of gender in the entrepreneurship field lag behind those in other disciplines (i.e., sociology, political/organizational science) and encourages scholars to develop the methodological repertoire to match what is now expected in women-driven entrepreneurship, suggesting a post-structural feminist approach.

Contribution

Ahl and Nelson (2015) say language is not innocent. I am curious to explore if there are any discourses in Canadian federal entrepreneurship policy that may be "othering" women, which may be the root cause of the gender gaps in entrepreneurship participation that we are seeing in Canada. The term othering originates from De Beauvoir (1956) who posits that men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them, on every level, as the *Other*, defined exclusively in opposition to men and effectively denying her humanity. Language has implications on how female entrepreneurs are positioned. Leading entrepreneurship researchers say the answer is the discourse of practices (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Foss, Henry, Ahl & Mikalsen, 2018; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Leitch, Welter & Henry, 2018). I propose that shifting the epistemological approach to a social constructivist approach and using post-structuralist feminist theory may help uncover any systemic issues with the wording of the policy itself as a signal of othering women entrepreneurs.

This thesis contributes to extant knowledge and understanding of gender and entrepreneurship policy, specifically in relation to women's entrepreneurship from a Canadian context. It contributes to an emerging body of constructionist/feminist research on entrepreneurship discourses. The findings will be of interest to academics and others who seek to shape women entrepreneurship policy. While studies on entrepreneurship policy are typically concerned with design, implementation, and impact or on the policy process itself (which will be covered in detail in the literature review), I expand on a new perspective first studied on Sweden and the USA by Ahl and Nelson (2015) to the unique Canadian landscape by focusing on policy formulation itself. This comes at a critical time as the Canadian Federal Government recently launched the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, touted as being the "centrepiece" of the 2018 Federal Budget (Government of Canada, 2019). Further, my research will contribute to the emerging body of feminist/constructionist research on gender and entrepreneurship discourses. While other researchers have used this epistemology to examine other facets of gendered entrepreneurship discourses (Ahl, 2006; Bruni, Gherardi &Poggio, 2004), for example, examined entrepreneurship research and Gill (2013) examined business periodicals, there are very few studies focused specifically on entrepreneurship.

Finally, I believe the research I conducted can also inform other marginalized groups such as racial minority groups, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community. My methodology can be applied to other research, shifting the lens of gender to a lens of another intersection to help inform how policy may be marginalizing certain groups from complete participation in entrepreneurship.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Discourse Analysis as a Theory

My methodological approach is based on the Phillips and Hardy (2002) approach to discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is considered both a conceptual and methodological approach to research, emerging over the latter part of the 20th century as a means of considering and discussing social reality in new productive ways (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Hamilton, Schiffrin & Tannen, 2003; Fairclough, 2012; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; and Grazzini, 2013). Discourse analysis is concerned with language as both spoken and written as it appears in conversations, narratives, or in this situation, as an expression of public policy through official government reports and programs (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). In comparison to other qualitative research methods that seek to understand social reality, discourse analysis aims to uncover how social reality is produced (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). I also take inspiration from Foucault (1972) who offers that discourses are neither neutral nor passive. Discourses arguably have power effects which has power implications that render thought and action as either feasible or unfeasible, legitimate, or illegitimate and can order people, ideas, policies etc. in relation to each other. Discourse analysis can help to explain how power is enacted, reproduced, or legitimized by examining the text of dominant groups and institutions such as federal government's policy documentation (Van Dijk, 1996). Foucault (1995) offers that such power is exercised rather than possessed and by drawing on discourses we can allow our actions to be presented in what can be seen as an acceptable light, making power, therefore, as a condition and as an effect of discourse. The more people knowingly or unknowingly draw on the same discourse the more institutionalized it becomes, making it more powerful (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). It has implications on how objects, in this case female entrepreneurs, are positioned. By using discourse analysis to analyze Canadian women entrepreneurship public policy it may help us

understand if the wording itself of the policy and programming resulting from the policy is having an adverse impact on women's participation in entrepreneurship.

Discourse Analysis as a Method

While discourse analysis as a method may often commence with conducting a content analysis, it is how the material is interrogated that distinguishes the two methods. Discourse analysis not only focuses on what the content is but also on what it does, what is included (and what is not), and finally what is asserted versus what is implied, treating the data as productive versus merely representational (Ahl & Nelson, 2015).

Foucault defined discourses as "practises, which systemically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, page 49). The object of my dissertation is women entrepreneurs or women's entrepreneurship. Examining the text used to describe the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and the subsequent programs that received funding from the strategy (guided by the policy development) I examine if and how discourses direct the conduct of individuals or of groups (Foucault, 1972). While I use Phillips and Hardy (2002) from a methodological standpoint I take inspiration from Foucault's approach to discourse analysis as a means of appreciating the nuances of the methodology.

Theoretical Framework: Poststructuralist Feminist Theory

In alignment with the epistemological basis of discourse analysis, I view gender as socially constructed in line with social constructivist and poststructuralist feminist theory (Harding, 1987). The poststructuralist feminist approach more specifically "…explores the connections between language, subjectivity, social organization, and power, and their ramifications for gender dynamics in all walks of life" (Prasad, 2005, p.165). Texts and language are seen as a 'politics of representation' that produces gender and "…deconstructive

studies that employ these approaches analyze concepts, theories, and practices of entrepreneurship, and how they construct (women) entrepreneurs" (Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund & Tillmar, 2017). It is with this lens that I examine the Canadian policy on women entrepreneurship. Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion of the commensurability of the poststructuralist feminist approach with discourse analysis.

Data Sources: Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund

In the 2018 Budget, The Government of Canada allocated $85 million to the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) Ecosystem Fund to strengthen capacity within the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Canada and close gaps in service for women entrepreneurs (Government of Canada, 2018). Eligible projects were those that addressed a gap and/or built capacity in the entrepreneurship ecosystem for women. Over 50 projects were funded through this initiative and are intended to support projects up to five years in duration. I have chosen to examine the publicly available, website-based text from the WES Ecosystem Fund as well as the website-based text of the 53 funded programs/agencies of the WES Ecosystem Fund as my data source. This was chosen because it represents the biggest spend by the federal government on women entrepreneurship policy and programming, it is national in breadth and the information on projects is readily available on funding recipient's websites.

Conclusion

Current studies on entrepreneurship policy in Canada are typically focused on design, implementation, and policy impact (Audretsch & Belitski, 2013) or on policy process (Arshed, Carter & Mason, 2014). I have taken inspiration from leading researchers to consider a different approach to policy development and instead will focus on the policy formulation itself, studying language that is written and used to create policy. By using discourse analysis with a poststructuralist feminist theory theoretical framework, I explore women entrepreneurship policy

to examine if there are discourses produced and reproduced that may have implications on women's participation in entrepreneurship.

The outcome of using discourse analysis is that it can offer a new perspective on existing theoretical debates, drawing on different identities that locate actors in positions from which they can influence the field and the establish new practices by discursively embedding them in organizational texts (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Within my analysis, I consider how language is formed in such a way that the discourse of women's entrepreneurship, in the context of the Government of Canada women entrepreneurship policy, is reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Chapter two of this thesis provides an in-depth review of the literature on gender, entrepreneurship, and policy. I provide more specific context to each of these from a Canadian perspective and provide further insight into methodologies used. In chapter three, I explore the chasm that exists between business and feminism (Mills & Williams, 2021; Richard, Deal & Mills, 2021) and provide an overview of the feminist approaches used in entrepreneurship. I give more insight into my chosen theoretical perspective and discuss the commensurability of my chosen method with the theoretical perspective. In chapter four, I provide an overview of the methodology employed as well as details on the data source, data collection, data analysis and analytical steps taken. In chapter five, I provide my findings and discuss the discourses found in detail. The thesis concludes with chapter six where I share my contribution to the literature, the theoretical contributions, the limitations of the research and implications for policy makers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature on gender and entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship policy, with a focus on emerging research from the last decade. Further, given that I am focusing on women entrepreneurship policy, the literature review will include a closer examination on what research has been done on entrepreneurship policy and gender and, contextually, women entrepreneurship policy in Canada.

It is important to consider that entrepreneurship has largely been positioned as an essential driver of societal health and wealth, and a formidable engine of economic growth (OECD/European Union, 2019). It is said to promote the innovation required, not just to exploit new opportunities, promote productivity, and create employment, but also to help address some of society's toughest challenges (OECD/European Union, 2019). Many of the world's governments, think tanks, non-governmental and international organizations look towards entrepreneurship as a key part of the solution to ending poverty and social inequity, promoting women's empowerment, and implementing business solutions to the world's environmental challenges (OECD/European Union, 2019). Thus, research on entrepreneurship remains a focus for academic enquiry. Understanding the current positioning of entrepreneurship early in the literature review gives context to the challenges and problems that this academic enquiry has uncovered, which is explored in depth in this literature review.

Ward, Hernández-Sánchez, & Sánchez-García (2019) argue that the subcategory of gender and entrepreneurship, while having gained traction in the last two decades, has appeared to suffer from an identity crisis, neither finding a home within entrepreneurship nor within gender studies. I find this simultaneously intriguing and troubling having similarly found this issue to be relevant

with the ownership of the Canadian women entrepreneurship policy portfolio being flipped back and forth over the years between the economic department and the gender and equality department. Later in this dissertation I reflect on how women entrepreneurship policy may be strengthened by resolving this identity crisis and by correcting the policy ownership issue, which I find problematic.

Research on Gender and Entrepreneurship

Schwartz (1976) published one of the first academic papers on female entrepreneurship entitled 'Entrepreneurship: A New Female Frontier'. Schwartz recognized that, while there had been an increase in research on female executives and managers, there was little attention being given to the woman entrepreneur. Her goal was to discern the set of characteristics, motivations and attitudes of female entrepreneurs. Understanding the kind of woman (versus the kind of man), who chooses entrepreneurship was thought to be important in developing the "special education" and training needs of self-employed women (Schwartz, 1976). Schwartz (1976) concluded that the entrepreneur must be able to recognize opportunistic changes in the market and economy, risk the capital needed to implement them and develop and manage a growing small business. She noted that women had been socialized in other directions away from owning and managing a business thus, for entrepreneurship to attract more women, they would have to be re-socialized first. I postulate that this re-socialization rhetoric has emerged through academic research and continues to inform women entrepreneurship policy, which I will discuss later in more detail. This early research publication is important for us to recognize and understand, as we explore the research on gender and entrepreneurship. Despite the fact that the number of articles published has increased substantially (Moreira, Marques, Braga & Ratten, 2019), I suggest that we have not yet moved past trying to validate or discredit the earliest findings on

gender and entrepreneurship (that women need to be re-socialized in order to become an entrepreneur) perpetuating a call from leading researchers (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Ahl & Nelson, 2015) to expand gender and entrepreneurship research into new theorizations and the use of new methodologies in order to stimulate more dialogue and ultimately advancements in inclusive approaches to women entrepreneurship policy.

Reflecting on their research on gender and entrepreneurship in the early 1980's, Holmquist and Sundin (2020) described women entrepreneurs as a phenomenon at the intersection between a "women's world" and the "world of entrepreneurship." They view this description as still valid today, postulating this intersection has been, and still is, constructed as a research field of its own – gender and entrepreneurship. This research field is connected to, and relies heavily on upon, the two fields that it combines – gender studies and entrepreneurship studies. They postulate that the recent "theoretical turn" has made entrepreneurship and empirical work even less visible in gender research. Ward, Hernández-Sánchez, & Sánchez-García (2019) seem to agree that the subcategory of gender and entrepreneurship, while having gained traction in the last two decades, has appeared to suffer from an identity crisis, neither finding a home within entrepreneurship nor within gender studies. The SME researchers of the early 1980's did not value the analysis of gender (Mazzarol, Volery, Doss & Thein, 1999) nor did women's studies researchers value the study of entrepreneurs (Aguinaga, Lang, Mokrani & Santillana, 2013). This tension resulted in gender being "added" to entrepreneurship research, and entrepreneurship being "added" to gender research, and subsequently, gender and entrepreneurship studies was not integrated into either field fully (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020). The impact of the early formation of this field of inquiry should not be underestimated. I agree that it continues to impact the present-day research being conducted on gender and entrepreneurship insofar as the mainstream

agenda in both fields fails to acknowledge the possibility of a richer understanding of the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship – in terms of understanding the functioning of entrepreneurship, as well as understanding how women form their working lives (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020; Richard, Deal & Mills, 2021). This point is fundamental to the argument I make in my thesis. In Canada, this has played out in the Federal Government as the women entrepreneurship portfolio has been flipped back and forth between economic departments (representing entrepreneurship research interests) and Women and Gender Equality Canada (formally known as the Status of Women Canada) (representing gender research and interests) numerous times over the last two decades. The implications of this in Canadian entrepreneurship policy formation, I believe, is that the policies have been designed in a silo without the rich learning, interests and perspectives of both bodies of research; the initial emergence of the field of gender studies and entrepreneurship studies is still reflected in Canada's present-day treatment of women entrepreneurship programing 30 years later. I explore this further in chapter 5.

Researchers of the 1990's note that entrepreneurship research efforts focused on quantifying performance, counting how many self-employed and small firm owners existed, exploring how these numbers be increased and how could these business owners be encouraged to grow their ventures (Greene & Patel, 2013). There was an overwhelming dominance of men within this field, by academics, business advisors, practitioners and subjects of research (Marlow, 2020). Holmquist and Sundin (1988) observed that research in this field was "by men, about men and for men" (p.1). I acknowledge that while this quantitative methodology does serve a role in understanding directional trends, later in the decade it led to an unease among researchers that these numbers may not be telling the whole story. To that end, Perren and Jennings (2005) observed that social discrimination was not often recognized as important given

assumptions that entrepreneurship was neutral towards profit creation at the market level and productivity at the societal level. When issues such as inequality and exclusion were acknowledged, whether as gender, ethnicity or class, the focus was on identifying pathways to encourage under-represented or disadvantaged groups into entrepreneurship. It was not until the late 1990's that a distinct critique gained traction, recognizing that the negative impact of social constructions of gender, specifically femininity and its dissonance with preferred entrepreneurial characteristics (Marlow, 2020). It was thought that such change could be achieved by supporting, advising, and training women to adopt a more masculine entrepreneurial attitude, becoming more agentic, more risk tolerant, competitive, and self-confident, resulting in higher levels of success of women in entrepreneurial pursuits (Small Business Service, 2003). This was met with a flurry of arguments and the ensuing academic critiques (Bruni et al., 2005; Ahl, 2006), dismissing the notion that "if only women were more like men" (Marlow, 2013, p. 10) then their persistent under- representation as entrepreneurs, and the underperformance of their ventures, would be solved! A discourse analysis of women and entrepreneurship research conducted by Ahl (2006) argued that the construction of the woman entrepreneur as secondary to her male peer results from normative masculinized assumptions prevalent in mainstream entrepreneurship research. The five discourses identified include: the primary purpose of entrepreneurship is profit on the business level and economic growth on the societal level; that entrepreneurship is something male; that entrepreneurship is an individual undertaking; men and women are different; and finally, that work and family are separate spheres where women prioritize, or ought to prioritize, their family (Ahl, 2006). While I agree with this, I also think that these five discourses may not be contextually relevant across all cultures and geographies. Gupta and Fernandex (2009) examined the similarities and differences in characteristics attributed to

entrepreneurs across cultures, challenging the view that some scholars have in recognizing that there is a widespread ethnocentric bias in extant entrepreneurship research that treats the definition of entrepreneurship as universal which limits the scholarly understanding of characteristics and attributes ascribed to entrepreneurs in different countries. Welter, Baker and Wirsching (2019) position the need for contextualized research somewhat differently. They highlight that we, as entrepreneurship researchers, have moved from challenging the "standard" or Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship towards considering more subjective elements and the construction and enactment of contexts and now are challenging the theorization of entrepreneurship by broadening the contextual elements that beg for examination and demand theoretical development (Welter et. al, 2019).

Ahl and Marlow (2021) believe that today's mainstream research on women entrepreneurship remains set in a male–female comparative frame, where women are seen to be on the losing side. Even more discouraging, Yousafzi et al., (2019) suggest that women, as a category, have fewer, smaller, and less profitable businesses leading to suggestions of gender-related under-performance. The assumption of entrepreneurship as something male is prevalent in measuring instruments comparing men and women (Mirchandani, 1999; Robb & Watson, 2012). Women are assessed as to whether they measure up to the norm, and if not, they are advised to improve themselves through business courses, increasing their management skills, boosting their self-confidence, networking better, et cetera (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Foss et al., 2018). If this sounds familiar it is because it is, bringing us right back to the very first study done by Schwartz in 1976! This reflects the postfeminist sensibilities of self-surveillance, self-discipline, and a makeover paradigm, and as noted by Marlow (2013), it effectively introduces a blame discourse where women are held responsible for their alleged shortcomings while

structures are not (Ahl & Marlow, 2021). My own view is that the lack of responsibility given to structures surrounding women while instead focusing the blame on women themselves is exactly the gap that needs to be explored, unpacked and checked for accuracy. It is the system, not the individual, that perpetuates discrimination and biases in entrepreneurship participation.

Further, although I concede that quantitative research is useful in providing snapshot guideposts of directional trends, I still maintain that the methodological approaches taken to arrive at these conclusions do not tell the whole story. For example, using feminist theory, Marlow (2020) found research has evolved from assumptions that men are naturally entrepreneurial and can provide leadership to women to a more critical, embedded reflection. As a second example, Ahl and Marlow critically examined how Sweden and the UK's use of postfeminism ideals suppressed criticisms that in a context of persistent structural discrimination, lack of welfare benefits and contrived aspirational role models, entrepreneurship constitutes a poor career choice for many women. While I challenge that these findings again may be contextually dependant and are bold in their assertations, I appreciate the nuanced approach of exploring postfeminism from a critical perspective.

From a methodological perspective, Holmquist and Sundin (2020) postulate that quantitative methods, with a focus on economic theory, have taken over to a large degree in entrepreneurship research. In gender studies, however, they observe the opposite trend, with more qualitative studies being deployed in the direction of a philosophical theory. Women, as individuals of flesh and blood, no longer exist and instead, intersectionality, not gender, is now emphasized (Holmquist & Sundin, 2020). With the field of gender and entrepreneurship largely based on other fields, they believe that gender and entrepreneurship researchers should focus on generating domain-specific theories for the field, with empirical studies that use quantitative, as

well as qualitative methods, and that account for differences in contexts. A systematic review

conducted in 2020 (Cardella et al., 2020) of over 2800 peer reviewed journal articles on gender

and entrepreneurship from 1950 to 2019 concluded that it is a multidisciplinary field that saw

expansive growth from 2006 onwards. The results suggest that the interest of academics, who

have approached the study of gender and entrepreneurship, has fundamentally converged into

two major areas of research: the study of barriers (economic, political and social) and the

relationship between socio-cultural factors and the gender-gap.

Research on Entrepreneurship Policy

Entrepreneurship policy has been recognized as a particularly powerful component in the

context of women entrepreneurship (Mason & Brown, 2014; Mazzarol, 2014; Stam, 2015).

Business ownership in industrialized countries has, to a large extent, been granted to women

through policy changes, where previously a woman did not have the right to inherit, the right to

own a business, or the right to borrow money without her husband's co-signature (United

Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). Policies typically take the form of

government support for business start-ups and the ease in which starting and operating a business

is in a particular region (World Economic Forum, 2013). Policy is a context-specific force; it is

embedded in a country's institutional framework and, consequently, has considerable ability to

influence entrepreneurial behavior regionally, nationally and globally (Welter, 2011). Some

researchers say this is particularly the case for women entrepreneurship in both developed and

developing economies (Acs et al., 2017; Estrin & Mickiewicz, 2011). Foss et al. (2018) argue

that good governance is a necessary prerequisite in supporting and stimulating growth oriented

entrepreneurial activity (Mendez-Picazo et al., 2012); thus, effective entrepreneurial policies can

help address market failures and promote economic growth (Acs et al., 2017).

The field of entrepreneurship policy grew in the late 20th century as an offshoot of the more established small business policy (Gilbert et al., 2004). It was born of the realization by politicians that small business policy measures aimed at impacting the conditions for established small businesses was not the same as measures aimed at creating new entrepreneurial ventures and new economic activity (Audretsch, 2007). Unlike small business policy, entrepreneurship policy focuses on the early stages of business life: pre-launch, launch and typically the 12 months following launch. Early entrepreneurship policy in Western countries was geared toward funding the promotion of entrepreneurial activity, specifically to improve the information and advisory system, start entrepreneurship courses, affect the education system through the inclusion of entrepreneurship pedagogy and improving access to finance for entrepreneurs (Audretsch, 2007). The primary measurement of entrepreneurship policy impact was the number of new businesses started, which was thought to have a direct impact on job creation and positive economic growth. Emerging research in the field of entrepreneurship policy in the early 2000's questioned the validity of this singular measurement (Nielsen et al., 2021). Contrary to previously cited research, statistical data from the OECD showed that the number of start-ups in a country was affected more by economic trends than by policy initiatives. The growing body of research also suggested that it was not the number of new companies as such that had a positive macroeconomic impact, but rather the start-up and development of companies with high growth potential, often called high-impact start-ups (Van Stel et al., 2005; Acs, 2008; Minniti, 2008).

