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Contexts and gender – Looking back and thinking forward

Friederike Welter

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Friederike Welter

Contact:

Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (IfM) Bonn and University of Siegen, Germany

Postal address: IfM Bonn, Maximiliansstrasse 20, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

Email: welter@uni-siegen.de

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Purpose: The paper aims to illustrate the main contributions of the context-gender discussion in entrepreneurship research and its main developments over time, in order to identify promising future research avenues.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The paper builds on the author's extensive knowledge of the context-gender debate and on several recent overviews and reviews of the debate. It is written as essay, introducing its main themes through a personal reflection and complemented by a selective review of research on gendered contexts and women's entrepreneurship.

Findings: The context-gender discussion has moved forward. In a first wave of context-gender studies, research contextualized gender, considering the impact of contexts on women's entrepreneurship. Nowadays, research studies how contexts are gendered and how they are constructed in gendered ways, through for example, words, images, cognitions, as well as how women entrepreneurs can impact on and enact their contexts.

Originality/Value: This paper contributes novel insights into contextualizing gender and gendering contexts. It is unique in suggesting that a perspective on gendering contexts will allow to explore the diversity of entrepreneurship and further develop theories related to contexts and gender.

Keywords: context, contextualizing gender, gendering contexts, contextual entrepreneurship

Contexts and gender matter

Contexts are deeply gendered, and they matter in many more ways, both for us

personally and in our research, than we often imagine and are aware of. Let me illustrate

that with two little stories. After my doctoral studies, in 1993, I began to work as

researcher in a renowned policy research institute in Germany, in their research group

on small businesses. We were actively involved in presenting our research to business

associations, chambers, industry meetings. Can you imagine my growing frustration

when I was frequently approached by male participants of those meetings as the

secretary and asked for coffee, train connections, copies of an important paper and so

on? Probably not surprising then, that women's entrepreneurship became one of my

research topics. One of the first research projects I managed was a large-scale study on

women's entrepreneurship in Germany: We presented the first ever comprehensive

overview on the state and perspectives of women's entrepreneurship, and investigated

the institutional framework for women entrepreneurs (Leicht and Welter, 2004, Welter

et al., 2003). The more I learned about which institutions may have had the greatest

impact on women (entrepreneurs), the more I became aware of the stereotypes inherent

in the normative and cultural environments in my own home country: For example,

until the 1970s, West German women had to ask their spouse for permission to work –

without the spouses' signatures they could neither sign a labour contract nor open their

own personal bank account!

In this short essay, I will illustrate how the gender-context debate has moved

from its initial focus on contextualizing gender, towards considering the gendering of

contexts. I base my assessments on my own (and rather extensive) knowledge of the

respective context debate as reflected in my published and forthcoming works (e.g.,

Baker and Welter, 2017, Baker and Welter, 2018, Baker and Welter, forthcoming 2020, Welter, 2011, Welter, 2016, Welter, 2019a, Welter et al., 2019, Welter and Gartner, 2016) and complement this with a selective – and admittedly neither comprehensive nor systematic – review of the existing literature. The next section briefly introduces the context concept. I then look back, illustrating the main strands and contributions of the contextualizing gender debate in entrepreneurship research before I turn to looking forward, illustrating the insights of the newer debate on gendering contexts. The essay concludes with a few thoughts on where to go next.

Understanding contexts

The context theme has been widely treated and discussed in disciplines like anthropology, philosophy, behavioural sciences or language studies (see Baker and Welter, 2018, Baker and Welter, forthcoming 2020, for an overview and in-depth review). In the management disciplines, organization scholars were the first to discuss the topic (e.g., Capelli and Sherer, 1991, Johns, 2001, Johns, 2017, Rousseau and Fried, 2001). Contexts then referred to external circumstances, conditions, situations or environments that enable or constrain the study subject.

Entrepreneurship scholars initially understood contexts as "external environments" (Ucbasaran et al., 2001). In Welter (2011) I introduced a typology of contexts, distinguishing between "who", "where" and "when" dimensions. Where includes business, social, spatial and institutional contexts, when the historical and temporal dimensions. I also extended typical entrepreneurship dimensions: For example, the social context has been widely researched in our discipline, but mostly focusing on networks whilst household and family perspectives that had been discussed

in agricultural economics, are equally important for entrepreneurship. Similarly, Zahra and Wright (2011) suggest four context dimensions: spatial, time, practice and change; Zahra et al. (2014) extend this to incorporate business-related characteristics such as organizational, ownership and governance dimensions.

