

ENTERPRISING WOMEN

A Comparison of Women's and Men's Small Business Networks

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This study demonstrates the importance of social context to the study of networks vital to business success. Results from analyses of the personal and business characteristics associated with different types of networks, a topic that has been neglected in past research, show the importance of structural perspectives emphasizing that women and men in the same situations have similar networks. Yet there are some network differences even among these women and men who operate the same kinds of businesses. This suggests that insights from gender construction perspectives should be integrated into network and other gender inequality studies.

Keywords: *networks; gender inequality; women business owners; network determinants; social ties*

Networks are an important focus for the study of women's equality. Network ties help people get jobs, promotions, and raises. Men's networks are different from women's in some key respects and are often

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described as providing greater career benefit (Erikson 2001; McGuire and Reskin 1993; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993). Given that society draws a sharp divide between work and family domains, assigns responsibility for family to women, and privileges the work sphere, men's network advantage is not surprising. Yet in the small business context, where boundaries between work and family are relatively fluid, women's greater responsibility for family and community may yield network strengths as well as network limits.

Many of the theoretical statements about gender and work-related networks come from job-search and organizational studies (Burt 1998; Campbell 1988; Ibarra 1992). Given emerging trends in the labor market (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin 1997), however, it is important to examine networks that span work, family, and community. Aldrich and colleagues introduced the small business context, an arena in which the boundaries between family, work, and community are blurred, but current knowledge about gender and small business networks comes primarily from one data set focused on nascent entrepreneurs (e.g., Aldrich 1989; Aldrich, Elam, and Reese 1997; Reese and Aldrich 1995; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000).

We chart new territory by comparing the networks of women and men who run similar established enterprises. First, we assess whether women who have achieved this threshold of success have the same types of networks as the men in the same structural position. Second, we investigate whether "enterprising women" have the same work history and personal and business characteristics as their counterparts who are men. This is one of the least developed areas of research on gendered networks (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin 1997; McGuire 2000).

Our extensive data set on the network determinants and characteristics of 320 women and 323 men who operate established enterprises in the same six industries permits us to provide a stringent test of arguments about gendered networks. Unlike past studies with small samples of business owners, relatively few women, and considerable industry segregation by gender, we are making "real comparisons" between women and men (Rosenfeld 2002). With our sample of small business owners who have achieved a threshold measure of success, we are able to evaluate the possibility that women's heavier noneconomic responsibilities need not always translate into network disadvantage. Our study makes a contribution to the broader topic of gender and networks, emphasizing the limits of structural perspectives based on men-defined models of good networks. At the same time, we highlight the importance of specific context to understanding of gendered networks.

GENDER AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Network theory contends that differences in structural position best explain why women and men tend to end up with different networks. Social construction perspectives on gender predict some differences in network characteristics even among similar women and men because gender is so deeply embedded in social life (cf. McGuire 2000). We believe these are complementary rather than competing perspectives and draw from both to frame our analyses and interpretations.

A typical structural argument is that sex differences in networks arise from the different opportunities and constraints associated with women's and men's positions in the social structure rather than because women and men are predisposed to form dissimilar networks (Fischer and Oliner 1983). For example, work history is linked to the kinds of networks that people have, yet many women and men have different career patterns because women continue to take major responsibility for family work. If differences in women's and men's social responsibilities were minimized, corresponding differences in women's and men's networks would diminish.

Findings that differences in women's and men's discussion and work-related networks are greatly reduced or disappear when social structural variables are controlled support this perspective (e.g., Ibarra 1997; McGuire 2000; Moore 1990). The structural perspective predicts that when differences in the personal and work experiences of women and men owners are controlled, their business networks will look the same. It also predicts that women and men with similar networks will have similar inputs, such as family situation, career history, and time spent on business work.