Entrepreneurship policy in western countries began to shift away from "volume" of new companies created to a qualitative measurement of potential impact of a high growth venture, resulting in debates on how the government defines quality in the context of a start-up as well as how to predict which start-up companies have the potential for high growth (Autio et al., 2007;

Bager et al., 2015). Some researchers are very optimistic regarding controlling the supply and demand of entrepreneurship through government policy intervention: "Public policy and governance can shape virtually all the contextual determinants of the demand for entrepreneurship and over a longer time, the supply of entrepreneurs as well" (Hart, 2003, p.8). There are opposing conclusions from other researchers who postulate the entrepreneurial field as more unruly, diverse, and influenced by society's informal institutions and culture, and only to a limited extent influenced by political regulation (Aldrich, 1999). The reality is likely more context dependent. The objectives of most entrepreneurship policies of present day are to increase the ease of doing business (e.g., by dismantling legal and legislative barriers), and to facilitate access to resources requisite to start-up and firm growth (Acs & Virgill, 2010) but as I have pointed out above, policies may not pay enough attention on who may end up being marginalized by these policies.

Research on Gender and Entrepreneurship Policy

Understanding how policy initiatives are constructed is important to the field as they represent a political ideological articulation of prevailing normative socioeconomic values (Bennett, 2014), not least regarding gender. Research conducted on gender-focused entrepreneurship policies include work by Mayoux (2001) and Orser and Riding (2006) while Minniti and Nardone (2007) have modelled gender effects on the start-up decision, independent of country-specific circumstances.

Interest in entrepreneurship policy as a means of targeting marginalised and disadvantaged populations in the economy has grown substantially in the last decade according to some researchers (Bennett, 2014) however, I find problematic that Foss, Henry, Ahl and Mikalsen (2018) found that while other ecosystem components have been debated in the

literature, the policy dimension has been underplayed in women's entrepreneurship research. Foss et al. (2018) note that entrepreneurship policy, in general and from a gendered lens, is an under-researched area and conclude that policy implications on women entrepreneurship research are vague, conservative, and center on identifying skills gaps in women entrepreneurs individualizing the perceived problem to the entrepreneur herself. A bibliography of the gender and entrepreneurship literature by Link and Strong (2016) found that only 4% of articles addressed public policy despite the establishment of national task forces in many areas of the world, representing a gap in academic inquiry. The establishment of these national task forces of major economies have sought to inform policymakers about the state of women's entrepreneurship and the need for gender-focused policy interventions. Henry et. al.'s (2017) review of country task force report conclusions and recommendations (including reports from Canada, the EU, the UK and Scotland) finds that:

- *Women's entrepreneurship policies focus primarily on individual-level challenges ('do-it-yourself solutions') rather than institutional (cultural and normative) level interventions.*

- *Gender disaggregated data are lacking with respect to access and utilization of small business support services (e.g., incubators, start-up garages, technology transfer facilities). Few countries integrate women's entrepreneurship policies across key economic ministries; policymaking about women's entrepreneurship is located outside the core economic policy process.*

- *Women's entrepreneurship policies are ghettoized in agencies tasked with women's safety and social welfare.*

In addition to the country review above, Ahl and Nelson (2015) identify several common discourses about women's entrepreneurship in a study conducted on US and Swedish entrepreneurship policy documents. The discourses (p.285) include:

- "Women entrepreneurs are an under-utilized resource in terms of national economic growth goals"

- "Women entrepreneurs face discrimination on the basis of sex"

- "Women entrepreneurs are (are not) different from men, for better or worse"

- "Women entrepreneurs are just like 'other' entrepreneurs"

- "Building women's entrepreneurship is women's work"

- "There is reason for optimism and reason to persevere: the dream of equality is possible"

- "Entrepreneurship may lead to gender equality, but as a secondary effect as it supports other goals"

These discourses are viewed as positioning women entrepreneurs as "other," thereby reinforcing women's inadequacy. I find these observations across seven geographic contexts concerning and it further supports an earlier observation of the literature review I made in that women are blamed for the lack of participation as opposed to institutional barriers. I propose that policy makers need to consider how and what is being measured as success from these policy interventions in order to fully understand the impact (or lack thereof) of women's participation in entrepreneurship. As an example, Ahl and Nelson (2015) found that policies for women's entrepreneurship are evaluated for design and effectiveness, but not for impact on the position of women with respect to equality or life opportunities and their research also suggests that entrepreneurship policy is gendered, subordinating women's entrepreneurship to neo-liberal

goals, such as job creation and economic growth (the business case for policy intervention) rather than gender equity (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). Few of the policies articulated outcomes of gender equality, equity, or women's economic empowerment (Coleman et al., 2019). Mason and Brown (2014) assert that women entrepreneurship public policy should address key issues plaguing current policy approaches, including the realization that one size does not fit all and that policy initiatives offered in isolation are likely to be ineffective. Possible directives to improve entrepreneurship policy geared toward women include lifting the research gaze from the individual entrepreneur and her business, instead addressing how process and context interact to shape the outcomes of entrepreneurial efforts (Aldrich & Martinez, 2001). Further, Zahra and Wright (2011) suggest that if entrepreneurship research is to influence public policy, there needs to be a dramatic shift in the focus, content, and methods. Foss et al. (2018) support this view in principle but also acknowledge that the increased attention paid by both researchers and policymakers to the entrepreneurship ecosystem framework makes such a shift challenging as it involves an interdependency between actors, businesses, and organizations, and thus makes developing policy implications more complex. They ponder if the complexity of these challenges and the difficulty involved in effectively addressing policy issues has discouraged more policy engagement from scholars (Foss et al., 2018). In the 13-nation study conducted by Henry et al. (2017) they conclude that despite the growing numbers and contributions of women entrepreneurs, they are still not valued and recognized as an integral part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and environment. I agree that this weakness in the normative pillar puts a spotlight on the need for an entrepreneurial ecosystem that includes women entrepreneurs as well as public policies that address normative as well as regulative and cultural/cognitive factors (Henry et al.,

2017). Griffiths et al. (2013) summarizes my conclusion from the literature review well by writing:

> "…in cultures where female entrepreneurship is perceived to have lower legitimacy in comparison with male entrepreneurship, women's self-perceptions and attitudes can affect their likelihood of pursuing this career choice, and this constrains women-led new ventures (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2003). In contrast, countries that provide normative support for women entrepreneurs, exhibiting admiration and respect along with gender equality, are likely to observe a higher level of female entrepreneurship activities (Baughan et al., 2006)." (p.350).

Bennett (2014) postulates that the centrality of entrepreneurship to contemporary socio-economic development has informed an extensive and diverse body of policy initiatives reflective of governmental interpretations of the role of entrepreneurship within society. Such initiatives also reflect and reproduce approaches to issues such as gender equality and the role of women. Bennett (2014) sees policy directives as not neutral in relation to gender positioning but rather as mechanisms whereby partisan ideas become actions through funded initiatives and are critical influences given their pervasive representation of normativity. Coleman et al. (2019) offer that in the face of perceived gaps between policy and practice, many groups such as industry associations, economic agencies, advocates, and scholars have called for the provision of gender-inclusive financing policies to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystems. Despite a growing body of literature that outlines gendered demand and supply side constraints, there is a dearth of knowledge about the underlying assumptions and impacts of policies designed to support women entrepreneurs' access to financial capital (Brush et al., 2019; Leitch, Welter & Henry, 2018).

Entrepreneurial feminism, a relatively new approach, is seen to proactively engage in and promote egalitarian, partnership-based decision-making, connectedness, cooperation, and empathy, where entrepreneurs act to coordinate and share knowledge and skills, rather than

competing for resources (Orser & Elliott, 2015). However, the current myopic focus on women's entrepreneurship policy fails to recognize alternative outcomes for venture creation such as these.

Women's Entrepreneurship Policy in Canada

In Canada, entrepreneurship policies are delivered both nationally and regionally through business programs, training centers, websites, incubators, sector associations and banks. Orser's (2017) research identified 15 studies in Canada regarding women entrepreneurship policy. She found that the most frequently cited recommendations include: increased access to start-up and growth capital, provisions needed for mentoring and networking opportunities among women, and more efficient coordination of federal support and related services. She noted half of the studies called for increased awareness of the not only the economic contributions of women entrepreneurs but also the social contributions.

While Canada has historically led the world in gender employment equality legislation, reform has not extended to gender-based procurement or entrepreneurship policy (Orser, 2017). Canada is cited to be among leading nations with respect to gender equality as it pertains to employed females (Gender Inequity Index, 2013; Gender Empowerment Measure, 2012; Women's Economic Opportunity Index, 2012) however Canada is lacking in policies to support female entrepreneurs despite numerous studies that have reported on the status of female entrepreneurs and the need for entrepreneurship policy reform (Orser, 2017). I see this as a critical issue in the Canadian landscape and potentially the biggest opportunity. While Canada has historically led the world in gender (employment) equality legislation, reform has not extended to gender-based procurement or entrepreneurship policy (Orser, 2017). In 2018, Canada introduced a government-wide Gender Results Framework to track how the country is

performing against key gender equality indicators, proposed to legislate for gender budgeting, created a Centre for Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion Statistics to ensure collection of disaggregated data relating to gender and other intersectional factors, and put Status of Women Canada (SWC) on a statutory footing as an official department (OECD, 2018). Despite these developments, in 2020 Canada fell three positions to 19th in the world for the Global Gender Gap (World Economic Forum, 2020). An initial study on gender and entrepreneurship policy in Canada by Orser (2007) concluded that there is a scarcity in the public domain of studies that examine women business owners' engagement in Canadian SME programs and services. Orser (2007) highlights that several factors contribute to the lack of published information including the extent and nature of interventions by multiple levels of government vary widely, many government-initiated program reviews are not widely disseminated and among those reports that examine gender-based programs, almost all were descriptive (e.g., anecdotal stories about selected program participants). None that were located within the study timeframe employed control sampling or disaggregated findings by program type, impact, etc. Orser (2017) postulates that examination of the consultative processes may help to close the gap by informing future initiatives that seek to redress gender differences in engagement and enterprise performance. Orser (2017) found that the failure of the Government to enact recommendations from the taskforce resulted in the maintenance of a male-centric entrepreneurship ecosystem in Canada. Specifically, the factors Orser retrospectively identified as impeding the implementation were as followed:

- The lack of a national women's entrepreneurship advocacy organization to advance gender-sensitive entrepreneurship policies and programming.

- The lack of accountability: The federal government is mandated to provide equitable access to business support programs and services, however, few (if any) systematic, gender-based evaluations are undertaken. As an example, the federal agency tasked with undertaking gender-based analysis at the time (Status of Women Canada) no longer funds or annually reports on the state of women's entrepreneurship.

- Conflicting perspectives about women's enterprise and policy priorities make it difficult to find commonality on a proposed path forward in policy reform. These fundamental epistemological ways of knowing entrepreneurship need not be mutually exclusive but do hinder progress in policy reform.

- Ghettoization of gender-focused entrepreneurship policies: At the time of her study, women entrepreneurship policy resided within the Status of Women Canada. By design, the agency is obliged to 'push' policy recommendations through various ministries rather than respond to mandated gender-focused policy priorities of lead economic ministries. (Orser, 2017)

As mentioned in the introduction, this research by Orser was in part the catalyst for my dissertation. I was deeply curious to see if her recommendations and criticisms had at all been considered when designing the newly created Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy in 2018. These factors and implications are discussed in detail in the discussion and conclusion of this thesis. One important note for readers is that when the current Liberal government came into power in 2017, they moved the Women Entrepreneurship portfolio from the Status of Women Canada to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. Further, they renamed the Status of Women Canada to Women and Gender Equality Canada. Appendix One highlights key

activities in relation to women entrepreneurship policy in Canada from 2015 to 2021. This information is also used in the findings and discussion as well as the conclusion and provides context to the discourses found.

Rationale for Chosen Method

Current studies on entrepreneurship policy in Canada are typically focused on design, implementation, and policy impact (Audretsch & Belitski, 2013) or on policy process (Arshed et al., 2014). I have taken inspiration from leading researchers to consider a different approach to policy development and instead will focus on the policy formulation itself, studying language as both spoken and written, used to create policy. By using Phillips and Hardy's discourse analysis approach (2002) with a post-structuralist feminist lens I explore women entrepreneurship policy to examine if there are discourses produced and reproduced that may have implications on women entrepreneurs.

As an example, Ahl and Nelson (2015) found, using discourse analysis, that policy discourse on women's entrepreneurship in both the US and Sweden tends to reproduce women's secondary position in society rather than improve it with the focus of promoting entrepreneurship activity among women specifically as a means to national economic prosperity rather than a personal accomplishment in and of itself.

The outcome of using discourse analysis can offer a new perspective on existing theoretical debates, drawing on different identities that locate actors in positions from which they can influence the field and the establish new practices by discursively embedding them in organizational texts (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Within my analysis, I consider how language is formed in such a way that the discourse of women's entrepreneurship, in the context of the

Government of Canada women's entrepreneurship policy, is reinforcing traditional gender roles. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter four.

Conclusion

This literature review provides an overview into the emerging, and still somewhat under-theorized, domain of gender and public policy research in entrepreneurship. Like a series of individual chirping birds slowly coming together to protest the status quo with a concerted and increasingly loud song, I recognize and acknowledge the call from established researchers imploring their peers to look at public policy from a new lens, deploying non-mainstream positivist research methodologies (Prasad, 2005) and to bravely offer concrete recommendations that challenge the current status quo of neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies, limiting entrepreneurship success strictly to financial outcomes and economic growth. Further, I recognize and acknowledge the opportunity to define and grow the gender and entrepreneurship research domain, drawing inspiration from both entrepreneurship research and feminist studies (that have been historically diverging) to inform and position future research on gender and entrepreneurship. It appears there is work to be done in connecting different sub-categories of entrepreneurship research that may be the key to the growth in gender and entrepreneurship that is sought. The next chapter of this thesis will provide more insight into the historical context of feminism in business studies and what theoretical feminist perspective I adopt when deploying my methodological approach.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspective

Introduction

This chapter will take us on a feminist exploration journey that will prime the reader as to why entrepreneurship policy reform needs feminism and, more specifically, why I am taking a poststructuralist feminist theoretical approach with my thesis.

I am including this chapter on feminism within my thesis because it is fundamental to what I am trying to achieve in understanding and appreciating the antagonistic and awkward chasm wedged between business and feminism. Harquail (2020) calls the relationship (or lack thereof) between the two - lopsided. For decades feminism has been calling for business to transform how it fundamentally operates by shifting from efficiency driven profits at all costs to a place that affords not just women but all people equal opportunities to define what *their* entrepreneurship prioritizes and defines as success. While feminism has struggled to get businesses attention, business has dismissed feminism's presence as largely irrelevant and waved away feminists' fundamental critiques (Harquail, 2020). I see this antagonistic struggle reflected in how women entrepreneurship policies are treated in Canada—having previously mentioned that the ownership of such policies has been flipped back and forth between economic departments and gender policy departments in Canada. As a nation we have not yet been able to combine the expertise and learnings from business and feminist principals to create inclusive entrepreneurship policy. Mazzarol (2014) suggests government policy is the critical component of an entrepreneurial ecosystem because entrepreneurs are directly impacted by policy. Combining this with Welter's (2011) research findings that policy is a context-specific force embedded in a country's institutional framework and has considerable ability to influence entrepreneurial behavior this builds the case for an examination of Canada's women entrepreneurship policy.

The objective and contribution of this chapter is thus to open a dialogue and lay the foundations of future discussions on possible pathways by arguing that an alternative, conceptually informed feminist critique of the assumptions which have informed the prevailing entrepreneurship research agenda is necessary. In order to do so I will provide a nuanced understanding and analysis of feminism and examples of how the context and version of feminism in which it is enacted impacts the resulting policy creation. As Calás, Smircich and Bourne (2009) suggest, the feminist critique offers an alternative perspective to challenge the normative institutional underpinnings, which constrain the possibilities of who can be recognized as an entrepreneurial actor and what constitutes entrepreneurial behaviour. I begin with the basics- what feminism is and why there are so many ways of defining it. I offer a discussion of problematic terms related to business and feminism: women, female and gender. I provide an overview of the role feminism has played in women's entrepreneurship. I then offer an understanding of feminist approaches to entrepreneurship including liberal feminist theory, postfeminism, and poststructuralist feminist approaches. I will share examples of how the research done in the Canadian context using liberal feminist theory and postfeminism have led to a standstill in the evolution of women entrepreneurship policy and will build my case for using the poststructuralist feminist approach in order to motivate and inspire a fundamental shift in policy development.

By examining Canada's public policy on women's entrepreneurship, using an underutilized feminist lens (poststructuralist feminist theory), I hope to offer approachable and accessible practical solutions to reform the existing narrow liberal hegemony, with the broader goal of bringing together business and feminism, igniting powerful and positive change in Canadian public policy on entrepreneurship.

Business vs. Feminism: The Chasm

Ahl and Marlow (2012) lamented that the entrepreneurship research agenda at a broad sense has become embedded within a series of gendered assumptions, which rest upon weak foundations. Part of this foundation, they suggest, is that entrepreneurship offers gender neutral meritocratic opportunities to individuals to help them realize their potential for innovation and wealth creation; that the normative entrepreneurial character is male and his ventures outperform those owned by women. Policy interventions are created to address female lack to close the perceived performance gaps, measured strictly from an economic measuring stick (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). The focus on individual women and their businesses does not explain current patterns of women's entrepreneurship and unjustly blames women for structural circumstances beyond their control (Bradley, 2007). This perpetuates a hierarchical gendered ordering where femininity is associated with deficit and a masculine discourse of entrepreneurship emerges as the unquestioned norm (Bruni et al., 2004a; Foss, 2010; Marlow, 2012).

On the other side of the chasm is feminism, moving us more towards theorizing as opposed to application, offering and teasing a new path forward yet resisting the field of entrepreneurship in her stubbornness. I am suggesting a new way forward for women entrepreneurs is a revolution that can only be driven by a bridge built over the deep fissure history created between the separation of entrepreneurship research and feminist research. That is, to provide context on the more traditional path women entrepreneurship researchers have used feminism in the women entrepreneurship domain (such as liberal feminism and postfeminism) and how the feminist approaches that exist on the fringes (such as poststructuralist feminist theory) might just be what we need to trigger a tectonic shift, closing the chasm completely and helping to inform inclusive

entrepreneurship policy that allows for and encourages participation for rationales beyond economic advancement of the country.

Feminist scholars have long argued that the majority of entrepreneurship policies are gender blind and lack the mandate to address underlying mechanisms that impede gender equality (Ahl & Nelson 2015; Pettersson et al., 2017). Coleman, Henry, Orser, Foss and Welter (2019) offer three supporting points to this argument. First, entrepreneurship policies prioritize revenue growth, masculine culture, and male-dominated industry sectors (Rowe, 2016), and rarely articulate socioeconomic priorities, such as equity, inclusion, and poverty reduction. Second, the historical lack of systematic, gender-sensitive program evaluation processes impede the construction of inclusive, evidence-based entrepreneurship policies. The recently released "Strengthening Ecosystem Supports for Women Entrepreneurs" by Orser, Elliott and Cukier (2019) address this gap and provides guidance. However, the lack of funding for agencies mandated to conduct gender-based analysis stifles progress by these agencies tasked with designing entrepreneurship or innovation policies. Further, a study done by Orser, Elliott and Leck (2011) examined how feminist attributes are expressed within entrepreneurial identity and suggest that policy makers and other stakeholders should check for unintentional gender bias both in language and decision making. Agencies who promote women's entrepreneurship are left to "push" policy recommendations through various, often tangentially related, ministries because they are not able to respond to gender-focused policy priorities (Orser, 2017, p. 122). Finally, Pettersson et al. (2017) observed that the absence of feminist theory in research on women's entrepreneurship is a missed opportunity to inform public policy. This is a gap I am aiming to fill with this dissertation in a Canadian context. Current academic discourse about feminist-informed entrepreneurship policy is obscure or idealistic, making it challenging to extract pragmatic

solutions to inform entrepreneurship policy and therefore are overlooked or dismissed as being "too academic" (Pettersson et al., 2017). This is a point not to be taken lightly; I am proposing that the path forward towards improved inclusive entrepreneurship policy involves applying feminist theory to entrepreneurship in a way that can be useful and practical, ensuring that it is easily accessible to women's enterprise advocates, demonstrating that it can align with the principles of entrepreneurship policy. This has proven to be challenging to date. As an example, Foss et al. (2018) applied a feminist lens to examine the implications of entrepreneurship policies within academic publications between 1983 and 2015 and concluded that policy implications were inherently gender biased, individualizing problems to women themselves, regardless of the feminist perspective used by the authors. The challenge thus lies in building a case using a feminist approach that shifts policy from individualizing problems to recognizing problems within the support structure (i.e., the entrepreneurship ecosystem).

Defining Feminism

One of the challenges with business and feminism it seems to me is one of misunderstanding and miscommunication. As an example, Harquail (2020) postulates that the problematic non-relationship between feminism and business may be a result of a wariness of feminism by business because business sees feminism as a threat to power, privilege, and position within the current status quo. While I agree with this in principle, I also think that the variety of and the evolution of definitions of feminism create conflict and ambiguity. Harquail concludes that most businesspeople and policy makers do not know enough about what feminism is (and what it is not) nor do they understand the value it can bring to entrepreneurship as a practice. I offer that this extends to governments as a whole and policy makers specifically.

