



Think Entrepreneur, Think Male? Business Students' Assumptions about a Hypothetical Entrepreneur

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Abstract. We used the Schein Descriptive Index to investigate the extent to which the stereotype of "entrepreneur" is male. Undergraduate business students rated a hypothetical male entrepreneur as similar to a gender-unspecified entrepreneur. A hypothetical female entrepreneur was rated as dissimilar to the male entrepreneur and to the unspecified entrepreneur. Two-thirds of participants given a description of a female entrepreneur recalled that entrepreneur as male. Four-fifths of those given a description of a male entrepreneur correctly recalled that entrepreneur as male.

Keywords: stereotypes, gender, entrepreneurship, cognition.

1. Introduction

Across cultures, fewer women than men own and run their own businesses (Fairlie, 2004; Minniti, Arenius, & Langowitz, 2005). The gap between male and female rates of business startup and ownership is greater in poorer countries (Maxfield, 2005). Even as female business ownership rates are increasing (Mueller, 2004), women-founded and women-run businesses are often less successful than their male-run counterparts (Winn, 2005).

In this study, we investigate whether business students stereotype entrepreneurs as male. Such stereotypes may inhibit entrepreneurship among women. Entrepreneurs depend on networks of suppliers, investors, customers, and even family members. Companies headed by a woman are perceived as less attractive investments than those led by a man, all else being equal. In one recent study, MBA students were willing to invest 300 percent more in a hypothetical firm run by a man than in a comparable firm run by a woman (Bigelow & McLean Parks, 2006). These participants also evaluated female business owners more negatively, and found them deserving of lower salaries, than male counterparts with identical resumes. Women business owners and entrepreneurs receive less family support than men do (Winn, 2005), have more difficulty selling to government and business clients due to not being taken seriously by buyers in

these institutions (Bates, 2002), encounter more obstacles in obtaining financing (Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006; Marlow, 2005; Winn, 2005), and have less startup capital on average (Verheul & Thurik, 2001). Suppliers, customers, and other members of an entrepreneur's network may harbor unconscious preferences for dealing with business owners with whom they feel comfortable – male business owners. While few financiers, suppliers or customers would admit to deliberate discrimination, unconscious stereotypes can affect decision-making:

Such biases may not reflect overt direct discrimination, but rather preferences based on established, comfortable (and male-dominated) networks. Yet in a competitive market place, the longer-term persistence of such network-based advantages may make women-owned businesses consistently less successful. (Weiler & Bernasek, 2001:97)

Entrepreneurship is often seen as an alternative for women who have hit the corporate glass ceiling (Heilman & Chen, 2003). Not everyone has the talent and inclination to become an entrepreneur, however, and someone who is pushed out of a corporation will not necessarily become a successful entrepreneur (Rosti & Chelli, 2005). In addition, if a “Think Entrepreneur = Think Male” stereotype persists, similar to the “Think Manager = Think Male” stereotype (Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996; Sczesny, 2003), then women in entrepreneurship will continue to contend with the same biases, but without recourse to any Human Resources department:

The autonomy and control of being an entrepreneur... does not provide immunity from stereotyping and the bias it produces. ... Customers who have the option of employing a male owned versus a female-owned construction firm may, for example, select the male owned firm simply because men are more commonly associated with and are believed to be more knowledgeable about the construction business... people do not always like working for female bosses...Inability to attract the best and the brightest may result. Stereotype-derived expectations that the woman or minority entrepreneur is not very competent also are apt to create problems in obtaining financial backing...Data lend support to this speculation. Women entrepreneurs have less bank credit than men entrepreneurs... (Heilman & Chen, 2003:359)

In the next two sections we outline the theory and hypotheses related to how male and female entrepreneurs are perceived. We then describe our data collection methods, followed by presentation of results. We conclude with a discussion of the results.

2. Theory

2.1. Stereotypes

Unconscious stereotypes carry important consequences. Stereotypes influence hiring decisions (Powell & Graves, 2003) and are often used to justify and maintain an inequitable status quo (Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske, 1998; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Stereotypes are used to form expectations and predictions about people (Brodbeck et al., 2000; Halpern, 1985). Stereotypes are characteristic of the way people process information (Brown, 1986; Lippmann, 1922; Madon, 1997). Stereotypes lighten the cognitive load, streamlining the way people perceive themselves and others (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). In the absence of complete knowledge, stereotypes automatically fill in the blanks (Stewart-Williams, 2002). People are frequently unaware of the stereotypes they hold (Bargh, 1994, 1997; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Chen & Bargh, 1997; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), even as those stereotypes may be distorting perception (Hepburn, 1985).