Yet gender construction perspectives suggest that women's and men's networks may look different even when women and men are in similar structural positions. There are two key ideas for the study of gender and networks that come from different theoretical strands. One is that women and men are never fully in the same social structural location even when it looks as though they are because of the deep and abiding gendering of social life (Bailyn 2003; Lorber 1994). The second is that because men have higher social status than women, they enjoy an advantage in the social interactions that produce instrumental network ties (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin 1997; Ridgeway 1997). Findings that women and men with similar job positions benefit from different types of network ties, that they use such ties differently, or that they do not have the same value as network members (Burt 1998; Ibarra 1997; McGuire 2000, 2002) are consistent with this conceptual orientation.

An Integrated Perspective on Gender and Networks

The complexities of gendered networks in the small business arena can only be understood by integrating the insights of social construction perspectives on gender into the foundation laid by structural perspectives. While it is crucial to control for variation in women's and men's work and family positions to demonstrate the tremendous explanatory power of structural variables, it is also important to acknowledge that the continued importance of gendered social norms renders structural explanations incomplete.

For example, structural perspectives often assume, at least implicitly, that women who get to the same work position as men benefit from the same kinds of networks. Such perspectives also imply that the only way for women to achieve even a threshold measure of network success is to carve the same work histories and run their businesses the same way as men. Yet gender construction perspectives predict network differences even among women and men owners who are running similar viable businesses, though the differences need not always signal women's network disadvantage. If women and men continue to operate in somewhat different social worlds because of the persistence of gender hierarchy, it stands to reason that one set of network characteristics would not be optimal for both (cf. Burt 1998; Ibarra 1997).

Gender construction perspectives also suggest the importance of context in evaluating what makes a good network and what it takes to get one. Thus, the fluidity of boundaries between work, family, and community that are a hallmark of the entrepreneurial arena may offer the chance for women to turn their greater family and community responsibilities into networks that sustain their businesses. This perspective also suggests the possibility that, free from the rigidities of employment systems, women may not have to "look like" men to end up with the same types of networks. In the small business arena, women may be able to build robust networks, despite the fact that they typically do not have the same network-building advantages as men.

With this integrated conceptual framework to guide us, we review past research on small business networks, job-related networks, and general discussion networks. Our first questions center on the comparison of women's and men's network characteristics.

NETWORK RESOURCES

Network ties are particularly important to small business owners, because they operate outside of the established channels available to

employees (Aldrich 1989). Because women enter entrepreneurship with deficits linked to their social position, network ties may be even more important for them (Brush et al. 2004; Moore and Buttner 1997). Past research suggests four key dimensions that determine whether or not a work-related network is useful: network size, the mix of kin and non-kin, network diversity, and the gender composition of network ties.

Network Size

Larger networks offer more of the information, help, and access to capital that are important to small business owners (Aldrich 1989). Research shows that women's discussion networks are the same size or larger than the networks of comparable men, and this seems to carry over into the workplace (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987; Fischer and Oliner 1983; Marsden 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; Moore 1990; Pugliesi and Shook 1998). We expect a similar pattern in the business discussion networks of small business owners (e.g., Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). However, given that men participate more in the kinds of activities likely to link them to those who can give practical business advice (Brush et al. 2004), women are apt to have smaller numbers of people to whom they can go for specific kinds of help or advice.

Kin and Non-kin

Kin may be valuable sources of social support, but kin are not as useful to careers or business start-up as non-kin (Campbell 1988; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). Women have more kin and more types of kin in their general discussion networks (Fischer and Oliner 1983; Marsden 1987; Moore 1990) because they are more centrally involved in kin-based networks (e.g., Marsden 1990; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993). Moore (1990) showed that the number of kin in discussion networks decreases when women spend more time in the world of paid work, as structural network perspectives predict.

Yet social construction perspectives alert us to the possibility that the small business context yields a different pattern. Given the potential for fluidity between the work, family, and community lives of small business owners (Aldrich 1989; Brush 1992), it makes sense that even successful women owners would include more kin in their networks than their counterparts who are men (Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). In fact, kin support might be particularly important to women owners as they navigate an arena that is still less typical for women than for men.

