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"Urban Desolation on 63rd Street,
South Side of Chicago, October 1990"

Photograph by Loïc Wacquant



Identity Theory

Two on Age

The Journal of Microsociologies

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The Journal of Microsociologies

A JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Gender and Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice: Do Self-assessments of Ability Matter?

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The gender gap in entrepreneurship has typically been understood through women's structural disadvantages in acquiring the resources relevant for successful business ownership. This study builds on resource-based approaches to investigate how cultural beliefs about gender influence the process by which individuals initially come to identify entrepreneurship as a viable labor-market option. Drawing on status characteristics theory, this study evaluates (1) how cultural beliefs about gender and entrepreneurship influence self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability, and (2) the extent to which such assessments account for the gender gap in business start-ups. Results suggest that women are significantly less likely to perceive themselves as able to be an entrepreneur and they hold themselves to a stricter standard of competence when compared to similarly situated men. This gender difference in self-assessments accounts for a significant portion of the gender gap in entrepreneurship after controlling for relevant resources. Additional analyses reveal that significant gender differences in self-assessed ability persist among established business owners.

Keywords: gender, entrepreneurship, status characteristics theory, self-assessments of ability

Women have started businesses in significantly greater numbers over the past two decades, though gender inequality in entrepreneurship continues to be especially pronounced when compared to the traditional labor market (Aldrich 2005; OECD 1998). For example, in 2005, women comprised 56 percent of professional and technical workers and 42 percent of legislators, senior officials, and managers (UNDP 2008). By contrast, in the same period, women were majority owners of only 30 percent of all privately held U.S. firms (Center for Women's Business Research 2004). Even when taking into account income, wealth, industry, and standard demographic

and human capital factors, men are still about twice as likely as women to pursue business creation as a labor-market strategy (Kim, Aldrich, and Keister 2006).

Despite this persistent gender gap in entrepreneurship, most existing research on the subject has focused on samples of people who are in the process of starting a new business or who already own one. This means that knowledge about the mechanisms contributing to men's persistently higher odds of pursuing business ownership is relatively limited. At the same time, there is anecdotal evidence that cultural beliefs about gender and entrepreneurship have consequences for women entrepreneurs. For example, women entrepreneurs frequently report that perceived lack of credibility by investors due to their gender disadvantages them in their searches for credit (Moore and Buttner 1997; Carter and Cannon 1992). Theory suggests that gender stereotypes may systematically disadvantage women entrepreneurs (see Heilman and Chen 2003), though few studies have investigated the extent to which cultural beliefs about gender

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might impact men and women in the initial decision-making process of choosing to start a business in the first place.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to develop and evaluate one mechanism by which shared cultural beliefs about gender may influence the likelihood that men and women identify and pursue entrepreneurship as a viable labor-market option. I frame this study within status characteristics theory, a theory that has been extensively evaluated in highly controlled laboratory settings. First, I propose that men and women draw on gender status beliefs in order to assess their ability at entrepreneurship. Specifically, cultural beliefs that accord men higher competence than women at tasks that "count" and stereotypes that associate entrepreneurship with men and masculinity generate different standards of attributing experience to ability among men and women. This process leads to differences in the assessments that men and women make of their own competence at entrepreneurship. Second, I propose that self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability shape men's and women's interest in and pursuit of business ownership as a work strategy, thereby accounting for a considerable proportion of the gender gap in start-up rates. Additionally, I investigate whether women's self-perceived lack of competence at entrepreneurship continues even after they have become an entrepreneur. Importantly, by influencing self-assessments of ability, it is possible that cultural beliefs about gender play a role in constraining women's involvement in economic development and more broadly, their position as leaders in society.

In the following paragraphs, I first discuss existing research on gender inequality in entrepreneurship, which has mostly centered on resource-based approaches. I then draw on status characteristics theory, with a focus on gender-based double standards for assessing competence, to suggest how gender status beliefs might influence self-evaluations of entrepreneurial ability and the choice to become an entrepreneur. Next, I analyze Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey data from the United States over a five-year period in order to investigate (1) the extent to which there

are gender-differences in self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability after accounting for relevant human, financial, and social resources, and (2) how this gender gap contributes to men's higher likelihood of being entrepreneurs. Though the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor is a cross-national dataset, I restrict this analysis to U.S. data because my focus is on an individual-level factor that operates within a given society.¹ Finally, I explore the extent to which gendered assessments of ability persist among established business owners. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my findings for future research.

GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Sociologists have largely understood gender differences in business start-ups and success by examining how gendered patterns found in the paid (employee) labor market map onto the experiences of the self-employed. First, women tend to have, on average, less workplace and managerial experience, which is often relevant for successful start-ups (Loscocco et al. 1991).

There is also a considerable amount of gender segregation by industry and, especially strongly and consistently, by occupation (Weeden 2004; Weeden and Sorensen 2004). These patterns carry over into entrepreneurship, as women entrepreneurs tend to be concentrated in low profitability, female-dominated industries such as retail, food service, and interpersonal care (Brush 1992; Loscocco et al. 1991; Loscocco and Robinson 1991).