2.2. Leader, Manager, Entrepreneur, Man

Women are not perceived as managers, and managers are not perceived as women. In 1973, Virginia Schein published her classic study, "The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics" in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. (Schein, 1973). She found that traits stereotypically attributed to males were also attributed to hypothetical managers, while those traits considered stereotypically "female" were not aligned with the managerial stereotype. The association of managerial qualities with stereotypically male characteristics has persisted through several replications of Schein's original study (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; V.E. Schein, 2001; Schein, Mueller, & Jacobson, 1989). Schein's findings are consistent with those of many other researchers (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). The role of "woman" and that of "leader" are perceived as mutually exclusive (Brenner et al., 1989; Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Heilman, Block, Simon, & Martell, 1989; Schein et al., 1989), and leadership is viewed as an undesirable trait in a woman (Auster & Ohm, 2000). The automatic association of "manager" and "male" persists (Powell & Graves, 2003) and is largely responsible for impeding women's success in business (Berthoin Antal & Izraeli, 1993; Labor, 1991).

2.3. Defining the Entrepreneur

Definitions of entrepreneurship, and its relationship to often interchanged terms such as self-employment and small business, vary from study to study, and from textbook to textbook (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991; Warren, 2005). Bruyat & Julien (2001) address this issue of definition thoroughly from a perspective of the entrepreneurship researcher. Some researchers use “self employment” and “entrepreneurship” interchangeably (Fairlie, 2005). Faced with this lack of agreement, along with a relative dearth of studies on entrepreneurial stereotypes, many scholars have extrapolated from the research on managers, thereby adding “manager” to the list of somewhat interchangeable definitions (Verheul, Uhlaner, & Thurik, 2005). In addition to the differences among entrepreneurship researchers, entrepreneurship experts often differ with the business community on what constitutes entrepreneurship (Verheul et al., 2005). Because we are interested in practitioner or “lay” assumptions around of the concept of “entrepreneur,” we have each participant describe a hypothetical entrepreneur by using a list of descriptors. The implicit associations with the term are precisely what we wish to investigate. How strongly is gender associated with the participant’s mental image of “entrepreneur”, however the participant defines “entrepreneur?”

Asked to describe a hypothetical entrepreneur, U.S. business students in one study painted a predominantly male picture of the entrepreneur. Among responses that named individuals (such as “Bill Gates” or “my dad”), there were 26 male examples and 3 female examples. In addition to these there were eight male-gendered responses, such as “a guy who has a 30-40 million dollar company” and “man in suit” (de Pillis & Reardon, 2001). A think entrepreneur = think male bias has been found among women (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991). Many female entrepreneurs believe this bias is prevalent enough that they deliberately downplay their gender in order to avoid violating the male entrepreneurial norm (Lewis, 2006).

2.4. Maleness and Masculinity

Not only is the entrepreneur male by default, he is also – like the manager – masculine. The relationship between perceived masculinity and managerial success is well documented. Good leadership is viewed in masculine terms (Kawakami, White, & Langer, 2000; Powell & Butterfield, 1989). Managerial success, career advancement and high status are associated with masculinity (Aguinis & Adams, 1998; Brenner et al., 1989; Heilman et al., 1989; Mainiero, 1986; Schein et al., 1989). Emergent group leaders are more likely to possess masculine than feminine characteristics (Goktepe & Schneier, 1988; Kent & Moss, 1994; Moss & Kent, 1996). The “agendered” (default male) image of the

rational entrepreneur (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004) marginalizes women (and non-masculine entrepreneurs). Even entrepreneurship researchers are susceptible to stereotypes. Despite the popular notion of entrepreneurship as a gender-blind, meritocratic enterprise, entrepreneurship researchers appear to go out of their way to find that female entrepreneurs are “different” from the “normal” male entrepreneur. Although they find few significant differences between male and female entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship researchers “make a mountain out of a mole-hill” by trumpeting insignificant differences, explain away similarity by suggesting that female entrepreneurs are self-selected and therefore atypical (while male entrepreneurs are not?), or frame women entrepreneurs as relationship oriented “good mother” types (Ahl, 2004). If even entrepreneurship researchers display these biases, to what extent do these biases lurk in the subconscious of the next generation of investors, suppliers and customers?

