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Urban Farmers and Cowboy Coders: Re-Imagining Rural Venturing in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Across the social sciences, there is a growing recognition that rural innovation and entrepreneurship are at the front lines of responding to increasing dynamism and complexity in social, cultural, and economic environments. Yet, a review of the disparate literatures on rural venturing reveals that this research has largely escaped the attention of management and entrepreneurship scholars. Our analysis suggests that scholarly progress has been forestalled by three interconnected research practices: gap-spotting scholarship, decontextualized theory building, and an allegiance to binary oppositions. In response to the challenges posed by these practices, this article identifies three alternative, multi-paradigmatic research tools to enhance the effectiveness of management scholars in contributing to multi-disciplinary fields of inquiry such as rural entrepreneurship: problematization, hybridization, and contextualization. Through the application of these tools, we develop new avenues to consider the complex interplay between community, space and place, novel innovation pathways, the power of traditional values and contexts, and the varied nature of modern business venturing. Our work also contributes fresh perspectives on the manner in which management scholars can offer more effective conceptual leadership in multi-disciplinary fields to theorize complex phenomena.

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"Not only do urban-based professionals and officials often not know the rural reality; worse, they do not know that they do not know." -- Dr. Robert Chambers, OBE

Squash by Sam is doing a brisk business. Fresh from the fields, Sam's large crates of zucchini, pumpkin, butternut, acorn, and delicata sell out in under an hour. Less than twenty feet away, Mountain Song, a local producer of artisanal cheese, also packs up after another successful morning, having sold out thirty pounds of handmade cheese for a total bounty of $754. Both young businesses have tapped into the urban appetite for anything evoking natural, local, and traditional features. Like Sam, Terry and Sheryl, the owners of Mountain Song, climb into their truck for the journey home. The drive is short and uneventful, helped by the fact that they operate out of a Brooklyn townhouse where Sheryl grew up that sits only six blocks from the downtown market.

Meanwhile, literally and figuratively a thousand miles away, Kyle Paulson and David Helm, break open another case of Red Bull. They have been coding a web application, using Ruby

on Rails, for the past thirty hours, but are still only two-thirds finished with contracted work that must be written, tested, and uploaded before the end of the week. Their fledgling software development company, Hands On, won the job by bidding through a rural outsourcing platform developed by Tech Sourcing Solutions, a firm that channels coding work to capable firms operating in rural areas. Rather than setting up shop in Silicon Valley, Austin, or the Mass Pike Corridor, Kyle and David created an advantage out of living in low-cost, rural Arkansas by avoiding the growing congestion of large, urban environments. The rural location also allows Kyle to care for his aging parents and David to raise his children in the same small town in which he grew up. With their six employees, Hands On expects to achieve billings of more than a million dollars this year. Just down the block, Linda Hestenbaum, is working on a website to attract more customers to her for-profit arts and education center. Through her business, visitors to the area can take classes from local experts in woodworking, musical instruments, weaving, ceramics, fly-tying, canning, and taxidermy. Kyle and David have successfully brought in business from afar and Linda is hoping to build a community of craft enthusiasts.

As these brief vignettes aver, the dividing line between activities we typically associate with urban and rural venturing has grown less distinct, creating colorful and sometimes surprising juxtapositions that challenge scholarly boundaries and popular conceptions of what constitutes rural and urban entrepreneurship (Dymitrow & Stenseke, 2016; Schaeffer, Loveridge & Weiler, 2014). Across national boundaries, in both the Global North and South, there are numerous examples of the mutually beneficial exchange of business models, novel forms of organizing, and innovative technologies that are rendering moot a common belief of a growing chasm between agricultural rurality and post-industrialized urbanity (Lichter & Brown, 2011). And yet, despite the growing recognition of these mutual interdependencies in fields outside of management and

entrepreneurship, most of this conversation is occurring outside of mainstream management and entrepreneurship journals (Lichter & Ziliak, 2017).

To the extent that management scholars have turned their attention to urban and rural environments, much of the work has focused on addressing widening gaps in wealth, education, technology, and access to healthcare in rural communities (Müller, 2016). These quality-of-life issues constitute a vital line of inquiry, as do research streams seeking to illuminate the ways in which rural entrepreneurship and innovation offer a crucial form of human agency to address the problems rural communities are facing amidst the rising tide of post-industrialism (Mitchell, 1998; North & Smallbone, 2006). But there also remains a significant opportunity for management scholars to extend important organizational and entrepreneurship theories and frameworks into rural contexts to enrich both theory development and practice. However, to capitalize fully these opportunities, scholars must overcome the temptation to reify and perpetuate antiquated notions of urbanity and rurality (Schaeffer, et al., 2014); notions that fail to fully account for the immense cross-pollination that occurs between entrepreneurs in both urban and rural contexts (Lacour & Puissant, 2007). Our alternative approach explores the possibility that rural modes of business venturing can provide important insights for management and entrepreneurship scholars regarding social support, community development, sustainability, novel organizational forms, and innovative business models, which have the potential to spawn new opportunities for entrepreneurial action in both rural and urban contexts.

In light of these opportunities, the purpose of this article is four-fold. First, given the virtual absence of rural entrepreneurship research in mainstream management and entrepreneurship journals, we summarize and integrate existing research to highlight the conceptual richness and diversity of this domain. Second, we explore the problem of fragmentation in rural

entrepreneurship research across a wide range of scholarly fields, focusing on several common practices in management research that perpetuate these problems: (i) gap-filling, which uses new variables to advance existing empirical models, thereby reinforcing existing conceptualizations; (ii) de-contextualization, which masks the critical ways diverse conditions shape important phenomena; and (iii) binary oppositions, which tend to cause dichotomization in framing research questions. Third, we identify several alternative research tools for overcoming these problems in rural entrepreneurship research: problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) contextualization (Welter, Baker & Wirsching, 2018), and hybridization (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016; York, Hargrave & Pacheco, 2016). Fourth, applying these tools, we contribute a set of "re-imagined" research opportunities for rural entrepreneurship and innovation in the 21st Century. Collectively, these new directions explore the complex intersection of rurality and urbanity to the benefit of general management and entrepreneurship research as well as to the study of rural venturing.

EXISTING RESEARCH ON RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In recent years, rural entrepreneurship research has been published in journals spanning at least twenty distinct fields of study, including anthropology, engineering, psychology, and economics. The sheer diversity of scholars engaged in the study of rural entrepreneurship serves as a testament to the importance of the phenomenon. While an exhaustive review of the disparate literatures informing rural entrepreneurship research is beyond the scope of this inquiry, some reflection on these varied perspectives is essential in order to understand the implications of rural entrepreneurship's conceptual fragmentation. In the following sections we detail and critique the most prominent of these perspectives, starting with structural and environmental approaches.

Structural and Environmental Approaches to Rural Entrepreneurship

Structural approaches to the study of rural entrepreneurship have elicited interest in the

ways natural and material conditions affect rural venturing. Core themes in this stream include research on the push and pull effects of geographic distance between markets, suppliers, and skilled labor (Smallbone & Hofer, 2009) which has found that while modern transportation and information technologies have in some ways brought rural entrepreneurs and potential buyers closer together (Lichter & Brown, 2011), rural entrepreneurs -- even those operating on the periphery of urban centers – continue to be impacted directly by the sparseness of local markets and the distance to urban centers of commerce (Storper & Venables, 2004).