Heterogeneity

Having diverse networks is considered to be good for business and careers. Marsden (1987) notes that having a lot of different kinds of people in one's work-related network provides access to more and different kinds of information and help. Men have been shown to have a small but significant advantage over women in the numbers of different occupations from which their network contacts come (Campbell 1988).

Although men's greater breadth and depth of experience in the world of work brings them many important conduits of information and resources (Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993), women's small business activity, even more than men's, is likely to be connected to other parts of life (Brush 1992; Loscocco 1997). We expect women owners to draw more readily from diverse areas of their lives for network members, leading to greater heterogeneity in women's than in men's networks. The only study to focus on small business owners showed that people with more heterogeneous networks are more likely to start new businesses, though there were no differences between women and men in network heterogeneity (Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). Yet it is still possible that heterogeneous networks are more important for the viability and growth of women's than men's businesses.

Gender Composition

Looking at both numbers and proportions of women in networks, researchers conclude that women, like men, seek out and benefit from job-related instrumental network ties who are men. This is consistent with the status characteristics strand of gender construction theory. The reasoning is that because men are concentrated in higher status positions, it is rational (and wise) for people to foster organizational ties to men (Ibarra 1997; McGuire 2000). In the small business context, Aldrich and colleagues showed that both men and women who were starting out were more likely to contact men than women for specific kinds of business help or advice. Women had an average of 66.1 percent of men in the networks they drew on for business advice compared to only 10.8 percent of women in the men's networks (Aldrich, Reese, and Dubini 1989). Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody (2000) found that 48 percent of the people in the business advice networks of women owners were women, but only 18 percent of the men's network ties were women.

The small business arena is still the province of men, and men's higher social status likely brings with it the perception that they have more

valuable resources to offer. Yet we suspect that for this sample, which includes equal numbers of women-typed industries such as retail and personal services, the women owners probably name higher proportions of women network ties. After all, women are more immersed than men in social and community-based organizations that are largely composed of other women (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1986), and women are also more likely to maintain kin and friendship ties (Hurlbert and Acock 1990; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993).

Many of the variables that are associated with network differences between women and men are controlled by our comparison of men and women who own similar businesses. Given the insights of network perspectives, we predict few gender differences in the means of network composition variables. Yet we also expect to show that even with key personal, family, and work history variables controlled, some gender differences in network composition will remain. We argue that the gendering of small business networks goes beyond structural location, as gender construction theory suggests.

PROBABLE DETERMINANTS OF NETWORK RESOURCES

What influences the types of networks that women and men have? Network theory indicates, and research studies confirm, that work positions are key. Workers' past and current work positions provide the chance to accumulate the social capital that makes one an attractive network member. Gendered work histories provide differential opportunity to form useful network ties (Ibarra 1992; McGuire 2000; Moore 1990; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody, 2000). Among the central facets of work that affect the quality of networks are occupational status, how much time one has spent in the labor force, and the number of occupations one has had (Beggs and Hurlbert 1997; Campbell 1988). For small business owners, whether one has owned a previous business might also be tied to network resources. It is likely that the average woman's lower occupational status and more limited, interrupted time in both employment and self-employment translate into network disadvantage.

Someone who has been in business for a longer time or who owns a larger business is probably better able to build a larger, more diverse network. People who devote a lot of hours to their business would probably be more connected to the kinds of network ties that are useful to them than would be true of part-time owners. A typical structural argument is that

because women work fewer hours in their businesses than men (Bird and Sapp 2004; Loscocco et al. 1991), they have smaller, less diverse networks. Running a home-based business, which is more common for women than for men (Danhauser 1999) could also limit connections to important network resources.

As noted earlier, the status characteristics strand of gender construction theory suggests that men are typically seen as more valuable network ties (e.g., Ibarra 1997; McGuire 2000). McPherson and Smith-Lovin's (1982) research on voluntary associations points to the possible limitations of network ties drawn from "typically female" contexts. Yet the greater value often attached to having men in networks may depend on their numerical dominance in important positions. We posit that in industries where women are concentrated, such as business and personal services, the value of women as network ties increases.