One may offer a very elementary definition of feminism to mean equality for women. This could very well seem threatening to men, creating an either/or tug of war. Perhaps, a better way to define feminism is hook's (2000) version that sees feminism as a "movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression". This definition is not meant to trigger an anti-male response and reminds us that we have all been socialized from birth to accept that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism which will not disappear until we replace sexist thought and action with feminist thought and action (hooks, 2000). More recently, feminism has expanded to include intersectional feminisms that include addressing race, gender, sex orientation, class, nationality, and other groupings. Harquail (2020) argues that feminism, by definition, incorporates all anti oppression movements because women in different groups face different combinations of oppressions that must all be challenged to achieve equality. This last piece, achieving equality, still may leave one feeling uneasy because of the underlying assumption that we are assuming so as far that privileged men have already imagined the most fulfilling standard of human life and women are assumed to want equal access to this standard. Perhaps beyond equality we can consider a definition of flourishing where feminism's goal is to create a world where everyone has what they need to flourish (Nussbaum, 2011; Cuomo, 1997). Before considering feminism from different feminist approaches to entrepreneurship (including liberal feminist theory, postfeminism, and poststructuralist feminist approaches) I first offer context to the challenges of terminology in this research domain.

Defining Women, Female and Gender

In this dissertation I am examining research from both empiricist researchers, who use the term women entrepreneurship, women's entrepreneurship or female entrepreneurs, and research from constructivist and poststructuralist researchers who use the term gender and

entrepreneurship. I acknowledge that the word choice used by the researcher reflects differences in basic assumptions. I also acknowledge that for some the term "women entrepreneurship" may feel awkward grammatically, but I use this term as it reflects what is used by the Government of Canada and empiricist researchers. This is a good juncture to bring in the problematization of the descriptors that entrepreneurship researchers in this domain use, some deploying liberties to use certain words interchangeably while others more vehemently steadfast in not mixing them. Sex and gender may be seen as coextensive where women are considered human females and men human males (Mikkola, 2022). Feminist researchers encourage a distinction between sex and gender in order "to avoid biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny" (Mikkola, 2022, p. 2) whereby "'sex' denotes human females and males depending on *biological* features such as chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features) and 'gender' denotes women and men depending on *social* factors including social role, position, behaviour or identity" (Mikkola, 2022, p. 2). Gender norms influence commonly accepted ways of how individuals see themselves and interact with others as well as the distribution of power and resources in society (Canadian Institute of Gender and Health, 2012; Johnston, Greaves & Repta, 2007; Tannenbaum, Greaves & Graham, 2016). Researchers are now recognizing that gender requires an intersectional approach since it can be structured by and within ethnicity, indigenous status, social status, sexuality, geography, socioeconomic status, education, age, disability/ability, migration status, and religion (Bauer, 2014; Bowleg, 2012). I apply a social constructivist feminist perspective in research for my dissertation implying that entrepreneurship, and thus entrepreneurs, are understood as gendered in both concept and practice (Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Brush, Anne & Welter, 2009; Petterson, 2004).

Feminist Approaches to Entrepreneurship

Feminist theory is an extension of the feminist ideology in different disciplines such as, but not limited to anthropology, art, literature, philosophy, politics, business and economics. Feminist research aims to understand and deconstruct gender inequality ingrained in the structure of societies (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). Feminist theory is commonly categorized in three perspectives: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and post-structural feminism (Harding, 1987; Calas & Smircich, 1996). What they have in common is what underlies feminism—the recognition of women's subordination in society and the desire to rectify this (Pettersson et al., 2017). Feminist research provides interpretations and explanations for women's subordination but since the perspectives/approaches differ in terms of how gender is conceptualized, how obstacles for gender equality are defined, and in ontological and epistemological assumptions (Campbell & Wasco, 2000), policy outcomes will differ depending on which feminist approach is favoured. Feminist empiricism is criticized as being essentialist in character because it assumes certain traits are unique to men and women. This approach reinforced the sameness between men and women, taking little account of within-sex variation. Inspired by the early work of West and Zimmermann (1987) and their concept of "doing gender", social scientists such as Di Stefano (1990), Bordo (1990) and Haraway (1991) introduced gender-as-process ("poststructuralist feminism"). By briefly reviewing the positioning of these feminist theories used in entrepreneurship research I will be able to better support my case for using poststructuralist feminist theory in this thesis. More detail has been given to the liberal feminist theory because of Canada's current liberal approach to entrepreneurship policy. This will be used in later chapters in contrast to what discourses are uncovered using a poststructuralist feminist lens.

Feminist Empiricism: Liberal Feminist Theory and Postfeminism

Holmes (2007) describes liberal feminist theory as a theory that sees men and women as essentially similar, equally capable, and as rational human beings. It builds on 19th Century liberal political theory which envisioned a just society as one where everyone can exercise autonomy through a system of individual rights. Liberal feminism aims for equal property and legal rights, women's suffrage, equal access and representation and assumes that women and men have similar capacities, so if only women are given the same opportunities as men, they can achieve equal results (Holmes, 2007). Liberal feminism thus sees discriminatory structures as the reason for women's subordination. The fight for equal pay and equal access to business ownership is an example of liberal feminist struggles. Any differences between men and women's achievements are explained by organizational or societal discrimination. Entrepreneurship research that is conducted within this theoretical framework investigates barriers (such as a lack of access to capital or training) and the focus is often directed towards differences between men and women (including demographic, behavioural, and cognitive differences), instead of problematizing institutional practices (Pettersson et al., 2017). Further, Foss et al. (2018) found that research using this perspective maps the presence of women in business, it maps their characteristics, or it maps size, profit, or growth rate differentials between men and women-owned businesses (e.g., Anna, Chandler, Jansen & Mero, 2000; Wicker & King, 1989).

The role of the entrepreneur in the liberal feminist theory is to recognize and capitalize on opportunity with performance measures focusing solely on profit maximization and revenue growth. Firm governance is predicated on owner or private shareholders, where control is formal, centralized, and hierarchical (Orser & Elliott, 2015). Women are positioned as 'untapped

resources' or assets for economic growth and are lacking in comparison to men in entrepreneurial abilities, characteristics, and knowledge. Women need to be "fixed" to participate in entrepreneurial activity and the prevailing discourse is that women's businesses are too few, too small, or are growing too slowly (Pettersson et al., 2017).

Policy implications from a liberal feminist perspective focus on resource allocation or women's equal access to resources. Policy suggestions include equal access to business education and training or legislation prohibiting banks from sexist and antiquated practices. Policies address individual-level constraints through targeted interventions such as financial training for growth-oriented women business owners and gender-sensitive training (Coleman et al., 2019). Policy interventions prioritize business owners who are white, heterosexual, and middle-class (Pettersson et al., 2017) or engaged in science, technology or engineering. While feminist empiricism is useful in making women's presence and condition visible, it has been criticized for accepting current (male) structures and simply adding women (Foss et al., 2018).

Postfeminism shifts emphasis away from organizational, structural, and cultural causes of sexism to focus on the choices, behaviors, and self-understanding of individual women (Harquail, 2020) but says little about what is expected of men. It ignores a system level cause of gender inequality and the subtle manifestations of patriarchy and disingenuously claims that a woman's individual agency is the best approach for making minor necessary improvements in her work prospects (Harquail, 2020). Lewis, Rumens and Simpson (2022) suggest postfeminism is a polysemic concept, recognizable through its selective choice of liberal feminist values of choice, empowerment and agency based on the neoliberal principles of individualism, self-governance and entrepreneurialism. This definition is further supported by research conducted by Ahl and Marlow (2021), Gill (2017), Lewis, Benschop and Simpson (2017) and McRobbie

(2009). Recent gender and entrepreneurship research has positioned postfeminism as a critical concept to investigate the kinds of entrepreneurial subjects women are called to become (Lewis, 2014; Nadin, Smith & Jones, 2020; Pritchard, McKenzie Davie & Cooper, 2019; Sullivan and Delaney, 2017). Some scholars see postfeminism as a regression in achieving feminist goals and, as the name implies, we have somehow moved beyond the need for feminism and its tenets. Postfeminism is said to have evolved as a cultural response to the challenges feminism has posed and the progress feminism has made, including limited acceptance of feminist ideals and perspectives, as well as backlash against and resistance to full gender equality and social justice (Harquail, 2020). Gill, Kelan, and Scharff (2017) see postfeminism as a way of defining the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideals where people see the progress of feminism even while experiencing ongoing sexism. Although postfeminism is about feminism it is not typically considered a feminist perspective but rather a reflection of deeply rooted sexism and an incomplete understanding of feminism that gets in the way of understanding gendered inequality and sexism in organization. It is, at best, a series of claims and a set of positions about whether sexism still exists and whether feminism is still needed or useful (Gill, 2008).

Poststructural feminism

Poststructuralism refers to a loose collection of theoretical positions influenced by post-Saussurean linguistics, Marxism psychoanalysis, feminism and the work of Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault (Gavey, 1989). Poststructuralist approaches are concerned with language as a system of difference whereby texts and language are seen as a politics of representation that produce gender and both universal and objective knowledge claims are called into question (Pettersson et al., 2017). Poststructuralist feminist theory emerged from the observation that discrimination may be based on any social category, not just sex (hooks, 2000), and from

postmodern critiques of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984), such as those justifying social orders by natural sex differences (Coleman et al., 2019). Gender is defined as socially constructed through history, geography, and culture and therefor what appears as masculine and feminine traits vary over time, place, and discourse and are constantly renegotiated. Gavey (1989) suggests poststructural theory recognizes there is no absolute truth and instead all identities are transient and relative. Researchers are unable to define a real or authentic personality since the self is produced differently depending on the discursive environment (Francis, 2002). Poststructural feminism aims to challenge the essentialist notion that women are made up of a single, static category of identity and instead frames "woman" as emergent and constantly shifting, multifaceted, and constructed within competing discourses (Butler, 1990). Further, poststructural feminism provides a framework for understanding the ways in which women simultaneously engage in resistance and are subjected to power by emphasizing the complexity and shifting nature of power relations (St. Pierre, 2000).

Calás et al. (2007) characterize gendering processes and practices as the product of power relations which have emerged from historical processes, dominant discourses, institutions, and epistemological arguments. It is not preoccupied with what men and women are but rather how masculinity and femininity is constructed and how this affects social order, particularly in relation to gender and power. The poststructuralist feminist approach more specifically "…explores the connections between language, subjectivity, social organization, and power, and their ramifications for gender dynamics in all walks of life" (Prasad, 2005, p.165). Texts and language are seen as a politics of representation that produces gender and "…deconstructive studies that employ these approaches analyze concepts, theories, and practices of entrepreneurship, and how they construct (women) entrepreneurs" (Pettersson et al., 2017).

Gender is socially constructed through discourse that governs human interactions and how male and female entrepreneurs view themselves and each other, including the assumed male norm for entrepreneurship that consigns women to the role of "other," and the belief that women entrepreneurs and their businesses are lacking in terms of size, profits, growth trajectories, return on investment or industry representation (Coleman et al., 2019).

Poststructuralist feminism provides us with a means of challenging assumptions, structures and discourse that are implicit within women's entrepreneurship policy. Possible policy suggestions with a poststructuralist approach could be mandatory gender awareness training among mainstream business advisors rather than a separate advisory system where women advise women. Literature reviews have found the poststructuralist perspective to be sparsely represented in policy creation but fruitful in revealing how gender discrimination is achieved (Neergaard, Frederiksen & Marlow, 2011). The research using this perspective point out the male gendering of the entrepreneurship field and claim that common and established research practices through their assumptions, problem formulations, research questions, methods, and interpretation of results subordinate women from the start (Ahl, 2006). The relationship between the use of feminist perspectives and policy implications in research on gender and entrepreneurship is an unexplored theme (Coleman et al., 2019).

Rationale for using Poststructuralist Feminist Theory as my Theoretical Perspective

In alignment with the epistemological basis of discourse analysis (to be discussed in the next chapter on methodology and method), I propose viewing gender as socially constructed in line with social constructivism and using poststructuralist feminist theory as my theoretical lens (Harding, 1987) in examining the Government of Canada's public policy on women entrepreneurship in order to provide a fresh and new perspective issues that may be plaguing

policy creation and implementation. As previously mentioned, feminist scholars introduced the word gender to make a distinction between social practices and representations associated with femininity, masculinity and biological sex, such as human bodies with male or female reproductive organs (Acker, 1992; Oakley, 1972). Applying a social constructivist feminist perspective in research for my dissertation implies that entrepreneurship and thus entrepreneurs are understood as gendered in both concept and practice (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Brush et al., 2009; Petterson, 2004). Women have not featured within the mindset or image of what an entrepreneur is or should be (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2005; Baker, Aldrich & Liou, 1997) and this gender bias is of critical importance not only as a social injustice but also because women are positioned in deficit unless they acknowledge and subscribe to a masculinized discourse and given they cannot deny or escape their feminine ascription their affiliation and acceptance can only ever be partial (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Poststructuralist feminism views gender as something enacted through discursive practices as opposed to characteristics of men and women (Kelan, 2009), and is sensitive to the power involved in gendered categorizations. Biological sex is entirely separated from social gender and is individualized allowing both femininity and masculinity to be performed by the biological male as well as the female (Ahl, 2004). In contrast to feminist empiricism, a poststructuralist feminist approach enables an analysis of how entrepreneurship concepts, theories, and practices construct gender and position women (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2007), viewing language and texts (e.g., policy documents) as producing gender and allowing for an analysis of how social orders are gendered and of how (women and men) entrepreneurs are represented (Pettersson et al., 2017).

Ahl (2006) conducted a discourse analysis of 81 research articles on women's entrepreneurship to uncover what research practices, if any, can cause a tendency to re-create the

idea of women entrepreneurs as being secondary to men despite intentions to the contrary (Ahl, 2006). One of the discursive practices she found was regarding the institutional support for entrepreneurship research whereby women become a variable in the growth equation in which they are rendered inadequate and contribute to the positioning of women as secondary (Ahl, 2006). Ahl suggested as a conclusion that future research on women's entrepreneurship should consider a shift in epistemological positioning from an objectivist epistemology to a constructionist epistemology as a way of researching women entrepreneurs without reproducing their secondary position (Ahl, 2006). Five years following this call to action, a special edition of *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice* was published to evaluate the progress to date, if any, on women's entrepreneurship research. While a shift to include more constructionist approaches with non-traditional questions is occurring in this maturing research domain, most of the research continues to be from a liberal perspective (Brush et al., 2012).

Ahl's 2006 paper also inspired a study in 2012 of using discourse analysis to compare the positioning of women entrepreneurs through entrepreneurship policy in both Sweden and the United States over the course of two decades. Despite Sweden being seen as highly progressive towards family-friendly policy in contrast to the U.S., the research revealed a legacy of discourse subordinating women's entrepreneurship to other goals such as economic growth and a positioning of women as "other" in both countries (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Yet another study proposes that studies of gender in the entrepreneurship field lag behind those in other disciplines (i.e., sociology, political/organizational science) and the proposed solution encouraged scholars to develop the methodological repertoire to match what is now expected in women-driven entrepreneurship: a poststructural feminist approach (Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016).

Conclusion

I am taking direction and inspiration from scholars who encourage new theoretical perspectives in doing research within gender and entrepreneurship when choosing poststructuralist feminist theory. As an example, Verloo (2005, p.22) postulates "that a policy (proposal) will always contain an implicit or explicit representation of a diagnosis, connected to an implicit or explicit prognosis and a call for action" making the poststructuralist feminist approach congruent to this analysis by surfacing the implicit discursive nature of policy. Further to this, Calás et al. (2009) argue that feminist perspectives offer strong potential in informing ontological pluralism. Ahl and Marlow (2012) extend this argument through their critical evaluation of how the assumptions underpinning the normative entrepreneurial discourse can be de-constructed through feminist critiques. They argue that such reflexive criticism should inform the analytical framing of entrepreneurial theorizing. The problem is that using liberal, social, psychoanalytical or radical feminist perspectives results in a tendency of essentializing gender (Calás & Smircich, 1996), risking the oversimplification and 'blaming the victim' in that women, or their actions (or lack of action), are used as explanations for their subordination (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Poststructuralist feminist theory allows for the exploration and analysis of how female subordination is constructed within and through language and texts. Ahl and Marlow (2012) offer that fundamental to these theories are key notions of dualities: to be weak is not to be strong; to be a risk taker is not to be risk averse; to be a woman is not to be a man. Socially constructed representations of gendered subject positions are articulated through oppositional categories within language itself where the feminine side of the binary reflects and sustains subordination (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). The poststructuralist stance has been critical to developing feminist advancements that challenges the notion of female essentialism and

assumptions of shared subordination arising from a homogeneous biological identity and socio-economic positioning.

In digesting the various feminist approaches to research and in understanding the research that has been done to date in a Canadian context, I am motivated in this dissertation to respond to the suggestion of an expanded research objective and a shifted epistemological position by studying the gendering of social orders in the form of support systems for women entrepreneurs, specifically in a Canadian context. A recent comprehensive review of the literature reveals that, for the most part, research on women entrepreneurship remains empiricist (making comparisons between men and women) as opposed to challenging gender practices (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Entrepreneurship policies and programs are viewed as having less impact on women compared to men. Coleman et al. (2019) advances the reason as the failure to address the gender constraints faced by women entrepreneurs, constraints that a feminist informed policy can address. My hope is that this thesis can offer a new path forward in policy creation for women's entrepreneurship; one that is informed, inspired, and measured by feminism's goal of a thriving society for all, using a poststructuralist feminist approach. In the next chapter, I provide more insight as to how a poststructuralist feminist approach works with the chosen methodology of discourse analysis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of my selected methodology, as well as a detailed account of my research design, data sources, data collection and data analysis. I begin by providing context in my chosen qualitative methodology of discourse analysis from a constructivist perspective. I provide an overview of several different types of discourse analytic approaches including discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis using poststructuralist feminist theory and my rational for choosing the latter. I then discuss my data collection and data analysis and finish with a preview of my findings, which is the basis of the next chapter.

Constructivist Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research incorporates a range of interconnected interpretive practices to get the best understanding of the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research has the goal of "making sense of, and interpreting, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). A constructivist standpoint maintains that the social world is made up of multiple, equally valid, and socially constructed realities and aims to uncover embedded meaning in words and text and their meanings are personally constructed, and continually changing (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). Constructivism enables the researcher to explore how participants construct and express their understanding of social reality, taking into account the broader social construction of narratives as the interplay between social, interpersonal and cultural relations, rather than analysing them as a representation with a single meaning (Esin et al., 2014). Further, a constructivist framework considers the influence of power relations as an effect of cultural, political, social, economic and historical discourses rather than

being natural and unquestionable. My approach maintains that reality is shaped by socially

constructed factors such as gender and aims to uncover the embedded meanings in the discourses

that frame women entrepreneurship policies in Canada.

Defining Discourse

The term discourse itself is recognized by researchers as being a contested term in terms of both

meaning and use. Cameron (2011) defines it quite simply as a sequence of sentences or

utterances constituting a text. Fairclough defines discourse slightly different as the "situational

context of language use" and "the interaction between the reader/writer and text" (Fairclough,

1992, p.3). This contrasts with definitions from those working with critical theory such as

Foucault who see discourse in the plural as discourses, specifically "practices that systematically

form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p.42). By practices Foucault means text,

but also other social practices such as in my case, as an example, the policy development of

women entrepreneurship in Canada. Ashcraft's (2004) categorization of discourse would

constitute this approach as 'discourse as social text'. Discourse is seen as contingent and

constitutive. Examining the text used to describe the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and the

subsequent programs that received funding from the strategy guided by the policy development I

examine if and how discourses direct the conduct of individuals or of groups (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault did not prescribe any particular method; in fact, he was against this, so it is up to the

analyst to devise a method suitable for the research question at hand (Foucault, 1972; Winther

Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). I understand discourses to be more than just linguistics, extending

to social and ideological practices that govern how we think, speak, interact, write and behave

(Baxter, 2010). Ahl and Marlow (2012) explain that linguistic practices can be themed and

analyzed as discourses, representing "a group of claims, ideas and terminologies that are

historically and socially specific and create truth effects" (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1999, p. 49,

Ahl & Marlow's (2012) translation) allowing language to be arranged, used and reproduced to

represent and privilege specific interpretations. Considering the context of women

entrepreneurship policy documents, a woman may create an identity relating to the word

entrepreneurship depending on which discourses are around to be drawn upon. Ahl (2004)

astutely says it well when she says "Discourse structures knowledge, and knowledge structures

what people hold as true and act upon" (p.161). Reiterating, thus, the importance of the research

question in this dissertation, in the context of the quote from Ahl is that exploring the discourses

that exist in Canada with women entrepreneurship policy allows us to unpack the knowledge

structure Canadians have with the term entrepreneurship and who then might be excluded from

this. Said differently, discourses can act as gatekeeping devices whereby dictating identities to

which individuals must conform to gain legitimacy and rejects those who do not or cannot

subscribe (Kelan, 2009; Speer, 2002, 2005). Meaning is constituted by language that embeds

specific discourses in contextualized ways of being that are produced and reproduced through

institutionalized processes and influences. The notion of gender as constructed through discourse

is framed as a fluid, contextualized diverse performance (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). As an example

of discourses found in research, Hamilton (2013) argues that dominant discourse of

entrepreneurship is portrayed as masculine and is perpetuated by media representation of an

entrepreneur by a narrow range of male stereotypes while women are under-represented and

often that representation is linked to domestic concerns. As a second example, Richard, Deal and

Mills (2021) conducted a discourse analysis on Canadian Introduction to Business texts

specifically on the entrepreneurship chapter and found a similar discourse of entrepreneurship

texts being overly gendered in masculine terms, serving to privilege the experience of male

business while simultaneously marginalizing the representation of women entrepreneurs. They argued that marginalizing women in textbooks forms barriers to their participation in entrepreneurial pursuits and called on scholars to reconsider the importance of equality in materials used in the classroom (Richard, Deal & Mills, 2021).