Additionally, structural approaches have examined how social network remoteness can affect rural ventures (e.g. Presutti, Boari, & Majocchi, 2011; Ring, Peredo, & Chrisman, 2010; Hindle, 2010). This research has found that while rural entrepreneurs typically have strong local network ties; their networks are sparser and less diverse, resulting in a thinness when compared to networks enjoyed by entrepreneurs in urban contexts (Ring et al., 2010). This thinness-of-networks can make acquiring resources, reaching customers, and accessing knowledge from extra-local sources difficult for rural entrepreneurs, dampening the chance of a nascent venture becoming successful (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Baum, Calabrese, & Silverman, 2000; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Alternatively, some scholars have argued that the tight, closed social networks associated with rural contexts may benefit rural entrepreneurs (e.g. Ring et. al., 2010; Jack & Anderson, 2002) and that such networks form the basis for some of the widely used rural economic development models (e.g. Flora, 1998), thereby underscoring the benefits of a strong local network (Besser & Miller, 2013; Jack & Anderson, 2002; McKeever et al., 2015). Although this potentially constitutes a promising advantage for rural ventures, much of the work on rural social capital ignores questions regarding the universal utility of such structures in rural contexts (Cloke & Goodwin, 1992) and what has sometimes been called the dark side of social capital (Uzzi, 1997).

In contrast, other studies have found that the relative isolation of rural ventures provides them with unique access to rurally-embedded landscapes, amenities, and produce; thus, mirroring the broader research on embedded entrepreneurial agency and new venture novelty (e.g. Baker & Nelson, 2005; Powell & Baker, 2014). Lang and colleagues (Lang & Fink, 2018; Lang, Fink, & Kibler, 2014) report significant differences in entrepreneurial activity across rural settings, despite similar resource endowments, suggesting endogenous resource enactment explanations for the variance in rural venture success. Consistent with this line of inquiry, Anderson (2000), discovered that some rural entrepreneurs utilize the distinctiveness of embedded resources in rural contexts as a "competitive advantage," a research theme that has been explored and confirmed (Borch, et al., 2008; Korsgaard, et al., 2015; McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015). For example, Baker and Nelson (2005) identified the important role of bricolage among successful entrepreneurs in rural settings, wherein the sparseness of resources is itself instrumental in spawning novel business venturing pathways. Thus, while there are notable liabilities to the painstakingly slow diffusion of enabling technologies, such as broadband internet access (LaRose, et al., 2007), there are also favorable impacts to rural livelihood, involving individual and community-level capabilities, equity, and sustainability (Chambers 2014).

These conflicting conceptions of distance, as both a liability and an asset, suggest that structures, both material and social, are likely to have disparate effects. Whether or not distance constrains or enables entrepreneurship, much like adversity or resource constraints, may depend as much on how it is understood by the entrepreneurs him or herself than the nature of the structure; what Welter and colleagues (2018) refer to as enactment of the resource environment.

Economic Theory and Rural Entrepreneurship

Economic approaches to the study of rural entrepreneurship have a long and storied history, as many of the earliest conceptions of entrepreneurial rents were motivated by observations of phenomena arising in agricultural settings (Riccardo, 1817: Schumpeter 1934). Until the latter half of the 20th century, agricultural economics played a dominant role in the study of applied economics, which is perhaps not surprising given the direct influence of agricultural production on economic growth and employment. Transportation systems, energy production, and both urban and rural infrastructure were designed and maintained with an eye towards optimization of agricultural goods and services (Lans, Seuneke, & Klerkx, 2013). Even seminal efforts to formulate theories of human capital were originally developed and applied in the context of rural settings (Becker, 1994; Schultz, 1961). Research in development economics has been closely linked to agricultural innovation and, in turn, to rural entrepreneurship, examining how entrepreneurship facilitates rural economic development (Henderson 2002; MacKenzie, 1992). As a consequence, research on the role of entrepreneurship in promoting rural economic development is, by some considerable margin, the single largest body of literature exploring rural entrepreneurship (Web of Science).

Similar to the structural approaches to rural entrepreneurship outlined above, contemporary economic studies of rural entrepreneurship have focused on limited access to finite inputs, fewer matches for labor and customers, and little opportunity to capitalize on knowledge spillovers (Carlino & Kerr, 2015), making it less likely new ventures will be launched (Bull & Winter, 1991). Among these factors, the social diffusion of knowledge is particularly important to an economic explanation of urban benefits (Audretsch, et al., 2004). The agglomeration of resources, markets, and knowledge in urban environments creates escalating opportunities to achieve economies of scale and scope, allowing urban environments to maintain an advantage (Carlino & Kerr, 2015).

Agglomeration advantages stemming from scale, scope, and knowledge spillovers exert a sort of gravitational pull, drawing human and capital resources from the periphery towards the core, relegating less populous areas to raw material production (Anderson, 2000). Austrian economics similarly holds that entrepreneurship is more likely to occur in places where it is already occurring (Stam & Lambooy, 2012). In this vein, Holcombe (1998) argues that when venturing is successful, the new innovation encourages still further innovation in adjacent areas by pointing to promising new opportunities. From this perspective, rural communities are doubly disadvantaged, lacking the initial stock of resources to be attractive contexts for entrepreneurs, and the tendency of remaining resources to gravitate towards denser environments.

However, some economists have challenged these core assumptions of an urban efficiency advantage. For example, Dijkstra, Garcilazo, and McCann (2013:348) have argued that agglomeration underestimates the long-term, nonlinear diseconomies of scale in urban environments, such as "congestion costs, pollution or oversupply of labor, and a higher cost of living." In the same vein, Folta and colleagues (2006) found that while agglomeration at lower levels of density contributed to marginal benefits for nascent firms, there was an inverse, U-shaped relationship between the density of locales and the outcomes of firm growth, performance, and the number of new ventures launched. Their research provides evidence that the dis-economies of scale and the attendant rise in resources cost (Dijkstra et al., 2013) may offset the benefits of density in urban contexts. This, in turn, may raise the cost of launching a new venture in urban environments to the point at which it becomes economically more attractive to start new ventures in rural settings, potentially reversing the rural diaspora in many national settings (Terluin, 2003).

Core assumptions about the central importance of agglomeration effects can also mask the recognition of counter-intuitive trends in the inherent mutuality of urban and rural economies as

reflected in the bi-directional flow of business models, organizational forms, and novel technologies between contexts. Congestion costs attendant to agglomeration, such as the increased difficulty in locating potentially relevant novel information amongst a larger available knowledge base (Folta et al., 2006) constitute a non-ignorable offset to the benefits derived from lucrative, information-based economies (Glaeser, 2010). In such cases, rural settings may offer attractive alternatives to the agglomeration mindset through less stressful environments, palpable social support, collaborative networks, and innovative twists on urban business models (Henry & McElwee, 2014). This view is supported by Dubois (2016:1) who asserts that "even peripheral and remote regions can host firms that are highly innovative and competitive."

Reciprocally, urban entrepreneurs may benefit from the importation of rural venturing logics that mitigate unwanted costs of agglomeration in metro areas. In line with this logic, Townsend and Naar (2018) illustrate emerging aspects of these trends in both urban and rural contexts (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about Here]

Although this profile of sectors, drawn from recent NAICS data, represents only a tiny portion of the industries supporting rural entrepreneurship -- and the use of percentages to illustrate the trends clearly is sensitive to initial base rates of startup activities -- these data indicate the prevalence of intriguing examples, such as those illustrated at the beginning of this article with urban farmers and rural coders. These data also raise interesting questions about the composition of urban and rural venturing activities. It appears that rural entrepreneurs are entering non-traditional industries, such as software coding, while urban entrepreneurs are increasingly starting businesses in organics, crafts, and artisanal foods (Townsend & Naar, 2018).

In summary, economic theories of rural entrepreneurship have contributed to the current

understanding as to why, in the aggregate, some rural communities have lower levels of entrepreneurship on a per capita basis (Cotter, 2002). However, existing models often fail to account for offsets involving resource congestion and rising costs in urban environments, forces that may fuel a counter-trend to the long-term flight of capital from the rural to urban. For this reason, neither structural nor economic perspectives alone seem to adequately explain the variance in entrepreneurship across rural communities (Acs & Malecki, 2003; Kim, Wennberg, & Croidieu, 2016; Marini, 2013; Müller, 2016). While structural-environmental and economic factors undoubtedly influence both the rate and type of entrepreneurial action in rural environments, explicating the sources of variance requires an exploration into the influence of individuals' ability and willingness to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities (Gnyawali & Fogel, 1994).