Whilst the earlier "environment" discussion saw these as independent from organizational behaviour or entrepreneurial actions, Welter (2011) drew attention to that contexts and entrepreneurial actions are interdependent, as well as that contexts are interdependent and cut across levels. Over the past decade, our understanding of the interplay of contexts and (women) entrepreneurship has developed: Entrepreneurs are now seen as constructing their contexts. This also suggests a more complex view on how the different contexts interact with gender, how contextualizing happens, and which role gender plays in that (Baker and Welter, 2018, Welter et al., 2014): Entrepreneurs, regardless of gender, are active change agents and we all contribute, voluntarily or involuntarily, to gendering contexts – just take another look at my anecdotes in the introduction. It is this development in relation to gender I will explore further.

Contextualizing gender: How contexts impact women entrepreneurship
Initially, research combining contextual ideas with a gender perspective, focused on the impact of contexts on whether, where, when and how women could enter entrepreneurship and develop their businesses. Studies analysed the impact of the various social, spatial and institutional contexts on women's entrepreneurship, in order to identify constraints and enablers for women entrepreneurs in setting up and growing their businesses.

In particular, the *institutional context* and its impact on women entrepreneurs have been very popular research themes, probably because institutions, especially regulatory ones, are easy to identify and measure. Studies have identified a whole bundle of institutions that impact on the nature and the extent of women's entrepreneurship (e.g., Estrin and Mickiewicz, 2011, Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle, 2015, Naegels et al., 2018, Pathak et al., 2013, Roomi et al., 2018). For example, regulatory institutions like tax policies can influence whether women have the required financial resources to set up businesses. Childcare infrastructure directly impacts on the time available for business activities and also influences whether women face a trade-off between family and their own professional career because they either cannot afford childcare or adequate structures do not exist (Kreide, 2003). Property rights influence women's access to resources, for example, their access to external financial capital where banks require securities such as property ownership. Family policies also reflect prevailing gender orders, which in turn impact on the degree to which the labour market participation of women on equal terms with men and women entrepreneurship is seen as desirable (Elam and Terjesen, 2010, Sjöberg, 2004).

Also, the labour market participation of women depends on whether they can reconcile their own and society's expectations as to what is expected of a good mother, for example, with their employment. Research has shown normative institutions such as the predominant gender ideology in a culture to have an enormous impact on women's entrepreneurship (e.g., Baughn et al., 2006, Hechavarría and Hechavarría, 2016, Roomi et al., 2018, Welter and Smallbone, 2008, Welter et al., 2006). In most instances, normative institutions appear to override the regulatory framework, so that even where regulatory institutions favour women's entrepreneurship, norms may suggest differently

and thus negatively impact on women's entrepreneurship. For example, for a country which generally is perceived as having a high level of gender equality – Denmark, Neergaard and Thrane (2011) illustrate that those institutions that create equality in public life and labour markets, simultaneously perpetuate outdated gendered roles, because they discriminate against women who are burdened with double responsibilities for their businesses and families. This in turn may hinder them both to enter entrepreneurship and to further develop their businesses, because of time-constraints.

Generally, societies that – implicitly or explicitly – ascribe housebound and family-related roles to women, mark entrepreneurship as a less-desirable career choice for women. Gender roles prescribe what is seen as typically male and typically female behaviour; and these discourses also influence policies to support women's entrepreneurship. For example, Ahl and Nelson (2015) have shown how women entrepreneurs are positioned as the "other" in policies. They are considered as "others" because they do not adhere to the male norm of entrepreneurship. Policies building on these assumptions both contribute to perpetuating gender roles and to constructing women's entrepreneurship as something which is of less value because the prevailing male entrepreneurship norm underlying these support policies is modelled on entrepreneurship as high-growth and innovative. Not surprisingly, then, that women appear to react strongly to normative institutions and that they require strong normative support (Baughn et al. 2006).

Welter and Smallbone (2008) emphasize the importance of also taking the historical and temporal contexts and their interplay with spatial and institutional contexts into account. Results from a large survey and in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan, a former Soviet country in Central Asia, illustrated how

normative institutions such as the prevailing gender roles that governed Uzbek society both during and after Soviet times, impacted on women's labour market participation. We also drew attention to the interplay of spatial with social and institutional contexts. Traditional neighbourhood communities as well as the resurge of patriarchal values in the Uzbek society after socialism had collapsed contributed to the re-emergence of traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, although we already mentioned that women (entrepreneurs) could also influence their contexts, our main perspective at that time was still one of "contexts matter, they are out there and influence who enters entrepreneurship, where and when" (Welter, 2019a).