Family variables have been identified as another likely set of network determinants. Women's greater responsibility for children inhibits their ability to form robust work-related networks (Campbell 1988; Munch, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin 1997). Finally, those who are married or cohabiting have a readily available network tie in their significant other and potential access to his or her network ties as well, which probably affects both the size and gender composition of small business networks. A study that analyzed General Social Survey data showed that married people tend to have more kin in their personal networks than those who are divorced or never married (Hurlbert and Acock 1990).

Other individual characteristics, such as age and education, position people differently. Older people have the advantage of more time to build networks, which may be why their networks are slightly bigger (e.g., Pugliesi and Shook 1998), though research shows a curvilinear relationship between age and the size of discussion networks (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). Education is positively associated with network size (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006) and the use of cross-sex ties (Aldrich, Reese, and Dubini 1989). Apparently, more educated small business owners can more easily build larger, more diverse networks.

Structural perspectives imply that the women and men with the same network characteristics will have the same personal and business characteristics. Social construction perspectives on gender suggest that the same structural position may not bring the same kinds of network resources and that women's different family and work positions need not necessarily translate into different small business networks.

DATA, METHODS, AND MEASURES

The Data

Our sample comes from the 1998-1999 Upstate New York Small Business Study. Participants were drawn randomly from lists of small businesses (defined as having 100 or fewer employees) compiled by two companies that track business activity. Participants came from six industries. Three of the industries chosen are considered nontraditional for women: manufacturing, wholesale trade, and transportation, and the other three are industries in which women have traditionally been concentrated: business services, personal services, and apparel. The industries selected had sufficient numbers of local businesses owned by women and men to allow meaningful comparisons. Structured interviews were conducted with 320 men and 323 women small businesses owners.

The overall response rate was 51 percent for men and 58 percent for women, with nonresponders counted as refusals (cf. Aldrich, Elam, and Reese 1989). Analyses comparing the participants and 477 people who refused to participate show no significant differences in business size or years of business ownership. However, men were significantly more likely to refuse than women, as the response rates show.

For these analyses, we exclude women who were owners of companies in name only, resulting in an N of 308 women. Almost all respondents were white and non-Latino, reflecting the lack of racial and ethnic diversity on the tracking company lists of small businesses in the upstate New York region. The average age of participants at the time of the interview was just over 48 years. About three-quarters of the sample were married or living with a significant other. The vast majority (97 percent) of participants completed high school, and nearly 40 percent graduated from college. They have owned their businesses for an average of 12.7 years. Just over 45 percent of the owners in the sample did not have any full- or part-time employees; 89 percent of them had 10 or fewer people working for them. Our respondents are similar in racial homogeneity and marital status to those in the sample used most often by Aldrich and colleagues, though they are not as highly educated. Business size is similar across the two samples, but since the Aldrich study was of nascent and recent entrepreneurs, our respondents have been in business longer.

Network Measures

The network question we use adapted a part of the General Social Survey name generator sequence, asking the following: Please tell me the

first name of the people who are important to your business *for any reason* (not including employees and partners). A second set of questions adapted from Aldrich, Elam, and Reese (1997) asked whether respondents had someone they could go to for specific kinds of help such as accounting, planning, or experience in their type of business. The respondent was asked the sex, age, education, occupation, closeness to respondent, and length and type of relationship for each person named in response to either question. To conserve space, we present only the results for the general networks but discuss results for the specific networks when noteworthy.

To measure determinants of network resources other than sex/gender, we use three sets of variables: owner characteristics, owner's work history, and business characteristics. Owner characteristics are age (in years), education (in years), whether or not respondent is currently married or living with a partner (0 = no; 1 = yes), and the number of children under 13 years in the household. Owner's work history includes the number of occupations held, the number of years out of the labor force, and the number of years in the same field as the current business. Business characteristics are how long the owner has had the business, the number of hours per week respondent does business work, the number of employees (logged), a dummy variable for industrial sector: 0 for male-dominated sector, 1 for non-male-dominated sector, and a dummy variable for whether the business is home based: 0 for not home based and 1 for home based. Means for all predictor variables are presented separately for women and men in the appendix.

