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Gender and Entrepreneurship in the New Era: New Perspectives on the Role of Gender and Entrepreneurial Activity

<https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2022-0228>

Received May 31, 2022; accepted June 21, 2022

Abstract: The topics of gender and entrepreneurship have been of great scholarly interest since the eighties. In this invited editorial, we provide an overview of the evolution of the field of gender and entrepreneurship. Specifically, we consider the evolution of the field by highlighting the importance of context and the need to consider gender in all future research examining 'entrepreneurial activity'. Drawing on a contextualized approach we provide an overview of the six articles in this curated special issue with the aim of increasing our understanding of women's entrepreneurial activity. Finally, we conclude with some suggestions for future research. We hope this invited editorial will spur deeper research at the intersections between gender and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: gender, entrepreneurship, context, intersectionality, Covid-19

1 Introduction

Despite the reported social and economic benefits of women's entrepreneurial activity globally, entrepreneurship continues to remain a male-dominated phenomena (Hughes et al. 2012). According to the 2017 Global Entrepreneurship Report (GEM), women are considerably less likely to start new businesses than men (Ahl 2004; Dheer, Li, and Treviño 2019; Heavlow 2017; Kelley et al. 2016). Research at the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship has demonstrated that entrepreneurship is gendered (Ahl 2006; Henry, Foss, and Ahl 2016).

Gender, in sociological terms, is understood as a social construction which distributes power through social network relations such that it elevates the male

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and the masculine and subordinates the female and the feminine (Treanor and Marlow 2021). Gender is performative, individuals ‘do gender’ through their behaviours, it does not have a biological basis; one performs and is performed by gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). In adopting ‘gender as a lens’, gender and entrepreneurship scholarship moved away from comparatively framed research, employing biological sex as a variable to examine the differences between women and men entrepreneurs, to explore how gender influences entrepreneurial behaviour (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018).

However, the typical focus upon women entrepreneurs within gender and entrepreneurship research limits our understanding and theorisation of gender as women become the symbolic category, and ‘woman’ becomes synonymous with ‘gender’ (Linstead and Pullen 2006). Accordingly, Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) called for a broader view of gender that reflects the diversities of gender within contemporary societies and thus, necessitates a move away from the dominant focus upon a mythologised female entrepreneur – isolated by her sex and defined by a gender binary.

Increasingly the influence of context upon the entrepreneurial proclivity, experiences and outcomes of individuals have come to be recognised (Welter 2020). While this was often characterised by research exploring different or comparative country contexts, there are calls for greater attention to be paid to examining entrepreneurial activity within different spatial, economic and social contexts (Jaim and Islam 2018), and most recently, for research to explore the gendering of contexts (Welter 2020). This necessitates adoption of an interpretivist perspective to examine how gender is constructed at the micro, inter-personal level, and how it is then produced and reproduced through multilevel processes (Brickell 2006) within organisations and societies which then shape individual behaviours at the micro, inter-personal level. In this way, studies can inform our understanding of how such gendered contexts are produced and maintained through their subsequent influence on the sense-making and actions of individuals.

Such observations suggest that to advance debate regarding women’s entrepreneurship, we need to consider gender in all its iterations and to also consider the context(s) in which entrepreneurship takes place. Consequently, the purpose of this invited editorial is to revisit some of the existing trends and themes relating to gender and entrepreneurship, and to highlight avenues of potentially fruitful, future research. We begin by providing a brief overview of the development of the gender and entrepreneurship field. We conclude by offering some suggestions for future research in this area.

2 Revisiting the Debate About Gender and Entrepreneurship

With a focus upon individuality, actor agency and personal achievement, entrepreneurship occupies a dominant space within contemporary political and socio-economic discourse, wherein it is promoted as a solution to a diverse range of global challenges (Ahl and Marlow 2021). However, the gendered nature of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship policy is not recognised. While the field of gender and entrepreneurship is relatively young, it is constantly evolving (Henry, Foss, and Ahl 2016). As Holmquist and Sundin (1988:1) observed, entrepreneurship research was largely undertaken *‘by men, for men and about men’*. This resulted in a masculine entrepreneurship discourse, wherein men were prioritized as the natural foci of normative practice (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018) and women were positioned as subordinate to men in the context of entrepreneurial endeavour (Ahl 2006).