Choosing the right form of Discourse Analytic Methodology for the Job

There are several different approaches to discourse analytic methodology to be considered. Though there are several distinct approaches they all share an interest in exploring how organizations, industries, and their socially contextual environments are created and maintained through discourse (Phillips, Sewell & Jaynes, 2008). Heller (2001) describes the approaches as fundamentally differing between the relationship in macro-analytical approaches that consider how broader social processes work through language and the micro-analytical approaches which examine a finer detail of linguistic interactions. The different discourse-analytic approaches are situated in different epistemological paradigms which will produce different and potentially conflicting accounts of the same data (Baxter, 2010). The methodology I review briefly before focusing on the chosen form for this dissertation are discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis.

Discourse Analysis (DA)

Discourse analysis is considered both a conceptual and methodological approach to research, emerging over the latter part of the 20th century as a means of considering and discussing social reality in new productive ways (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2003; Fairclough, 2012; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Maguire & Hardy, 2009 and Grazzini, 2013). Discourse analysis is concerned with language as both spoken and written as it appears in conversations, narratives, or in this situation, as an expression of public policy through official

government reports and programs (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). Phillips and Hardy (2002) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) posit that the only way to understand the world is to first have a pre-understanding of the ordering categories in a comprehensible way, with language offering such ordering. This builds on the idea that language is constitutive as opposed to representational, aligning the ideas of discourse analysis with those of social construction (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Ahl and Nelson (2015) show that what these definitions share is the position that discourses have effect: they are neither neutral nor passive. The more people knowingly or unknowingly draw on the same discourse the more institutionalized it becomes, making it more powerful (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). Discourse analysis can offer a new perspective on existing theoretical debates, drawing on different identities that locate actors in positions from which they can influence the field and establish new practices by discursively embedding them in organizational texts (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In comparison to other qualitative research methods that seek to understand social reality, as it exists, discourse analysis "…endeavours to uncover the way in which it is produced" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p.6). In this case, "…draw(ing) on different identities that locate actors-even relatively powerless ones-in positions from which they can influence the field, the ability to frame diverse arguments in ways that cut across sectional interests, and the entrenchment of new practices by discursively embedding them in organizational texts" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p.55). Baxter (2010) highlights that a combination of macro and micro approaches work together in discourse analysis in order to identify discourses. That is to say, the main interpretive conceptual tool seeks to identify linguistic features such as idioms, metaphors and figures of speech that help to identify a wider pattern of language use. Discourse analysis works from "…a hermeneutic, interpretive or social constructionist stance, which challenges the idea that there is a single Archimedean point from

which linguistic data can be analysed neutrally and a single, reliable interpretation reached"
(Baxter, 2010, p.11).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis was developed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1992, 2005; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) in response to other forms of discourse analysis (such as conversation analysis) that Fairclough felt either focused too narrowly on the micro-linguistic aspects of discourse at the expense of neglecting its more macro social aspects or vice versa (Phillips et al., 2008). Critical discourse analysis starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyses those in power, those who are responsible and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems (van Dijk, 1986, p.4). Language is viewed as a form of social practice and CDA researchers are concerned with systematically investigating hidden power relations and ideologies embedded in discourse (Johnson & McLean, 2020). Foucault (1972) explains that discourses have power implications that can make thought and action feasible or infeasible, legitimate, or illegitimate, while also ordering people as well as ideas and objects in relation to each other and the more people that draw on a discourse, the more institutionalized it becomes and the more powerful it is. Sharing Foucault's dialectical view of discourse, CDA researchers consider discourse to be socially shaped as well as socially constitutive challenge the power relations or social problems under investigation either explicitly or implicitly attempting to make links between micro, meso, and macroscale social phenomena (Johnson & McLean, 2020). CDA unveils how social inequities are created through binary power relations constitute identities, subject positions and interactions within discourses and texts. For example, Wodak (2005) used CDA on the transcripts of interview narratives with members of the European Parliament to

explore whether gender mainstreaming policies were producing structural changes in equalizing gender roles.

Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA)

Similar to CDA, FPDA has roots in discourse analysis approaches but sources its inspiration from poststructuralist theory and more specifically a feminist poststructuralist perspective (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Derrida, 1987) versus CDA which is based on Marxist social theory (Baxter, 2008). It draws on poststructuralist principles of "complexity, plurality, ambiguity, connection, recognition, diversity, textual playfulness, functionality and transformation" (Baxter, 2008, p.17) considering gender differentiation as the dominant discourse with a transformative quest versus an emancipatory agenda. One of the things I appreciate the most about FPDA is that it supports small-scale and localized social transformations that can collectively challenge dominant discourses and challenges binary thinking that structures thoughts in opposing either/or pairings. Baxter (2008) notes that CDA polarizes subjects into two categories (the most powerful versus the least powerful) while FPDA "argues that most females are not helpless victims of patriarchal oppression, but that gender identities are complex, shifting and multiply located, continuously fluctuating between subject positions of powerfulness and powerlessness" (p.19). Both CDA and FPDA take issue with the positivist approach to research that assumes an independent and knowable world unrelated to human perception and social practices, however, while CDA and FPDA are both interested in the workings of power through discourse, the conceptualization of this differs between the two approaches (Baxter, 2002). CDA assumes discourse to work dialectically (e.g. Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) where the discursive event is shaped by and continuously reconstructs 'real' or 'material' events, situations, institutions and social structures. FPDA, on the other hand, adopts

an anti-materialist stance in its view that discourses operate as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Baxter (2002) explains with FPDA social realities are always discursively produced so a subject's position is being continuously reconstructed and open to redefinition through discourse, not outside it. FPDA demonstrates the notion of contradiction between micro and macro-analysis is irrelevant and shows how it can undo the macro-micro dichotomy (Heller, 2001), by "analyzing transcripts micro-analytically within a given time and space and using these as a reference point for identifying how larger-scale discourses produce significant shifts in the power relations between speakers during a stretch of discourse" (Baxter, 2008, p.22).

Chosen Approach to Discourse Analysis

My method (step by step) approach to discourse analysis is based on Phillips and Hardy (2002). From a methodological perspective I use FPDA to inspire Phillips and Hardy's (2002) approach to discourse analysis as a method of analysis. It is compatible with poststructuralist feminist analysis given that both are built on social constructionist epistemology in which language and/or discourse is seen as constitutive of reality, instead of merely representational (Pettersson et al., 2017). As such, I analyze how Canadian government policies position women entrepreneurship as well as women and what assumptions they hold about women and their businesses. To do so while answering the call of leading women entrepreneurship research requires the use of a novel theoretical perspective and complimentary methodology. While one might think critical discourse analysis may be more suitable in analyzing gender and entrepreneurship because of the potential power dynamic at play, I prefer the FPDA approach because it recognizes the complexity of gender identities where women may find themselves powerful and powerless at the same time. This is something that Orser, Elliott & Leck (2011)

take feminist entrepreneurship researchers to task on, citing that the stereotypical gender attributes described in prevailing literature were not reflective in a Canadian context. They found women entrepreneurs perceived themselves to be action-oriented, creative thinkers/problem solvers, visionary, and determined while their bias towards action reflected an interest in, or a perceived need to, initiate change (Orser et al., 2011). A FPDA approach allows for simultaneous gender identities with less rigidity found in CDA.

By using discourse analysis to analyze public policy documentation on women entrepreneurship policy in Canada it may help us uncover and understand the implications of the wording of the policies themselves on women's participation in entrepreneurship in Canada.

"Through discourse, humans in social interaction construct their reality, including constructions of femininity and masculinity, that is, ideas of how women and men do and ought to behave. [This]...implies a rejection of the idea that men and women can be adequately described by essential differing qualities, but it also implies reference to power; gender relations within the context of society and people's lives are of interest. This perspective also extends the research objects from gendered bodies to anything gendered, such as gendered policy" (Ahl & Nelson 2015, p. 277).

Focusing on differentiated experiences can be problematic. Hartsock (1990) surmises that the focus on language, specificity and difference denies common experiences of subordination, challenging movements to address inequality and discrimination (see also Calas and Smircich, 1992).

Research Design

My research question is: what is the discourse of women's entrepreneurship and how does that discourse on women's entrepreneurship in Canadian Federal policy position women

and their entrepreneurship? The importance, or "so what" of this question is because policies for women's entrepreneurship are routinely evaluated for design and effectiveness but are not typically evaluated for the impact on the position of women with respect to equality or 'life opportunities' (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). Discourse analysis allows us to examine the mainstream (positivist) approach to entrepreneurship to explore potential root causes on why, despite the increased investment in women's entrepreneurship programming and funding in Canada, the number of women participating in entrepreneurship is not increasing substantially. The design of my study using discourse analysis allows for reflective analysis by its nature of providing a deep analysis of the current discourses present in women's entrepreneurship. The data set, along with the theoretical framework and the feminist positioning provides a platform to be able to look at the things that are familiar in our world (such as the ongoing positivist positioning of women's entrepreneurship in Canada) and to ask those questions that will enable a critical understanding of this context. It helps us build reflexivity in the participation for progressive change.

What Data to Use? Women Entrepreneurship Policy in Canada

Entrepreneurship policies in Canada are typically delivered through a variety of business programs, training centers, loans, websites, portals, webinars, incubators, sector associations, training materials, newsletters, and other resources. The cornerstone of Canadian entrepreneurship policy is made of mainstream programs complemented by regional and occasionally gender-specific small business support services (Orser, 2017). Historically, federal agencies were not expected to report on gender equality and the government did not report on client gender in federally funded entrepreneurship programs or SME procurement. Orser (2004) concludes that federal policy and programs targeted specifically at women business owners are

limited with the majority of agencies being inactive or passive in their commitment to support women business owners (Orser, 2017).

In order to provide context to the data sources I have chosen, I have included a high-level chronicle of key events in Canadian policy on women's entrepreneurship from 2015 to 2020 (see Appendix One). This approach was in part inspired by Orser's (2017) summary that spanned from 1986 to 2011. Four key events have occurred since Orser's 2017 retrospective on her time as the Founding Chair of the Canadian Taskforce for Women's Business Growth. First, the women entrepreneurship portfolio shifted from the Status of Women Canada (now known as Women and Gender Equality Canada) to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. The implications of this will be examined in the next chapter. Secondly, the first women's entrepreneurship strategy was launched in 2018 with a $5-billion investment. Thirdly, the Government of Canada committed $85 million to a fund called the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund. This fund was designed to increase women-owned businesses' access to the financing, talent, networks and expertise the government perceives they need to start up, scale up and access new markets via projects led by not-for-profit organizations that would help close service gaps and strengthen capacity within the women entrepreneurship ecosystem in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019). Finally, the federal government awarded Ryerson University over $13 million to establish the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. National in scope, the hub is made up of 10 regional hubs with the mandate to work together to coordinate women's entrepreneurship activities and support in different regions across Canada. These four events since Orser's 2017 summary are not insignificant given the financial commitment supporting these federally mandated initiatives.

Data Source

In Budget 2018, The Government of Canada allocated $85 million to the WES Ecosystem Fund to strengthen capacity within the entrepreneurship ecosystem and close gaps in service for women entrepreneurs. Eligible projects were those that address a gap and/or build capacity in the entrepreneurship ecosystem for women. Over 50 projects were funded through this initiative and are intended to support projects up to five years in duration (see Appendix Two for a complete list of the projects along with a brief description of the projects). These projects are led by non-profit organizations across Canada and were asked to take into account the needs of diverse and under-represented women. Funding was available through both a national/multi-regional stream and a regional stream. $15 million dollars was allocated to fund projects that were national or multi-regional in scope. Priority was given to national projects that would deliver benefits in all provinces and territories and the minimum funding amount that was considered for a national or multi-regional project was $1 million. A multi-regional project is one that combines three or more of the following regions: Western Canada, Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada and Northern Canada. $70 million of the WES Ecosystem Fund investment was allocated to fund projects delivered at the afore mentioned regions.

In May of 2020, The Government of Canada announced they would be providing $15 million in additional funding to existing WES Ecosystem Fund recipient organizations, enabling these third-party organizations to provide support and advice to women entrepreneurs facing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funded activities include (Government of Canada, 2021):

- supplier diversity activities that target women entrepreneurs
- initiatives to support women in traditionally under-represented sectors

- networking, matchmaking, and mentorship opportunities

- incubator and accelerator programs

- initiatives to support the participation of diverse and under-represented women in entrepreneurship

- efforts to scale up programs that support women entrepreneurs across regions and on a national basis; and

- other activities supporting the objectives of the WES Ecosystem Fund.

I chose to examine the publicly available, website-based text from the WES Ecosystem Fund as well as the website-based text of the 53 funded programs/agencies of the WES Ecosystem Fund as my data source. My rationale is fourfold: first, the substantial investment into this fund indicates a marked advancement in support for Canadian women entrepreneurs. The scope of the projects ranges from national to regional to provincial to grassroots. The chosen non-profit agencies are part of the policy network across Canada and thus this data source should provide a wide range of insight into the discourses of women's entrepreneurship both at a national level and at a provincial and local level. It will also be interesting to explore if the discourses are the same or differ across Canada.

Secondly, the projects funded include a variety of organizations that support women from marginalized populations including Ingenious women, Afro-Canadian women and immigrants to Canada. By examining the discourses across all projects funded I can also explore if and how the discourses with women entrepreneurship policy differs with mainstream organizations versus organizations supporting historically marginalized women.

Thirdly, unlike other countries Canada does not provide easy access to policy documentation explaining the rationale and strategy behind the policy (Orser, 2017). Rather, we are left to

interpret policy strategy from the forward-facing public access of the Government of Canada website. That being said, it is these publicly available texts that provide guidance and possibly impact the identity formation of what it means to be a women entrepreneur in Canada (see also Krysa, Mills, & Barragan, 2017).

Data Collection

The data was sourced from the publicly available Government of Canada website and the websites of each of the 53 organizations that received funding. Specifically, text in relation to the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and the WES Ecosystem Fund was collected and recorded in a separate file. I then systematically began collecting the text from the websites of the organizations that were listed in the external data source: 'Successful applicants to the WES Ecosystem Fund' in order, beginning with National Stream organizations followed by Regional Stream organizations which are categorized by province.

I drew on search terms, that were either used directly in the project description or terms similar to that mentioned in the project description, to find relevant data on the organization's website. The results were collected and recorded in a separate file for the organization. If the search found no related results, I then investigated content on the organization's website related to women's entrepreneurship. A Google search was also completed, using the organization's name and specific terms used in the project description, as well as the organizations name and 'women's entrepreneurship strategy' to find data such as news releases relative to the projects. Collected data was categorized by organization and data directly related to WES funding was noted.

My data folder is organized by having a sub-folder for the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, a sub-folder for the WES Ecosystem Fund and a sub-folder for each of the

organizations who received funding. Each sub-folder contains a single word document that contains the text from the corresponding organization's website. If there were pdfs found on the organization's website that supported the funded program these were also downloaded and placed in the organization's sub folder. I also created a master word document that included the text from all the organizations, excluding the Women Entrepreneurship and WES Ecosystem Fund text. This was created to support the data analysis which will be discussed next.

Data Analysis

Inherent in discourse analysis, I recognize the data analysis process is interpretive though I follow a well-documented and transparent systematic coding convention. It is important that I declare my own assumptions, including my moral standing on social egalitarianism and feminism. Following the lead of Ahl & Nelson (2015), I believe in gender equality in access to opportunity and as a goal for visible practice in society. My goal is to limit the assumption of the biases that I hold by making them visible to the reader for integration and interpretation.

While I used Phillips and Hardy (2002) as my guiding approach to discourse analysis I also found Putnam's (2005, p. 28) guiding principles for conducting discourse analysis useful in analyzing the data. She proposes four principles:

1) Let the text and context talk to you.

2) Work back and forth between the text and the concepts.

3) Look for inconsistencies, ironies, or unexpected occurrences; and

4) Dispute your own interpretation and explanation.

Consistent with the poststructuralist feminist focus of this study, the analysis paid specific attention to descriptions of "the social practices associated with the applications of disciplinary

techniques, individuals' reactions in terms of compliance or resistance, and implications for the constitution of identity" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002: 26).

Analytical Steps

The first step in analyzing the text from interviews and documents was to become immersed in the content of the text and identify elements of the discourse that might represent themes or patterns. Having selected the text for analysis, I began by reading through all of the text collected to gain a general understanding and familiarity with the content, paying attention to see if any subtle or overt stories were being told. I made notes along the way on words that seemed to position women entrepreneurship.

As a second step, I then went through each piece of text in detail carefully noting language effects of discourse, appreciating that careful and intensive reading and rereading of the text is necessary to identity systematic patterns within the text. As I read and re-read the text, I kept a record of the specific words and phrases used in each body of text, taking notes of how power, privilege, and marginalization emerged through the language in use and made note of any signaling the socially constructive and productive aspects of the text used. I stayed cognizant to what was said, what may have been left implicit and what was not said. I looked for patterns, variability, and consistencies within the narratives the data revealed. I ensured I remained rooted in my theoretical perspective- post structuralist feminism theory, which views gender as a social and cultural construct rather than as a sex, allowing research to analyse the social and material implications of gender, rather viewing gender as a sex by which to compare men and women (Henry et al., 2016; Williams & Mills, 2019). I worked back and forth between the texts and the consistencies across texts that I saw emerging and carefully identified key passages of text that demonstrated these consistencies. As I re-read the documents, I paid attention to general shifts

and displacements by asking questions such as: What is the stated aim of the program? How are women constructed as entrepreneur/entrepreneurial? How is gender in/equality to be addressed through policy? In addition to this I made note of who was speaking; Generally, it was the funded organization as a whole but there were instances where quotes of specific voices were heard. I also made note of where the text/speaker was speaking from in terms of positions. Finally, I considered what was being said, looking to see if there was any signaling of positioning in reference to women entrepreneurs.

As a third step, I grouped the findings into general discursive and dominant discourses based on the patterns of consistent messaging within the text that was identified. This analysis demonstrated a clear change over time. This part of the analysis involved a discussion among the authors resulting in the identification of three thematic areas, in which general displacements were observed: 1. Women's entrepreneurship serves primarily as an engine for economic growth 2. Women need training to become entrepreneurs 3. Canada's government is a feminist government. I then re-read the texts comparing the notes and key words identified in step one with the three identified discourses to ensure they aligned.

As a fourth and final step I re-read the documents looking for quotations that reflected the general themes identified while also looking for countering themes to what I had originally found. I challenged my own assumptions and biases having been a women entrepreneur in the Canadian ecosystem for the past 20 years to ensure there were no counter themes to those that I had identified.

The next chapter discusses the discourses in detail uncovered in the analysis.

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the discourses found in the text, relating to the Women's Entrepreneurship Fund, as outlined in the data source of chapter four. As discussed in the previous chapter I ascribe to the definition of discourse as being "a group of claims, ideas and terminologies that are historically and socially specific and create truth effects" (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1999, p. 49, Ahl & Marlow's (2012) translation) allowing language to be arranged, used and reproduced to represent and privilege specific interpretations.Three main discourses emerged from my research, which align with similar research that has been undertaken in countries deploying the same methodology and theoretical perspective. However, there were several subtle departures from the discourses. These departures are small fissures indicating a slight departure from the norm, which may lead to greater shifts in future women entrepreneurship policy design in a Canadian context.

The following table depicts an overview of each of the three discourses. Following this, I provide greater context to the discourse and relate it to appropriate literature. I share quotes for each discourse to provide context and enrichment to the discourse and set the stage for my conclusion in the next and final chapter.

Table 1

Three Discourses Found from the Data Set

Discourse	Overview
"Save our economy, won't you?"	Women are an untapped and powerful source of economic opportunity. Canadian women should become entrepreneurs because it will grow the Canadian economy.
"The darn thing still needs fixing"	In order for women to become entrepreneurs they need training, indicating an othering from a masculine accepted view of

	entrepreneurship in Canada and re-producing the second ordering of women. Women are expected to adapt to the man's business world.
"Contradicting Feminist Approaches"	A neo-liberal feminist perspective on women entrepreneurship prevails in women entrepreneurship despite more evolved forms of feminism appearing in other public policy designed by the same government.

Discourse #1: Save our economy, won't you?

The first persuasive discourse I found are that women are positioned or used as an untapped and powerful source of economic opportunity. The discourse that Canadian women should become entrepreneurs to grow the Canadian economy was reflected in every one of the 52 funded projects. As an example, consider the following three quotes:

The Government of Canada is demonstrating its commitment to women-led SMEs today through significant investments delivered by FedDev Ontario. We value the incredible contributions women entrepreneurs make to our society and economy, and we are proud to support them as they work to strengthen their businesses and re-build our economy during this unprecedented time. (Anon, 2020)

With only 16% of Canadian businesses being owned/led by women, the Government of Canada recognizes that advancing women's economic participation in the economy is good for the country's bottom line and has set the goal of doubling the number of women-owned/women-led businesses by 2025. (LAMBC, 2021)

Women are being recognized as entrepreneurs and the abilities that they have to be entrepreneurs. And if we are able to create more female entrepreneurs and create business

and economic turnaround for this entire region, I think that will be phenomenal for this

point in time, given what the economy is looking like. (Ganovicheff, 2019)

The pressure for women entrepreneurs to rebuild the Canadian economy is strong

signaling of the external responsibilities of entrepreneurship versus the internal intrinsic reasons

a woman may pursue entrepreneurship. These sorts of statements coming from the overarching

Women Entrepreneurship Strategy further subordinate women's entrepreneurship to neo-liberal

goals, such as job creation and economic growth (the business case for policy intervention)

rather than gender equity (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). What is interesting about Canada is that gender

equality legislation has contributed to the participation of women in c-suite positions and the

narrowing of gender wage gaps, the impact has not been extended to women entrepreneurship

policy (Golla et al., 2011: Kabeer, 2012; Orser, 2017). Consider the following quotes

representative of the language used across the 52 funded projects that clearly show current

support programs for women entrepreneurs across Canada are focused almost solely on

economic outcomes.