The dependent variables include the size of the network (0-5), percentage kin (0-100), percentage women (0-100), and the number of kin. We also calculated measures of network heterogeneity, tapping the diversity of relationships reported in respondents' business networks (based on Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000, 533). Respondents indicated the type of relationship for each person named in these seven categories: family, business associate, professional advisor, client/customer, acquaintance, voluntary organization member, and friend. The more different types of relationships an owner reports in her or his networks, the higher the heterogeneity score, with a range from 0 (fully homogeneous) to 1 (completely heterogeneous).

Analytic Strategy

To compare women's and men's small business networks, we began by generating overall means or percentages. Then we used multivariate techniques to look at whether there were differences between women and men's networks with business and owner characteristics controlled. To examine

the explanatory power of sex, we first ran a regression model for the whole sample that included all independent variables except sex, then added sex to a second model and looked at the change in the *R*-squared value.

Next, we analyzed the effects of owner characteristics, owner's work history, and business characteristics on our dependent variables: network size, percentage kin in network, percentage women in network, and heterogeneity score. We ran this for the pooled sample with sex as a control variable and then produced separate models for men and women. The results were consistent, so we present only separate models for ease of interpretation.¹ For network size, we used negative binomial regression (with SAS's GENMOD procedure). Negative binomial regression fits generalized linear models and has the advantage of being precisely tailored to count data because these data are discrete, often highly skewed, and have low means. Using ordinary least squares (OLS) models, we regressed percentage of family members in the business network, percentage of women in the business network, and heterogeneity of the business network on the independent variables.

These analyses show whether network differences diminish or disappear among women and men small business owners who share the same characteristics and also whether owner and business characteristics are linked to network characteristics in the same way for the two groups.

RESULTS

Network Characteristics

Table 1, Panel A, shows that women name more network members than men do. This suggests that women's larger general discussion networks (e.g., McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; Pugliesi and Shook 1998) prove useful in the small business arena. Data not presented in the tables provide more detail about network size. Contrary to our expectations, these women and men owners reported having the same number of network ties to whom they could turn for specialized kinds of help or advice. This casts some doubt on the view that women do not have as many ties that are specifically geared to the small business arena (e.g., Brush et al. 2004). In answer to a question about whether they felt they had enough people to talk with about their business, about one-third of women and one-quarter of men answered no. In addition, 38 percent of women and 26.3 percent of men reported that they had no organizations to which they could go for business help.

TABLE 1: Network Characteristics for Women and Men without Control Variables (Panel 1): How Women’s and Men’s Networks Compare, and with Control Variables (Panel 2): The Effect of Being a Woman with Owner Characteristics, Work History, and Business Characteristics Controlled

	Panel A ^a		Panel B ^b	
	Women	Men	Gender Effect	Change in R ²
Network size ^c	2.37**	1.95	.147* (.073)	NA
No. kin ^c	1.08**	.81	.219^ (.113)	NA
Percentage kin ^d	.44	.39	.024 (.043)	.001
Percentage women ^d	.39	.38	-.023 (.037)	.000
Heterogeneity score ^d	.25	.14	.029 (.027)	.003
N	307	318	625	

b. Control variables are age, education, couple status, no. of preteen children, no. of occupations, no. of years without paying job, time in field, years had business, no. of hours worked per week, size of business, sector, whether business is home based

c. We use negative binomial regression for network size and no. of kin variables because they are count variables. R² does not exist for negative binomial regression.

d. We use ordinary least squares regression for percentage kin, percentage women, and heterogeneity score because they are continuous variables. The change in R² column represents the amount of change in R² between the model that does not include sex and the model that does include sex.

^ t-tests (two-tailed) significant at .10 level, * at 05 level, ** at .01 level.

