

Introduction: an international multi-level research analysis

Kate V. Lewis, Colette Henry, Elizabeth J. Gatewood and John Watson

One of the many rich opportunities presented via an endeavour such as the Diana Project is to aggregate a cohort of researchers around a bounded topic of interest, and observe the way in which their discoveries both coalesce around key dimensions and break out to push forward the boundaries of understanding. An associated privilege of such a network is to seek from its members, and interested observers, written contributions to books that capture the vibrancy and value of those research activities. The international nature of the Diana network, and its associated activities such as conferences, is fertile ground for attaining the type of scope and scale that is often difficult to achieve in terms of linked individual research projects. We are fortunate to build on a fine tradition of Diana volumes (Brush et al., 2006; Brush et al., 2010; Hughes and Jennings, 2012) and it is our view that this current book has been no less successful in achieving its international ambitions. The 14 chapters in this volume span a wide geographic spread, and derive data from a diverse range of countries: the Czech Republic, the United States of America, China, Japan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Poland, Northern Ireland, Sweden, France, Slovenia and the Caribbean.

Rather than gender merely being a variable of inquiry, the range of topics for which gender is now used as a lens to understanding is as varied as it is impressive (Jennings and Brush, 2013). Taking a gendered perspective to exploring 'mainstream' constructs has now been legitimized, rather than gender remaining notable only in a discrete list of topics that are deemed particularly germane to women and/or gender researchers (Henry et al., 2013). This is in part a function of how far gender and entrepreneurship has come as a field, but also mirrors the rich myriad of ways in which women enact entrepreneurship in their daily lives (Garcia and Welter, 2013; Gatewood et al., 2003). As a reflection of this enrichment of the gendered entrepreneurship agenda, and as a tribute to the urgent calls from

scholarly leaders in the field to further extend the ambit of focus to move beyond work that 'recreates the idea of women as being secondary to men and of women's businesses being of less significance' (Ahl, 2006, p. 595), we deliberately sought contributions to this book that traversed two axes of exploration: the first was the continuum of conceptualizations of entrepreneurship in and of itself (that is, as a policy, a process, an act and/or an outcome), and the second was a spectrum of chapters that extended across the macro, meso and micro architecture of analysis. We were fortunate to achieve that objective and, as a result, have chosen to organize the work according to that structure. Each of the three parts – macro, meso and micro – is previewed in the remainder of this Introduction, along with brief vignettes of the chapters contained therein.

PART I: MACRO: THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM

The impact of the broader context (at the level of country, state and culture, and so on) on the entrepreneurial activity of firms and individuals is well established (Welter, 2011). Further, it is said to be particularly influential on women and, unfortunately, more often in a burdensome or disadvantageous fashion (Brush et al., 2009). Part I of the book contains five chapters that are oriented to this macro focus from a diverse range of vantage points, and spanning the theoretical–empirical spectrum. It opens with a chapter led by Diana founder Candida Brush, joined by colleagues Anne de Bruin and Friederike Welter. Their contribution is theoretical in nature and has, at its heart, the construct of embeddedness; something they describe as a 'basic building block' in understanding gender-driven differences in venture creation. They articulate the relevance of several forms of embeddedness (family, cultural and structural) to gendered considerations of entrepreneurship specifically, and they hypothesize in relation to the nexus of embeddedness (and variants of it) and gendered perceptions of desirability and feasibility in relation to start-up.

The second chapter of the book is an examination of gender and academic entrepreneurship in the context of Swedish incubator projects, and is authored by Diamanto Politis, Jonas Gabrielsson and Åsa Lindholm Dahlstrand. Echoing the terminology of the Part I title, it has a very strong ecosystem focus with its emphasis on unbundling the impact of institutionally based structures in, and around, university incubators. The multi-level research model that forms the core of the chapter reveals a number of findings, including the fact that the proportion of female-led incubator projects is impacted upon by both the proportion of female

faculty in senior positions at the associated university, and the presence of women on incubator boards. This, in turn, evidences that university based ecosystems are not impervious to (and, rather, are embedded in) broader gender structures.