> Women represent half of Canada's population, and their full and equal participation in
>
> Canada's economy is essential for our future. Removing the systemic barriers to
>
> women's full economic participation will support economic growth, strengthen the
>
> middle class, and build a fairer society that gives everyone a real and fair chance at
>
> success. (Government of Canada, 2018)

> Our government believes that women's economic empowerment is not just the right thing
>
> to do, it's good for the bottom line. That's why we launched the Women
>
> Entrepreneurship Strategy, a strategy that seeks to double the number of women-owned

businesses by increasing their access to financing, networks and advice. It's a smart

investment with an economic and social return. (Western Economic Diversification

Canada, 2019)

It is problematic that 100% of the funded projects in Canada have a focus on economic

growth because it allows certain questions and ignore others, making women entrepreneurship

policy focus on performance and growth issues while ignoring issues such as gender equality and

gender/power relations (Ahl, 2006). A discourse analysis of women and entrepreneurship

research conducted by Ahl (2006) found that 65% of the 81 research articles between 1982 and

2000 in four leading entrepreneurship journals cite the importance of women's entrepreneurship

as an instrument for economic growth as a reason for why researching women entrepreneurs is

prudent. She further found that the word entrepreneurship is positively characterized by not only

economic growth but also words such as innovation, change, risk taking, opportunity recognition

and driving force, supporting the grand narrative of modernity where development implies

change and progress (Foucault, 1969; Lyotard, 1984; in Ahl, 2006). The newly formed Women

Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub demonstrates the same focus on economic outcomes:

> The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) shares research and resources
>
> on women entrepreneurs in Canada. Made up of 10 regional hubs, WEKH operates in
>
> both official languages and includes a network of over 250 organizations, reaching more
>
> than 100,000 women entrepreneurs. Using a methodology developed by the Boston
>
> Consulting Group and the Cherie Blair Foundation (2019), it is estimated that closing the
>
> gender gap in entrepreneurship in Canada could add $41-$81 billion to Canada's GDP.
>
> (WEKH, 2021)

Canada is not the only country with economic outcomes as focus for women's entrepreneurship. Such is the same in entrepreneurship public policy development in Scandinavian countries. In a review of entrepreneurship documents in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, Pettersson et al. (2017) concluded that policies give precedence to economic growth in a non-feminist fashion, and that over time, economic growth becomes the key focus, while feminist approaches are silenced. Socio-economic priorities such as equity, inclusion, and poverty reduction are rarely articulated. They conclude the lack of systematic, gender-sensitive program evaluation processes impede the construction of inclusive, evidence-based entrepreneurship policies which results from housing "gender issues" in government agencies that operate at a distance from agencies tasked with entrepreneurship, innovation and financing policy, an issue I will revisit in the third discourse discussion. While research in other countries can provide a point of reference and can contribute to the understanding of discourses that may be happening at a broader scale, Welter (2011) insists policy is a context-specific force that it is embedded in a country's institutional framework. Without consideration for the Canadian context specifically there may be a tendency to make conclusions that entrepreneurs and their ventures are all alike (Aldrich, 2009). Orser, Elliott and Lick (2011) recommend the further examination of gender in country context of entrepreneurship is needed because of the variation of legislation in relation to gender equality programs.

The issue with using policy as an women entrepreneurship stimulant for economic growth alone where women are seen as an untapped and not fully adequate resource is that it is a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing. The Government of Canada is celebrated as being a leader in Gender Equality (ranking 24th out of 156 on the Global Gender Gap Index 2021, ranking #4 on the Gender Inequality Index 2020 and 16th out of 189 on the Gender Inequality Index 2019) but

it is not proven that policy initiatives for women entrepreneurs contribute to gender equality, to social change for women (such as enhancing entrepreneurship as a means to women's wellbeing and financial or other independence) or to gendered change of society. In fact, Orser (2017) reported that among developed economies there appears to be an inverse relationship between the level of gender equality and the proportion of women relative to men who choose self-employment. Pettersson et al. (2017) found that even if a liberal feminist perspective is present, polices give precedence to economic growth in a non-feminist fashion and over time, economic growth becomes the key focus, while feminist approaches are silenced. Contemporary neoliberalism constructs a new, agentic citizen who, having absorbed the individualized market logic of neoliberalism as a normative way of being (Couldry, 2010; Jessop, 2002), embraces "self-governmentality" (Rose, 1993; Ahl & Marlow, 2021). This will be explored more extensively in the third discourse discussion.

Alternatives (or at the very least equal partners to economic growth) are emerging in academic research including entrepreneurship as social change (see Calás et al. 2007, 2009), as feminist change (Ahl et al., 2016), as a means of poverty reduction (Braidford et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2004), and social inclusion (Rouse & Kitching, 2006), demonstrating that entrepreneurship can be disconnected from simply a focus on economic growth. Even though 100% of projects examined in the Canadian context mentioned economic growth as an outcome, there were several organizations that went beyond this focus to include other motivating outcomes. Consider the following quotes:

> Indigenous women are and always have been at the very heart of our communities.
> Entrepreneurship represents a promising pathway for Indigenous women to enrich their
> lives, strengthen their families, and participate in the development of their communities.

Indigenous women are thriving in business despite the additional challenges they face in

pursuing their entrepreneurship dreams. As a key part of the Indigenous entrepreneurship

ecosystem and AFI market, Indigenous women are valuable investments for both

communities and investors. Indigenous women entrepreneurs make calculated, rational

business decisions, seek out services and supports, generate wealth, create job, training,

and education opportunities, and become role models within their local communities.

(NACCA National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, 2021)

We are contributors, inventors, craftspeople, and most importantly problem solvers.

#BeTheDrum is a calling to existing and prospective entrepreneurs to come alive with

determination, strengthened through the support of peer mentorship and navigation.

Together we will build solutions to help bring our nation forward – to lift our

communities and to break a new trail toward prosperity. (NWAC, 2021)

The Women of Ontario Social Enterprise Network offers a suite of programs for women

interested in starting or growing their own venture, that seeks to have a positive social,

cultural or environmental impact through its operations, and/or the sale of their products

and services. (Wosen, 2021)

All these examples are from organisations outside of the mainstream women

entrepreneurship support organizations. The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada

(2020) reports that research on Indigenous entrepreneurs generally and Indigenous women, in

particular, is limited. Existing research suggests that Indigenous entrepreneurs are more likely

than non-Indigenous entrepreneurs to create businesses aimed at the collective benefit of their

communities rather than to advance personal goals (Curry, Donker & Michel, 2016); Sharing emerged as a dominant value, with competition seen as an opportunity for sharing skills, sharing customers to meet demand. This value was also reflected in a desire to see everyone succeed. This seems to match with the approach taken with the funded projects and represents a very interesting departure from the main discourse. Further research into the differences in discourses between mainstream and indigenous entrepreneurship support for women may yield insights to a stronger path forward for all women entrepreneurs, motivated by Indigenous approaches.

The positioning of women's entrepreneurship as positive for women in general and for economic growth more specifically is motivating increased criticism among academic researchers questioning if we should be promoting entrepreneurship at all to women. Consider the following quotes:

If we want Canada's economy to run on all cylinders, everyone must have the opportunity to succeed. Our government's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy will help businesswomen reach their highest potential and provide their full contribution to our economy by supporting them with the tools they need to grow their businesses and create jobs. (Western Economic Diversification Canada, 2019)

Entrepreneurship can offer more potential benefits to Indigenous women than employment. As an entrepreneur, you are your own boss, and your schedule can be much more flexible. You can set your own hours and structure your work around your schedule. This makes it easier to balance work and family life—a significant concern for many women who are also caring for children. Being in control of your business means that you can choose how much responsibility you want to take on. Some women work full-time, while others prefer to keep

their business small, with limited clients, allowing them to work part-time. (Maskawisîw, 2021)

… the earlier you start nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit, the better. Each and every woman is essentially born with the potential to become a successful entrepreneur, it just takes some time and effort to foster the development of their entrepreneurial potential. The sooner we begin developing the key traits that define a successful entrepreneur, the more likely it is that she will go on to make a positive impact through her business. (Tsuts'weye Women's Entrepreneur and Innovation Network, n.d.)

This bright outlook for women specifically and those considering entrepreneurship in general maybe misleading in terms of overall positive impact on an individual's life. Shepherd (2019) provokingly asks us to consider the dark side of entrepreneurship referring to an actor's negative psychological and emotional reactions from engaging in entrepreneurial action. He posits that the dark side and downside of entrepreneurship can negatively impact entrepreneurs but also society. The notion of the destructive side of entrepreneurship refers to the negative impacts on society members from damage to resources owned or accessed by others because of entrepreneurial action. In examining the texts of over 52 programs funded by the Women's Ecosystem Fund there was no mention of any negative or downside to entrepreneurship. I suggest that there is a disruptive and negative side of entrepreneurship that would be refreshing to be told about, supported, and normalized through the programming developed for entrepreneurship promotion. The current promotion of entrepreneurship ignores the evidence that for many women, such as those with poor access to entrepreneurial resources, time constraints, caring responsibilities, et cetera, entrepreneurship constitutes a precarious and poorly

rewarded form of work (Klyver et al., 2013; Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018; Yuen et al., 2018). This economic growth discourse does not account for the fact the majority of small firms (regardless of owner sex) are marginal performers with few prospects for innovation, productivity growth and employment creation (Aldrich & Ruef, 2018). Ahl and Marlow (2021) propose that this generates a naive discourse underpinning policy initiative, encouraging more women into entrepreneurship founded upon postfeminist ideals complicit in reproducing a discourse that subordinates rather than emancipates proving contemporary policy initiatives are both enabling and detrimental. Governments acknowledge gender bias within entrepreneurship and fund programs meant to reduce the bias, but the way this is addressed, through postfeminist sensibilities of individualism, choice, self-discipline and consumerism is detrimental (Ahl & Marlow, 2021).

Discourse #2: The darn thing still needs fixing

The second discourse prevalent across all 52 funded projects was a primary focus on the need to train women to become entrepreneurs. Coleman et al. (2019) suggests that claims regarding the enabling powers of neoliberalism and entrepreneurialism, percolated through postfeminist claims of emancipation, generate a policy discourse based on an assumption that women are reluctant entrepreneurs who just require guidance to develop more entrepreneurial attitudes. This mindset dates back to the earliest days of studying women in entrepreneurship with research by Schwartz (1976) who concluded that women had been socialized in other directions away from owning and managing a business thus, for entrepreneurship to attract more women, they would have to be re-socialized first. It appears through the text used today in programs funded by the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy that women should be and can be

entrepreneurial if given appropriate help to overcome entrepreneurial deficits. Consider the following quotes that represent this discourse:

> Women's contributions to business are a major part of Canada's economic success. However, women who are trying to start, grow and scale their own businesses face significant barriers to gaining full and equal participation in the economy. The Government of Canada is committed to supporting the organizations that empower women by providing the necessary resources, mentorship and capital needed to grow successful businesses. (ACOA, 2021)

> The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) will coordinate a series of boot camps across Canada for promising women entrepreneurs looking to start their business. These bootcamps will focus on enhancing business skills and financial literacy. As well, the BDC will expand its suite of online learning content to better equip women entrepreneurs with the knowledge and tools they need to succeed. (Government of Canada, 2018)

The design and wording of the Women Entrepreneurship policy and funded program does not consider the role that power plays in gender dynamics. Orser (2017) suggests that when women "do" entrepreneurship in Canada they are often seen as underperforming in terms of growth rate and employment rates. There must be something wrong with women; they need to be "fixed" in order to "do" entrepreneurship. Harquail (202) postulates that business efforts to reduce gender inequality focus on developing in women whatever additional skills, attitudes, and behaviors they need to succeed as the male entrepreneur does. Consider the following quotes from the research that further demonstrate this discourse:

Specific project activities include developing 6 new and/or enhancing existing business incubators with female entrepreneur-specific programming; implementing a comprehensive coaching, training, and mentorship program; and to promote entrepreneurship to women. (Community Futures Lloydminister & Region, 2020)

Women's Enterprise Centre is a non-profit organization devoted to helping BC women launch, lead and scale their own businesses. Our full range of services includes business loans up to $150K, business advice, skills training, mentoring, resources and a supportive community to help women entrepreneurs realize their business potential. (Women's Enterprise Centre, 2019)

Brainstorming your business ideas, Business Planning, Pro Forma Statements, Registering your business, Researching funding opportunities, Preparing pitch deck presentations, Branding: Help with creating business and social media profiles, Developing marketing strategies and pricing models, Creating marketing material, Advertising, Finding new revenue streams, Adding your business to Federal Government Buy & Sell site, Be there for you as your mentor – to answer your questions or just have someone to talk with. (NWAC, 2021)

Harquail (2020) notes that approaches for fixing women address them as individual potential performers, as if gender equality will be achieved by some appropriate number of successfully renovated individual women. This approach purposely leaves organizational policies and structures intact, so that the women who can be fixed enough to assimilate

themselves can do so with minimal of disruption to the status quo. Consider the following quotes that are representative of the discourse even within more specialised areas of focus: STEM and film

Economic Development Lethbridge (EDL) will receive $1.68M in funding over the next 3 years for Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) training, mentoring and other entrepreneurial support programs through its Tech connect location. Objectives of the Women in STEM program will include Entrepreneur Training, Networking, Mentorship and Funding, Access to training in current & emerging technologies, and Outreach Opportunities. (Westem, 2021)

With support from Western Economic Diversification Canada, BANFF Spark offers training, mentorship, and investor connections to women entrepreneurs ready to grow or launch their own businesses in the screen-based industries. (Banff Spark, 2021).

Even when the organization that supports women on the fringes of entrepreneurship (marginalized or underrepresented groups of women) wrote of their specialized programing the positioning shifted to more inclusive language but then still fell back to offering training.

Groundswell, Vancouver's alternative business school for social entrepreneurs is committed to empowering underrepresented entrepreneurs and growing the local impact ecosystem. We will be offering scholarships for newcomer women in Canada to give them the confidence, skills, tools and space to find their unique gift and put it to work for themselves and for their community. (Groundswell Alternative Business School, 2019)

We accelerate organic growth, based on the human needs and lived experiences of

women entrepreneurs, while fostering a welcoming, inclusive, intergenerational program

culture where everyone can thrive. We support women entrepreneurs as they grow their

business their way, with a focus on equitable models for structure and governance. First

and foremost, Fifth Wave Initiative exists to help women-led companies grow and

become financially sustainable. To achieve this, we have designed a unique, high-

powered program that will strengthen founders' business skills, generate new insights,

accelerate business development efforts (domestically and internationally), grow

revenues/monetize followings, facilitate access to aligned capital and to values-aligned,

diverse mentors and coaches for women in business. We will also leverage the

Government of Canada's women's entrepreneurship initiatives, for example, participation

in supplier diversity efforts. (Canadian Film Centre, 2021).

This particular quote demonstrates the gendered ignorance that still exists:

Lots of people in the industry—and this is especially the case for women—don't have

that business growth mindset or education, and certainly don't have the social and

business networks within financial circles that they need in order to grow their business,

Kuzmyk says. (Banff World Media Festival, 2019)

As shared in the literature review, in the late 1990's a distinct critique gained traction,

recognizing that the negative impact of social constructions of gender, specifically femininity

and its dissonance with preferred entrepreneurial characteristics (Marlow, 2020). It was thought

that such change could be achieved by supporting, advising, and training women to adopt a more

masculine entrepreneurial attitude, becoming more agentic, more risk tolerant, competitive, and

self-confident, resulting in higher levels of success of women in entrepreneurial pursuits (Small Business Service, 2003). This was met with a flurry of arguments and the ensuing academic critiques (Bruni et al., 2005; Ahl, 2006), dismissing the notion that "if only women were more like men" (Marlow, 2013, p. 10) then their persistent under- representation as entrepreneurs, and the underperformance of their ventures, would be solved!

Despite the evidence presented in academic journals over the last twenty years the Government of Canada continues to focus millions of dollars into specialized training for women entrepreneurs. Women are assessed as to whether they measure up to the norm, and if not, they are advised to improve themselves through business courses, increasing their management skills, boosting their self-confidence, networking better, et cetera (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Foss et al., 2018).

The entrepreneur in Canada is still male gendered and the government has just spent close to $100 Million on a marketing campaign from coast to coast and community to community to remind women that they need "fixing" before they can become an entrepreneur. We then as a society look to each other in wonderment questioning why more women in Canada are not flocking to become entrepreneurs! In essence we are enacting a quintessential definition of insanity by continuously doing the same thing repeatedly (promoting education specific for women entrepreneurs) and expecting a different outcome, a magical rise in the number of women starting businesses with no reflection on how this pervasive discourse may be impacting a women's identity as it relates to entrepreneurship and her corresponding propensity to start a business. There is a further irony to consider. According to Cukier et al. (2021), Canadian women entrepreneurs are better educated than Canadian male entrepreneurs. Of the male entrepreneurs 7.9% have less than a high school level education, 25% have a bachelor's degree,

and 15% have a master's degree or higher. Of the female entrepreneurs, 2.5% have less than a high school education, 28.4% have a bachelor's degree, and 17.4% have a master's degree or higher. While most businesses have owners with some post-secondary education, men-owned businesses are more likely to have a high school education or less while those with majority women ownership are more likely to have a college, university, or graduate degree. The report notes when comparing to 2011, entrepreneurs overall are better educated, particularly majority women-owned businesses, where the share of business owners with less than high school education drop by nearly two-thirds, from 7.4% to 2.5%. Considering this, how do we determine whether women have just been conditioned to say they need more training, more access to capital and more mentoring because that's what they've heard as the predominant rhetoric over the last 20 years? We, as a society and as a government, give them what they think they want and need, and it still doesn't move the needle. Though outside the scope of this thesis, I am deeply curious to understand women's identity to entrepreneurship in a very contextualized manner. Do we need to unpack how women's identity as it relates to entrepreneurship has been formed in our provinces and country as a whole in order to truly understand what women need if they decide to pursue an entrepreneurial endeavor for themselves? Orser and Elliott (2015) offer insight into the impact of the deficiency focus on women:

> Deficiency rationales create language that diminishes women's entrepreneurship. Contributions are missed. One can think about such rationales within a balance sheet, in which being female is moved from being an asset to being a liability to enterprise performance. The implicit message is that female entrepreneurs simply don't measure up to expectations…Being female is seen as problematic. Underperformance hypotheses legitimize

political and government indifference to recognizing the contributions of women to the social and economic fabric of the global economy. (p. 15).

Is it the woman that needs training or the ecosystem that surrounds her? Consider the quote from only four of the 52 funded projects. These quotes do not follow the norm of what was found across 92% of the funded projects; the first quote is from the only organization to identify power dynamics that exist in women's entrepreneurship in Canada. It is interesting to note in the second example that the original project was funded by the Status of Women in Canada prior to the application for funding through the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem fund. It is the only mention across all 52 funded projects that there may be issues in the ecosystem itself as opposed to the individual entrepreneur in terms of gender bias in entrepreneurship.

Lack of funding is often cited as the predominant reason that initiatives and companies fail to reach viability. While this is partially true, it places too much power in money itself to create generative outcomes. A focus on access to capital alone ignores power dynamics that exist when capital is divorced from discussions of investment terms and accompanying ecosystems of support. This narrative also bolsters existing notions of who holds power, and that financial capital is the predominant source of power. If we continue to ask the same capital holders for more access to capital without fundamentally challenging entrenched notions of who is 'worthy' to receive it, we will continue to spin our wheels. In venture, winner-take-all unicorn models tend to exacerbate power and wealth accumulation. This is why it is critical to build new models that reshape power dynamics instead of replicating more of the same. (Hearn, 2020)

Restigouche CBDC's Women Entrepreneurs' Access to Business Financing is a 3.75-year

national, bilingual project (2019-2023) that will provide business loan agents with an

interactive online toolkit containing simple tips and strategies to address challenges that

women face in relation to accessing business financing. Building on the success of the

Restigouche CBDC's provincial (NB) project which was funded by Status of Women

Canada, this new project will enhance the existing toolkit for business loan agents across

Canada. (ANOn, 2020)

Together, we are redesigning how business supports are provided so these entrepreneurs

build skills that match their potential and help them succeed. Through our programs,

WOSEN seeks to address the gaps in our current systems that support entrepreneurs and

adapt these systems to create a more inclusive economy that promotes prosperity for all.