3. Hypotheses

We propose that entrepreneurs, whose role includes that of business manager, are stereotyped as male in the same way that managers are: as male by default.

H1: When participants are asked to describe a gender-neutral entrepreneur, male entrepreneur, or a female entrepreneur, the description of “gender-neutral entrepreneur” will be more similar to “male entrepreneur” than it will be to “female entrepreneur”.

Although the “think manager = think male” stereotype persists, it is weakening, especially among women (V.E. Schein, 2001). Female participants generally attribute positive characteristics to female managers while male participants seemed to hold negative views of female managers (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Heilman et al., 1989). We propose that the same pattern will emerge in perceptions of entrepreneurs.

H2a: Descriptions of female entrepreneurs will be more negative than descriptions of male entrepreneurs.

H2b: Descriptions of female entrepreneurs will be more negative than descriptions of gender-neutral entrepreneurs.

H2c: Male subjects will show a stronger “think entrepreneur = think male” bias than will female subjects.

H2d: Male subjects will describe female entrepreneurs in more negative terms than will female subjects.

The participant is asked to envision either a male, female, or gender-neutral entrepreneur. At the end of the survey there is a manipulation check where the participant is asked whether he or she was envisioning a male or female entrepreneur. If the entrepreneur stereotype is strongly male, the entrepreneur whose sex is not specified will be assumed by most participants to be male. If the male stereotype is extremely strong, some participants in the female entrepreneur condition might disregard the female pronouns and imagine the entrepreneur as male anyway.

H3a: The proportion of participants who are prompted with a female hypothetical entrepreneur and indicate that they were envisioning a male will be greater than those who are prompted with a male but envision a female.

H3b: Of those participants who are prompted with a gender-neutral entrepreneur, a greater proportion will envision the entrepreneur as male.

4. Methods

We used the 92 – item Schein Descriptive Index (Schein, 1973) along with demographic items. The Schein Descriptive Index is a list of 92 adjectives and descriptive phrases such as “adventurous”, “demure”, and “dominant”.

The Schein Descriptive Index, because of its elegant design and its long history of use, continues to be used by management scholars more than 30 years after its introduction for such investigations as the effect of personality variables on perceptions of male and female CEOs (Dennis & Kunkel, 2004) and racial stereotyping (Tomkiewicz & Brenner, 1996). Because it has been used since the early 1970s, it is helpful in measuring changes (or lack thereof) in stereotypes over decades (de Pillis & Meilich, 2006; Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Dodge et al., 1995; Kasi & Dugger, 2000; Virginia E. Schein, 2001; Tomkiewicz & Brenner, 1996).

The participants were randomly assigned an instrument with only one of the three conditions: successful entrepreneur, successful male entrepreneur, or successful female entrepreneur. Having a *successful* entrepreneur in each condition, as opposed to simply an entrepreneur, risks narrowing the variance in the responses because it eliminates the effect of any assumption that a male entrepreneur will be more successful than a female entrepreneur. However, specifying a successful entrepreneur ensures that we are only varying the sex of the entrepreneur, rather than the sex in addition to possible variations in perceived success. This approach follows Deal & Stevenson (1998). The introductory paragraph of the instrument follows the one used in Deal and Stevenson’s study. We did not use the terms “female entrepreneur” or “male entrepreneur” because we did not want to alert participants that we might be looking for gender bias.

Instead, the gender cues were in the pronouns, with the grammatically incorrect but commonly used “they” standing in for the gender neutral case:

You will find a series of descriptive terms commonly used to characterize people in general. Some of these terms are positive in connotation, others are negative, and some are neither very positive nor very negative.

We would like you to use this list to tell us what you think successful entrepreneurs are like. In making your judgments, it may be helpful to imagine that you are about to meet a person for the first time, and the only thing you know about (him/her/them) is (he is/she is/they are) a successful entrepreneur. Please rate each word or phrase in terms of whether or not it is characteristic of (him/her/them).