Paid labor market experiences may also affect entrepreneurship through the mediating effect of network structures. Larger, more heterogeneous business discussion networks have been shown to increase the likelihood of business start-up (Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). Time spent in paid labor and higher occupational statuses are related to more

¹ The odds of and reasons for starting a business can vary with the many features of a society, such as its economic and social policies. Thus, when the focus is on an individual-level factor, it is best to minimize this societal-level variation. Future research however could extend the analysis to a cross-cultural context.

diverse network structures (Beggs and Hurlburt 1997; Campbell 1988); a high level of education is an additional asset, given that it is positively related to network size (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006) and the use of cross-sex ties (Aldrich, Reese and Dubini 1989). Compared to men, women tend to have more kin and more homogeneity in their networks (Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993). This suggests that women's labor market interruptions, lower occupational status, relative lack of managerial experience on average, and relatively more homogeneous networks disadvantage them in their ability to access information and recognize business opportunities. Men entrepreneurs also have particularly gender homophilous discussion networks (Aldrich et al. 1989; Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter 2003), which may add to women's network disadvantage. However, when comparing men and women who are already nascent or established business owners, both have similar levels of heterogeneity in their networks (Renzulli et al. 2000) and the same numbers of network ties to whom they could turn for specialized advice (Loscocco et al. 2009).

While a lack of business contacts and connections to other entrepreneurs may put women at a general disadvantage for recognizing business opportunities, others have focused on the mechanisms that lead men and women toward entrepreneurship. For example, women are much more likely than men to be "pushed" into entrepreneurship as a result of work/family conflict and gender discrimination in traditional work environments (Buttner and Moore 1997; Heilman and Chen 2003; Maniero and Sullivan 2006). Budig (2006), however, finds that these push factors vary according to professional status. While non-professional women are likely to enter entrepreneurship for family-related reasons, women in the professions are more likely to follow a careerist strategy (Budig 2006). Discrimination in the labor market can also have an indirect effect on self-employment outcomes, as people who seek refuge from discriminatory experiences via self-employment may also be disadvantaged in terms of managerial experience and network diversity.

Taken together, these studies suggest that women's structural disadvantages regarding human, network, and financial resources in the overall population indeed contribute to their lower likelihood of starting a business. However, because most studies have focused on individuals who are already interested in entrepreneurship or who are entrepreneurs, there is a relative lack of understanding of the earliest stage of nascent entrepreneurship; that is, how do individuals come to recognize that starting a business might be a viable option for work in the first place? Specifically, individuals who were initially steered away from entrepreneurship due to lack of information and biased or incomplete perceptions are not present in the sample. This is particularly problematic for the question of gender, since the design masks implicit incentives embedded in the cultural environment that lead people toward entrepreneurship in the first place. For example, it is not clear why women who have adequate structural advantages to start a business are less likely than men to do so. In this study, I address this limitation by analyzing a sample of the U.S. adult population. I propose that gender-differentiated self-assessments of competence at the task of entrepreneurship, which stem from and are supported by shared cultural beliefs about gender, place constraints on men's and women's choices to pursue entrepreneurship as a career.

GENDER BELIEFS

Sociologists increasingly understand gender as a multilevel structure, which includes cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior at the interactional level, and roles and identities at the micro level (Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 1998). Because processes at each level simultaneously reinforce each other, the gender structure is an overdetermined system that powerfully reinforces inequality. In this analysis, I focus specifically on shared cultural beliefs about gender that prescribe different expectations of competence for women and men (or gender status beliefs) in the area of

entrepreneurship, and analyze the implications of those beliefs for women's career choices. I do this by first examining the degree to which self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability may be gender-differentiated, and then evaluating the extent to which this difference accounts for the gender gap in the pursuit of entrepreneurship.

Gender Beliefs and Entrepreneurship

Studies suggest that men are widely thought to be more capable (Williams and Best 1990:334) and more competent (Fiske et al. 2002:892) than women. For example, Fiske et al. (2002) found that diverse samples of respondents from different regions of the United States consistently rated the category "men" higher than the category "women" on a multi-dimensional scale of competence, regardless of their age. Specifically, participants were asked: "As viewed by society, how [competent, confident, capable, efficient, intelligent, skillful] are the members of this group?" (Fiske et al. 2002:891). Experimental research corroborates this finding: People tend to expect more competent task performances from men than from women, except in cases where the task being performed is particularly "feminine", such as a nurturing task (Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Wagner and Berger 1997). Importantly, scholars have noted that it is particularly in contexts where the task in question is male-typed when gender beliefs about competence become linked to performance evaluations and ability assessments (Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Research widely confirms that entrepreneurship is one such male-typed activity. In a study of business students in the United States, India, and Turkey, Gupta et al. (2009) demonstrated that respondents in all three contexts strongly associate entrepreneurship with stereotypically masculine characteristics. Buttner and Rosen (1988) similarly found that American loan officers rated women as significantly less like "successful" entrepreneurs on the dimensions of leadership, autonomy, risk taking, readiness for change, endurance, lack

of emotionalism, and low need for support when compared to equivalent men. More generally, scholars have argued that entrepreneurship is an activity that involves a sense of dominance tied to notions of masculinity within modern capitalist cultures (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004; Connell 1995; Mirchandani 1999).