Table 1 shows two additional differences in the networks of these women and men. Even these established women owners have more kin in their networks than their male counterparts. Women’s networks are also more heterogeneous than men’s. This is consistent with research on managers (Ibarra 1997) and our predictions based on the connections between ownership activity and family and community life. Women and men have the same proportion of women in their networks (almost 40 percent), while past studies of entrepreneurs who are just starting out found much lower proportions of women in men’s networks (e.g., Aldrich 1989; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000; Staber and Aldrich 1995). Still, contacts for both groups are more often men than women, as we expected based on men’s higher social status and greater presence in the small business arena.

These comparisons reveal some differences in the network resources of women and men. If we make the comparison even more stringent and add controls for differences in these owners' businesses and backgrounds, will the network differences disappear, as structural perspectives suggest?

Panel B in Table 1 displays the results of regression models constructed to answer this question. We tested for differences between women and men on network characteristics with several owner and business characteristics controlled. There are no differences between men and women in percentage kin in network, percentage women in the network, or network heterogeneity, all of which indicate the importance of structural position. The addition of sex to the network models for these network characteristics added no additional explanatory power to the models, as shown by the lack of change in the R-squared term. Yet women still have larger networks and a greater number of kin in their networks, even when they are similar to men in work history, personal characteristics, and business characteristics.

Probable Determinants of Network Characteristics

The negative binomial regression results for determinants of network size are presented in Table 2.

Note that the coefficients for owner education and length of time in the field are positive and significant in the equation for network size. Women and men who have spent more time in their field have built larger networks. Education is associated with more business ties for both women and men but to varying degrees. Each additional year of education increases the number of ties in women's business network by 3.4 percent ($e^{0.033} = OR = 1.034$), while each additional year of education increases the size of men's business network by 7.4 percent ($e^{0.071} = OR = 1.074$). This translates into a network 14 percent ($e^{0.033*4} = OR = 1.14$) larger for women with a four-year college degree and 28 percent ($e^{0.071*4} = OR = 1.28$) larger for men with a four-year college degree, relative to those with only a high school diploma.

There are also some differences between men and women in which independent variables are associated with the size of business networks. Women who have had more occupations prior to small business ownership have larger business networks, but this pattern does not hold for men. Finally, the age of the business matters only for men's business networks. Among men, those who have been in business longer have smaller networks. This pattern does not exist for women.

TABLE 2: Negative Binomial Regression of the Effects of Owner Characteristics, Work History, and Business Characteristics on Network Size, for Women and for Men (unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Women</i>		<i>Men</i>	
Intercept	.330	(.394)	-.774	(.506)
Owner characteristics				
Sex				
Age	-.009	(.006)	.005	(.006)
Education	.033	^ (.019)	.071	** (.025)
Coupled	.018	(.090)	-.099	(.151)
No. preteens	.076	(.104)	.103	(.124)
Work history				
No. occupations	.028	* (.013)	.004	(.015)
Years without paying job	.010	(.006)	.030	(.031)
Time in field	.011	* (.005)	.016	* (.007)
Business characteristics				
How long had business	.006	(.007)	-.014	* (.007)
No. hours work per week	.002	(.003)	.004	(.003)
Size of business	.031	(.048)	.004	(.050)
Sector	-.027	(.085)	.069	(.102)
Home-based	0.03	(.098)	.080	(.147)
N	307		318	
Pearson chi-square/DF	1.04		.98	

NOTE: The squared term for age was not significant.

^ *t*-tests (two-tailed) significant at .10 level, * at .05 level, ** at .01 level.

Table 3 presents OLS regression coefficients predicting percentage kin in network,² percentage women in network, and heterogeneity score separately for women and for men.³

Surprisingly, the findings from Table 3 suggest that owning a business in an industry typical for women, spending some time outside of the paid labor force, and spending fewer hours per week on business—all more common among the women in our sample—are not disadvantages for small business owners in forming business networks.

Patterns of association between education and network composition mirror those reported for general discussion networks (e.g., McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). Owners with more formal education have more diverse networks of people who are important to their businesses. For women, formal education appears to broaden network choices even more, as the more educated women have a smaller proportion of kin in their networks.