A deficit discourse emerged where women were regarded as a *“problem”* (Carter 2000) because of their lack of ambition and entrepreneurial competence (Ahl and Marlow 2021; Foss et al. 2019). This deficit discourse within policy documents and entrepreneurship research positioned women as needing to be fixed (Ahl 2006); Marlow (2020) highlights the fallacy of this underperformance narrative summarised by the sentiment, “if only women were more like men” (Marlow and McAdam 2013, p. 10).

Critical, feminist analyses of the gendered discourse and construction of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship emerged in the late 1990s. This work recognized the negative impact of the masculine construction of entrepreneurship upon women. Ahl (2006) illustrated how this deficit discourse emerged as social constructions of masculinity mapped onto entrepreneurship, while constructions of femininity, uncritically transposed upon women as a sex category, placed them at a remove from the entrepreneurial norm. The gendered entrepreneurial discourse privileged those associated with masculinity [men] above those associated with femininity [women] as women were designated as an oppositional category and attributed ‘outsider status’ (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018). Such approaches have led to a significant degree of work scholarly activity, both in terms of scope and sophistication, focussed upon how gender constrained women’s entrepreneurial activity, experiences and outcomes (Dy et al. 2017). To advance understanding and theorisation in this field, research exploring the multiplicity of genders within contemporary societies involving nuanced explorations of the interplay between diverse genders and context is advocated (Ahl and Marlow 2021; Kelley et al. 2016; Welter 2020).

3 Overview of the Curated Special Issue Articles

The following section provides an overview of the six papers comprising the curated special issue. The papers draw largely upon quantitative methods to explore women's entrepreneurial activity and behaviours in different contexts across the entrepreneurial process, from opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial intention through to enterprise education and training, start-up, and growth. We highlight the contextualized approach to understanding women's entrepreneurial activity within each of the six papers (see Table 1 for an overview of papers).

The antecedents of entrepreneurial action include opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention; as such, these have attracted research interest in mainstream and gender and entrepreneurship research communities (Shane and Venkataramn 2000). However, Cavich and Chinta (2021) highlight that the relationship between opportunity recognition and the entrepreneurial intent of nascent entrepreneurs remains empirically underdeveloped in their paper, *'Nascent Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, and the Moderators of Race, Gender, and Government Support'*. They explore this relationship in a narrow geographic context, that of Florida, in order to illuminate the influence of a given context and the perceived government support therein upon the intention of 1246 minority, nascent entrepreneurs to start a business. This reflects prior research establishing that the opportunity recognition of nascent entrepreneurs can be enhanced or constrained both by their perception of the context and the actual context itself (Arenius and Minniti 2005; Mary George et al. 2016), given that the context influences the nascent entrepreneur's belief in their abilities to be successful in their entrepreneurial endeavours in that context. Cavich and Chinta (2021) found government support, education and opportunity recognition to be statistically significant factors in explaining variation in entrepreneurial intent. While opportunity recognition significantly affects entrepreneurial intent, the strength of this is moderated by government support and gender, but not by racial minority. This differential influence of context upon individuals, related to their categories of social belonging, underpins calls for future research to adopt an intersectional lens (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018); a theme we revisit again in the last paper in our special issue.

Ghatak and Bhowmick (2021) explore the interplay of push and pull factors upon the entrepreneurial intentions of women. The literature highlights that many women who encounter a *'glass ceiling'* in their workplace are motivated to exit their careers and start their own business to circumvent such constrained vertical career progression. It is also recognised that entrepreneurial intention (EI) is a precursor

Table 1: Overview of special issue articles.