Such a perspective was (and, sometimes, still is) common in most studies which analyzed normative and cultural institutions as major impact on women's entrepreneurship. The value of all these studies lies in that they have drawn attention to *contexts and their role as constraints or enablers* for women's entrepreneurship. I believe that research on contextualizing gender was a necessary stock-taking exercise to identify the general impact of contexts on women's entrepreneurship. Over time, such research has become more nuanced, even if it still follows the dictum of "contexts are out there and impact entrepreneurship". For example, Micelotta et al. (2018) examine the role of industry-specific sociocultural institutions on gendered new venture creation in the sports industry, identifying liabilities that new ventures face if they are not aligned with gender-specific normative institutions. Wieland et al. (2019) illustrate how gendered cognitions nudge "women into lower-return ventures in less lucrative industries", whilst Wheadon and Duval-Couetil (2019) illustrate the potential negative impact on women's entrepreneurship if industries and concepts such as technology are portrayed as masculine.

Fewer studies, however, initially looked at the interplay of different contexts, considered place and history, the temporal contexts or the agency of women entrepreneurs in influencing their contexts. This has changed over time towards an explicit perspective which focuses on how contexts become gendered. Brush et al. (2009) paved the way towards this perspective, suggesting a gender-aware framework to study women's entrepreneurship, that already pointed to the multiple levels of contexts as influences on the entrepreneurial actions of women. I will now turn to explore the gendering contexts theme in more detail.

Gendering contexts: How contexts are constructed and enacted

Since the 2000s, the field on women's entrepreneurship has increasingly moved from taking sex as a – control – variable (and, often, controlling it away) towards applying a gender lens (e.g., Bird and Brush, 2002, Greer and Greene, 2003, Hughes et al., 2012, Yousafzai et al., 2018). The "gender as lens" approach suggests that differences between women and men-owned firms in size, industries, enterprise development, entrepreneurial goals and other aspects are indicative of gendered contexts (Welter et al., 2014) and that this gendering of contexts is incredibly heterogeneous across geographies, cultures, religions, class, and many other dimensions of contexts (Baker and Welter, 2017). As soon as we pay attention to individual differences, acknowledging, for example, that individuals bring different expectations, knowledge, and motivations to their entrepreneurial ventures, we become aware of that contexts are gendered in much more fundamental ways, reflecting structural and cultural differences. From a gender-as-lens perspective, gender is not a given, resulting in typical female or male characteristics of a person, but it is socially constructed. Not surprising, then, that

the context-gender debate has turned to study the construction of contexts, as we have come to recognize that not only do contexts impact on entrepreneurs, but that all of us – entrepreneurs and researchers alike – "do context" (Baker and Welter, 2017), that is we play an active role in constructing the contexts we live and work in. In the following, I will explore three facets of that argumentation: why individual differences matter in this regard, how contexts are gendered through words and images, and how women entrepreneurs (can) do context.

Individual differences matter for gendering contexts

Many research studies have shown wide differences between outcomes, survival rates, goals of women- and men-owned businesses (e.g., Du Rietz and Henrekson, 2000, Justo et al., 2015, Watson, 2002, Watson et al., 2017, Zolin et al., 2013). But, at the same time these studies also have shown that much of these differences decrease or even disappear once the wide array of contextual factors and their interplay are considered. This questions some of our taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the characteristics of women entrepreneurs and their ventures, such as "women own small and non-innovative firms, they do not want to grow" and the like. For example, women entrepreneurs often are considered as risk-averse compared to men entrepreneurs, and their risk aversion is seen as hindrance to (rapid) business growth and development. However, risk-taking takes on very different meanings for women and men in many places (Humbert and Brindley, 2015, Watson and Robinson, 2003), and risk-aversion also results from cultural and structural reasons than that it is an individual characteristic. Just think of a culture like Saudi-Arabia which, until recently, did not allow women to drive their own cars and go out in a car without male companions –

which impact will this have on the ways they assess risks, be that in personal or business life? Or think back to my example of Germany I told in the introduction, where until the 1970s, married women were not allowed to sign their own labour contracts or open their own bank accounts without approval from their husband – how will that influence their self-confidence, their risk-taking behaviour and their role in society?

Contexts are gendered through words and images

Recently, research has started to emphasize that contexts are constructed and enacted, not only through our actions, but through social relations, cognitions, words and images (Welter, 2019b, Welter and Gartner, 2016). Steyaert (2016) sees contextualization as a process and outcome of language and conversations. Words and pictures matter, because they generally influence our perceptions of the world and which options are available to us. In this regard, Hentschel et al. (2017) showed that women were less interested and perceived themselves as less fitting when an entrepreneurship programme was advertised using typical masculine images and/or a solely masculine form for entrepreneur.