TABLE 3: OLS Regression Coefficients Obtained from Regression of Network Variables on Owner Characteristics, Work History, and Business Characteristics for Women and for Men (unstandardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses)

	% Kin		% Women		Heterogeneity Score	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Owner characteristics						
Age	.002 (.004)	.001 (.003)	.001 (.003)	.001 (.003)	-.003 (.002)	.003+^ (.002)
Education	-.047*** (.012)	.018^ (.013)	.002 (.010)	.016 (.012)	.017* (.008)	.015+ (.008)
Coupled	.207*** (.056)	.174* (.083)	-.083+ (.048)	.139+^ (.075)	.006 (.037)	-.013 (.051)
No. preteens	.026 (.065)	.132+ (.067)	.029 (.056)	-.016 (.060)	-.014 (.042)	.044 (.041)
Work history						
No. occupations	-.003 (.009)	-.007 (.009)	-.005 (.007)	.002 (.015)	.001 (.006)	.008 (.005)
Years without paying job	.001 (.004)	.002 (.017)	-.005 (.004)	.016 (.015)	.001 (.003)	.005 (.010)
Time in field	-.001 (.002)	-.004 (.004)	.001 (.003)	-.004 (.003)	.002 (.002)	-.001 (.002)
Business characteristics						
How long had business	-.004 (.004)	.005 (.004)	-.003 (.004)	.005 (.003)	.003 (.003)	-.006*^ (.002)
No. hours work per week	.000 (.002)	-.002 (.002)	.000 (.001)	.000 (.001)	.000 (.001)	.000 (.001)
Size of business	-.040 (.030)	-.095*** (.026)	-.033 (.025)	-.077** (.023)	-.019 (.019)	.010 (.015)
Sector	.083 (.053)	.025 (.055)	.006 (.045)	.030 (.050)	-.018 (.034)	-.011 (.034)
Home-based	-.052 (.061)	-.013 (.079)				
Intercept	.954**	.138	.466*	.035	.039	-.135
R^2	.137	.141	.039	.120	.032	.077
N	258	236	258	236	258	236

NOTE: OLS = ordinary least squares.

Significance level: ***.001; **.01; *.05; +.10. Difference between coefficients for women and men statistically significant at .05 level.

Men and women who are currently married or living with a partner have higher proportions of kin in their business networks. Not surprisingly, men who are coupled have a greater proportion of women in their networks than men who are single, while among women, it is those who are single who have a greater proportion of women important to their businesses. Yet the

number of preteen children is not statistically significant in any of the equations for women, contradicting the notion that having young children hurts women's chances to build useful networks.

Work history and business characteristics contribute relatively little to these equations for women's or men's networks. Two key variables associated with success have a significant impact on men's but not women's networks. The longer men have owned their business, the less heterogeneous are their networks. Without longitudinal data, we can only speculate about what this means. It is possible that with time, men are able to develop a small number of valuable ties adequate for their business needs. This could also represent a cohort effect, with younger groups of men somehow more able to harness different kinds of network ties. Whatever the explanation, it does not apply to women. Also, as the size of men's businesses increases, the proportion of women and kin in the network declines. This is not the case for women. We speculate that more successful men have somewhat more opportunity to include men and non-kin in their networks (cf. McGuire 2000, 2002). Results not presented indicate that the proportion of women in the network of people that owners turn to for specific advice and help is significantly greater for those who have businesses in sectors typical for women, although the effect is stronger among women than among men.

DISCUSSION

Our results show that structural position is central to understanding differences in the network resources of these women and men who run small enterprises. Yet a focus on structure alone would obscure our equally important finding that the meaning and consequences of virtually the same structural position may be different for women and men, a result that confirms the importance of overarching social constructions of gender. We have also demonstrated the importance of social context for gender and networks. From the perspective of women's equality, our results indicate both good news and bad news.