The financial risk-taking that is often associated with entrepreneurship also adds a prescriptive edge to the stereotype that entrepreneurship is a male-typed activity. Indeed, studies in the fields of economics and psychology have shown that women are, on average, more financially risk averse than men (see Croson and Gneezy 2009 for a review). Some explanations for this finding include men's less emotional reactions to uncertain situations, overconfidence in the likelihood of positive outcomes, and greater tendency to view risky situations as challenges rather than threats. However, the willingness to take risks has also been documented as an important component of prescriptive stereotypes about agentic, masculine behavior (Prentice and Carranza 2002). Because women are expected to be more communal than men (i.e., women should be kinder and more sensitive to others), women who display agentic traits are often penalized for being insufficiently feminine (Heilman 2001; Rudman and Glick 2001). Therefore, when men become entrepreneurs, they fulfill the prescriptive stereotype that they should be agentic risk takers; by contrast, when women become entrepreneurs, they implicitly violate prescriptive stereotypes about feminine behavior.

Notably, this masculine stereotype of entrepreneurship has been shown to have a strong impact on women's intentions and experiences. For example, when women are exposed to the masculine stereotype about entrepreneurs, they are much less likely to demonstrate entrepreneurial intentions (Gupta and Bhawe 2007). Women entrepreneurs in the United States and Europe also report that they often perceive that they lack credibility because of their gender when they seek funding (Carter and Cannon 1992; Moore and Buttner 1997; Smallbone et al. 2000).

Status Characteristics Theory and Double Standards

I rely on status characteristics theory to develop hypotheses about the effect of cultural beliefs about gender on self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability. An outgrowth of expectation states theory, status characteristics theory examines the development of power and prestige hierarchies in collectively oriented task groups and identifies and tests the valued attributes that imply task competence (Berger et al. 1977). A status characteristic can be a categorical distinction based on either a personal attribute (e.g., gender, race) or a role (e.g., manager). Gender operates as a "diffuse status characteristic" in that it is a cue for general expectations of competence: People tend to expect more competent task performances from people with the more valued state of the characteristic (men) compared to those with the less valued state (women). This is the case not just for male-typed tasks, but also for most *general* tasks. In turn, these performance evaluations tend to operate in a self-fulfilling way. For example, because they are expected to be more competent, higher status actors have their performances evaluated more positively, are given more opportunities to participate, and tend to have more influence over others in groups (Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Ridgeway 1993; Wagner and Berger 1997). Importantly, gender status beliefs, or beliefs that men are more socially valued and diffusely more competent than women at things that "count," are just one kind of stereotype about the many traits, attributes, or behaviors that might be expected of a person given their sex category (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Furthermore, because diffuse status characteristics inform expectations of competence for particular individuals in a given setting, they can also inform the standards that are used to determine the extent to which a task performance indicates ability (Foschi 1989). As higher status group members, men tend to have their performances judged by a more lenient standard than women, who are lower status group members (Foschi 1996, 2008; Foschi, Lai, and Sigerson 1994). This is because

when women perform well, their performances are inconsistent with status-based expectations; when men perform equally well, their performances are consistent with expectations, and are, as a result, less scrutinized. This creates a double standard for the level of performance needed to generate a positive assessment of competence at a gendered task.

Experimental research demonstrates that this phenomenon can occur when the assessor is a third, non-performing party (Foschi et al. 1994) or one of two performers (Foschi 1996, 2008). For example, when opposite sex partners performed a task that was defined as masculine and had received information that their scores were highly comparable to their partner's, women imposed a higher standard of ability on themselves and reported believing that they had less ability relative to their partner than men did (Foschi 1996). Conversely, men held themselves to lower standards compared to women. When women received feedback that they clearly scored higher than their partners, they imposed a stricter standard on themselves than men did when they outperformed their partner to the same degree (Foschi 2008). Moreover, even in the absence of any feedback about ability, men still reported believing that they had more ability at the task relative to their partner than women did (Foschi 2008).

Gender Differentiated Self-assessments and Career Outcomes

While status characteristics theory has mostly restricted its scope to collectively oriented task groups, recent research has established that status generalization can occur in individual evaluative settings (Correll 2004; Lovaglia et al. 1998). Correll (2004) argues that even when self-evaluations do not occur in collectively oriented group settings, individuals still feel pressure to assess their task competence relative to others because evaluative tasks often have the explicit purpose of ranking performances of actors. However, standards for a competent performance are often not clearly defined. Therefore, status characteristics play a role such that those with the

more valued state of the characteristic (men) hold higher expectations for their performance and see their performances as more competent versus those occupying the less valued state (women), regardless of any “objective” measures of performance. Importantly, gender must be salient as a status characteristic in the setting for this to occur. This is the case when men are believed to be generally better at the task, for example.