Success will require the input and participation of many voices, including the entrepreneurs,

and networks of supporters including advisors, investors, and community leaders, that make

up Ontario's entrepreneurship ecosystem. Our goal is to broaden and diversify the systems

that support women entrepreneurs. We do this by working together as a collaborative and

with the ecosystem to create programs that are designed to be inclusive and accessible,

systems-informed, decolonized, responsive, anti-oppression, human-centred (and with) an

ecosystem-approach. (Wosen, 2021)

I also wonder, given that gender in and of itself has become more nuanced, if the words

female and women become increasingly problematic particularly for the LGBTQ+ community.

Is it time to rethink how to make the entire ecosystem inclusive instead of coming up with

smaller fractured approaches to entrepreneurship trying to create individualized programs for all

people who have lived on the margins of a white male dominated version of entrepreneurship? This is the opportunity to explore. Consider the following quotes:

Although collectively the term 'women' is used throughout this site, WOSEN is dedicated to equity and inclusion, and seeks to support women-identified and gender non-binary entrepreneurs from underserved and underrepresented communities. This includes Indigenous women, women in rural or remote regions, racialized women, newcomer women, LGBTQ2+, women with disabilities, and those who identify as gender non-binary. WOSEN works to unleash the entrepreneurial energy and capacity of women who have solutions that put people and the planet first. (Wosen, 2021)

Our women-centred approach means that services are available to women, non-binary and gender-nonconforming folks, and anyone else who may have experienced gender-based inequalities related to participation in entrepreneurship. We aim to be a welcoming place for people to access the services that they need to succeed in business ownership. (The Hubs, 2021)

I may be giving the impression that I think training nascent entrepreneurs is problematic. This is not the case. I think there are two opportunities to rethink the relationship between training and entrepreneurship. The first one is the need to integrate the needs of women within mainstream entrepreneurship policy and corresponding training programs. This is when an individual's full contributions can be recognized and celebrated without othering those who are not white and male. Women have not featured within the mindset or image of what an entrepreneur is or should be (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2005; Baker et al., 1997). This gender bias is of critical importance not only as a social injustice but also because women are positioned in

deficit unless they acknowledge and subscribe to a masculinized discourse. Given they cannot deny or escape their feminine ascription, their affiliation and acceptance can only ever be partial (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Secondly, I believe that emerging feminist ideals, such as those offered by Celia V. Harquail in *Feminism: A Key Idea for Business and Society*, can and should be integrated into the development of domestic entrepreneurship public policy. This will be explored further in the third and final discourse. Both opportunities offer a novel path towards emancipation.

A promising framework has recently been developed in Canada by Orser and Elliott (2021) with the creation of the Gender-Smart Entrepreneurship Education & Training Plus (GEET+). The goal of this framework is to "reduce gender, racial and occupational stereotypes and unconscious biases associated with entrepreneurship education and training. The entry point of GEET+ is gender, with the understanding that gender is one identity attribute that interacts with others, through venture creation, small business management and entrepreneurship education and training" (p.ii). Orser and Elliot (2020) suggest policy makers, funders and advocates can draw on the GEET+ scorecard to hold delivery agencies accountable for inclusion. I am hopeful that in the near future programs funded through the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund will be required to integrate this sort of rigour into program design while also remaining doggedly optimistic in the long term we can employ systematic changes to entrepreneurship policy creation that creates an inclusive system whereby a separate program for marginalized groups are not needed.

I will leave you with this quote from the Tsuts'weye Women's Entrepreneur and Innovation Network before moving on to the third discourse. This is unique messaging among

the funded programs analyzed and I think it offers hope of a new approach to engaging all in entrepreneurship education regardless of race, gender or class.

> "When we think of teaching entrepreneurial skills, we often turn to teaching basic business practices and marketing strategies, but entrepreneurship is so much more than that. It's about changing your perspective and looking through a new lens – a way of seeing things not for what they are but for what they have the potential to be. Teaching young females to look at the world as full of business opportunities challenges them to think differently, thus shaping the world around them and encouraging their grit and determination…. To bring out a young girl's entrepreneurial spirit is to teach them that anything is possible – whether they may go on to create their own business or not. From fostering imaginative thinking, to encouraging prioritization, to teaching young girls to believe in themselves, it is never too early to teach children and youth the building blocks for both entrepreneurship and life in general. By teaching the next generation to look through the lens of entrepreneurship, we're ultimately setting them on the path to success." (Tsuts'weye Women's Entrepreneur and Innovation Network, n.d.)

Discourse #3: Contradicting Feminist Approaches

The third discourse is much subtler compared to the first two. The call for proposal from the Government of Canada laid out specific frameworks and guidelines for which the applicants needed to follow to be successful in gaining funding including programming designed to help women-owned businesses grow through business skills, mentorship, networking and procurement opportunities. (Government of Canada, 2018) That being said, several "entrepreneurial" agencies took an opportunity to explore alternatives to mainstream liberal entrepreneurship positioning. Several of these agencies had previous projects that were funded by the Status of Women Canada prior to applying for funding through the Women Ecosystem Fund, a small but important point I will expand on in this section.

I explored the language used in other areas of the federal government (including documents supporting the current Government of Canada as being a feminist government, as well as the Women and Gender Equality Canada) and noticed a difference in the language and approach to gender equality versus the language and approach present in the Women's

Entrepreneurship Strategy (which since 2017 is housed in the federal department named

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada). Consider the following quotes from

Budget 2018 (Government of Canada, 2018) on Advancing Canada's Gender Equality goals:

> "The gender wage gap is the average difference between what a woman makes relative to a man in the workplace, and it is a good indicator of the broader state of gender equality in society. Right now in Canada, the median annual earning for a woman is about 31 per cent lower than the median earning for a man. This is due to a number of factors, including a greater proportion of women in part-time jobs and in lower-paid fields, sectors and occupations. There are also a range of work, family and societal issues that contribute to this gap, from discrimination in the workplace to stereotypes about gender roles, to unequal sharing of caregiving responsibilities, leading to fewer hours worked by women. The net result is that women in Canada have a lower earning potential, and fewer opportunities to advance their career, or move into a position of leadership." (Government of Canada, 2018, p.42)

> "Gender equality is not just about women and girls. That is why the Government of Canada will introduce a strategy focused on men and boys. The Government will provide $1.8 million over two years to Status of Women Canada to develop an engagement strategy for men and boys that promotes equality and pilots innovative, targeted approaches to addressing inequality. Few governments have a strategy focused on men and boys as part of their work to create a more egalitarian society; investing in this effort would make Canada a world leader in this area." (Government of Canada, 2018, p 56)

> "As part of the Government's commitment to address gaps in gender and diversity data, the Government is also proposing to provide $1.5 million over five years, starting in 2018–19, and $0.2 million per year ongoing, to the Department of Finance Canada to work with Statistics Canada and Status of Women to develop a broader set of indicators and statistics to measure and track Canada's progress on achieving shared growth and gender equality objectives." (Government of Canada, 2018, p 57)

> "Budget 2018 also proposes to provide $5 million per year to Status of Women Canada to undertake research and data collection in support of the Government's Gender Results Framework. One of the first projects this would support is an analysis of the unique challenges visible minority and newcomer women face in finding employment in science, technology engineering and mathematics occupations. This research will fill important gaps in knowledge as to how to achieve greater diversity and inclusion among the high-paying jobs of tomorrow." (Government of Canada, 2018, p 57)

From these quotes, there appears to be strong commitment for the advancement of gender

equality from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (formally Status of Women

Canada) but the issue is that it does not appear to be informing women entrepreneurship strategy.

Orser (2017) reported that Canadian Policy Studies called for the establishment of an office of

women's enterprise within the key ministry tasked with economic development. At that point in

time, the women entrepreneurship policy resided within the Status of Women Canada. It was

thought that the priorities of this federal department (women on corporate boards, domestic

violence, workplace harassment, poverty reduction, income security, women in the trades, and

leadership) and the lack of convening power versus key economic federal ministries resulted in

weak policy recommendations exasperated by the limited expertise of the department in the

venture creation process. As recommended, the women entrepreneurship portfolio moved from

the Status of Women Canada to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada in

2017, prior to the release of Budget 2018. Consider the following quote from the Budget 2018

that explains the development of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy:

> "Budget 2018 proposes to provide $105 million over five years to the regional
> development agencies to support investments in women-led businesses, helping them
> scale and grow, as well as to support regional innovation ecosystems, including
> incubators and accelerators, and other third-party programs supporting mentorship,
> networking and skills development. These areas are consistent with the recommendations
> of the Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and
> Business Leaders, and the Expert Panel on Championing and Mentorship for Women
> Entrepreneurs, chaired by Arlene Dickinson." (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 113).

The Canada-U.S. Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business

Leaders was established jointly by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and U.S. President Donald

Trump in February 2017. The Council was formed to provide recommendations on how to

expand women's participation in the economy and the number of women business leaders and

thereby contribute to the growth, integration, and competitiveness of both the U.S. and Canadian

economies (Business Council of Canada, 2017). The Council was comprised of ten of the top

female business executives in the United States and Canada. The second report mentioned in the

quote is the Expert Panel on Championing and Mentorship for Women Entrepreneurs. This Expert Panel was tasked by the Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women to examine the role of championing and mentorship as tools to support women entrepreneurs entering into, and succeeding in, business. In addition, the Panel was asked to provide guidance on the financial tools that may support women entrepreneurs (Status of Women Canada, 2015). The panel interviewed over 400 male and female entrepreneurs from across Canada to help inform their recommendations which included mentorship programs specifically for women entrepreneurs, an online hub for access to resources and a national marketing champaign aimed to increased women's participation in entrepreneurship. These two reports are cited as driving the development of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (Government of Canada, 2018) yet there was no mention of the 2011 Canadian Taskforce for Women's Business Growth and their concluding recommendations. In contrast to the two panels that informed the current Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, the 2011 taskforce was a national and nonpartisan consortium of prominent women business owners, service agencies, academics, and industry associations (Orser, 2017). It appears that academics and industry associations were effectively silenced in the development of the current Women Entrepreneurship Strategy. Further, the strategy appears to be developed in a silo from the work being down on gender equality in Canada by Women and Gender Equality Canada.

In reviewing a Government of Canada report called Feminist Government (Government of Canada, 2020) I found evidence that the current Liberal Federal Government in Canada responsible for creating the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy is also invested in exploring their government as a feminist government via a working group. Members of this feminist working group were comprised of civil servants from across the public service and from a variety of

disciplines including policy communications, law and science. They started from a place of understanding that gender inequality is still a challenge in Canada; Women are still making less money than men and this is exemplified with African American women and Indigenous women. There are still significantly few women in politics on executive boards and in positions of power. Gender based violence continues to be a problem where 20% are more likely to be victims of violence than men (Government of Canada, 2020).

As a government they are recognizing the importance of gender equality and equity and report that they are taking measures to impact change by applying gender-based analysis in the development of policies programs and budgets. The working group reported they purposefully did not try to develop a shared definition of feminist government citing that the theme varied from one participant to another. Instead, they came up with four principles of what would constitute a feminist government for Canada. The four principles are:

1   Inclusiveness is being responsive to the intersectional identities and experiences of the people it serves. A feminist government develops and delivers policies, programs column, and services in a way that takes into account historical, social and political context, And the impact of an individual's gender identity or expression, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status and or religion. This approach acknowledges and addresses the experience of discrimination based on different aspects of identity. Examples include the GBA plus model of analysis used across government, as well as the approach to use throughout this project. (Government of Canada, 2020)
2   People focused helps individuals live up to their potential by providing programs and services that reflect their needs and experiences. (Government of Canada, 2020)
3   Accessible meets people where they are and seeks to make services and programs more accessible, and participation in society and the economy easier. For Canada, this means creating policies and programs that reflect its responsibilities under the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. (Government of Canada, 2020)
4   Collaboration encourages collaboration between all levels of government the private sector and citizens. (Government of Canada, 2020)

Working with their stakeholders the task force decided on a focus that would reduce the number of immigrant refugee women who are not making full use of their qualifications and skills in their working lives in Canada. Their basis of decision making was based on the fact that Canada's foreign-born population could reach 30% by 2036 working with their stakeholders including input from within government the feminist government team developed a primary intervention, a feminist newcomer talent hub for women trans and nonbinary people. The team also developed two interventions for this population that could be administered via the hub: the social impact bond for newcomer career advancement and new support for immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs.

The Government of Canada also announced in 2017 that Canada is adopting a Feminist International Assistance Policy that seeks to eradicate poverty and build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). Consider the following quote from the policy report:

> A crosscutting approach to gender equality means that all of our international assistance initiatives, across all action areas, should be developed and implemented in ways that improve gender equality and empower women and girls. This approach also means that all our implementing partners must consult with women and involve them in needs assessments, decision making and planning of initiatives, as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. Canada has adopted a feminist approach because we firmly believe that women and girls have the ability to achieve real change in terms of sustainable development and peace, even though they are often the most vulnerable to poverty, violence and climate change. (Global Affairs Canada, 2017, p. ii)

In analyzing the various texts, I conclude that the women entrepreneurship strategy aligns with the classic liberal feminist approach whereas other branches of the government have evolved to a more social feminist approach. I see this as problematic as feminist scholars have argued that most entrepreneurship policies are gender blind and lack the mandate to address underlying mechanisms that impede gender equality (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Pettersson et al, 2017). Liberal feminism thus sees discriminatory structures as the reason for women's subordination. The fight for equal pay and equal access to business ownership is an example of liberal feminist struggles. Research using this perspective maps the presence of women in business, it maps their characteristics, or it maps size, profit, or growth rate differentials between men and women-owned businesses (e.g., Anna et al., 2000; Wicker & King, 1989). Foss et al. (2018) found that policy implications from a liberal feminist perspective focus on resource allocation or women's equal access to resources. Policy recommendations include equal access to business education and training and thus while feminist empiricism has been useful in making women's presence visible, it has been criticized for accepting current male structures and for simply adding women (Foss et. al., 2018). Pettersson et al. (2017) conclude the lack of systematic, gender-sensitive program evaluation processes impede the construction of inclusive, evidence-based entrepreneurship policies which results from housing gender issues in government agencies that operate at a distance from agencies tasked with entrepreneurship, innovation and financing policy. I have also demonstrated that this is the case with the Government of Canada's approach to women entrepreneurship policy. The groundwork is there within the Department of Women and Gender Equality and as a nation we are already

implementing social feminist policies internationally but have failed to integrate and implement domestically.

As mentioned in chapter 4, texts and language are seen as a politics of representation that produces gender (Pettersson et al., 2017). My approach aligns with post-structuralist feminism where gender is socially constructed through discourse that governs human interactions and how male and female entrepreneurs view themselves and each other, including the assumed male norm for entrepreneurship that consigns women to the role of "other," and the belief that women entrepreneurs and their businesses are lacking in terms of size, profits, growth trajectories, return on investment or industry representation (Coleman et al., 2019).

Ahl & Marlow (2012) provide their critical evaluation of how the assumptions underpinning the normative entrepreneurial discourse can be de-constructed through feminist critiques. They argue that such reflexive criticism should inform the analytical framing of entrepreneurial theorizing. The problem is that using liberal or social feminist perspectives results in a tendency of essentializing gender, risking the oversimplification and 'blaming the victim' in that women, or their actions (or lack of action), are used as explanations for their subordination (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Post structuralist feminist theory allows for the exploration and analysis of how female subordination is constructed within and through language and texts. Ahl and Marlow (2012) offer that fundamental to these theories of language and text are key notions of dualities (to be weak is not to be strong; to be a risk taker is not to be risk averse; to be a woman is not to be a man) and thus socially constructed representations of gendered subject positions are articulated through oppositional categories within language itself where the feminine side of the binary reflects and sustains subordination. I suggest there is an opportunity to evolve women entrepreneurship public policy development in Canada by departing from a

liberal feminist approach to a more inclusive and evolved approach. The Government of Canada argues that including women matters not because women are human, but because women will help increase productivity, share prices, and profits (Harquail, 2020). Perhaps one solution is to put a stake in the sand whereby the Government of Canada provides an overarching definition of feminism for Canada that serves to inform public policy creation across all departments. The irony is not lost on me; however, by providing one definition (implying that we are rejecting other forms of feminism) that can serve all public policy going forward we can mandate a more inclusive feminist approach that works for all walks of life as opposed to having a fractured and non-homogenous approach that shifts from department to department within the Government. I think the approach that Harquail (2020) offers is powerful whereby using feminism to promote feminist values of equality, agency, whole humanness, generativity, and inter-independence as guidelines for entrepreneurship public policy priorities so that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs can thrive by supporting feminism's goal of a world where everyone flourishes. Said somewhat differently, transforming entrepreneurship to reflect feminist values and goals, to achieve democratic organisations free of dominance and inequality where everyone flourishes while the entrepreneurial venture performs. The next chapter will explore these themes in more detail while offering suggestions for improving entrepreneurship public policy development in Canada.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis will provide a reminder of my original aim, research question and objectives of my research and then will provide concluding thoughts on my findings. I provide an overview of my contribution to the literature, my theoretical contributions, and my methodological contributions. I offer recommendations on future areas of research that may provide further insight into the development of inclusive women entrepreneurship public policy in Canada. I revisit Orser's 2017 Strategies to Redress Entrepreneurship Gender Gaps in Canada to see which strategies, if any, have been implemented and offer my own recommendations for policy makers on strategies that may better serve future design of women entrepreneurship public policy in Canada.

The aim of my dissertation was to deconstruct how government policies and the programs they fund position female entrepreneurs in Canada. In following the call from leading critical entrepreneurship scholars (Ahl, 2006; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016), I sought to apply discourse analysis to the women entrepreneurship policy in Canada, then sought to understand if the current entrepreneurship policy in Canada is inadvertently "othering" (Ahl, 2004; Ahl & Nelson, 2015; DeBeauvoir, 1956, Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016; Marlow et al., 2009) women entrepreneurs as those that need fixing, in order to do entrepreneurship.

The objectives of the thesis were laid out as follows:

- Answer and contribute to the call for action from leading women entrepreneurship researchers to employ 'a gender lens' (Rankin, Vickers & Field, 2001) to women's entrepreneurship policy.

- Explore how obstacles to women's full participation in entrepreneurship can be removed at the policy level.

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- Expand on the exploratory research done by Orser (2017) on Canadian women's entrepreneurship policy by using a feminist perspective.

- Employ discourse analysis to explore policy texts, seeking the presence of discourses produced and reproduced that may have power implications against women.

Throughout this concluding chapter I will outline how the objectives were met particularly in the sections explaining my contribution to literature, to theory and to methodology.

Contribution to Literature

My contributions to the literature include answering a call from critical entrepreneurship scholars, contributing to an under-researched area of entrepreneurship policy, and providing a Canadian context.

Answering a Call

My research contributes to the emerging body of feminist/constructionist research on gender and entrepreneurship discourses while answering the call from leading critical entrepreneurship scholars (Ahl, 2006; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016) to use more constructionist approaches. Ahl (2006) conducted a discourse analysis of 81 research articles on women's entrepreneurship to uncover what research practices, if any, can cause a tendency to re-create the idea of women entrepreneurs as being secondary to men in spite of intentions to the contrary (Ahl, 2006). One of the discursive practices she found was regarding the institutional support for entrepreneurship research whereby women become a variable in the growth equation in which they are rendered inadequate and contribute to the positioning of women as secondary (Ahl, 2006). Ahl suggested as a conclusion that future research on women's entrepreneurship should consider a shift in epistemological positioning from an objectivist epistemology to a constructionist epistemology as a way of researching women entrepreneurs

without reproducing their secondary position (Ahl, 2006). While a shift to include more constructionist approaches with non-traditional questions is occurring in this maturing research domain, most research continues to be from a positivist perspective (Brush et al., 2009). My research contributes to the constructionist research of women entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship Policy

While other researchers have used this epistemology to examine other facets of gendered entrepreneurship discourses (for example, Ahl, 2006), Bruni et al. (2004) examined entrepreneurship research and Gill (2013) examined business periodicals, there is little focused on entrepreneurship policy. Link and Strong's (2016) bibliography of the gender and entrepreneurship literature found that only 4% of articles addressed public policy. Recent scholarship Entrepreneurship research insists public policy must address the challenges at hand, including the fact that one size does not fit all and that policy initiatives offered in isolation are likely to be ineffective (Mason & Brown 2014). My research, thus, contributes to the under-researched area of gender and entrepreneurship public policy. The three discourses I found may be hindering the effectiveness of the policies in place to encourage women's participation in entrepreneurship in Canada. I have shown that more attention needs to be paid to the wording of the policy and the corresponding programs to avoid othering women in the process.

Canadian Context

Foss et al. (2018) called for future scholars to embed the policy implications from their research findings and implications in the actual context they are investigating, be this geographical or industry specific, with an understanding of how their particular entrepreneurial ecosystem operates. They found that the power of their own research was not in its theoretical preciseness but in its recognition that entrepreneurship is embedded in dynamic interactions with

other businesses and organizations as well as within a regulatory and political framework (Zahra & Nambisan, 2012), and that ecosystem components are in themselves interconnected and mutually impacting (Kantis & Federico, 2012). Public policy is developed within such structures, is thus highly contextual and it is not gender neutral. Further, Foss et al., (2018) found public policies do not work because of the generality, context-free, and disconnectedness of the larger gendered society they are part of and they called for future research to develop more context dependent policy implications. My thesis builds on the work of other Canadian gender and entrepreneurship researchers and provides a more contextualized perspective of the gendered nature of the Government of Canada Women Entrepreneurship policies by employing discourse analysis while exploring policy texts, seeking the presence of discourses produced and reproduced that have power implications against women.