Individual-level Approaches to Rural Entrepreneurship

As some scholars have noted, one reason the rate of rural entrepreneurial action lags behind urban locations is due to differences in human capital (Andersson et al. 2016; Crowe, Ceresola, Silva, & Recker, 2015), stemming from a lack of college education or other formal training (Gibbs, 2005; Smallbone & Hofer, 2009). These problems are further compounded in many rural communities because of the over-concentration of skills in the dominant industries of the region (Fortunato, 2014). Aging and declining populations in many rural communities also create additional human resource challenges as the exodus of talented and educated youth from rural environments continues (Gibbs, 2005).

Rural communities are also thought to be disadvantaged by the lack of high-tech knowledge and skills associated with high-growth innovation. This has led to a proliferation of job training programs in rural communities, often under banners such as "Turning Coal Miners into Coders" (Kasabov, 2015). However, even when these programs are implemented in rural

communities, they often encounter low participation rates (Gunn 2015; Meccheri & Pelloni, 2006). Since there are so few rural firms with jobs that require high-tech knowledge, rural residents with such training are often forced to leave in order to find job opportunities elsewhere, perpetuating a cycle of declining local job skills (Atkin 2003; Corbett 2009).

Action-oriented research in the field of entrepreneurship, however, illuminates alternative perspectives on the formation and role of micro-level factors in the persistence and survival of rural ventures. As noted earlier, Baker and Nelson (2005) extend Levi-Strauss's work on bricolage to explore how rural entrepreneurs construct resources from local sources, highlighting the generative creativity of entrepreneurs who overcome resource constraints. Many studies follow this work, highlighting individual and collective creativity as a source of entrepreneurship in rural areas (Berglund, Gaddefors, & Lindgren, 2016; Bosworth, 2008; Carter, 1998; Eikeland, 1999; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Gladwin et al., 1989; Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Johannisson & Olaison, 2007; McKeever et al., 2014; McKeever et al., 2015; Müller & Korsgaard, 2018).

As these studies suggest, while rurality may be a source of innovation and entrepreneurship, there are open questions as to whether rural ventures are positioned to leverage the innovative and entrepreneurial potential of the rural context in which they operate. Path-dependencies and lock-in effects are particularly prevalent in rural areas (Isaksen, 2015, 2016) as local resources remain committed to existing patterns of use and meaning. Thus, rural entrepreneurs have an important function in challenging existing and unproductive patterns of resource utilization (Berglund et al., 2016). Supporting this conclusion, emerging empirical research suggests that in-migrants are over-represented among rural entrepreneurs since they possess a broader range of network contacts for ideas and opportunities and, thus, are not locked into existing cognitive and cultural patterns of resource use (Bosworth, 2008; Kalantaridis & Bika,

2006; Stockdale, 2006). The emerging literature on mixed embeddedness and returnee entrepreneurs demonstrates the importance of bridging across social and spatial contexts through diversified and heterogeneous networks (Dubois, 2016; Korsgaard, et al., 2015; Munkejord, 2017). For example, Dubois (2016) highlights small businesses that have become competitive internationally despite locational remoteness through what he calls "translocal embeddedness," a hybrid conceptualization of local, rural embeddedness, with transnational awareness. Recent studies support Dubois's finding that individuals who return to rural environments appear to be more successful in enacting these bridging strategies because in part they can leverage network contacts from their previous locations (Gaddefors & Cronsell, 2009; Jones, et al., 2014; Kloosterman, Van Der Leun, & Rath, 1999; Stone & Stubbs, 2007).

Cultural Approaches to Rural Entrepreneurship

In addition to structural, economic, and human capital approaches, cultural factors are also relevant to entrepreneurial action in rural environments (Walls & Billings, 1977). A large, multidisciplinary body of research illustrates the link between culture and rural venturing (e.g. Kibler, Kautonen, & Fink, 2014; Kraybill, Nolt, & Wesner, 2011; Lippmann & Aldrich, 2015; Stuetzer, et al, 2014). For example, scholars have shown that individuals from rural contexts may hold aversive views of entrepreneurship, a problem that can be exacerbated by a lack of local role models (Bhagavatula, et al., 2010). These cultural impediments are amplified in certain locales due to "the historic dependence upon large industrial employers," resulting in a kind of corporate paternalism "despite the decline in this type of employment" (North & Smallbone, 2006:54).

Conversely, new developments in rural sociology highlight the pull factors of rural socio-cultural contexts for entrepreneurs. As Lichter and Brown (2011) note, rural values and the imagery of rural idyll sit deeply in the cultural heritage of Western societies as an attractive

alternative to the stresses and anxiety of modern life (e.g. Bosworth, 2012). Romantic notions of a better life in the rural countryside has attracted entrepreneurs to rurality in what some refer to as counter-urbanization driven by creative entrepreneurial individuals (Bosworth, 2008, 2010; Herslund, 2012). There is some debate about the extent to which such entrepreneurial activities constitute rural entrepreneurship proper (Bosworth, 2012; Korsgaard, Müller, & Tanvig, 2015), but, as described above, the notion of in-migration as a source of entrepreneurial activity remains a strong theme within this literature.

Beyond the human capital and network bridging that in-migrant and returnee entrepreneurs provide, their entrepreneurial efforts are richly infused with the rural idyll emanating from "traditional" values of community and family (Alsos, Carter, & Ljunggren, 2014). This complex social matrix of related values and images underlies the daily operation and strategic development of many rural ventures. For this reason, the formation and growth of rural ventures is often governed by non-economic concerns such as those related to family, community, and concerns for the local heritage (Alsos, Carter, & Ljunggren, 2014; Bessière, 1998; Carter, 2001; Kibler, Fink, Lang, & Muñoz, 2015). Alsos and colleagues (2014) developed one example of how this unfolds in an entrepreneurship context, exploring how new ventures related to rural farming are undertaken within familial kinship networks to ensure that all family members have meaningful work. A similar theme is explored by Niska, Vesala & Vesala (2012), involving peasantry, entrepreneurship, and stewardship as frames that guide the development of new farming related business opportunities in the rural countryside.

Here too, however, there are mixed effects. In some cases, the rural cultural milieu encourages illicit activities, such as illegal drug production and sale, a pernicious challenge in many rural post-industrial contexts. Emerging work identifies such illicit activities, sometimes in

the form of a portfolio rural ventures, to which tight-knit rural communities have "turned a blind eye" (see e.g. Smith, 2004; Smith & McElwee, 2013a, 2013b; Somerville, Smith, & McElwee, 2015). Equally challenging, the rural idyll, with its socially conservative, traditionalist slant, may sustain oppressive gender roles, even when rurality is expressed in entrepreneurial activities (Bock, 2004, 2015). Thus, while, rural idyll provides a powerful, romantic ideal of community, nature, and kinship, the realities of rural life and rural entrepreneurship are not always harmonious.

Several studies have also pointed to the dark side of idyll-inspired entrepreneurship, where the destruction of the local rural context is evidenced, such as in Tonts and Grieve's (2002) study of rural Australia. Here, commodification of rural landscapes and culture through the emergence of tourist ventures resulted in cultural erosion and the destruction of landscapes (see also Mitchell, 1998). A similar issue has been witnessed in the effects of counter-urbanization through new ventures established by in-migrants. Shucksmith and Chapman (1998) point to the danger of "two-tier communities," where socio-economic roles of locals are excluded, crowded out, or replaced by in-migrants, who are not embedded in the local community. Additionally, rural studies scholars have highlighted the harm potentially caused by the entrepreneurial exploitation of sensitive resources in rural contexts. (Marsden, et al., 2000; Cloke & Goodwin, 1992).