Indeed, several studies have shown that status beliefs impact task performance in individual task settings (Lovaglia et. al. 1998; Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995). Particularly important for the current research, however, gender status beliefs have also been shown to inform individuals’ self-assessments of their own competence at career-relevant tasks (Correll 2001, 2004). Gender-differentiated self-assessments significantly impact career choices because both men and women must adopt to a certain extent a perception of themselves as competent at the tasks necessary for a specific career if they are to pragmatically choose that career. For instance, Correll (2001) found that male high school students made higher assessments of their competence at math than female students did, despite having the same actual math ability. These gendered assessments partially accounted for why women were less likely than men to enroll in a calculus course or choose a college major in science, math, or engineering. Experimental evidence further shows that when participants are told that men have higher ability on average at a particular task, women assess their ability at the task to be lower than men do (despite receiving equivalent performance feedback) (Correll 2004). They are then less likely to aspire to careers that are described as requiring competence at the task.

Self-assessments and Entrepreneurial Activity

As discussed earlier, entrepreneurship is viewed as a particularly male-typed task. The fact that there are far fewer women than men entrepreneurs overall may also serve to

reinforce stereotypes about men’s higher levels of ability at entrepreneurship. Women’s gender homophilous and relatively homogeneous social networks may also restrict their opportunities to personally know an entrepreneur and thus be aware of what kinds of skills and knowledge it actually involves. This suggests that women may be especially less likely to know someone of the same sex who is an entrepreneur, a person who might challenge widely held beliefs about women’s competence at entrepreneurship.

In addition to the stereotype of entrepreneurship as a male-typed task, there are no collectively agreed upon criteria that necessarily deem a person to be competent at the task. Under these conditions, gender status beliefs are readily available to impact self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability. Because higher performance expectations lead to more lenient performance standards for men in settings where the activity is believed to be male-typed, I propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Men’s self-assessments of their entrepreneurial competence will be higher than women’s, despite having the same measurable levels of human capital, financial capital, and network resources.

Next, as long as individuals use a rubric to determine their competence, it is likely that women will hold themselves to a stricter standard. I suspect that one such rubric may be education level.²

Hypothesis 2: Women will require a higher level of education on average than men do before they

² Another measure may be work experience, though unfortunately this dataset does not include work history, so I am unable to investigate this factor. Additionally, the most ideal dataset for conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the double standards theory would further include the level of education that each respondent believes is required to indicate entrepreneurial ability in a person of the opposite sex. Thus, it is important to note that my analysis of double standards is based solely on the standards individuals set for themselves.

consider themselves competent at entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, because self-assessments of ability lead to career interests and aspirations, a certain level of entrepreneurial competence is likely deemed to be a prerequisite for the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities (though importantly, only in the usual circumstance that entrepreneurship is not being considered for reasons of economic necessity alone).

Hypothesis 3: Positive self-assessments of ability will have a strong positive effect on the likelihood that a person is an entrepreneur, thereby accounting for a considerable amount of the observed gender gap in entrepreneurial activity.

Finally, I investigate whether women's lower self-assessments of their abilities continues even after they become an entrepreneur. That is, while positive assessments of ability may indeed increase both men's and women's likelihood of being an entrepreneur, I suspect that:

Hypothesis 4: Women business owners will be less likely to view themselves as competent at the task when compared to men business owners.

There are two theoretical reasons for the final hypothesis. First, women entrepreneurs may be particularly apt to question their abilities at entrepreneurship because other entrepreneurs, those to whom a comparison is implicitly being made, are predominantly men who possess the advantaged status characteristic when it comes to entrepreneurial competence. Second, when the decision to start a business is not solely based on perceived market opportunities, but rather involves responses to labor market constraints, an individual may continue to doubt his or her ability to be successful in entrepreneurship. This is especially the case for women because, as discussed earlier, more women than men

are "pushed" into entrepreneurship as a result of negative experiences in the traditional labor market, such as discrimination or lack of flexibility. This often results in women having less managerial experience and fewer network ties upon becoming a business owner, which could contribute to self-doubts about ability.