Authors	Research question(s)	Theoretical perspective	Sample	Treatment of gender	Findings in relation to gender and entrepreneurship
Wolfe et al.	Examine the unique differences in the experience of newness and smallness between male and female informal entrepreneurs in Brazil	Organizational ecology	2562 Brazilian informal firms	Biological/sex	Liabilities of newness may reign strongly for female-owned informal firms who may eventually find it difficult to formalize,
Conley and Billimoria	Compare the obstacles to growth experienced and the mitigating strategies employed by minority-owned entrepreneurs through studying black- and white-owned, and male- and female-owned businesses.	Minority and women's entrepreneurship drawing upon Weber's disadvantage theory	Semi-structured interviews with 31 entrepreneurs of high revenue firms	Not defined	Black and female entrepreneurs often faced racial discrimination and gender bias obstacles to their business growth. Such entrepreneurs draw upon various forms of social capital, their networks and relationships, to overcome the barriers to business growth they encountered
Cavich and Chinta	How does gender and context influence the opportunity recognition – entrepreneurial intentions relationship?	Entrepreneurial intentions	1246 nascent entrepreneurs in Florida U.S.A	Biological/sex	In Florida, women's ability to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities is significantly more likely to influence their entrepreneurial intentions than it is for their male counterparts. Female entrepreneurs who go through accelerator programmes are more likely to receive venture capital finance than women who do not.
Dams et al.	The impact of accelerators, as entrepreneurship education and training (EET) interventions, upon start-up business performance	Human capital theory	1500 startups in the U.S.A between 2007 and 2014	Biological/sex	The influence of the pull factors is higher than push factors in general for women's entrepreneurial intentions in the sub-continent.
Ghatak and Bhowmick	How do interpersonal motivators and context affect women's entrepreneurial intentions?	Push-pull framework for motivation	302 working women across Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka	None	

Table 1: (continued)

Authors	Research question(s)	Theoretical perspective	Sample	Treatment of gender	Findings in relation to gender and entrepreneurship
De Clercq et al.	When and how does family-to-work conflict discourage women from adopting an entrepreneurial orientation?	Job demands – Resources model	200 women entrepreneurs from Ghana	None	Challenging situations at the family-work interface can influence the entrepreneurial decision making of women entrepreneurs.

to new venture creation (Liñán and Fayolle 2015); thus, this paper explores how push factors, such as experiencing a glass ceiling and a need for recognition, may influence the EI of women. Further, contextual pull factors (such as family support) are also investigated to explore whether they mediate this effect. Of particular interest is the finding that family support moderates the glass ceiling – EI relationship such that, older women who are mothers will rely upon higher levels of family support to engage in entrepreneurial activity. This is reminiscent of the Brush et al. 5 M model which illustrates the family embeddedness of women's entrepreneurial activity (Brush, deBruin, and Welter 2009). While the majority of gender and entrepreneurship research derives from North America and Europe, this study was undertaken with a sample of 302 working women from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka which are considered patriarchal societies; contexts wherein women's traditional gender roles and family responsibilities can constrain their entrepreneurial activity (Jaim 2022).

De Clercq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl's (2021) paper, *'Tacking into the Wind: How Women Entrepreneurs can Sail Through Family-to-Work Conflict to Ensure their Firms' Entrepreneurial Orientation'*, explores this issue of family-work conflict in the Ghanaian context; a country with a collectivist culture wherein women are expected to prioritise their familial responsibilities. This quantitative study investigates the relationship between women experiencing such family-to-work conflict and their adoption of an entrepreneurial orientation in their business, finding the effect is mediated by work-related emotional exhaustion and moderated by both family-to-work enrichment and family support at home. The study confirms that challenging situations at the family-work interface can influence decision making (Yu et al. 2018) such that exhausted women will adopt a more conservative entrepreneurial orientation whereas women who have family support, such that household members contribute to housework, may have sufficient resources to be more entrepreneurial. Securing that practical family support may not be as easy as the paper title suggests, however, given the gender role expectations and stereotypes within this country context.

Turning attention away from gendered family and formal workplace contexts, Wolfe, Pereira, Patel and Williams (2021) undertake a comparative analysis of the influence of liabilities of newness and smallness for male and female informal entrepreneurs. Informal and part-time entrepreneurial activity is often a pre-cursor for formal business start-up. Their paper, *'Are the Liabilities of Newness and Smallness the Same for Male and Female Informal Entrepreneurs? Evidence from Brazil'*, presents a quantitative analysis of 2562 informal entrepreneurs in the developing market context of Brazil, a highly patriarchal country. Male owned firms experienced a linear relationship between age and revenue whereas female-owned firms experienced an inverted U-shaped relationship between age and revenue. The authors

contend that as female-owned firms age, lender or investor reticence stemming from gendered stereotypes around women's financial management ability and business acumen may abate, meaning women can access financial resources. This facilitates business and revenue growth. However, women-owned firms then experience a decline. This could relate to inter-generational succession issues (Kubíček and Machek 2019; Mustafa, Elliott, and Zhou 2019) and/or, as the business and its ownership becomes better known, may reflect gender discrimination on behalf of customers. This echoes research highlighting that women entrepreneurs cannot escape gendered stereotypes and attitudes through career exit or leaving a particular workplace context. The gendered challenges they face in employment are mirrored in self-employment (Treanor and Marlow 2021), even in informal enterprise.