Critical theory and post-Marxist literature take this a step further, framing entrepreneurship *sui generis* as a system of soulless capitalistic optimization that is fundamentally at odds with rural values. These literatures assert that historically entrepreneurship in rural contexts has led to increased levels of poverty and economic oppression (Gieryn, 2000; Kitchen & Marsden, 2009; Niska, Vesala, & Vesala, 2012). Mainstream entrepreneurship research, however, has instead sought to consider the totality of rural entrepreneurship's varied impacts; including, as noted by Korsgaard and colleagues (2015), a vital connectedness of entrepreneurs to the idiosyncratic rural

settings, providing support for and benefits from entrepreneurial action. Attentiveness to embeddedness (Jones, et al., 2014) and "place" in rural scholarship is instructive and beneficial since much rural entrepreneurship exists at the periphery of the high-tech, high-growth focus of contemporary entrepreneurship and management research.

In sum, even a select review of rural entrepreneurship yields an immense diversity of perspectives (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). The intersection of business venturing and rurality manifests itself in complex, convoluted forms that encompass immense variation and hold rich promise for deeper, more inclusive and diversified understandings of management and entrepreneurship research related to organizational notions of space, time, values, sociality, and communities – wherever continuity and change are wrought in discursive, diachronic fashion.

ADDRESSING THE FRAGMENTATION OF RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

Despite exceptional work being conducted across a panoply of fields, existing research in rural entrepreneurship is highly fragmented across these fields of study, riddled with conflicting assumptions, inconsistent methodologies, and construct proliferation. At the same time, fewer than a dozen articles have been published in what would generally be considered elite general management journals, and far less than 1% of the articles referencing "rural entrepreneurship" in the title, abstract, or key words have been published in a management or entrepreneurship journal of any sort (Web of Science). As Figure 1 reveals, the lack of cross-fertilization and the lack of emphasis in mainstream management and entrepreneurship journals on the topic is telling, and points to an important opportunity for management and entrepreneurship scholars to provide comprehensive approaches to integrate these fragmented fields of study.

[Insert Figure 1 about Here]

Figure 1 displays the degree to which scholars of rural entrepreneurship and five other sub-fields cite works outside scholars' respective "home fields," which were determined through the SCImago classification of the journal publishing each article. Using a sample of ten articles for each of the twenty fields producing rural entrepreneurship research, "out-of-field" citations constituted only 18% of all references. Compared with other sub-fields in entrepreneurship research, this constitutes a comparatively low cross-citation rate. For example, a similar citation check of articles on gender issues in entrepreneurship -- another multi-faceted entrepreneurship-focused topic -- revealed that out-of-field citations constituted 47% of all references, well over double the rate in rural entrepreneurship. Other sub-fields for which we conducted a similar analysis exhibited out-of-field citation rates ranging from 38% for sustainable entrepreneurship to 71% for youth entrepreneurship. It is possible that the lower levels of cross-citation among rural entrepreneurship scholars is a consequence of greater sub-field specialization, or greater focus on region-specific, policy-related phenomena, or even greater maturation of rural entrepreneurship scholarship versus the other sub-fields. To delve further into this possibility, we investigated the extent to which articles in each sub-field of entrepreneurship cite entrepreneurship theories that were published in prominent management or entrepreneurship journals[1] (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 about Here]

Rural entrepreneurship scholars employed predictive frameworks, definitions, and conceptual models from entrepreneurship or management journals 34% of the time, considerably less than scholars in the other sub-fields. For instance, gender entrepreneurship scholars cited entrepreneurship theories that were developed in management and entrepreneurship journals 70% of the time, while cultural entrepreneurship, exhibited a citation rate of nearly 90%. Certainly, key

[1] Prominent management journals included AMR, AMJ, ASQ, SMJ, OS, MS, JOM and AMP; while prominent entrepreneurship journals included JBV, ETP, SEJ, JSBM, SBE, IJSB, and FBR.

differences in how scholars think about rural entrepreneurship may be driving this disparity. Alternatively, rural entrepreneurship may be comparatively *a*theoretic versus the other five sub-fields. Or, rural entrepreneurship scholars may not view themselves as pursuing a sub-field of entrepreneurship. Any or all of these explanations may be valid, but the dearth of theoretical integration borne out by the comparative data, suggests that relatively little bridging scholarship has been aimed at generating a mutual exchange of insights, ideas, and theory development.

The Risks of Fragmentation

We believe this fragmentation creates several risks for management and entrepreneurship scholars. First, as the frontisquote from Robert Chambers suggests, urbanity's conception of rural reality is plagued by ignorance, misinformation, and misunderstanding. Many of the implicit assumptions about rurality found in the management and entrepreneurship research have become antiquated (Schaeffer, et al., 2014). Left uncorrected, scholarly fragmentation has allowed for the continued proliferation of errant characterizations of rural areas. For example, the perception of rurality as innovation "wastelands" persists, despite many rural communities having long-lived traditions of innovation (Eller, 2008).

Second, the fragmentation of scholarship represents a missed opportunity for scholars and policy makers with an interest in advancing entrepreneurship in rural contexts to integrate insights from mainstream entrepreneurship and management with those generated in rural studies. Research in foundational disciplines such as sociology and economics have explored topics related to rural venturing with considerable vigor. Yet, this effort, while greatly adding to our understanding of entrepreneurship in rural contexts, has often failed to incorporate key developments and insights from mainstream entrepreneurship research. For example, advances in research on business models (e.g. Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2010) and opportunity development

(Ardichvili, Cardozo & Ray, 2003) have not made their way into the rural entrepreneurship literature despite the rich set of tools both perspectives offer for identifying, describing, and predicting entrepreneurial action and outcomes, including those occurring among marginalized populations (Hunt & Ortiz-Hunt, 2018) and in developing economies (Webb et al., 2010).

Third, we concur with the growing number of entrepreneurship scholars who have argued for the need to broaden the study of entrepreneurship beyond the high-growth, high-tech contexts which have dominated the field (Shepherd, 2015; Welter et al., 2017; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Such a development is vital to not only entrepreneurship scholarship, but organizational and management theory, as well. Undue narrowing in the contextual focus has left underexplored the diversity of innovation pathways and modes of entrepreneurial action which occur in alternative contexts and in organizations of all sizes, ages, locations and configurations (e.g. Hunt & Ortiz-Hunt, 2017). The lack of attention to rural venturing may contribute to missing important ways in which mainstream entrepreneurship could apply learnings from rural modes of entrepreneurial action to inform and influence the study of key areas, such as: informal entrepreneurship (Godfrey, 2011) necessity entrepreneurship (Webb et al., 2009; Monilor & Altay, 2016), and resource constraints (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Anderson, Dodd & Jack, 2012).

Barriers to Integrated Rural Entrepreneurship Research

As the foregoing discussion illustrates, the fragmentation of rural entrepreneurship research across multiple fields of study has impeded the emergence of a robust, multidisciplinary conversation where scholarship in different domains might be richly informed and shaped by parallel conversations in other domains. Within the fields of entrepreneurship and management research, the situation is even more problematic since not only are scholars largely unaware of the important research being conducted outside these fields, but the paucity of attention directed

towards rural venturing masks an important source of diversity in organizational phenomena that can richly inform theory-building efforts in management and entrepreneurship studies. We believe the cause of this unwanted set of circumstances stems from three pervasive, interconnected, and sometimes problematic research practices in the field of management: empirical studies which strive to "fill gaps" in existing theoretical frameworks but not challenge the foundational assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011); the trend towards decontextualized theory-building in management (Welter, 2011; Whetten, 2009); and, the use of binary oppositions to differentiate rural and urban settings (Korsgaard et al., 2015; McEvilley, 2012). We discuss these barriers in greater detail below.