DATA AND METHOD

In order to address the possibility that gender-differentiated self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability influence gender inequality in entrepreneurship, I utilize Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data. Started by Babson College in the United States and the London Business School in the United Kingdom in 1998, the GEM is a large cross-national dataset with information on individuals and their propensity for entrepreneurial activity. For the purposes of this study, I use data from the United States over five years (2001–2005). This dataset is appropriate given the theoretical focus of this study because it is an adult population survey that provides information on self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability and entrepreneurial activity, as well as other demographic factors that are related to business start-up. After excluding cases on core variables for the analysis, there were 15,242 respondents.³

Dependent variables. In the following analysis, I first examine gender differences in self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability, and then consider how such assessments influence the gender gap in entrepreneurial activity using logistic regression. Self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability are measured dichotomously with the item: "You have the knowledge, skill and experience required to start a business." Respondents either agree (yes = 1), or disagree (no = 0). I define an entrepreneur as a person who

³ I dropped 2,599 cases due to missing values on the income variable. Missing values on other variables constituted less than 3 percent of the total sample. Results from sets of analyses that excluded the income variable and that relied on values for income that were generated using multiple imputation techniques were consistent with those presented here.

currently, alone or with others, is either trying to start his or her own new business or is already a business owner. Entrepreneurs are coded 1, all others are coded 0.⁴

Independent variables. Gender is the independent variable of central importance; this is coded as a dummy variable (1 = female, 0 = male). Other independent variables adjust for important factors that may influence self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability and that are known to influence the likelihood of business ownership. These include human capital-related factors, the availability of personal financial resources, and a basic measure of relevant network resources.

Human capital variables include age, education, and workforce status. I test for a curvilinear effect of age by including a squared term because although people may be more likely to start a business as they get older and gain more experience, they may be especially less likely to start one after retirement age, simply because of the time and effort involved. However, I keep people over 65 in the sample because many people who are over 65 often own businesses. Dummy variables are included for each ordinal category of education level (secondary degree, post-secondary degree, and graduate experience; some secondary education is the reference category). I account for workforce status with two more dichotomous variables, one for current full-time employment and one for current part-time employment. The reference category consists of those who are unemployed, retired, or otherwise not in the labor force.

Next, I consider financial resources with a basic measure of household income bracket that is calculated by Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data technicians.⁵ Dummy variables control for when the respondent's household income is in the middle third or the upper third of the income distribution (reference category = lowest

third). I also include a basic measure of network resources with a dummy variable to adjust for whether the respondent personally knows someone who has started a business in the past two years.

In my final analysis, I investigate the gender gap in self-assessments among established business owners. These models include characteristics of businesses that could have an important impact on self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability. First, I adjust for whether or not a person is the sole owner of his or her business. This is a dichotomous variable (1 = sole owner, 0 = not sole owner). Second, I include the size of the business, as measured by the log of the number of full-time employees. Following Loscocco et al. (1991), employee size was increased by 1 for each business to permit the transformation and to account for the owner's labor. Third, I include dummy variables to adjust for ten major industry categories.

All analyses use standard logistic regression modeling techniques. The first two models predict the odds that a respondent agrees that he or she has the ability to be an entrepreneur. Covariates include the respondent's sex, education level, and the other measures of resources discussed above. Model 2 includes an interaction effect between sex and education level to investigate the possibility that women hold themselves to a stricter standard of entrepreneurial ability than men do. Models 3 through 5 then estimate the odds of being an entrepreneur. These models allow me to investigate the degree to which resource measures and self-assessments of ability account for the gender gap in the odds of being an entrepreneur. Finally, only respondents who are established business owners are analyzed in Model 6. The model employs respondent's gender, resources, and business characteristics as covariates to predict the odds that an entrepreneur believes they possess entrepreneurial ability.

All models include standard population-sampling weights that were calculated by the survey firm. These weights help render the sample to be nationally representative. They are based on age, gender, geographic region, and educational attainment.

⁴ Separate analyses confirm that results do not differ when the "entrepreneur" variable is disaggregated into those who are currently starting a business versus those who are established business owners.

⁵ Unfortunately, detailed data on income are not publicly available.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	SD
Self-assessed Entrepreneurial Ability	0.57	
Entrepreneur	0.22	
Female	0.49	
Age	46.13	16.94
Age Squared	2415.41	1689.18
Labor Force Status		
Not employed (reference category)	0.35	
Employed Full Time	0.54	
Employed Part Time	0.11	
Education		
Some High School (reference category)	0.09	
High School Diploma	0.32	
Postsecondary Degree	0.45	
Graduate Experience	0.14	
Year of survey		
2001 (reference category)	0.16	
2002	0.37	
2003	0.33	
2004	0.07	
2005	0.07	
Know an entrepreneur	0.38	
Income		
Lowest Third (reference category)	0.28	
Middle Third	0.35	
Highest Third	0.37	
<i>N</i>	15,242	

Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2001–2005.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) variables. On average, about 57 percent of the respondents believe that they indeed have the knowledge, skill, and experience required to start a business; by contrast, only 22 percent are engaged in entrepreneurial activity themselves. And yet, a relatively high percentage of people (38 percent) know an entrepreneur personally. It is also important to note that GEM collected the majority of the data (86 percent) in the earlier years of 2001 through 2003. This means that my findings primarily reflect information that was collected in these three years.