Women entrepreneurs also suffer from discriminatory verbal and non-verbal language, even unintentionally because language favours the emergence and persistence of gendered contexts. This is supported by research looking into the stereotypical representation of women's entrepreneurship in various media that highlights how contexts become gendered through words and images (e.g., Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011, Ahl, 2004, Baker et al., 1997, Eikhof et al., 2013, Langowitz and Morgan, 2003). Achtenhagen and Welter (2011) and Ettl et al. (2016), for example, show that and how

the way women entrepreneurs are portrayed in media, both through the content and the language of articles, contributes to the overall social construction of women's entrepreneurship. Although women entrepreneurs, in this case in Germany, are increasingly visible in the public, the prevailing image of entrepreneurship still is portraying women as the "other", in contrast to the male norm of entrepreneurship. The language, metaphors and words that are used, transmit a reality of women's entrepreneurship, which reduces women to their sex and highlights their double burden instead of seeing them as successful entrepreneurs in the first instance. Research has confirmed that repeatedly. For example, Smith (2014) looked at photo images of women entrepreneurs, distilling a few archetypical gendered stereotypes: The Business Woman, the Matriarch, the Diva, and the Pink-Ghetto Girl. Where women cannot identify with these images and narratives, they may hesitate to consider entrepreneurship a viable career option. In this regard, a recent study by Byrne et al. (2019) illustrates that female entrepreneurial role models continue to present themselves as aligned to societal expectations, with their dominant narrative emphasizing them as "superwomen" capable of doing it all and reconciling business with family.

Research also has turned to study the interplay of language on business contexts, for example, its differing impact on the funding access for women and men entrepreneurs (e.g., Balachandra et al., 2019, Gorbatai and Nelson, 2015, Malmström et al., 2017). For example, investors tend to favour men by asking them positively framed questions and disfavour women by asking them negatively framed questions (Kanze et al., 2018). For the reality show "Shark Tank", Wheadon and Duval-Couetil (2018) illustrate how the content, the social interactions and the ways of communication between the "sharks" (potential investors) and the entrepreneurs constructs and

reinforces gendered stereotypes. Overall, gendered linguistic structures explain around 4% of the gender gap in early stage entrepreneurship (Hechavarría et al., 2018).

These and similar studies emphasize that contexts are gendered not solely through social structures and institutions, but also through words, the ways we talk to each other and the ways we see and look at each other, as well as through the images, prejudgements and stereotypes reflected in certain wordings, narratives and imagery.

How women entrepreneurs "do context"

Baker and Welter (2017) use the concept of "doing context", originally coined as "doing gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987), to describe and study the agency of entrepreneurs towards their different contexts. In Welter (2011), for example, I drew on female examples from former socialist countries in Central, Eastern Europe and Central Asia to illustrate how entrepreneurs could impact contexts and – eventually – contribute to changing them. Within the frame of the DIANA International Project in particular, much research on women's entrepreneurship has been published from – to us – unfamiliar cultural or institutional contexts, providing a rich (and, I believe, under-explored) evidence base on how women enact, change and defy their social, spatial, institutional and historical contexts as is reflected in the DIANA series of books and special issues of journals (see the lists in Brush et al., forthcoming 2020).

In Baker and Welter (forthcoming 2020), we review a number of studies that show the creativity of women entrepreneurs in challenging and gender-averse contexts, as illustrated by the papers published in a recent special issue of "Entrepreneurship & Regional Development" (Yousafzai et al., 2019), providing interesting and deep insights

into the variety of cultural and political environments for women's entrepreneurship and the manifold ways they move between, negotiate and reconcile or defy the demands of various, public and private contexts. For example, Villares-Varela and Essers (2019) illustrate how women entrepreneurs in the migrant economy used their transnational journeys as contextual resource to enact gender through entrepreneurship, either liberating themselves from patriarchal structures, reconfiguring gender, defending gender equality and diversity, or re-establishing their prior social status and complying with known gender relations from their country of origin. Xheneti et al. (2019) outline the process of negotiating business and family demands of women entrepreneurs operating informally in Nepal. Studies of Arab women entrepreneurs draw attention to the complexities of simultaneously "doing gender" and "doing context" to achieve career success in Lebanon (Tlaiss, 2019) and the creative but "'hidden' entrepreneurial enactment" of displaced Palestinian women entrepreneurs operating in Jordan (Al-Dajani et al., 2019). As Baker and Welter (forthcoming 2020) note "This and similar work celebrate the agency of socially excluded, marginalized and silenced groups", thus demonstrating the "value of critical perspectives on studying (women's) entrepreneurship by those our research too often renders ignored and silenced."

Where to next?