Barrier #1: Gap-Filling Approaches to Rural Entrepreneurship. As with most fields of study, identifying and addressing "gaps" in the existing literature serves as the primary means by which scholars develop publishable contributions (Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). The approach promotes systematic and coherent scholarship, through which new research solidifies extant theoretical foundations through digestible, incremental contributions (Clark & Wright, 2009). However, since gap-filling motivates research intended to improve the explanatory power of existing models and frameworks, there is an aversion to publishing studies that seek to explore seemingly fringe phenomena (Glick, et al., 2007) and unique contexts that may cast doubt upon the underlying assumptions of incumbent theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). As such, gap-filling scholarship tends to reinforce the foundational assumptions scholars already hold about a phenomenon. In addition, gap-filling often perpetuates a bias towards aggregating data in order to improve explanatory power and model fit (e.g., measuring innovation solely through patent counts, see Hunt, 2013). Within research on rural venturing, given the variance in entrepreneurial activity found across rural contexts (Acs & Malecki, 2003; Marini, 2013), context aggregation reinforces

rural-urban distinctions and obscures important endogenous idiosyncrasies across different rural environments (e.g., the development of sustainable farming innovations; see Meyer 2009).

Since much of the scholarly focus on rural entrepreneurship has historically aimed to elucidate matters of economic development, it is common for researchers to aggregate contexts for the purpose of budgets and policies (Irwin et al., 2009). However, as Zahra and Wright (2011:68) noted more generally regarding the search for gaps in entrepreneurship research, "This replication and extension research fails to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, making it difficult to engage in path-breaking (consensus changing) research." In the case of rural entrepreneurship, such tendencies might result in some questioning why there are no "Googles" emerging in rural environments, but argue later that even Google is failing to innovate (Schrage, 2012). Perhaps the problem lies not with rural environments, or Google, but is instead an artifact of the manner in which we conceptualize entrepreneurship and innovation (Hunt, 2018). At a time when escalating socio-cultural and economic tensions are reshaping perceptions and politics (Cramer, 2016), the emphasis on gap-filling in entrepreneurship research may inhibit the extent to which differing perspectives about entrepreneurship, innovation, and the overall health of entrepreneurial ecosystems are identified and discussed. Ironically, this conversation fails at precisely the time that a dialectical process challenging the underlying assumptions and bridging multiple perspectives (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) is most needed, especially as the rural-urban divide moves center-stage due to socio-political fragmentation.

Barrier #2: De-Contextualization. As Zahra and Wright observed (2011), gap-filling approaches and the trend towards aggregation tend to focus on controlling for context in support of a broad set of propositions pertaining to phenomena that are defined *a priori*. The role of the researcher in this approach is to maintain distance and even detachment from the focal context.

The relative absence of contextualization is both a cause and an effect of the field's focus on gap-filling studies. "Studies that fill such gaps typically address particular and often well-defined research issues" (Zahra & Wright, 2011:68). In contrast, a more contextualized approach to research will involve a heavily engaged researcher (Meyer 2009), exploring a bounded set of predictions, pertaining to significant insights that will be harvested from a compelling context in a fashion that may evolve during the course of the research (Welter, 2011; Whetten, 2009).

For rural entrepreneurship, the decontextualization trend in entrepreneurial research has been profoundly impactful and has adversely reinforced common biases built around the rural-urban divide. By attempting to control away context, scholars lose contact with the specific ways in which market actors engage with their respective environments (Bamberger 2008). As noted above, part of the problem is that rural entrepreneurship is often studied in the aggregate, when it is most compelling as a localization story. As a common focus of public policy, rural entrepreneurship is often analyzed in terms of trends, means, and growth rates, when it is not these issues that makes them interesting and impactful, but rather the engagement with the local, social, and cultural meanings of places by rural entrepreneurs (Korsgaard et al. 2015).

The minimization or outright elimination of context vitiates the benefits that contextualized investigations bring to multi-level analysis (Welter, 2011). Since all contexts cross at least two levels of analysis (e.g. individual and market), removal of the context from analytical consideration limits the insights that can be drawn from intimate details regarding the context-specific idiosyncrasies, insights that are vital instruments for scholars to test the efficacy of extant theory (Steyaert & Katz 2004). This point, while poignantly illustrated in rural entrepreneurship, is not unique to the decontextualization of rural phenomena. Work by Baker and Welter (2017) demonstrates that decontextualized theorizing runs the risk of marginalizing certain forms of

entrepreneurship, to the potential detriment of entrepreneurship research broadly. By aggregating away context, important meso-level facets of entrepreneurship can get lost (Kim et al., 2016). For example, Anderson (2000) shows that the role of social capital in the rural context is highly dependent on not only the amount of social capital, but also the ways in which social capital flows through a community. Studies of innovations related to arts and crafts in rural areas (e.g. Bell & Jayne, 2010) confirm these meso-level, context-driven effects. Thus, while generalizable theories of entrepreneurial action play an indispensable role in shaping the field, there is strong evidence to support the recontextualization of entrepreneurship research (Zahra & Wright, 2011), as rural entrepreneurship makes readily apparent.

Barrier #3: Binary Oppositions in the Urban-Rural Divide. The focus on gap-filling approaches combined with a trend towards decontextualized theory-building are connected with the third barrier instantiated in the tendency to define rurality in terms of the absence of urbanity. Here, the binary opposition drawn from entrenched notions of the rural-urban divide has pigeon-holed the conceptualization of rural entrepreneurship in precisely the way that Zahra and Wright (2011) and Welter (2011) cautioned against. This malady, which is not unique to rural entrepreneurship, runs rampant throughout management and organizational frameworks (Townsend, Hunt, McMullen & Sarasvathy, 2018). Binary oppositions, constructed by contrasting two concepts or ideas in order to maximize their perceived differences, are utilized as the foundation of a variety of formal and informal systems of thought (McEvilley, 2012). While binary oppositions are common in management and entrepreneurship scholarship, (e.g., agency/structure, transformational/ transactional leadership, creation/discovery, and effectuation/causation), these binaries often devolve into overly emphatic strawman arguments and an unbalanced emphasis on one "side" of a given pairing. To wit, where is the research on structural, transactional leadership,

discovery, and causation approaches to entrepreneurship research? Along these same lines, the unbalanced nature of the binary opposition of urban versus rural privileges research on entrepreneurial action in urban contexts as the field's main subject of scholarly interest and, more pragmatically, as a model to be exported to rural environments (Hoey, 2015; Steyaert & Katz, 2004; Welter et al., 2018). As a result, critics note that rural environments are not seen as the source of innovation or change, but rather as targets of "epistemic colonialization" (Mignolo, 2010). Settings where the latest "transformational strategies," "disruptive business models," incubated within fast-paced, cosmopolitan, urban environments, must be diffused to fold both land and people into a collective utopian vision of the future (Eller, 2008).

However, while there is little doubt that by most commonly-used measures in contemporary empirical research, urban environments provide entrepreneurs with the most robust platforms upon which to develop new intellectual assets and ideas (Orlando & Verba, 2005), the perpetuation of the urban/rural binary opposition creates several key challenges for entrepreneurship theory: First, the artificial divide between urban and rural entrepreneurship masks the surprising diversity of activities that takes place across both settings (i.e., craft entrepreneurship in urban settings, and technology entrepreneurship in rural settings). Second, since such binary oppositions privilege the urban over the rural, the dominant development strategy is to export urban models into rural environments without regard to their fundamental utility or relevance to the rural environment. Third, due in large part to the first two problems, rural environments are not widely viewed as unique, potential sources of innovation where entrepreneurial ventures develop such novelty by contending with and striving to solve key problems in their local environments (e.g., rural communities as a potential front-line source of innovation in fighting climate change, especially when fused with cutting-edge scientific knowledge – Agrawal, 2010).

Having now identified barriers to the general absence of rural entrepreneurship in the mainstream entrepreneurship and management literature, in the following section, we highlight the central task of illuminating new research opportunities and a path forward for entrepreneurship and management scholars to re-imagine rural entrepreneurship in the 21st Century.