Gender and Self-assessed Entrepreneurial Ability

Next, Table 2 presents logistic regression estimates for the effect of gender on self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability. Model 1 shows support for Hypothesis 1. Despite having approximately equal amounts of human, social, and financial capital, women are significantly less likely than men to believe that they have entrepreneurial ability. Specifically, the odds ratio indicates that women are about half as likely as men with similar background characteristics to think they have the ability to be an entrepreneur. This means that men respondents are almost two times *more* likely than women respondents to agree that they have entrepreneurial ability (odds ratio for men = $1/0.51 = 1.96$). This supports the theoretical premise that gender status beliefs about who is better at the task of entrepreneurship (i.e., men) are particularly apt to creep into self-evaluations of entrepreneurial ability.

The other variables indicate that the middle-aged, those with a postsecondary degree or higher, and those with higher levels of income are more likely to believe they have the knowledge, skill, and experience to start a business. Importantly, knowing another entrepreneur is also a strong indicator of positively self-assessing one's abilities, underscoring the important role that gaining information about entrepreneurship from network ties can play in shaping self-evaluations.

Model 2 includes interaction effects between gender and education levels to investigate whether education influences men's and women's self-assessments differently. I do so in order to investigate the claim that status beliefs might lead women to judge their ability by a harsher standard. The interaction effects between female and postsecondary degree and female and graduate experience are positive and significant, indicating that the odds of assessing oneself as competent at entrepreneurship are significantly greater for women than for men with a postsecondary degree or graduate experience. For women,

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Odds Ratios for the Effect of Gender on Self-assessments of Entrepreneurial Ability

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Female	-0.68*** (0.04)	0.51	-0.91*** (0.14)	0.40
Age	0.07*** (0.01)	1.07	0.07*** (0.01)	1.07
Age Squared	-0.0007*** (0.00007)	1.00	-0.0007*** (0.00007)	1.00
Labor Force Status				
Employed Full Time	0.09 (0.05)	1.09	0.08 (0.05)	1.09
Employed Part Time	-0.12 (0.07)	0.89	-0.12 (0.07)	0.88
Education				
High School Diploma	0.13 [†] (0.08)	1.14	0.05 (0.11)	1.06
Postsecondary Degree	0.37*** (0.08)	1.45	0.23* (0.11)	1.26
Graduate Experience	0.33*** (0.09)	1.40	0.17 (0.13)	1.19
Year of survey				
2002	-0.11 [†] (0.06)	0.90	-0.11 [†] (0.06)	0.89
2003	-0.14* (0.06)	0.87	-0.14* (0.06)	0.87
2004	-0.05 (0.09)	0.95	-0.05 (0.09)	0.95
2005	-0.13 (0.09)	0.88	-0.13 (0.09)	0.87
Income				
Middle Third	0.24*** (0.05)	1.27	0.23*** (0.05)	1.26
Highest Third	0.27*** (0.06)	1.30	0.26*** (0.06)	1.30
Know an entrepreneur	0.91*** (0.05)	2.47	0.90*** (0.05)	2.46
Entrepreneur	1.62*** (0.06)	5.06	1.62*** (0.06)	5.07
Female × High School Degree			0.18 (0.16)	1.20
Female × Postsecondary Degree			0.31* (0.15)	1.37
Female × Graduate Experience			0.35* (0.18)	1.41
Intercept	-1.77 (0.17)		-1.66 (0.19)	
Wald Chi-Squared	1942.39		1935.93	
N	15,242			

Note: The data are weighted using population weights calculated by GEM researchers. Standard Errors are in parentheses.

[†] $p \leq 0.10$; * $p \leq .01$, *** $p < .001$.

having a postsecondary degree is associated with a 72 percent increase in the odds that she assesses herself to have entrepreneurial ability (odds ratio = $\exp(0.23+0.21) = 1.72$), but only a 26 percent increase for men (odds ratio = $\exp(0.23) = 1.26$). Similarly, having graduate experience is associated with a 68 percent increase in the odds of assessing oneself as competent at entrepreneurship for women (odds ratio = $\exp(0.17+0.35) = 1.68$), but only a 19 percent increase for men (odds ratio = $\exp(0.17) = 1.19$). This finding supports Hypothesis 2, that women may require a higher level of education on average before they are willing to consider themselves able to be an entrepreneur, providing support for the theory that women judge their own competence at entrepreneurship by a harsher standard than men do.

Self-assessments and Entrepreneurial Career Choices

Given that there are prominent gender differences in self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability, to what extent do these assessments actually contribute to gender differences in rates of entrepreneurship? Consistent with previous studies, the gender gap in rates of entrepreneurship is particularly high when compared to women's overall labor force participation. The odds ratio for the effect of gender in Model 3 (Table 3) shows that the odds for women are 62 percent of the odds for men. Substantively, this indicates that men are 1.61 times more likely than women to be an entrepreneur (odds ratio for men = $1/0.62 = 1.61$). Another useful way to interpret this is to calculate the predicted probability of entrepreneurship for men and women. The predicted probability of being an entrepreneur is greater for men than women by 0.08 (men = 0.2702, women = 0.1867).