For the items of the Schein Descriptive Index, participants indicated, on a scale of 1 through 4, how characteristic each trait was of their hypothetical entrepreneur. Participants could also indicate that they were not familiar with the word or phrase. These “don’t know” responses were converted to missing values for statistical analysis. A typical item reads:

Demure

a=very unlike the person I am considering
b=somewhat unlike the person I am considering
c=somewhat like the person I am considering
d=very much like the person I am considering
e=I do not know what this word or phrase means

4.1. Participants

There were 140 surveys completed by 72 female and 65 male students, and three who declined to disclose their gender. These participants are undergraduate business majors enrolled in general management courses. They do not possess any specific expertise or training on entrepreneurship or entrepreneurs, and have not taken coursework in these areas. It is likely, however, that in the course of their studies they have been exposed to textbook portrayals businesspeople and entrepreneurs that reinforce gender stereotypes. A study of photographic illustrations in 12 business communication texts from 10 publishers between 1990 and 1994 showed that while men and women were depicted in proportion to their representation in the workforce, men were more likely to be portrayed as serious, older, and “in charge” (Pomeranke, Varner & Mallar, 1996).

5. Results

We used independent-samples t-tests to determine where perceptions of male, female, and gender-unspecified entrepreneurs differed. The hypothetical female entrepreneur differed from the male entrepreneur and from the unspecified entrepreneur on nine variables each, while the male entrepreneur differed significantly from the unspecified entrepreneur on only two. This pattern of results supports **Hypothesis 1**, that a hypothetical female entrepreneur would be perceived as more different from an entrepreneur and from a male entrepreneur than they are from each other.

	Male vs. Female	Male vs. Unspecified	Female vs. Unspecified
Bitter			F=1.68 U=1.38†
Dawdler and procrastinator		M=1.41 U=1.73†	
Demure			F=2.06 U=2.55†
Ethical		M=3.14 U=3.44†	
Feelings not easily hurt	M=3.23 F=2.88†		
Intuitive	M=3.53 F=3.23†		F=3.23 U=3.67**
Not uncomfortable being aggressive			F=2.60 U=3.08*
Objective			F=3.25 U=2.93†
Self reliant	M=3.57 F=3.22*		F=3.22 U=3.51†
Sentimental	M=2.44 F=2.1†		
Sociable	M=3.60 F= 3.33†		
Strong need for achievement	M=3.76 F=3.43*		
Strong need for social acceptance			F=2.42 U=2.82*
Tactful	M=3.29 F=2.97†		
Talkative			F=2.81 U=3.27*
Vigorous	M= 3.28 F=2.87*		F=2.87 U=3.22†
Wavering	M=2.10 F=1.62*		

†p<.10

*p<.05

**p<.01

Compared to the hypothetical male entrepreneur, the female entrepreneur is perceived as significantly less self-reliant, intuitive, sociable, achievement oriented, tactful and vigorous, while having feelings that are more easily hurt.

The female entrepreneur is also viewed as less wavering and sentimental than the male. Compared to the unspecified entrepreneur, the female entrepreneur is perceived as more bitter, less intuitive, more uncomfortable being aggressive, less self-reliant, less talkative, and having less need for social acceptance. This pattern of results supports **Hypotheses 2a** and **2b**. The female entrepreneur would be perceived more negatively than the male, and most instances where the female entrepreneur differs from the unspecified entrepreneur are unfavorable to the female entrepreneur.

Coming from the literature on managerial stereotyping, we would expect to see a stronger “think entrepreneur = think male” bias among male participants than among female participants. When male participants’ responses are analyzed separately, this does not appear to be the case. The findings do not support **Hypothesis 2c**.

5.1. Responses of Male Participants Only

	Male vs. Female	Male vs. Unspecified	Female vs. Unspecified
Cheerful	M=3.28 F=2.79†		
Competitive			F=3.0 U=3.58†
Desire for friendship			F=2.65 U=3.17†
Ethical		M=2.79 U=3.54*	
Feelings not easily hurt			F=2.72 U=3.33†
Frank			F=3.11 U=3.59†
Generous		M=2.63 U=3.25*	
High in self regard	M=3.58 F=3.05†		
Intuitive	M=3.63 F=3.11†		F=3.11 U=3.67*
Passive		M=1.68 U=2.3*	
Reserved	M=2.0 F=2.65*		
Self-reliant	M=3.28 F=3.0†		F=3.0 U=3.65*
Skilled in business		M=3.37 U=3.88*	F=3.44 U=3.88†
Sympathetic		M=2.37 U=3.09*	
Talkative		M=2.84 U=3.41*	

†p<.10

*p<.05

**p<.01

Male participants evaluated the female entrepreneur as significantly less intuitive and less self-reliant than both the male and the unspecified entrepreneur. The unspecified entrepreneur wins out over the male and the female entrepreneur in business skill, and is considered more ethical, generous and sympathetic than the male entrepreneur.