Natalie Sappleton, in the third chapter of the macro-oriented part of the book, takes as her subject matter the discrimination women face in obtaining external financing for their ventures. Utilizing a sample from the United States of America, and gender congruency theory to underpin a quantitative methodology, she explores whether women in male-dominated fields suffer more perceived discrimination than women who are not in such sectors. An overarching thrust of her concluding argument is against the pervasiveness of 'sex-as-a-variable' approaches to the investigation of such issues, as it can create a masking effect. Rather, she delineates and evidences the need for, and importance of, within-category differences in groups separated by gender (rather than the undifferentiated approach to sampling that can be a common occurrence).

The next chapter of the book shifts geographic focus to the developing countries generally, and rural Vietnam specifically. Cuc Nguyen, Howard Frederick and Huong Nguyen examine the potential for rural entrepreneurship to be an economic growth stimulant, as well as an emancipatory pathway for women in the region who are constrained by a number of factors (and typically pushed to engage in necessity-driven forms of entrepreneurship). Whilst the women may enter self-employment via a particular route that may be perceived as negative in motivation terms, it is the lack of support architecture that actually prevents them from moving forward with their endeavours. This juxtaposition of original intent with willingness and desire to upskill once engaged demonstrates how such scenarios can be oversimplified, and consequently opportunities to scaffold women into even better positions via self-employment may be being missed.

The final chapter of Part I retains an Asian focus but moves to the economies of China and Japan. Kathryn Ibata-Arens examines the influence of national culture and cultural norms (including the maintenance of women in traditional roles within broader 'masculine societies') in relation to female entrepreneurship. Using a case-study-driven methodology, she seeks to unpack the potential influence of state policies and cultural norms on incidences of opportunity-driven women engaging in entrepreneurial behaviours. In doing so, she contrasts cultural approaches with those that are statist in nature, and concludes (in these cases) that infrastructure-related interventions and institutional barriers are more of an impediment to engagement by women than the pervasive impact of cultural norms.

PART II: MESO: FIRM-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The second part of the book takes the firm as its dominant unit of analysis, or lens. Our understanding of women in the context of entrepreneurship has been energetically advanced via studies that seek to unbundle or nuance the relationship between women and venture creation, leadership and management (Moore et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2012). Studies have sought to differentiate outcomes in management practice, enterprise performance and firm characteristics via gender comparative approaches. Whilst successful in many respects in revealing distinctions rooted in gender, firm-oriented approaches have also moved away from being dominated by those strategies primarily comparative in orientation, and now are also equally as likely to explore women-led firms in their own right and from the perspectives of excellence and gender-led behaviours (that is, not only in comparison with male counterparts) (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The balance of the four chapters that comprise this meso part of the book are weighted towards both approaches, with two taking a gender-specific lens to understanding, and two a comparative perspective.

Chapter 6 (by Alicia Robb and Susan Coleman) uses a sample of 200 entrepreneurs from the United States of America to interrogate differences according to gender in respect of attitudes and behaviours in relation to innovation. They found that many differences identified in the first phase of analysis (for example, women being more likely to innovate in the domain of practice; to not pursue intellectual property protection; and be more reticent to implement innovative ideas due to a perceived lack of 'how to' knowledge) did not remain significant when certain variables (such as age and firm size) were controlled for. Their conclusions expand on the implications of such methodologically oriented observations and the need for the broadest possible conceptualization of what innovation is (and is not) in relation to female entrepreneurs.

The following chapter (Chapter 7) takes France as its geographic locale and considers the implications for French family businesses of the lack of daughters on the succession pathway. Janice Byrne and Salma Fattoum shift away from what they term an essentialist approach to gender inequality, and situate their contribution at the intersection of person, firm, gender and context. They argue that not to pursue such an approach denies the heterogeneity of participation of women in the family business context and stifles further understanding of that diversity. A key conclusion of their chapter is that to reduce the gender-driven differences in family business succession to the differences in socialization experienced by men and women is a gross simplification, and an attribution that disempowers notions of female agency. Further, they add that it is not the

dominant reason for the absence of women; rather, they offer data that reveal the key roles that exclusion and separation play as deniers of experience for women in the family business context.