Model 4 includes measures of human, financial, and social capital. Consistent with previous research, employed, middle-aged people who are in higher income brackets and who personally know an entrepreneur

are more likely to start businesses. However, after accounting for gender differences in these resources, men are still 1.43 times more likely than women to be entrepreneurs (odds ratio for men = $1/0.70 = 1.43$). The gender difference in the predicted probability of being an entrepreneur is also smaller than in the previous model: The predicted probability for a respondent with average characteristics on other variables is greater for men than women by 0.05 (men = 0.2204, women = 0.1658). Interestingly, people were also more likely to start businesses from 2003 through 2005 than they were in 2001 and 2002.

In Model 5, I evaluate Hypothesis 3, that gender differentiated self-assessments of entrepreneurial activity will be strongly associated with the likelihood of being an entrepreneur, thereby accounting for a large portion of the gender gap in entrepreneurship. The effect of self-assessed entrepreneurial ability is indeed positive and significant, indicating that respondents who believe that they have the ability to be an entrepreneur are five times more likely to actually be one. The gender coefficient indicates that men are 1.15 times more likely than women to be entrepreneurs (odds ratio for men = $1/0.87$). Adjusting for self-assessments in the model further reduces the gender difference in the predicted probability of being an entrepreneur from the previous models: The predicted probability is now greater for men than women by only 0.02 (men = 0.1769, women = 0.1569). This suggests that an important reason why women are less likely to start businesses than men arises from their self-perceived relative lack of ability at the task of entrepreneurship, a difference that emerges even when controlling for relevant resources. Certainly, women's relative lack of resources not captured by the variables in this analysis, such as work histories or detailed aspects of network structure, may contribute further to the lower assessments of ability among women. However, even considering this limitation, the analyses demonstrate that self-assessments of ability are strongly gendered and that they are key factors in the decision-making process that lead a person to pursue business ownership or not.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Odds Ratios for the Effect of Gender and Self-assessments of Entrepreneurial Ability on the Likelihood of Starting or Owning a Business

Independent Variable	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Female	-0.48*** (0.04)	0.62	-0.35*** (0.05)	0.70	-0.14** (0.05)	0.87
Age			0.07*** (0.01)	1.08	0.05*** (0.01)	1.05
Age Squared			-0.0008*** (0.0001)	1.00	-0.0006*** (0.0001)	1.00
Labor Force Status						
Employed Full Time			0.51*** (0.07)	1.67	0.48*** (0.07)	1.62
Employed Part Time			0.88*** (0.09)	2.40	0.92*** (0.09)	2.50
Education						
High School Diploma			-0.01 (0.09)	0.99	-0.05 (0.10)	0.95
Postsecondary Degree			-0.05 (0.09)	0.95	-0.15 (0.09)	0.86
Graduate Experience			-0.06 (0.11)	0.94	-0.15 (0.11)	0.85
Year of survey						
2002			-0.10 (0.08)	0.90	-0.07 (0.08)	0.93
2003			0.47*** (0.07)	1.61	0.51*** (0.07)	1.67
2004			0.63*** (0.10)	1.87	0.64*** (0.10)	1.90
2005			0.51*** (0.10)	1.67	0.54*** (0.11)	1.72
Income						
Middle Third			0.16* (0.06)	1.17	0.09 (0.07)	1.09
Highest Third			0.17** (0.07)	1.20	0.10 (0.07)	1.11
Know an entrepreneur			1.09*** (0.05)	2.99	0.82*** (0.05)	2.28
Self-assessed Entrepreneurial Ability					1.62*** (0.06)	5.03
Intercept	-1.00 (0.03)		-3.76 (0.22)		-4.29 (0.23)	
Wald Chi-Squared	116.76		1196.09		1625.44	
N	15,242					

Note: The data are weighted using population weights calculated by GEM researchers. Standard Errors are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Self-assessed Ability among Business Owners

Finally, I evaluate whether gender-differentiated perceptions of entrepreneurial ability persist after individuals become established business owners (Hypothesis 4). I do so to investigate whether status processes inform self-assessments of ability under circumstances where men and women are already performing the task at highly comparable levels.

As Table 4 shows, even among established business owners who have similar resources and whose businesses share similar characteristics, women are still significantly less likely than men to agree that they have the ability to be an entrepreneur. The odds ratio for the effect of gender in Model 6 shows that women entrepreneurs are less than half as likely as similar men entrepreneurs to believe that they have the ability to be an entrepreneur. In other words, men entrepreneurs are more than two times more likely than women entrepreneurs to believe that they have the knowledge, skills, and experience to be an entrepreneur (odds ratio for men = $1/0.44 = 2.27$).

This is a larger gap in self-assessed competence than was observed even among the general population. As suggested earlier, when assessing their abilities, women entrepreneurs may be more likely to compare themselves to men (whose status characteristic advantages them in terms of entrepreneurial competence) simply because so many more entrepreneurs are men. Moreover, women are more likely than men to start businesses as a result of gender-related constraints in the traditional labor market. Such individuals may have less work and managerial experience as well as fewer network resources, which could contribute to their lower self-assessments of ability. These possible contributing factors could be evaluated in future research.