CONCEPTUAL TOOLS FOR RE-IMAGINING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH

Collectively, these obstacles have led to a balkanization of rural venturing research at precisely the point in time that multi-disciplinary cross-fertilization is most critically needed. The rise of populism in Western industrialized countries and the stark disparities between haves and have-nots (Moffit & Tomey, 2014) underscore the need for a fundamental reconceptualization of rurality and urbanity. Gaining deeper understanding of these forces, which far too often pitches "lagging and/or declining regions against more prosperous ones" (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018: 190) points to the need for more integrative and nuanced approaches to addressing these issues. An effort to reassess the fragmented landscape of rural entrepreneurship research offers a compelling model to approach these issues due to the plethora of both positive and negative examples of rural venturing to address the structural disadvantages entrepreneurs often face in these environments. As with other observational challenges to the field – such as studies of the informal economy (Webb, et al., 2009), the role of impulsivity in early-stage venturing (Lerner, Hunt & Dimov, 2018), and the differences between how men and women experience business venturing (De Bruin, Brush, & Welter 2007) -- the purposeful integration of disparate perspectives towards rurality requires mitigating impediments posed by the traditional emphases on gap-filling hypotheses, binary oppositions, and decontextualization. Fortunately, as depicted in Figure 3, organizational scholars are uniquely equipped to lead this important effort through the activation

of three interrelated research practices: problematization, hybridization, and radical contextualization.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

In this section, we outline these approaches and identifying important new research opportunities for advancing contemporary entrepreneurship theory. More broadly, the willingness and ability of management scholars to embrace and operationalize these antidotes substantively dictates the extent of the field's impact on critical issues requiring conceptual and practical leadership from management and organizational scholars.

Conceptual Tool #1: Problematizing Rural Entrepreneurship Research.

While the goal of gap-filling approaches to theory development is to identify and address omissions in existing theoretical models through the addition of new variables, as Figure 3 illustrates, problematization provides a powerful methodology for generating new research questions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Within the rural entrepreneurship literature, problematization can foster the re-imagination process by calling into question the fundamental assumptions of existing theoretical frameworks, for example: urban as active and rural as passive (Bell et al., 2010); rural as isolated and urban as connected (Montgomery, 2000); or, rural as natural and urban as mechanical (Wilson et al., 1992). Furthermore, as we have asserted from the outset, many of the existing approaches to rural entrepreneurship have stifled rather than enriched the generation of provocative research questions. As our review of this literature indicates, theoretical and observational isolation has resulted in a diverse, but unintegrated set of perspectives. Such conditions are ideal for a problematization approach, particularly with respect to alternative innovation pathways and alternative models of work.

An example of the limits to gap-spotting research can be seen in programs designed to turn

cowboys and coal miners into coders (e.g. Rosenblum, 2017); programs that are intended to bridge perceived human capital and structural gaps between rural and cosmopolitan environments. Gap-spotting has largely ascertained that rural domains are untapped locales for the importation of urban enterprise logics. A problematization approach, however, unearths a new set of questions that is more closely attuned to skepticism harbored by new and old rural inhabitants regarding the momentum and influence of technological change (Suddaby, et al., 2017) as well as issues of viability, desirability, and sustainability. The vital distinction is that problematization challenges the dominant logic regarding the future of innovation, allowing for alternative innovation pathways that infuse emergent technologies with community values and rural connectedness with nature.

The emergence of the Danish windmill industry provides an illustration of alternative innovation pathways (Hansen, Jensen & Madsen, 2003). In this context, rural innovators combined the experiential expertise of the local craft industry with knowledge sourced from urban actors to develop a source of alternative energy production that proved to be superior to the innovations developed through corporate R&D initiatives (Garud & Karnøe, 2003). In the field of rural healthcare, Project Lazarus has leveraged local grassroots efforts in rural North Carolina to create a novel solution to the opioid crisis in Appalachian region of the US. Local organizers work together to create inclusion-oriented, community-based organizational structures, rather than the top-down, expert-focused, external funding models commonly used in such cases. Project Lazarus' locally embedded approach, infused with rural values, has led to material improvements in fighting the opioid epidemic by re-constructing local rural network ties between local institutions and individual actors to create comprehensive communication and referral networks, enabling timely interventions with high-risk patients (McPhee & Scoot, 2002). In all of these cases, the successful development of alternative innovation pathways was predicated on the emergence of local

leadership in generating novel, rural-based solutions that largely eschew taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the essentiality of urban innovation models.

At the same time, the emergence of craft entrepreneurship in urban environments is another example of how traditionally rural work has been incorporated into post-industrial and post-digital socio-economic environments (Stinchfield, et al., 2013). While many individuals will continue to adapt to the increasing socio-economic insecurity digital forms of capitalism impose on residents of global cities through the gig economy and other related forms of contingent work, it is perhaps not surprising to witness the re-emergence of craft entrepreneurship even in global, cosmopolitan cities. This is at least partially a result of the fact that these forms of entrepreneurial action permit the re-integration of identity, labor, and albeit sometimes limited economic vitality that is actively undermined in the advance of digital forms of capitalism. (Crawford, 2010).

Conceptual Tool #2: Contextualizing Rural Entrepreneurship.

Gap-spotting research, together with multiple literatures that have primarily cast rural entrepreneurship in opposition to urban forms of high tech/high growth entrepreneurship, have deflected attention away from the rich contexts that characterize rural entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2009). If decontextualization is a consequence of gap-spotting and the use of oppositional logics, it is also at least partially the cure. Re-introducing context is a key to ensuring the veridicality and relevance of rural entrepreneurship research (Welter, 2011; Whetten, 2009; Zahra & Wright 2011), particularly studies that fully comprehend and exhaustively explicate contextual factors (Welter 2011; Zahra & Wright 2011) for the study of entrepreneurship: spatial, temporal, social, institutional, and commercial. Through this contextual fidelity, rurality is no longer characterized simply through a contrast with urbanity, but rather on its own merits, in terms of the local conditions shaping the what, when, where, how, and why of entrepreneurial

engagement with the opportunity environment (Johannisson, 2009). The key, as Welter (2011:177) emphasizes, is to seek out contextual diversity and then apply tools and methods that accentuate the idiosyncratic aspects of context:

> "While some authors argue that quantitative methods and testable hypotheses help the field as such to gain legitimacy (Cornelius, et al., 2006), I suggest that the gap in multi-context analysis partly also results from the neglect of (more) qualitative or combined methods, which allow capturing the richness and diversity of the context(s)."

For example, eco-tourism is an illustration of how local context drives innovation and entrepreneurial activity. For generations, the quintessential rural experience used to be the "dude ranch," a lively conduit to experience the Old West. Now, there are literally thousands of options for individuals seeking a rural experience across a diverse range of environments and contexts. Similarly, the rapid growth of craft brewers and distillers in many rural settings continues to fuel the revitalization of many small towns as local, rural entrepreneurs build innovative new products using local ingredients, traditional knowledge, and craftsmanship (van Dijk, Kroezen, & Slob, 2017). Many rural environments have also preserved important traditional methods in agriculture as an alternative for consumers concerned about the health risks and environmental consequences of industrial agriculture (Cannarella & Piccioni, 2011). In this fashion, rural contexts are an important source of new innovations, precisely because of elements that are foreign to urban business venturing modes: remoteness, resource constraints, heritage-based communities, and connectedness to the natural ecology.

Conceptual Tool #3: Hybridizing Rural Entrepreneurship.

As noted above, a third barrier to re-imagining rural entrepreneurship stems from the use of binary oppositions or oppositional logics to juxtapose urban and rural forms of entrepreneurship. The widespread use of oppositional, rural-urban logics in existing explorations of rural entrepreneurship often promulgates perspectives that are neither current nor veridical. Managerial

and organizational scholars are better served through the use of hybrid logics that synthesize the influence of structure, culture, and entrepreneurial action across each environment. Related research at the intersection of entrepreneurship and organizational theory has begun to reject the pitfalls of definitionally incompatible concepts or systems (e.g. York et al., 2016; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016) that tend to reinforce overly simplistic categorization schemas. Hybrid logics offer an antidote to this state by generating new insights through the unification of ideas that previously were positioned as opposites (York et al., 2016). This "…transformation does not emerge 'in the relationship' between the two poles, but rather is a new element which emerges from the relationship of the two poles" (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2016:2).