In Chapter 8, Karin Širec and Dijana Močnik report that, in the context of high-growth Slovenian firms, firm size mediated by gender is negatively related to firm growth. The authors also note that female entrepreneurs particularly resist the pursuit of high growth until a stable level of profitability is achieved. In identifying areas for further work, they note that there is a need for a better understanding of the firm growth related competencies required by female entrepreneurs (rather than just at the point of start-up).

In a similar vein, but contrasting global context, Mosfeka Jomaraty and Jerry Courvisanos in Chapter 9 also focus on gender in relation to high-growth firms, but in the context of the traditional Islamic society and developing-country context of Bangladesh. Their chapter, the last in this part of the book, takes cases of female-led, high-growth outliers. They conclude that in addition to the specific growth actions and practices implemented within the firm, the individual perceptions of self-efficacy and the growth aspirations of the women entrepreneurs themselves were critical to success.

PART III: MICRO: INDIVIDUALS AND DYNAMICS

The ‘person behind the firm’, embodied in sociological approaches that tend towards the privileging of the subjective and interpretive, are increasingly argued as being germane to understanding the enactment of female entrepreneurship (Hamilton, 2013; Lewis, 2013). This enriching of the body of knowledge relating to gender and entrepreneurship (frequently through narrative and life history) is one of the many advances of the modern turn of gendered understandings of entrepreneurship that has revealed not only why but how women engage. This part of the book includes five chapters that span a diverse range of foci, but all have stories of the female entrepreneur at their centre.

Part III opens with Chapter 10 in which Claire Leitch and Richard Harrison examine the networking behaviour of a group of Northern Irish women entrepreneurs. The novelty of their focus is that they emphasize the process of networking rather than the substance or structure of the networks that are formed by the women. One of the notable conclusions of their work is the importance for female entrepreneurs of ‘indirect reciprocity’ via generalized exchange (rather than close dyadic ties) in cementing the networking relationship and any potential ensuing benefits.

The subsequent chapter, authored by Stephanie Chasserio, Typhaine Lebègue, and Corinne Poroli, takes a gendered perspective on spousal support for French female entrepreneurs, in terms of both instrumental and emotional forms of support. Spousal support is often described as an asset for entrepreneurial women, and as a resource that can be harnessed to mitigate tensions that may emerge between the work and family domains. The authors of this chapter paint a contrasting picture in their elaboration, in that they describe how the spousal support offered can be tenuous and can alter in shape, form and efficacy according to the stage of the venture life-cycle.

Our focus shifts in Chapter 12 to the nature of the copreneurial dynamic in the Czech Republic. Here, authors Alena Křížková, Nancy Jurik and Marie Dlouhá note the invisible leadership of women in such dynamics (even if they were not technically owners or managers), and the tendency towards gender-oriented divisions of labour despite the supposedly copreneurial nature of the relationship. The authors observed some atypical splits (however, never in terms of labour in the home domain) but noted that the prevailing organization was towards culturally driven, gender-oriented norms. Utilizing a methodology that involved both partners being interviewed, the authors were also able to determine that the actual divisions of labour in the work domain were frequently incongruous with those described during the interview process.

The penultimate chapter of the volume is situated in the Caribbean, and through the use of the construct of entrepreneurial identity seeks to contribute understanding of how the reconciliation of work and family conflicts occurs in a cultural context with strongly traditional gender norms. Talia Esnard notes in her chapter the contradictory nature of the socio-cultural messages around expectations that women receive relative to the motivations and intentions of those same women who are determined to be enterprising.

The book closes with Chapter 14 by Ewa Lisowska who interrogates the impact of motherhood on women who are self-employed in the transition economy of Poland. She reports that self-employment is not the reported solution to the tensions such dual roles encapsulate, and that in some instances self-employment fuels the conflict by juxtaposing the role demands so acutely. At best, she describes self-employment as a potential easing mechanism, but notes that the inability of women to access institutional forms of childcare is an ongoing impediment to both active participation and fulfilment for those women engaging in self-employment in Poland.

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