5.2. Responses of Female Participants Only

	Male vs. Female	Male vs. Unspecified	Female vs. Unspecified
Ambitious			F=3.96 U=3.64*
Bitter		M=1.85 U=1.38†	
Competitive	M=3.89 F=3.52†	M=3.89 U=3.38*	
Courteous		M=3.48 U=3.04†	
Dawdler and Procrastinator			F=1.33 U=1.81†
Desire to avoid controversy	M=2.57 F=2.0†		
Dominant		M=3.52 U=3.15†	
High need for monetary reward			F=3.09 U=3.5*
Nervous	M=1.8 F=1.39†		
Objective			F=3.26 U=2.88†
Self controlled	M=3.29 F=3.78*		F=3.78 U=3.46*
Sentimental	M=2.8 F=1.91**		
Sentimental		M=2.8 U=2.21*	
Sociable	M=3.75 F=3.48†		
Sociable		M=3.75 U=3.42*	
Talkative	M=3.53 F=2.87*		
Wavering	M=2.0 F=1.48†		

† $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Female participants rated the female entrepreneur as having positive traits overall. Compared to the unspecified entrepreneur, the female entrepreneur was perceived by women as more ambitious, objective and self-controlled, as well as less materialistic and procrastinating. Female participants also rated the female entrepreneur as more competitive and self controlled than the male entrepreneur, as well as less afraid of controversy, nervous, sentimental, sociable, and talkative.

These results support **Hypothesis 2d**, that the female entrepreneur is viewed more favorably by female participants than by male participants.

5.3. Manipulation Check

One item at the end of the survey asked whether the participant had been envisioning a male or female entrepreneur. Since participants were free to look back through their surveys any time they wished, they could have re-read the introductory paragraph that described the hypothetical entrepreneur. We expected that most participants would take their cue from the pronouns in the introductory paragraph, and that in the case of the unspecified entrepreneur, a majority of participants would have assumed that entrepreneur was male.

Of 44 surveys with a male hypothetical entrepreneur, 36 (82%) correctly envisioned the entrepreneur as male, 5 (11%) reported envisioning a female entrepreneur, and 3 did not answer the question. Out of 44 surveys with a hypothetical female entrepreneur, only 12 participants (27%) reported envisioning a female entrepreneur, while 28 (64%) reported envisioning a male, despite the use of the pronoun “her” in the description. Of the 49 surveys with the entrepreneur’s gender unspecified, 40 participants (82%), the same proportion as in the male entrepreneur condition, pictured a male entrepreneur. Eight participants (16%) envisioned a female entrepreneur.

This strongly confirmed **Hypotheses 3a** and **3b**. Participants were more likely to report envisioning a male entrepreneur under every condition. This result also compelled us to re-examine the other variables, categorized by the hypothetical entrepreneur *that the participant recalled* rather than the hypothetical entrepreneur presented in the survey. This gave us 104 surveys describing the hypothetical male entrepreneur and only 25 describing the female entrepreneur. Of the 25 participants that reported envisioning female entrepreneurs, only 3 were male. Two of these male participants had in fact received the description of the female entrepreneur, while one had been given the description of the male entrepreneur. Envisioning a female entrepreneur was highly related to the participant being female, and only moderately related to the hypothetical entrepreneur being described as female.

Results based on the gender of the hypothetical entrepreneur as recalled by participants:

	Male vs. Female
Bitter	M=1.59 F=1.32†
Knows the way of the world	M=3.29 F=2.76*
Quarrelsome	M=2.20 F=1.67*
Vulgar	M=1.81 F=1.43†

†p<.10

*p<.05

**p<.01

Analyzing the results based on the recalled gender of the entrepreneur indicates that the female entrepreneur is viewed as less bitter, worldly, quarrelsome and vulgar, but because the recalled entrepreneur is so highly confounded with the sex of the participant, we should avoid overinterpreting these results.