Given the traditional deficit discourse, effective training and entrepreneurial support interventions for women entrepreneurs have received significant research interest, particularly since many of these focus their support upon high-growth, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) businesses which retain masculine cultures despite women's increasing numerical presence (Treanor and Marlow 2021). Business incubators and accelerators have typically been staffed by men and are considered gendered contexts (Marlow and McAdam 2015) and, as such, may offer useful contexts for future research. In this special issue, Dams et al. (2021) undertake a quantitative study to explore the impact of accelerators, considered as an education and training intervention that increases human capital, upon women entrepreneurs. In their paper, *'Impact of Accelerators, as Education & Training Programs, on Female Entrepreneurs'*, they draw upon a sample of over 1500 entrepreneurs, including STEM entrepreneurs, from two different accelerators in different U.S. States. The findings highlight women who participated in accelerator programmes were more likely to attain equity finance than women who did not avail of this support.

Intersectional analyses explore the influence of social positioning and the cumulative disadvantage and compounding of discrimination that can ensue from multiple categories of social belonging (Holvino 2010) upon the proclivity, experiences and returns from entrepreneurship for different individuals (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018). The contribution from Conley and Bilimoria (2021), in this special issue, helps to illustrate the potential of such research. In their qualitative paper, *'Barriers and Mitigating Strategies of Entrepreneurial Business Growth: The Role of Entrepreneur Race and Gender'*, the authors undertake 31 semi-structured, personal interviews. Given the small sample size and composition of the sample they were not able to undertake a full intersectional analysis; however, their findings highlight that while accessing finance is a challenge for all firms, the greater challenge faced by women and black-owned businesses is often a consequence of gender and race discrimination. While all entrepreneurs were found to

draw upon various forms of social capital, their networks and relationships to overcome the barriers to business growth they encountered, minority entrepreneurs would require assistance to establish the banking relationships that white men enjoyed. In addition to highlighting relevant future research avenues, a key finding from this study was that Government diversity and preferential procurement programmes help ‘level the playing field’ and contribute to positive societal effects through synergistic relationships and cooperation. Diversity and preferential procurement programmes are a potential vehicle to enable minority businesses to access mainstream procurement systems given participants in this study report their positive effect upon business growth.

Future research is likely to continue to explore gendered contexts such as business programs which includes business incubators, accelerators and science parks, and their effectiveness for different individuals based on their gender and/or other categories of social belonging. In recognition of the differential positioning of individuals and so, the scale of disadvantage, discrimination and relative barriers they face, it is also likely that research will explore the effectiveness of supports and interventions to identify how women and other marginalised or minority entrepreneurs can most effectively be supported in the post-Covid era.

4 Future Research Directions

Exploring the nuances and diversity associated with gender, and how this shapes entrepreneurial activity, is essential to advance debate. The six papers in this curated special issue, each highlight the importance of taking both gender and context into consideration when exploring entrepreneurial activity and each suggest avenues for further research: predominately in relation to quantitative analyses. We also suggest potential opportunities for qualitative research in relation to gendered contexts and intersectional analyses.

4.1 Gendered Contexts

As outlined in the introduction, the importance of context has been increasingly recognised and incorporated within entrepreneurship research (Patriotta and Siegel 2019; Welter 2011). Welter (2011) highlighted that context and entrepreneurial actions are interdependent and, also, multiple, multi-level and potentially interdependent. Welter (2020) encourages researchers to consider more deeply the gendering of contexts in studies exploring gender and entrepreneurship, recognising that gender shapes and is shaped by context. Considering the context within

which research is being conducted, its influence upon the understandings and behaviors of research participants, their perceived choices and potential entrepreneurial outcomes, is essential to ensure we do not overclaim but, instead, recognise the context-dependent nature of our research findings and theory development (Chan and Mustafa 2021).