DISCUSSION

This research builds on resource-based approaches to investigate the impact that cultural beliefs about gender and the task

of entrepreneurship have on the gender gap in entrepreneurship. The results suggest several important things for understanding the gendered process of choosing entrepreneurship as a work strategy. First, women are much less likely than similar men to perceive that they have the ability to be an entrepreneur. Status characteristics theory suggests that this inequality arises because women hold themselves to a stricter standard when evaluating their competence at the male-typed task of entrepreneurship. The finding that women on average must have a higher level of education than men in order to perceive themselves as competent at entrepreneurship lends support to this claim. Furthermore, self-assessments of entrepreneurial ability strongly inform both men's and women's decisions to pursue entrepreneurship. This means that women's lower assessments of ability are a major factor contributing to their lower rates of business ownership vis-à-vis men. However, even after women pursue entrepreneurship as a work strategy, they are still much less likely than men to believe they are competent as an entrepreneur.

Importantly, there are no objective, collectively agreed upon criteria that deem a person "able" to be an entrepreneur, such as level of education, work experience, or number of social contacts. This provides ample room for gender status beliefs to provide a basis for self-evaluations. It also makes it impossible to establish whether a person is overestimating, underestimating, or accurately estimating their ability. Nonetheless, this study is limited in that it does not include detailed work history or network data. Such information could allow for comparisons of the self-assessments of men and women in even more similar structural positions, and better assess the degree to which individuals rely on gender status beliefs to attribute their own performance to ability. Women's segregation in education and in labor market skills and work experience could also contribute to the observed gender gap in self-assessed ability if women perceive that there are more business opportunities in male-dominated fields, or that managerial

Table 4. Logistic Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Odds Ratios for the Effect of Gender on Self-assessments of Entrepreneurial Ability among Established Business Owners

Independent Variable	Model 6		
	Coefficient	SE	Odds Ratio
Female	-0.82**	0.24	0.44
Age	0.02	0.04	1.02
Age Squared	-0.0005	0.0004	0.99
Employed Full Time	-0.14	0.35	0.87
Employed Part Time	-0.83*	0.39	0.44
Education			
High School Diploma	-0.09	0.50	0.92
Postsecondary Degree	-0.12	0.50	0.88
Graduate Experience	0.45	0.55	1.56
Year of survey			
2002	0.27	0.32	1.28
2003	0.17	0.30	1.18
2004	0.29	0.31	1.33
2005	0.54	0.40	1.71
Income			
Middle Third	0.27	0.32	1.31
Highest Third	0.26	0.30	1.30
Know an entrepreneur	0.71**	0.22	2.04
Sole Owner of Business (1 = yes)	0.39	0.24	1.47
Business Size	-0.11	0.11	0.90
Industry Type (Omitted Category: Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing)			
Mining and Construction	1.49**	0.44	4.44
Manufacturing	2.00**	0.64	7.39
Transportation, Communications, and Utilities	2.66***	0.67	14.28
Wholesale and Repair	2.49**	0.82	12.06
Retail, Hotel, and Restaurant	1.36**	0.39	3.90
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	2.57***	0.71	13.03
Business Services	0.89*	0.39	2.42
Health, Education, and Social Services	1.05*	0.46	2.85
Consumer Services	0.28	0.44	1.32
Intercept	1.07 (1.15)		
Wald Chi Squared	124.10		
N	1229		

Note: The data are weighted using population weights calculated by GEM researchers.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

experience is a requirement for entrepreneurship. However, while gendered workforce experience likely matters, the finding that the gender gap in self-assessments is especially large even among established business owners who operate businesses of the same size in the same industry suggests that experience may not be a critical factor.

One important avenue of future research is to investigate the conditions under which gender beliefs are more or less likely to constrain women's self-assessed ability and career choices. For instance, network structure may not only influence the information about business opportunities that a person is exposed to, but also the extent to which individuals draw

on gender status beliefs to assess their ability and interest in entrepreneurship. Future research could also address the extent to which there is variation or consistency in this phenomenon across cultural contexts.

Notwithstanding these considerations, this study supports the theory that cultural beliefs about gender and entrepreneurship play a key role in determining who becomes an entrepreneur and who does not. This finding is substantial given that entrepreneurship, unlike any one specific job or occupation, is an entire form of work. That is, entrepreneurs encompass a wide range of occupational skills and educational backgrounds, not just those that are particularly male-dominated. Thus, the mere fact cultural beliefs advantage men at the task of business creation constrains the choices of otherwise qualified, creative women. Furthermore, entrepreneurs create jobs and contribute to economic development and innovation. If widely held cultural beliefs about gender constrain women's involvement in that process, then their role as leaders in society, and in economic production more specifically, is also constrained.

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