Bridging oppositional categories through hybridization is especially important within the context of rural venturing as a growing volume of research acknowledges the inherent limitations of perpetuating the rural-urban divide in social theorizing – recognizing instead the fundamental interdependencies of urban and rural environments (Lichter & Brown, 2011). To be clear, hybridization does not remove all oppositional boundaries between rural and urban venturing, but simply recognizes a fundamental unity of entrepreneurial action across both rural and urban environments through complex, but novel forms of action and organizing. Our previous discussion on the Danish Wind Industry illustrates the importance of blending the local knowledge of craftspeople with specialized scientific knowledge to create new innovations in renewable energy (Hansen, Jensen & Madsen, 2003). Similarly, the farm-to-table movement brings together local traditional culinary and agricultural knowledge with modern food science, marketing, and supply chain management (Ljunggren et al., 2010).

At the same time, the hybridization of urban and rural venturing also challenges the dominant logic of dematerialization as an inevitable byproduct of post-industrialism across both

urban and rural environments (Suddaby, Ganzin & Minkus, 2017). While there is little doubt that digital forms of entrepreneurship might enjoy higher levels of total factor productivity, the relative prosperity of economies in the Global North will not be sustained by armies of social media influencers selling each other fashion tips and travel suggestions. Emerging trends such as urban farming, which in some cases blends together digital platforms and "big data" with traditional farming practices, represent an important area of mutuality between global urban and local rural entrepreneurs (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). From this vantage point, there is a temptation to accentuate what scholars perceive to be the positive elements of urbanity – such as diversity, cosmopolitan values, productivity gains in digital forms of "knowledge work," and agglomeration/network spillovers -- while criticizing the perceived shortcomings of rurality, including traditionalism, regressive socio-political values, network holes, and sparseness. Reifying the perception of an urban-rural divide masks the identification of important counterfactuals, such as: runaway urban congestion; declining urban embeddedness; re-integration of labor, materiality, and identity in craft-entrepreneurship; and, the importance of local communities in rural settings. While economic developers laud the merits of turning "coal miners into coders" to solve problems of post-industrialism in rural communities (Field, 2017), it is just as important to explore the possibilities of importing rurally-sourced, sustainable agricultural practices to address problems of urban blight and food deserts (Epatko, 2016), or to re-contextualize alternative community-building strategies from diverse rural communities to address the problems of toxic communities shackled to digital platforms such as GamerGate (Massanari, 2017). Hybrid approaches that blend knowledge and practices from both urban and rural contexts offer insights that are germane to managerial and organizational studies – even well beyond the urban-rural divide.

Illuminating a Path towards Re-Imagining Rural Entrepreneurship Research

We have argued from the outset that for management scholars rural entrepreneurship is an exemplar of when and how the field can influence and be influenced by a challenging, multi-dimensional context that is in a state of technological and organizational flux. Our shift to problematization, radical contextualization, and hybridization provides widely applicable tools. Table 2 summarizes this comprehensive approach towards theorizing complex phenomena.

Insert Table 2 About Here

In the table, we summarize the key definitions of our recommended tools for re-imagining rural entrepreneurship, and offer several recommendations for research directions and questions. These research directions span from macro-level approaches that address the potential for research on novel innovation pathways emerging from the confluence of different cultural, social, and economic logics embedded within various rural contexts, to micro-level approaches that enable both rural and urban entrepreneurs to integrate social identity and economic concerns within a set of common actions. In addition, by re-emphasizing the role of contextual factors in shaping rural venturing, we also highlight the importance of the local conditions beyond simply enabling and constraining forces in shaping entrepreneurial action. Absent the use of these three interlocking tools, it is our view that progress in the rural entrepreneurship literature will remain elusive as scholars struggle to address the inherent complexity of entrepreneurship in rural communities.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The central premise of our study posits that through the use of problematization, contextualization, and hybridization to re-imagine rural entrepreneurship research, management and entrepreneurship scholars will generate a diverse range of insights and frameworks that are useful to scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers. At the same time, as the foregoing discussion

demonstrates, rural entrepreneurship does not suffer for want of scholarly research. A wide range of disciplines have taken up the challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurial action in rurality, ranging from development economics to women's studies, and from sociology to information technology. However, as we have discussed, what rural entrepreneurship does suffer from is a lack of interdisciplinary integration as scholars across these fragmented and far-flung fields are not often aware of important work being conducted on related topics in other literature streams. In the case of entrepreneurship and management, scholars have not yet embraced rurality as a vital source of learning and influence in much of our mainstream literatures. Meanwhile, other disciplines have not made the best possible use of new theoretical developments, methods, measures, and analytical frameworks emanating from the field of entrepreneurship. Thus, there is at once in rural entrepreneurship, too little sense of what constitutes modern rurality and too little sense of what constitutes modern entrepreneurship, especially since both are evolving at an accelerating rate. While this is, to some extent, true for many fields of management research, the specific circumstances related to rural entrepreneurship are poignant, colorful, and illustrative of key steps the field must take to correct its course. The question now becomes: How will we respond? Does management's approach to rural entrepreneurship suggest that we are ready or remiss?

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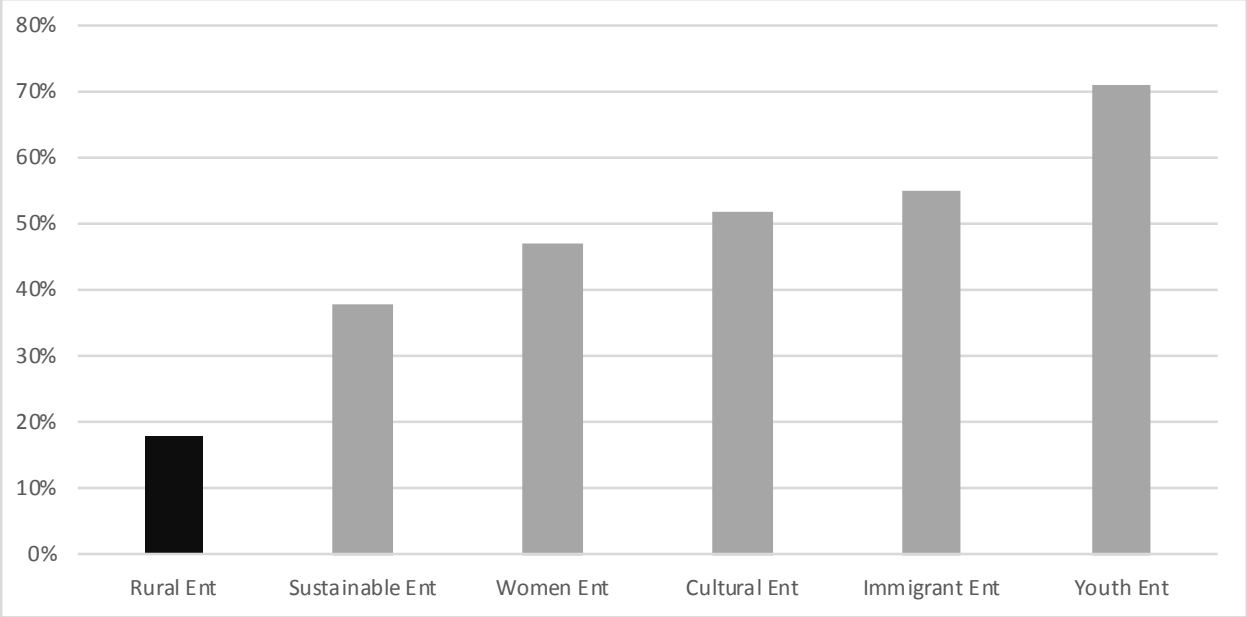
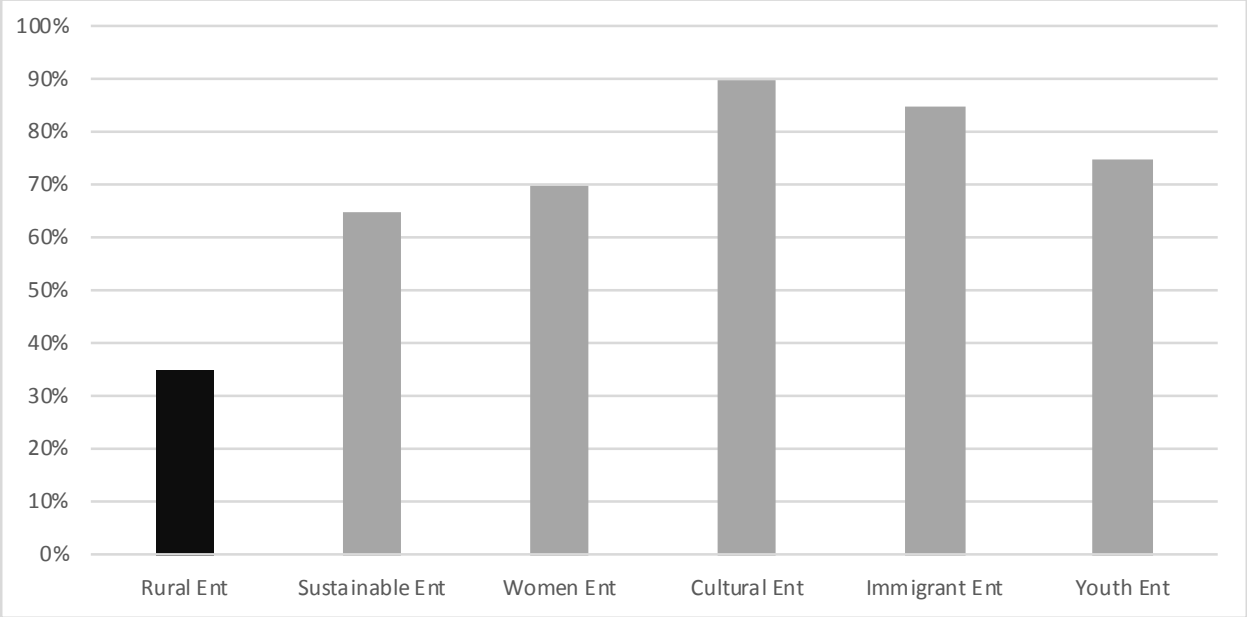
Figure 1: Out-of-Field Citation Rates