The global Covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented within our lifetimes, providing a similar context and challenges for most entrepreneurs. However, Government policy responses mandating school and business closures, combined with the typical division of domestic responsibilities within households (including child and elder care and home-schooling) along traditional gender lines, resulted in women entrepreneurs experiencing disproportionate disadvantage. The literature highlights the challenges women entrepreneurs face as a consequence and illustrates their adaptive and self-organizing capability and their solutions for recovery and business continuity (Dvouletý, de Arroyabe, and Mustafa 2021; Manolova et al. 2020). However, much of this evidence has been premised on the experiences of women in Western developed contexts (Chmura 2020). In contrast, Jaim (2022) highlights that women entrepreneurs in highly patriarchal, developing nations can face even greater challenges. Accordingly, future research employing qualitative approaches may be particularly valuable in exploring the gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs, and the impacts upon their businesses in different country contexts, particularly in developing nations, both during and after COVID-19. We would also encourage such research to undertake longitudinal analyses to explore these impacts and uncover women's creative responses to business recovery.

Considering gendered national contexts and related policies may inform critiques challenging assumptions about the positive effects of entrepreneurial activity upon women. For instance, the prevalent neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives, which remove the female subject from contextual and structural constraints, suggest that women should seize the opportunities offered by entrepreneurship despite their being disproportionately constrained by gendered structural challenges (Ahl and Marlow 2021). Similarly, the potentially deleterious effects upon women's mental health and well-being has been highlighted as a consequence of a gendered STEM professional context, which constrains women's career progression and engagement in entrepreneurial activity, in tandem with postfeminist discourses that simultaneously blame the women for their gendered career outcomes due to the assumed meritocratic advancement available within neoliberal societies (Treanor and Marlow 2021; Treanor, Marlow, and Swail 2021). Hence, greater critical evaluation of the potential promise of entrepreneurship can help develop nuanced understandings of the benefits and challenges of entrepreneurial activity for women. This research also illustrates the potential for

exploring gendered contexts at the meso level, that of professions or individual organisations or areas, in addition to macro, societal or country level studies. Exploring the influence of changing contexts also affords interesting research opportunities, such as the work of Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010) exploring the influence of a different country context upon displaced refugee women's entrepreneurship within the MENA region.

4.2 Intersectionality

In their call to rethink gender and entrepreneurship research, Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) called for scholars to move beyond gendered analysis of entrepreneurial activity to also acknowledge the importance of context, place and social positionality in influencing women's entrepreneurship. Such research can offer a deeper understanding of how different categories of social belonging can both enable and constrain women's entrepreneurial activity (Dy et al. 2017; Kelley et al. 2016). The recent work of Adeeko and Treanor (2022) highlights the influence that differential social positioning has on the entrepreneurial proclivity and outcomes of refugee women who left what is commonly referred to as the Global South to travel to the UK. While all the refugee women entrepreneurs in their study faced a similar experience, the different levels of human and social capital they possessed from their previous lives in their home countries was shown to influence their entrepreneurial activity and outcomes in the U.K. Thus, intersectional analyses afford greater nuance in our understanding of individual's differential outcomes from entrepreneurship and can truly assist in contextualising research findings at the micro individual or social category level. Accordingly, we believe that future researchers interested in gender and entrepreneurship can benefit greatly by adopting such approaches.

5 Conclusion

Women represent approximately half of the working-age population; yet, they remain underrepresented within some occupations and leadership positions; this under-representation informs their under-representation as entrepreneurs as well. However, the profile of women entrepreneurs is increasing and the development of gender and entrepreneurship research, and particularly critical gendered analyses, has improved our understanding of the challenges faced by women and effective supports to enhance parity of access and outcomes. Consequently, the field affords many opportunities for future researchers to better engage with

the topic and, in so doing, to further develop our understanding of the influence of gender upon entrepreneurial behaviours in different contexts.

In this invited editorial, we sought to provide a brief overview of the evolving field of gender and entrepreneurship research. Emphasising the influence of context, we provided an overview of the six articles in this curated special issue. Our overview of the six papers continues to highlight the importance of taking both gender and context into consideration when exploring entrepreneurial activity. We concluded with some brief suggestions for future research which highlight the opportunity for future scholars to explore the multiplicity of genders within contemporary societies, to avoid the term gender becoming a synonym for women. Thus, much remains to be understood about the influence of gender and context in relation to entrepreneurial activity. We hope future scholars accept this challenge.

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