So far, I have outlined how the discussion on contexts, gender and entrepreneurship has developed over time, showing its initial grounding in a perspective that emphasized contexts as given, towards a perspective that sees contexts as constructed and gendered. Our current knowledge on contextual entrepreneurship, together with the gender theme,

offers avenues for promising future research and theory work. I will suggest a few ideas below.

Contextualizing is a process, and gendering contexts also. Both processes are socially constructed and enacted. Individuals not only do gender, but they also do contexts. Entrepreneurs are not passive in the light of contextual constraints, but they also influence and change their social, spatial and institutional contexts, as, for example, investigated in research that looks at empowerment, emancipation and women entrepreneurs (e.g., Al-Dajani et al., 2015, Jennings et al., 2016, Rindova et al., 2009). I suggest that we need much more research looking into the agency of entrepreneurs and other actors in gendering contexts, also going beyond an emancipation perspective, but understanding this agency as happening intentionally, involuntarily and as part of our everyday lives, actions and conversations. For example, can we theorize when and where (women) entrepreneurs actively enact contexts, and when and where this happens as a by-product? Can we identify "typical" contexts where (women) entrepreneurs routinely conceal their gender, and contexts in which they openly defy social, institutional and spatial gender orders? What can we learn from analyzing the gendering of contexts in various cultural, spatial and historical settings?

Also, a perspective that puts the gendering of contexts to the forefront, emphasizes that contexts are valorised. Contexts as such are not good or bad in terms of that they always enable or constrain entrepreneurship. It is the gendering – that is our actions, our narratives, our stereotyping – that attribute contexts with positive and negative values. And it is the individuals that then enact such gendered contexts and that understand their individual actions either being enabled or constrained by these gendered contexts. Again, this suggests that we need to pay much more attention to

entrepreneurial diversity, not only in the nature of entrepreneurship, but also in the ways entrepreneurs understand their world – through cognitions, talking and narrating as well as visualizing their contexts.

In order to adequately capture gendered contexts and their interplay with entrepreneurship, we also need to theorize differently, as put forward by Hamilton (2013), who suggests that we need to refuse the "othering" that still is visible in much of our current entrepreneurship concepts. One such example refers to the standard high-growth, high-technology, venture-capital backed model of Silicon Valley entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017) which – implicitly – positions women entrepreneurs as having deficits because they are not high-growth oriented, not venture capital backed and not innovative (Marlow and Swail, 2014). Instead, we need to put more emphasis on theorizing entrepreneurial diversity and differences, because it is variations and differences that matter. And as soon as we acknowledge that contexts are gendered, we can move forward to seeing, considering and analysing the varieties of (women's) entrepreneurship that otherwise and too often remain invisible to us.

For research on gender and entrepreneurship, this implies a close look at concepts we apply to study women entrepreneurship. For example, we would need a differentiated view on what constitutes business success and business performance (Ettl and Welter, 2012): Given that individual goals and motivations differ, depending on contexts and individual life cycles (Coleman, 2016), can we at all distinguish between business and personal success? How do we measure success, both at business and personal levels? How do personal and business goals interact and influence business development? How do we theorize the interplay between personal and business lives and entrepreneurial development? Or do we set this aside as an issue which only

pertains to women (entrepreneurs) and not men, equating women with a personal life that impacts on their businesses, but not men? Jennings and Brush (2013) suggest that we need to identify concepts and models that explain both economic and non-economic outcomes, allowing us to go beyond the general assumption of financial wealth creation as main goal for entrepreneurs to set up a new business.

Besides developing our theories further, we also will need to look for methodologies that allow us to adequately capture the gendering of contexts. One possible way forward is to pay more attention to how we narrate and visualize contexts and gender. In a forthcoming book, I have explored that further, in particular looking into the possibilities that arise, for example, through incorporating visual methodologies and images into our research, or for the potential of fine arts photography in making women's voices more explicit (Baker and Welter, forthcoming 2020). But we also could be more creative in how we present our research.

As soon as we apply a contextual perspective to entrepreneurship, we will be able to get deeper insights into the messiness and heterogeneity of everyday entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2019). Add gender and this becomes ever more complex. Nevertheless, I suggest it is worthwhile not least because our "real world" is messy and complex, and one of our responsibilities as researchers is to search for adequate explanations that can also serve as guidance for entrepreneurs and policymakers. However, we also need to move beyond equating gendered contexts with women's entrepreneurship only. Gender is not restricted to women but applies to all of us. The current and future discussion on gender and contexts has much to contribute to entrepreneurship research as such, both theoretically and methodologically – and I am

looking forward to continue that journey in my own work and to see your exciting ideas on "where to next".

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