Finally, I believe the research I am conducting is relevant to and can also help inform other marginalized groups within the entrepreneurship ecosystem such as racial minority groups, immigrants and the LGBTQ+ community. My findings are relevant to other research shifting the lens of gender to a lens of another intersection to help inform how policy may be marginalizing certain groups from complete participation in entrepreneurship.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes contributions at the level of theory in three important ways. First, I respond to the suggestion of an expanded research objective and a shifted epistemological position by studying the gendering of social orders in the form of support systems for women entrepreneurs, specifically in a Canadian context in relation to the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy by the Government of Canada. Specifically, I do so by using feminist theory. Secondly, I provide additional confirmatory research that supports the body of research showing women

entrepreneurship policy and research focus on performance and growth issues while ignoring issues such as gender equality and gender/power relations. Finally, my research supports the theorizing by other researchers that focusing on training and development reproduce the second ordering of women.

Entrepreneurship and Feminism

My thesis used post-structuralist feminism as a means of challenging assumptions, structures and discourse that are implicit within women's entrepreneurship policy. Foss et al. (2018) applied a feminist lens to examine the implications of entrepreneurship policies within academic publications between 1983 and 2015, concluding that policy implications were inherently gender biased, individualizing problems to women themselves, regardless of the feminist perspective used by the authors. Pettersson et al. (2017) observed an absence of feminist theory in research on women's entrepreneurship. A literature review by Neergaard et al., (2011) found the post-structuralist perspective to be sparsely represented in policy creation but fruitful in revealing how gender discrimination is achieved. This is also reflected in the work of Henry, Foss and Ahl (2016), who propose that studies of gender in the entrepreneurship field lag behind those in other disciplines (i.e., sociology, political/organizational science) and the proposed solution is for scholars to develop the methodological repertoire to match what is now expected in women-driven entrepreneurship: a post-structural feminist approach (Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016). Similar to Ahl's finding in 2006, my research using a post-structuralist feminist approach and discourse analysis points out the male gendering of entrepreneurship policy where common and established policy practices, such as the focus on economic growth subordinate women from the start. The relationship between the use of feminist perspectives and policy implications in

research on gender and entrepreneurship is an unexplored theme (Coleman et al., 2019) and my research contributes to addressing this gap.

Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth

Calás, Smircich, and Bourne asked: "What would happen, theoretically and analytically, if the focus of the literature were reframed from entrepreneurship as an economic activity with possible social change outcomes to entrepreneurship as a social change activity with a variety of possible outcomes?" (2009, p. 553). I, too, asked myself this question prior to starting my Ph.D program. Through my research on women entrepreneurship policy in Canada I have shown that the focus on performance and growth ignores issues on gender equality and gender/power relations even in a country that refers to itself as a feminist government. Ahl (2006) found the word entrepreneurship to be positively characterized by not only economic growth but also words such as innovation, change, risk taking, opportunity recognition and driving force, supporting the grand narrative of modernity where development implies change and progress (Foucault, 1969; Lyotard, 1984; in Ahl, 2006). She concluded that policies give precedence to economic growth in a non-feminist fashion, and that over time, economic growth becomes the key focus, while feminist approaches are silenced. My research in the Canadian context supports and confirms this theory. Socio-economic priorities such as equity, inclusion, and poverty reduction are rarely articulated. Rowe (2016; in Orser et al., 2019) concludes the lack of systematic, gender-sensitive program evaluation processes impede the construction of inclusive, evidence-based entrepreneurship policies which results from housing "gender issues" in government agencies that operate at a distance from agencies tasked with entrepreneurship, innovation and financing policy. In Canada, I have shown that regardless of where women entrepreneurship policy is situated within the federal government there still lies a chasm

separating the policy of being informed by a feminist perspective. Orser (2017) recommended that women entrepreneurship policy be part of a key ministry instead of the Status of Women in Canada who may not have been positioned to design and administer the breadth of knowledge need for new venture creation. The portfolio was shifted to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada in 2018. My research suggests that neither department can have success without being informed by the other; Women and Gender Equality Canada needs to help inform women entrepreneurship policy to create inclusive entrepreneurship policy and programs for Canadians.

Entrepreneurship and Sustained Male Norm

My research supports the theoretical finding by other researchers that the dogged focus on providing entrepreneurship training to women with the hope that more women will become entrepreneurs is inadvertently creating bigger barriers by "othering" a woman as someone that needs to be fixed before she can become an entrepreneur. The wording found in the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund and the corresponding funded programs, from a post-structuralist feminist theory lens, put women in a subordinate position to men and thereby risk sustaining a male norm. Foss et al., (2018) found that almost all policy recommendations center on training, both directed at women entrepreneurs who should take part in training, to educators or governments who should arrange training, or to bankers and others who should raise awareness and highlight the particular needs of women entrepreneurs. Bartunek and Rynes (2010) found that to become more aware, to conduct training, and to learn were the most common recommendations articulated in 1738 management publications. While education and training may be an important input to entrepreneurship activity it can also serve to further highlight women's perceived deficits, reinforcing their othering and lending support to the

argument that women need to be fixed, reproducing the second ordering of women (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

Methodological Contribution

As previously established, there has been a strong call from leading gender and entrepreneurship scholars to expand epistemologically the approaches taken and methodology used with researching women entrepreneurship, particularly in the under researched area of public policy. Discourses have effect: they are neither neutral nor passive. This effect, Foucault (1972) tells us, has power implications, that is, it renders thought and action feasible or infeasible, legitimate or illegitimate, and it also orders people (as well as objects, ideas, etc.) in relation to each other. My research is one of the first in a Canadian context to examine women entrepreneurship policy with the epistemological basis of discourse analysis and with gender as socially constructed in line with social constructivist and post-structuralist feminist theory. By using discourse analysis, I have shown a pervasive discourse of gender still present in women's entrepreneurship in Canada, creating persistent and effective power relations (Berglund et al., 2018). This positions me to make a strong contribution to the growing body of women's entrepreneurship research done outside the typical positivist approach, specifically in a Canadian context.

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

There are several limitations that I recognize exist in the structure of my research that I see could be the basis of subsequent research. I recognize that while I am exploring policy to see if there is systematic gender discrimination (whether it is intentional or unintentional) there is a silent stakeholder who has not been given a voice: the female entrepreneur. It would be prudent to conduct semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs specifically to explore and

unpack their understanding of public policy relating to their participation in entrepreneurship in Canada.

The Government of Canada does not have a formal policy document (while many other countries do) so I focused on the forward-facing policy programs that were developed from the women entrepreneurship policy by the Government of Canada. I did not have access to the application parameters of the Women Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Fund. Having this information would have been helpful in providing context to the discourses found among the funded programs. That being said, I was able to use the texts and words that women in Canada are exposed and marketed to which, from my perspective, is extremely important and valuable given that it is these words that impact the identity women form for themselves as it relates to entrepreneurship. A future area of research would be to explore the measures the Government of Canada uses to determine the success of the funding program as well as the reports I am assuming the funded organizations must submit as a stipulation to the funding. Organisations may have been limited by what they are able to pursue with the funding in order to satisfy the funding agreement. This does not detract from the discourses I found but may provide context to the pressures the organizations were under to position their programing in a way that satisfied the funder.

In their study of the USA and Sweden using discourse analysis, Ahl & Nelson (2015) note that they acknowledged the difference between policy statements and policy in practice, and in my study I have not considered the latter. Resource availability, power relationships, and commitments may influence the strength of the connection between the policy as stated and the policy in practice. As opposed to trying to address this limitation in this study given the

increased breadth of analysis, I propose that the "policy in practice" examination be a suggestion for a future area of inquiry.

Implications for Policy Makers

Prior to pursuing my PhD, I was (and still consider myself to be) an entrepreneur. I also had the great fortune of working with and supporting other women entrepreneurs as they considered, developed, and started businesses. I grew frustrated with the messages I was being delivered on a consistent basis on what I needed to do to be successful as an entrepreneur. What I internalized was that success is measured in dollars and the number of employees. What did not matter was that my business may have given me flexibility to raise my family with a balance that met my life goals nor did the desire to make a positive impact on my community and the community of women that I served. My businesses were simply measured by dollars and cents. I recognized deficiencies and discrimination in seeking support and funding for my businesses, often from organizations designed specifically to support women entrepreneurs. I tried to impact change to how we promote entrepreneurship to women. I felt like I needed to build my own knowledge and credibility to amplify my voice, thus leading me to pursue my Ph.D. with a focus on gender and entrepreneurship. I share this perspective with you because this concluding section of my thesis is a contribution I have been yearning to make for a very long time.

Coming from industry and being of a practical mindset, I pragmatically desire to see academic research be translated into practical implications and applications. As such, my goal for the implications for policy makers is to be as clear and direct as possible. Pettersson et al. (2017) observed academic discourse about feminist-informed entrepreneurship policy can be either obscure or idealistic, making it challenging to extract pragmatic solutions to inform entrepreneurship policy. Academic insights that might inform entrepreneurship policy are

overlooked or dismissed as being too academic and feminist-informed studies are not easily accessible to women's enterprise advocates. Foss et al., (2018) suggest lifting the research gaze from the individual entrepreneur and her business and address how process and context interact to shape the outcomes of entrepreneurial efforts.

Before listing the implications of my research for policy makers I want to first go back to Orser's 2017 strategies to redress entrepreneurship gender gaps in Canada. As a reminder, in 2009 *Canadian Taskforce for Women's Business Growth* was founded. Chaired by Orser, the taskforce was a Canadian non-partisan consortium of prominent women business owners, service agencies, academics and industry associations with a mandate to grow women's enterprises through the creation of public policy, advocacy, applied research, collaboration and sharing of best practices. In 2011 the taskforce released *Canadian Task Force Roundtable Report. Action Strategies to Support Canadian Women Owned Enterprises*. Summary recommendations included a national strategy to facilitate women's enterprise growth, female focused programs on financial and technology literacy, increased access to growth capital grants and related resources, and reporting on the economic contributions of women to the Canadian economy. By 2015, none of the task force recommendations had been implemented (Orser, 2017). As a follow-up Orser published a study in 2017 that examined the failure of the task force to have an impact on changing the discursive structure of the women's entrepreneurship policies of the Canadian Federal Government. She offered four propositions to explain what she feels is a government indifference to the task force recommendations. The first is a lack of advocacy. In Canada there were no national women's entrepreneurship advocacy organizations or forums to advance gender sensitive entrepreneurship policies and programs. The second is a lack of oversight and accountability. Within federal agencies there are no mechanisms to identify or report on the

gender of program users. The third is a conflicting perspective about women's enterprise and policy priorities. Differing views about appropriate interventions were evidenced in internal committee and roundtable discussions primarily focused on how gender influences the venture creation process, the perceived value of mainstream versus gender specific business support, the merit of private versus public service providers, and the rationale for governments investment in women enterprise. Finally, Canadian Policy Studies have called for the establishment of an office of women's enterprise within a key ministry tasked with economic development. The ghettoization of gender focused and entrepreneurship policies positions women entrepreneurship policy to lack power and is relatively weak relative to key economic federal ministries (Orser, 2017). Orser (2017) expressed disappointment that women entrepreneurship policy in Canada is not evolving despite the academic body of research showing the gendering of entrepreneurship.

Fast forward to 2021. There is evidence that many of the original task force recommendations have, in theory, been put into place. The women entrepreneurship portfolio moved from the Status of Women Canada to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. The Women Entrepreneurship Strategy launched in 2018 as a national strategy to facilitate women's enterprise growth. As part of this strategy the Government of Canada allocated $85 million to the WES Ecosystem Fund to strengthen capacity within the entrepreneurship ecosystem and close gaps in service for women entrepreneurs. The Government of Canada allocated $55 million in Budget 2021 for the creation of a second fund, a new national microloans fund. This new fund seeks to provide smaller amounts of affordable financing to women entrepreneurs, particularly for start-ups, underrepresented groups or sole proprietorships which may experience more difficulty in accessing financing (Government of Canada, 2021). Finally, in 2018 the Government of Canada awarded Ryerson University up to $8.62 million

over three years to establish the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH). In Budget

2021, the government committed a further $5 million to support the Hub's work. National in

scope, WEKH is made up of 10 regional hubs that work together to coordinate activities in

different regions and brings together researchers, business support organizations and key

stakeholders with a mandate to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow

women's entrepreneurship in Canada, including data collection and dissemination. It appears as

though many of the Task Force recommendations have indeed been instituted. The problem that

I have is that I do not think we have addressed the underlying issues with policy formation.

Based on the three discourses I found there is not enough attention being paid to the wording

used in the policy creation to ensure women are not rendered as "other".

I do not want to overcomplicate the proposed practical implications of my research. While

simple to understand I am not naive to think it is necessarily easy to implement. A utopic future

scenario for women entrepreneurship policy in Canada is that there is no women

entrepreneurship policy in Canada. Despite the enormous budget from 2018 that has been put

behind the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy my research shows that we are still recreating the

same gendered entrepreneurship ecosystem. While we may have gotten more efficient (doing

things right) in servicing women entrepreneurs we have not become more effective (doing the

right things). I did not see evidence in Canadian research nor did the Taskforce recommend more

training of women entrepreneurs is needed, yet the vast majority of funds were allocated to

agencies across Canada to implement training programs for women. Women apparently are still

not fixed!

Thus, if the longer-term goal is to have an inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem in Canada

where all people can thrive and flourish with a version of entrepreneurship that addresses a host

of individual identities and measures success in a multitude of ways, how can we work backward to create a path that leads us here? First, we need to acknowledge that this is where we want to go. Canada belongs to the Paris Climate Agreement and has a well laid out path to achieving the objectives with measurements and check points built in. I suggest we need the same for entrepreneurship.

I concur with Orser that Canada was and still is lacking a gender-sensitive entrepreneurship advocacy organization that could help advanced gender sensitive entrepreneurship policies and programs. Orser and Elliot (2015) postulate that only when governments at all levels recognize the needs of women within mainstream entrepreneurship policy will their full contributions be realized. I think there is an opportunity to widen the net further to go beyond gender to include other intersectionality's and marginalized groups such as indigenous people, racialized groups, LGBTQ+ and immigrants. This advocacy group could work with established structures both within and across government offices as well as with the infrastructure being built by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub to break down and re-build the fundamental structures of entrepreneurship in Canada.

This leads me to my next recommendation. We as a nation and as a government need to fully embrace and own a well-defined, consistent, and emerging version of feminism, bringing together the parallel paths of economics and feminism. I have shown in my research that momentum is being gained within pockets of government policy however it is perplexing that in in Canada politicians are more likely to support sex and gender-based analysis with our International Development agencies than within domestic economic policy. By removing gender and discriminatory barriers to entrepreneurship participation by using a feminist approach, all that sit on the fringes or who have been marginalized by the pervasive male norm will be

emancipated and the Government of Canada will be able to achieve its desired goal of growing

our economy. The outcome of entrepreneurship activity does not change but rather the impetuous

to creates the activity in the first place.

Finally, we need to train the ecosystem not the entrepreneur. We need to empower the

agencies supporting women to critically examine their role and approach in perpetrating

gendered support for women entrepreneurs. They have the relationships and awareness with

women across Canada- what leadership role can they take? How can we shift the conversation?

How can we critically examine every tool we use to ensure it is inclusive?

Closing Remarks

There is increasing pressure on scholars, regardless of their discipline area, to

demonstrate the influence of their research (Steyaert, 2011). Steffens et al. (2014) postulate that

entrepreneurship researchers have become aware of the disparity between knowledge generated

by academic researchers and that which can be usefully employed by entrepreneurs and

policymakers. My goal with this thesis was to take a less travelled path of entrepreneurship

research (both from an epistemological and ontological perspective) with the intention of finding

practical implications of my research. The potential relationship between the use of feminist

perspectives and policy implications in research on gender and entrepreneurship remains a

largely unexplored theme. My hope is that this study fills a gap and builds new knowledge on

how policy implications can create effective ecosystems for women's entrepreneurship. If the

entrepreneurial ecosystem for women is to be improved from a policy perspective, future

research must move beyond consistently recommending fixing women through education and

training and instead to study both the resource providers and the connectors within the

ecosystem, as well as the institutional environment embedded within it (Foss et al., 2018). This is

not the end, but rather the beginning.

Table A1: Women Entrepreneurs Canadian Policy Timeline

Date	Federal Political Party in Power	Federal Ownership of Women Entrepreneurship Strategy	Policy and Program Highlights and Recommendations
March 2015	Conservative	Status of Women Canada	The Government of Canada announced the Action Plan for Women Entrepreneurs. The Action Plan is led by Status of Women Canada, an agency with the mandate to promote equality for women and their full participation in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada. (Government of Canada, 2017)
May 2015	Conservative	Status of Women Canada	Women's Economic Council (WEC): Funding of $409 774 to support a 36-month project aimed at increasing economic prosperity for women in Canada by fostering their participation in enterprises with a community economic development focus. The project will engage women and key local and national stakeholders such as financial and educational institutions, to identify best practices and successful models to engage and support women-led enterprises; as well as coordinate the sharing of information and innovative approaches. The project will work collaboratively with stakeholders to review their internal programs and practices using a gender lens, in order to meet the needs of women. The project will develop an interactive online 'one-stop shop' platform to facilitate access to local and national supports and resources for women-led enterprises. (Status of Women Canada, 2015)
July 2015	Conservative	Status of Women Canada	Report on the Expert Panel on Championing & Mentorship for Women Entrepreneurs. The objective of the panel was to identify gaps in existing supports and recommends key strategies to help women entrepreneurs through championing and increasing access to critical resources. The Expert Panel (the "Panel") on Championing and Mentorship for Women Entrepreneurs was tasked by the Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women to examine the role of championing and mentorship as tools to support women entrepreneurs entering into, and succeeding in, business. In addition, the Panel was asked to provide guidance on the financial tools, mentoring, championing mechanisms to help women entrepreneurs succeed across the different stages of business development" The Expert Panel was convened for a twelve-week period to consult with key stakeholders across Canada and provide recommendation on how to champion and support women

			entrepreneurs. The Panel engaged with 400 entrepreneurs through 11 roundtables.
			The resulting seven recommendations were delivered in the areas of financing, improving mentorship, navigating government resources, and improving networking opportunities. The Panel also recommended that Canada explore supplier diversity policies and programs. (Women's Enterprise Centre, 2015)
2017	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	Venture Capital Catalyst Initiative: BDC is a federal Crown corporation wholly owned by the Government of Canada. Its mandate is to help create and develop Canadian businesses through financing, growth and transition capital, venture capital and advisory services, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. Through this initiative, the Federal government is tying investing in the innovation economy to promote gender equality. **Scope:** BDC is (i) requiring firms to explain how they are improving women's representation within the industry when applying for VCCI funding; (ii) asking supercluster applicants to include strong representation of women and under- represented groups. (European Union, 2019; Government of Canada, 2020)
March 2017	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	The Government of Canada entered into an agreement with the federal government of the United States of America to form the Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders with a goal of "advancing equal opportunities for women in the workforce and to encourage women to start and grow their businesses." (Business Council of Canada, 2017)
June 2017	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	The Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, launched Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy with a vision of positioning Canada as a leader on gender equality and promoting equal rights for women and girls. (Global Affairs Canada, 2017)
February 2018	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	A proclaimed centrepiece of the 2018 Federal budget, the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy was launched as a comprehensive, government plan to help women grow their businesses through access to financing, talent, networks and expertise. The strategy notes that the full and equal participation of women in the economy is essential to Canada's future competitiveness and prosperity.(Government of Canada, 2018a)
November 2018	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	As part of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy the Women Entrepreneurship Fund was launched by the Government of Canada to demonstrate their commitment to advancing gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and supporting women entrepreneurs. The $20 million dollar funding is available to women-owned

			and/or women-led businesses to support them to grow and pursue market opportunities abroad. (Government of Canada, 2018b)
March 2019	Liberal	Women and Gender Equality Canada (formerly Status of Women Canada)	As a complement to the tabling of the Government of Canada Budget 2019, the Department for Women and Gender Equality launched the Gender Results Framework Portal as a live source of data and research relevant to the indicators included in the Women and Gender Equality Framework. (Government of Canada, 2019)
April 2019	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	As a part of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, the government funded the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub with a focus on advancing gender equality, women's economic empowerment and supporting women entrepreneurs. In effect the knowledge hub is the platform linking together the elements of the ecosystem, advancing research and the sharing of best practices, promoting a gender and diversity lens across all elements in the innovation ecosystem not just women entrepreneurship organizations but also financial institutions and investors, incubators and business support organizations, educational institutions and large organizations, which procure services from entrepreneurs. WEKH is organized around 9 regional hubs and brings together more than 100 researchers, 75 partner organizations, as well as stakeholders across the ecosystem. (Cukier & Chavoushi, 2019)
May 2020	Liberal	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	As a part of the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES), the government provided $15 million in additional funding to support women entrepreneurs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The money went directly to select organizations that were currently WED recipients. "This investment will help thousands of women entrepreneurs and business owners get the support they need through things like business workshops, mentorship and skills training to adapt to a digital marketplace." (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2020)