6. Discussion

Entrepreneurship is often touted as providing a career refuge for women, offering freedom from the corporate glass ceiling. In fact women are “pushed” into entrepreneurship by discrimination in large organizations more frequently than they are “pulled” by attractive opportunities (Hughes, 2003). While frustration with discrimination is a major factor in women’s opting into self-employment, the female corporate refugee then faces entrenched networks of customers and suppliers who prefer to deal with men (Weiler & Bernasek, 2001). Large organizations at least have Human Resources departments and codified antidiscrimination policies; individual customers and suppliers are free to indulge their prejudices, and are rarely required to defend their choices. As long as entrepreneurship is seen as a safe refuge from corporate discrimination, the glass ceiling can be dismissed as a nuisance. As Ahl (2004) put it,

Women’s entrepreneurship as a solution to the glass-ceiling problem reinforces a social order where men support men [and normalizes, and accepts, discrimination against women in large corporations while pretending that the same discrimination does not obtain in self-employment]. (177)

When confronted with evidence of such widespread prejudice, it is tempting to put our hope in future generations, who will presumably grow up to be more enlightened than their predecessors. To paraphrase Max Planck, we expect that progress will occur “one funeral at a time” (Weinberger, 2004). This is why the attitudes of college students are important. While one must take care generalizing from college students to a working adult population (Peterson, 2001), research based on undergraduate responses can be valuable (Wintre, North, & Sugar, 2001) because students and managers tend to make decisions similarly (Bateman & Zeithaml, 1989). In this case, undergraduate business students are exactly the ones we want to study – some may become entrepreneurs themselves, and many more will certainly be entrepreneurs’ customers, suppliers, and investors.

Among our participants, the entrepreneurs and businesspeople of the future, the successful male entrepreneur was perceived as very similar to the successful entrepreneur. The successful female entrepreneur was perceived as dissimilar to both. Moreover, our manipulation check provides some of the strongest evidence for the existence of a “think entrepreneur = think male” bias. Even in the condition where the entrepreneur was deliberately described using female

pronouns, only 27% of participants envisioned a female entrepreneur. With so many participants appearing to misremember the initial condition, are the other responses valid? They appear to follow the patterns we would expect from the management literature. Female participants think more highly of the female entrepreneur. The female entrepreneur is rated lower on self reliance, need for achievement, and comfort with being aggressive. The male entrepreneur is rated relatively low in passivity, high in self reliance, and is considered to have feelings less easily hurt than those of his hypothetical female counterpart. These differences are consistent with past research using the Schein Descriptive index. It appears that enough participants recalled the initial condition to yield these significant differences.

It is true that there are more male than female entrepreneurs, but the results of our study are disproportionate to the actual numbers. Entrepreneurship is still constructed as male and masculine (Bruni et al., 2004), and our results confirm this. If 65-70% of entrepreneurs are men (Fairlie, 2004), an accurate reflection might be that men would be recalled in the unprimed condition 65-70% of the time. Instead, in the absence of pronoun cues, 82% of participants assumed that the hypothetical entrepreneur was a man.

Talented women, potential entrepreneurs, have to deal with widespread “entrepreneur = male” stereotyping – and in some cases, may even be stereotyping themselves. (Of the women in our study who were asked to imagine meeting a successful woman entrepreneur, ten of them instead envisioned the entrepreneur as a man.) We do not believe that self-stereotyping is the main obstacle for women, however, and we think it would be misleading to overemphasize internal barriers:

Women business owners in America, Western Europe, and European transition countries voice similar needs for their business’s development – access to capital, access to education and training, access to networks and markets, and to be taken seriously. (Winn, 2005)

Our results are certainly not encouraging to those who hope for, or already believe in, an equal opportunity business climate for entrepreneurs. We believe, however, that it is important for educators to be aware of unconscious prejudices in ourselves and those we teach. We cannot count on progress occurring “one funeral at a time”, especially when we ourselves hold implicit “entrepreneur = male” stereotypes. Even entrepreneurship researchers tend to assume a default male entrepreneur, and treat women entrepreneurs as a special case (Ahl, 2004).

Entrepreneurship educators and researchers, no matter how well-intentioned or enlightened, cannot singlehandedly undo the implicit prejudices of an entire society. What we can do is start with ourselves, staying mindful of our own prejudices, questioning our assumptions, and cultivating the entrepreneurial talent in all of our students.

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