Percentage of citations from outside scholars' home field for a random sample of journal articles on each topic

Figure 2: Citation Rates of Mainstream Entrepreneurship Theories



Percentage of articles citing entrepreneurship theories developed in management or entrepreneurship journals

Figure 3: Interlocking Methodologies in Re-Imagining Rural Entrepreneurship

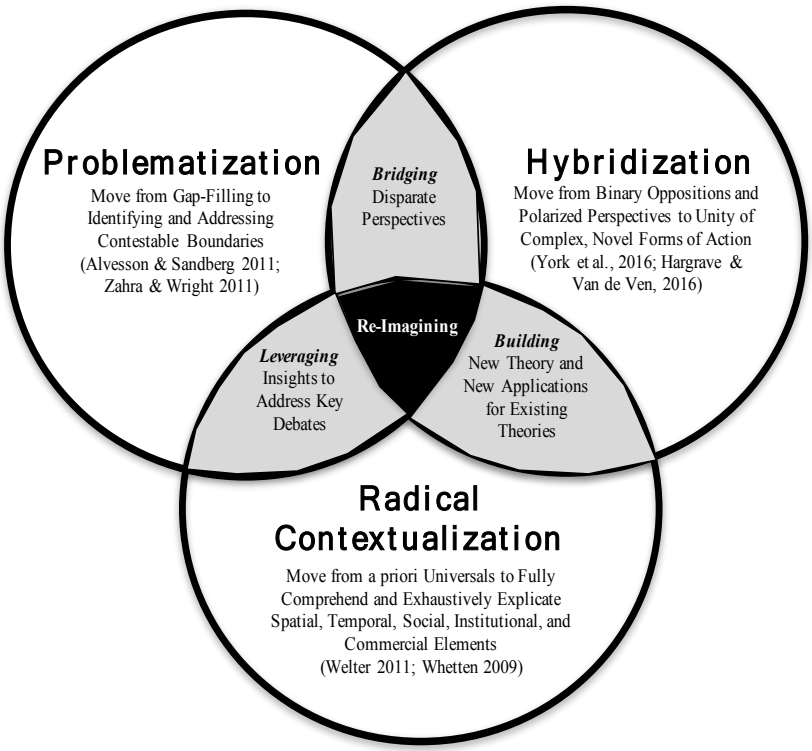


Table 1 – Common Rural-to-Urban and Urban-to-Rural Start-up Models

Business Sector	New Business Start-Ups Growth Rate (2000-2015)	
	Rural	Urban
Software development	117%	16%
Packaged organics	13%	124%
Business consulting	145%	27%
Woodworking	8%	24%
Small-scale manufacturing	29%	(12%)
Call centers	34%	(8%)
Landscaping and nurseries	1%	17%
Veterinarians	(3%)	15%
Custom clothing	18%	13%
Internet service providers	38%	(14%)
Jewellery	22%	53%
Artisanal foodstuffs	48%	231%
Eco-tourism	70%	85%

Source: U.S. Census, SBA, and NFIB

Table 2: Implications and Opportunities in Re-Imagining Rural Entrepreneurship

	Problematization	Hybridization	Radical Contextualization
Description:	Addressing tensions between competing explanations of entrepreneurship in rural environments	Fusing explanations and frameworks from urban and rural environments to synthesize common approaches to entrepreneurial action	Re-embedding entrepreneurial action back into local environments. Behaviors most vividly conveyed and understood in context (Welter 2011)
Definition:	The dialectical approach to theory building where research questions are developed through contrasting and exploring differences in the fundamental assumptions of specific theories.	The utilization of bridging logics to fuse binary oppositions together through challenging the underlying oppositional logics.	An approach that accentuates the complete diversity of actions expressive of a phenomenon by identifying and explicating the idiosyncratic nature, richness and dynamics of individual actions.
Purpose:	Generate novel research questions to explore the deep complexities of rural venturing	Eliminate oppositional logics that inflate the contrast between urban and rural venturing	Invigorate action research that is richly informed and shaped by local contextual factors
Future Research Directions & Representative Questions:	• Rural venturing provides an alternative innovation pathway through which novel forms of entrepreneurial action emerge. • The sparseness of local network both enables and constrains novel forms of action to emerge. It enables by allowing action that does not conform to the prevailing institutional logics to emerge but constrains as it limits the diffusion of such practices. • **RQ1:** How does the complex interaction of alternative social, cultural, and technological logics in rural venturing yield novel innovations? • **RQ2:** How do sparse networks both enable and constrain the ability of rural ventures to specialize in niche products and business models?	• Re-emergence of craft entrepreneurship as a relevant model of labor that re-unites identity, labor, and economic vitality • Rural brokers bridge geographic, social, and cultural distance through linking actors across sparse networks. • Meso-level elaboration of the purported urban-rural divide, separating the veridical from the non-veridical. • **RQ3:** To what extent does the growing contingency of labor in digital environments shift individuals into craft labor practices as the mode of re-integrating social identity and economic gains? • **RQ4:** How does the effectiveness of brokering strategies change as brokers span various forms of geographic, cultural, and social distance across sparse networks?	• Inclusion of entrepreneurs marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, education, age and locale. • Overcome “hidden in plain view” phenomenon. Rediscover illuminating stories of everyday entrepreneurs, including those in BOP contexts. • **RQ 5:** Are there local solutions to wicked problems, such as the ways that local resource constraints prompt radical action in response to global instabilities brought about by climate change? • **RQ6:** Can models and methods that disaggregate common conceptions of entrepreneurial action elucidate sources of rural stasis and dynamism? • **RQ7:** What drives homegrown rural entrepreneurship versus “importable” opportunities from urban-based models? Why is there variance in the identification of local assets?