Table A2: Successful Applicant to the WES Ecosystem Fund

Successful Applicants to the WES Ecosystem Fund				
National Stream				
Organization	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount - 2020**	**Total Funding**
Asia Pacific Foundation	The project will focus on addressing barriers faced by women entrepreneurs looking to access growth opportunities across the Asian markets by organizing and leading international trade missions. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to: (1) develop an Innovation Ecosystem Mapping Tool - to better facilitate in-person or virtual trade missions ; and (2) undertake a virtual trade mission to South Korea, by hosting a multi-session virtual conference over a two-week period.	$1,754,836	$247,400	$2,002,236
Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) (submitted by the Manitoba Women's Enterprise Centre Inc.)	The project will establish a centralized, national headquarters for the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada to deliver focused, business-growth services to Canadian women entrepreneurs, including business training opportunities, export and trade support, pathfinding services and advocacy. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to facilitate cross-regional connections via a dedicated digital platform, a virtual symposium, a longitudinal national survey on the impacts	$2,254,000	$500,000	$2,754,000

	and recovery from COVID-19, and training tools/resource creation based on data collected.			
National Aboriginal Capital Corp. Association (NACCA)	The project will develop capacity, tools and supports for Indigenous women to undertake entrepreneurship to build or grow a business as well as develop a proof of concept for an Indigenous women's microfinance fund. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to deliver 10 new targeted workshops focused on: post-COVID planning and recovery support for Indigenous female entrepreneurs; tools and resources that will support entrepreneurial and business skills; and opportunities to network with other Indigenous women engaged in business development.	$1,200,000	$250,000	$1,450,000
Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)	The project aims to support the Native Women's Association of Canada to develop an incubator program to assist and provide ongoing mentorships, networking opportunities, workshops and resources to Indigenous, Two Spirit and gender-diverse entrepreneurs. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will allow more women across Canada to benefit from the originally proposed activities using the new COVID-19 funds.	$1,199,911	$265,000	$1,464,911

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	The project focuses on supporting Inuit women entrepreneurs by sustaining and enhancing existing networking and mentorships initiatives while identifying and addressing Inuit women's key economic development issues and priorities. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to create a series of animated instructional videos in English and Inuktut to guide and support aspiring and established Inuit businesswomen to address structural gaps, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19.	$2,014,054	$143,000	$2,157,054
Restigouche CBDC Inc.	The project's goal is to increase the volume of women entrepreneurs who access business financing by providing tools, awareness and training to loan officers to ensure a better understanding of the specific needs and barriers that women entrepreneurs face. **Enhancement:** n/a	$2,170,000	n/a	$2,170,000
SheEO	The project will enable SheEO to expand its existing programs and services across Canada to help women entrepreneurs access non-traditional financing along with customized training. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to revamp its existing engagement and learning strategies to pivot towards a sustainable virtual medium. As part of the pivot, SheEO will be able to maintain and expand awareness and mentorship opportunities within its Activator Network.	$2,500,000	n/a	$2,500,000

Regional Stream

Alberta

Organization	City/Town	Project Description	Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)	New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount − 2020	Total Funding
Banff Television Festival Foundation	Calgary	The project aims to develop the Banff Accelerator for Women in the Business of Media, which will empower women entrepreneurs to build and grow their businesses within the screen-based industries. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources both online and in person to women-owned/led business to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic.	$1,993,000	$275,000	$2,268,000
Momentum Community Economic Development Society	Calgary	The project objective is to deliver a 'Women in Business by Design' program which will provide business development training to vulnerable women in the Calgary area. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to develop an enhanced on-line curriculum and additional remote coaching resources, as well as assisting clients in	$1,373,379	$300,000	$1,673,379

		identifying and taking advantage of new business opportunities.			
Alberta Women Entrepreneurs Association	Edmonton	This project will launch a new digital business training program for women entrepreneurs. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources to women-owned/led business to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.	$1,140,000	$550,000	$1,690,000
Lethbridge Economic Development Initiative Society (Economic Development Lethbridge)	Lethbridge	The aim of this project is to develop a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) centric community of practice that includes mentors, entrepreneur service providers and trainers, angel investors, and venture capitalists to embrace emerging technologies and innovation. **Enhancement: n/a**	$1,681,080	n/a	$1,681,080

Community Futures Lloydminster and Region Development Corp.	Lloydminster	The project objective is to create and enhance incubator space in rural and remote north-eastern Alberta and north-western Saskatchewan to promote entrepreneurship to underrepresented women. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources to women owned/ led business to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic.	$1,096,000	$335,000	$1,431,000
Community Futures Central Alberta	Red Deer	The project will focus on the creation of an Indigenous entrepreneurship program which will be delivered in rural and remote areas in central Alberta. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will include an easily accessible online/virtual platform as well as childcare services for in person programming to ensure the maximum number of women entrepreneurs are supported.	$183,300	$107,980	$291,280

British Columbia					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**
Women's Enterprise Centre	Kelowna	The objective of this project is to improve the competitiveness of diverse women entrepreneurs impacted by geographical, sectoral and demographic representation. Activities will enable enhanced export readiness, finance, technology, business and networking skills, and provide mentorship opportunities. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources to women-owned/led businesses to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic.	$2,700,000	$670,603	$3,370,603
Community Futures Development Corp. of Fraser Fort George	Prince George	The focus of the project is to support the creation and implementation of a business resource center for women entrepreneurs in Northern British Columbia. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide support to women entrepreneurs through the recovery of their business,	$745,000	$151,372	$896,372

		acquiring a business coach and finalizing a pivot and implementation plan for their businesses.			
Community Futures Shuswap	Salmon Arm	The project will support the delivery of business advisory services (e.g. small business training and knowledge transfer activities etc.), to diverse groups of women entrepreneurs, such as women with disabilities, Indigenous and Metis women, immigrants, and women located in the Shuswap Region of British Columbia (Tsuts'weye Project). **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide incremental and tailored services to women entrepreneurs in the Shuswap Region, including business retention and expansion, tourism re-start, digital transition and a COVID-19 speaker series.	$476,280	$140,000	$616,280
		The project will focus on social entrepreneurship programs specifically targeting underserved, diverse women (LGBTQ+, immigrant, Indigenous or low income) in order to address gaps in the entrepreneurship ecosystem for women, including practical business education instruction, workshops, and mentorship. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will provide additional activities to design and develop a platform to deliver the program online,			

		and marketing to reach new online clients.			
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.	Vancouver	The project will develop an entrepreneurship program tailored for visible minority and recent immigrant women. Activities will include one-on-one business coaching, group-based workshops, networking and training activities, mentoring, and the creation of a business centre and website to provide in-person services and online support. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business training and advisory services (including business resiliency, digital marketing, re-branding, financing, and cybersecurity) to women-owned/led businesses to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.	$1,500,000	$230,000	$1,730,000
Community Futures North Okanagan	Vernon	The project objective is to develop and deliver a business scale-up program for women entrepreneurs within the Okanagan region of British Columbia. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to develop an online knowledge hub to improve virtual access to training and resources, helping women entrepreneurs improve their social media and on-line presence; develop new HR and business management tools; conduct website and e-commerce audits; and advising on pivoting the business and the	$575,000	$140,000	$715,000

		development of new business models.			

Manitoba					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**
Community Futures Parkland Inc.	Grandview	The project will aim to close service gaps in the ecosystem unique to rural and northern women entrepreneurs. This objective will be met by establishing rural business "Hubs" which will provide services such as tools, resources, training, and mentorship. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will provide services and support to help women in rural and northern Manitoba move their business online (marketing, sales and distribution). Additional supports include mentorship, training, an incubation program and the establishment of production labs with equipment to assist clients in branding, virtual marketing and product packaging.	$1,215,000	$199,000	$1,414,000

Manitoba Women's Enterprise Centre Inc.	Winnipeg	The project objective is to improve competitiveness of diverse women entrepreneurs impacted by geographical location, culture and sector representation and will aim to close the entrepreneurship ecosystem gaps faced by rural and remote-based entrepreneurs. **Enhancement:** The increased funding will provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources including needs assessments, peer support groups, resources and knowledge building through industry experts that work directly with women entrepreneurs.	$1,513,900	$352,567	$1,866,467
SEED Winnipeg Inc.	Winnipeg	The project will aim to provide opportunities in skill building, networking, matchmaking, and mentorship in order to strengthen business and entrepreneurial skills in diverse women's communities. The focus will be on low-income, financially vulnerable Indigenous and newcomer women. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will include curriculum adaptation for virtual delivery, a laptop-lending program for participants, business advisory services, webinars, resources and consultant supports working directly with women entrepreneurs.	$664,612	$63,043	$727,655

Newfoundland and Labrador

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Organization	City/Town	Project Description	Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)	New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020	Total Funding
Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs	St. John's	The project will target women in underrepresented groups and sectors to help scale up and diversify their products/services, through services such as skills training in finances, operations management, new market identification, exporting, networking, mentoring and human resources. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will support advisory services programming in Newfoundland and Labrador, and, through partners, advisory services in New Brunswick. This will assist women entrepreneurs to navigate the COVID-19 economic situation.	$1,940,292	$688,800	$2,629,092

New Brunswick

Organization	City/Town	Project Description	Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)	New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020	Total Funding

		This project aims to develop and implement a provincial program to support women throughout the process of taking over a business. Activities will include the adaptation of tools to meet individual needs, as well as leveraging resources and services already offered in the ecosystem. Efforts will focus on community economic development in New Brunswick's Acadian and Francophone communities and businesses in underrepresented traditional sectors (e.g. manufacturing sector).			
Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick Inc.	Moncton	**Enhancement:** n/a	$1,211,595	n/a	$1,211,595

Nova Scotia					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**
Centre for Women in Business	Halifax	The project objective is to develop and deliver an intensive management program called Greater Heights for Growth (GHG). The program will target women-owned high-growth businesses. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will support advisory services programming in Nova Scotia, and through partners in Prince Edward Island, to assist women entrepreneurs navigate the COVID-19 economic situation.	$2,015,600	$459,200	$2,474,800

Ontario					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**
Community Futures Development Corporation of North & Central	Bancroft	This project, in collaboration with the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nations, will provide customized training to Indigenous women entrepreneurs residing in the remote region of the Algonquin community. The Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nations will host training sessions from their centre to help women start and scale-up their businesses and leverage resources, such as training material from the CFDC. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to support the purchase of technical equipment such as tablets, laptops and digital cameras and to collaborate with at least one other First Nation community to establish an online marketplace for indigenous women entrepreneurs to sell their products.	$266,250	$60,600	$326,850

Haltech Regional Innovation Centre	Burlington	The project will create an accelerator to help diverse women entrepreneurs to scale-up and reach global markets. Activities will include training sessions through cohort-based programming and mentorship opportunities. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to support the following incremental activities: Power Panel & Mentorship - establish quarterly panels in which women-owned companies pitch to a group of mentors; enhancing Advanced Advisory Services; and expanding Roadmap to MVP through a combination of content sessions and mentoring.	$307,800	$235,500	$543,300
Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation	Cobourg	This project will support the development of a fintech algorithmic coding platform; its aim is to correct bias and advance gender equality for women entrepreneurs applying for loans through the Community Futures Program Investment Fund. The project will also provide women entrepreneurs access to working space and business advisory/counselling services. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to collaborate, coordinate and support further refinement to the fintech	$1,436,500	$380,000	$1,816,500

		platform to improve its usability.			
LaCloche Manitoulin Business Assistance Corporation	Gore Bay	This project will stimulate women-owned and women-led business start-up and scale-up by increasing their access to business development supports throughout the region. Women will be connected to industry experts to address their specific growth needs. **Enhancement:** The additional funding will allow LaCloche Manitoulin Business Assistance Corporation to build on the success of the Northern Ontario Community Futures Women in Business Enhancement project and further support start-up and scale-up of Northern Ontario women-owned and women-led businesses by providing them with access to mentoring networks, professional services and expert advisors.	$1,375,000	$522,075	$1,897,075
Innovation Guelph Resource Centre	Guelph	This project seeks to develop and accelerate the "growth to scale" of women-led companies through customized mentoring, facilitated learning and skill-building training and market development. Innovation Guelph and partners will run the proposed program with a focus on STEM, rural and social enterprises. Diverse women entrepreneurs to be supported include refugees, immigrants, and Indigenous women.	$1,879,983	$261,250	$2,141,233

		Enhancement: The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to support the creation of a goal setting app to help companies establish a path forward post COVID-19, as well as the development of a COVID-19 pivot accelerator to provide focused advisory/mentorship for high potential women-led businesses that need to pivot and adjust due to COVID-19.			
The Hamilton Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA Hamilton)	Hamilton	This project will support women with business training and coaching to successfully start up or grow their own small businesses. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to support the Hamilton YWCA to help bridge digital skills shortfalls of women entrepreneurs through a digital advisory service which will include the addition of two e-Business Advisors to assist with their digital transformation, the hosting of online workshops and the leveraging of platforms to connect women entrepreneurs.	$1,015,641	$138,691	$1,154,332
Société de développement communautaire de Prescott-Russell	Hawkesbury	This project will deliver entrepreneurial programming, services and provide easier access to capital for women entrepreneurs in Official Languages Minority Communities (OLMC's)	$955,128	$289,631	$1,244,759

		in southern Ontario. Activities will develop a new network of women in business through strategic alliances with Francophone and bilingual stakeholders in various and diverse sectors. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to support the development of an online testing tool, in collaboration with La Cité College, to immediately identify competencies of entrepreneurs, in order to tailor mentoring and coaching specific to their needs.			
Ontario East Economic Development Commission	Kingston	The project aims to promote, launch, deliver, and evaluate a Women's Virtual Entrepreneurship Incubator Pilot Project, which includes on-line training, workshops, virtual one-on-one discussions, and access to networking, matchmaking and mentoring via virtual activities. **Enhancement:** n/a	$823,000	n/a	$823,000
Queen's University at Kingston	Kingston	The project will deliver a suite of programming for women in tech and indigenous women entrepreneurs that will accelerate the commercialization of new technologies and will include mentorship and matchmaking services within the regional ecosystem.	$3,267,616	$250,000	$3,517,616

		Enhancement: The additional COVID-19 funding will be used to expand services provided to women entrepreneurs through its collaborators and to develop and launch 'OvercomeHER' a virtual workshop series that addresses accessibility barriers for women entrepreneurs with disabilities.			
Pillar Nonprofit Network	London	The project will aim to broaden and diversify the entrepreneurial ecosystem supporting women entrepreneurs. Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge/practices across programming, support and expansion of women-led social enterprises, training sessions and access to capital will be integral activities. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to increase one-on-one coaching, expand French language supports to deliver a series of social enterprise workshops, offer business development services in digital sales, deliver investment readiness coaching, engage a partner to create stories and profiles, and provide impact reporting for each participant.	$3,585,303	$284,500	$3,869,803

ventureLAB Innovation Centre	Markham	This project will aim to increase the number of women led tech companies that specifically build software or hardware-enabled solutions for various priority economic sectors. Activities will include the development of training materials, delivery of a cohort-based program for female tech founders and mentorship opportunities. **Enhancement:** Additional COVID-19 top-up funding will help deliver activities such as B2B customer matchmaking events to provide female-founded tech companies with strategically aligned connections, the hosting of three Investor Round Table sessions to enable companies to pitch to a targeted investment partners, and brand visibility and networking connections.	$1,716,835	$370,000	$2,086,835
Tecumseh Community Development Corporation	Sarnia	The project objective is to deliver the Pathway to Personal Success program with an aim to foster stronger economic development growth by utilizing a holistic approach to assist, equip and enable women entrepreneurs from varying diverse groups. **Enhancement:** n/a	$337,000	n/a	$337,000

PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise	Thunder Bay	The Enterprising Indigenous Women project will support Indigenous women in remote and rural communities to start and scale-up their businesses. PARO will provide holistic business and entrepreneurship supports and training to facilitate business start and/or scale in growth sectors such as mining, forestry, transportation, and power. **Enhancement:** Additional funding will allow PARO to provide enhanced supports and expertise to women entrepreneurs, as they navigate impacts to their business operations and move towards business transformation and recovery post-COVID-19.	$1,433,031	$405,888	$1,838,919
Canadian Film Centre	Toronto	The project will deliver an incubation program that will accelerate 200 women-led companies in southern Ontario's digital media ecosystem through specialized boot camp training sessions, demonstration events to showcase products and companies, and networking. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to launch a new program, Fifth Wave Service Boost, that will provide existing Fifth Wave participants with access to a pre-established pool of accelerated service offerings. It will also	$3,395,000	$600,000	$3,995,000

		enable an additional Fifth Wave Lab/Boot camp cohort of companies comprised of women digital entrepreneurs who represent the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.			
Elizabeth Fry Society (Elizabeth Fry Toronto)	Toronto	The project will initiate a second cohort of My Start-Up to support marginalized women who may have struggled with mental health issues or conflict with law to launch their own viable business. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to retool its existing My Start Up program to be fully virtual by equipping participants with the applicable technology and training that will facilitate completion of the program and better equip participants with the skills necessary to enter today's workplace.	$1,002,004	$43,296	$1,045,300
York University	Toronto	The project will develop and deliver the Fempower program (known as ELLA), which will support women entrepreneurs by providing business education and resources, female centred supports, real solutions to overcome barriers, access to resources, and networking. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will support the incorporation of a new	$1,868,400	$281,600	$2,150,000

		Coaching and Leadership Support module to the ELLA programming and launch a new initiative, a Fractional Executive Program, where a cohort of 10 advanced ELLA participants will have support to access mentorship and coaching that will assist in addressing barriers or challenges associated with scaling globally.			
Wilfrid Laurier University	Waterloo	The project will utilize existing incubation/acceleration space to offer support to women entrepreneurs at the early start-up stage and those looking to accelerate and scale their businesses, focusing on the non-tech sectors and those creating social enterprises. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to digitize their operations. As a net new incremental activity to its existing WES Ecosystem project, the university will rely principally on new partnerships and collaborations with external organizations to reach women entrepreneurs.	$1,385,000	$290,000	$1,675,000
Windsor Essex Economic Development Corporation	Windsor	This project will encourage women entrepreneurs to start and grow emerging technology businesses, such as agri-food, automation, automotive and mobility.	$692,000	$117,000	$809,000

		Enhancement: The additional COVID-19 top up funding will be used to support the EPIC VentureWomen Accelerator Program - led by EPICentre, the accelerator program will support new or early start-ups to bring innovative ideas to market, and F5: Refresh or Reload Venture Success Team - led by WEtech Alliance, the program will provide women entrepreneurs with incremental training to help them better leverage technology to rebuild their company following the COVID-19 pandemic.			

Quebec					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount – 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**
Collège d'Alma	Alma	The project will aim to support Colab, which works to train and mentor women entrepreneurs in a 4.0 digital culture framework. **Enhancement:**The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will allow the client to support female entrepreneurs remotely through a new digital platform and offer them expert services that meet their needs.	$912,631	$200,000	$1,112,631

Fédération des agricultrices du Québec	Longueuil	The project aims to implement an adapted program to support access to networking and mentoring activities for women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding aims to expand supports for women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector through adapted networking and mentorship support.	$456,961	$88,390	$545,351
Association Communautaire d'Emprunt de Montréal (Microcrédit Montréal)	Montréal	The project aims to offer a support service adapted to immigrant women in order to develop their entrepreneurial potential. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding aims to help immigrant women develop their entrepreneurial potential (particularly in areas such as e-commerce and management) through tailored support.	$1,461,000	$320,000	$1,781,000
École des entrepreneurs du Québec	Montréal	The project will aim to stimulate the creation and growth of women-led businesses with a cohort approach and tailor-made solutions in all regions of Québec. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will serve to consolidate a women's virtual campus, which will offer better access to tailored online training, coaching, and networking.	$3,262,070	$785,510	$4,047,580

Organization	City/Town	Project Description	Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)	New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020	Total Funding
Youth Employment Services Foundation	Montréal	The project aims to support Official Languages Minority Communities (OLMC) women start and grow their SMEs in all regions of Quebec through the delivery of Youth Employment Services's ELLEvate Women Entrepreneurs Project. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will provide individual coaching that will be enhanced by new specialized e-learning, online seminars, and networking.	$1,260,000	$237,100	$1,497,100
Femmessor Québec	Québec	The project aims to provide support and facilitate access to financing for women entrepreneurs in under-represented sectors, diverse women, rural and remote areas and those in their early stages of growth. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will provide individual coaching, specialized expert services, and amplify co-development and e-learning.	$5,735,823	$1,250,000	$6,985,823

Saskatchewan					
Organization	**City/Town**	**Project Description**	**Original Funding Amount - 2018 (up to…)**	**New COVID-19 Related Funding Amount – 2020**	**Total Funding**

Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre Inc.	Saskatoon	The project will help women entrepreneurs in the food processing sector by creating business development services such as mentoring, networking, coaching, and training. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will help women-owned value-added agriculture SMEs re-establish market share, respond to changing regulations in the food industry due to the COVID crisis, and lower costs for processing product.	$1,000,000	$245,000	$1,245,000
Saskatoon Open Door Society Inc.	Saskatoon	The project will support the creation of a business incubator and start-up business training services for newcomer and recent immigrant women entrepreneurs. **Enhancement:** The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will include the creation of a collective on-line platform where immigrant women can market and sell their products, develop an online/virtual presence of the Society's international women incubator, and to purchase equipment to aid the transition to e-commerce platforms and increase marketing through social media.	$999,219	$250,435	$1,249,654
Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc.	Saskatoon	This project will aim to develop and deliver a new program called "The Exchange," which will focus on scaling up existing women-owned businesses in Saskatchewan.	$1,560,000	$350,000	$1,910,000

		Enhancement: The additional COVID-19 top-up funding will be used to provide specialized business advisory services, mentoring, training and other resources to women-led businesses to assist them in recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic, particularly in relation to new safety requirements implemented due to the pandemic.			

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