Our comparison of established owners suggests that differences in the characteristics and probable determinants of women's networks need not always translate into networks that are not as good as men's, as structural perspectives sometimes imply. It is true that some of the differences in overall network resources appear to confirm that men have more effective networks, such as the fact that men have a smaller number of kin in their

networks. Yet we also found that women's networks are larger and filled with more different kinds of people; these are both hallmarks of useful networks (Aldrich 1989; Marsden 1987).

Both women and men owners are more likely to have men in their business-related networks. This is consistent with status characteristics perspectives suggesting that men's higher status and associated opportunities make them seem to be more valuable network members (e.g., McGuire 2000). Yet we also show that these women and men have the same proportion of women (about 40 percent) in their business networks, a finding that differs from much past research (e.g., Ibarra 1992; Marsden and Hurlbert 1988; Moore 1990; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). We suggest that this is because, in our sample, men are more likely to be in the same industries as women, including some industries where women are concentrated, such as retail and personal services. In arenas associated with women, the availability and value of women as network ties are apt to be enhanced. This interpretation is supported by our finding that the proportion of women in networks of people to which owners turn for specific advice is greater in those industries where women are concentrated. Furthermore, in response to an open-ended question about what it meant to be a woman (or a man) in their business work, many of the women in such industries said that their sex/gender status was an advantage.

Results of our analyses of the probable influences on network characteristics reinforce the importance of integrating structural and gender construction perspectives. We found that some of the network disadvantage that women experience in the labor market (e.g., Campbell 1988; Smith 2000) is not problematic in the small business context. For example, while women had more labor force interruptions than men before they became owners, this did not result in any difference in network characteristics. Nor are women's apparent "business deficits" associated with network characteristics. Even though these women are more apt to run home-based businesses and these men average more hours in their businesses, neither of these variables is associated with any of the network dimensions we analyzed. Furthermore, having young children is not linked to any of women's network characteristics, though it does matter for men. Apparently, women are able to maintain active business-related networks while also parenting young children.

Thus, the blurring of work-family boundaries and reliance on community ties characteristic of the small business arena may make it easier for women to accumulate the kinds of network resources that analysts have shown to be useful. It is especially noteworthy that women achieve

the same kinds of business networks as men without having had to travel the same career path or work as many hours in the business or establish a business outside the home or forgo children. Feminists note that the major remaining barriers to women's work equality are career structures, work schedules, and work requirements that are based on a male-defined model of the ideal worker (e.g., Bailyn 2003; Lorber 1994). The flexibility and autonomy of the small business arena appear to offer an escape from some of those constraints. When women are in charge of their own work, perhaps they can harness network ties in new ways. This may bode well for women's equality, as the small business arena is a bellwether of emerging trends in the labor market (cf. Ibarra and Smith-Lovin 1997).

Yet we also found evidence of women's continuing uphill battle to achieve equality with men. The pattern of association between variables such as education, experience, and network characteristics suggests that men enjoy greater network return from their human capital. Business size, a key measure of business success, is associated with "better" networks for men but not for women.

The results for network size highlight the basic good news–bad news story that we uncovered. Women have larger networks of people who are important to their businesses. This is true even when comparing men and women with similar personal background and business characteristics, which suggests that women's key roles in family, friendship, and community networks have a payoff for business activity. Women are also as likely as men to have networks of people to whom they can turn for specific advice on accounting, planning, or the nature of the industry. However, we also found some unmet network needs among these women. More women than men report that they have no formal organization to which to turn for help or advice with their business, though most owners do have contacts with such organizations. A significantly smaller number of women than men say that they feel they have enough people with whom they can talk about the business.

The biggest unanswered question is to what extent women turn aspects of their networks into business success comparable to men's. Connections to the "right" people may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for economic success (cf. Ibarra 1997; McGuire 2002). To what extent can network members provide the resources small business women need to be as competitive as similarly positioned men? Is women's economic success helped or hindered by the kin who fill their networks in greater numbers? Further research is needed to tie network measures more directly to economic success.

Studying comparable men and women offers both substantive and conceptual richness to our understanding of networks. Yet we were able to explain more of the variance in men's than in women's network characteristics. This suggests the need for more studies that start from the standpoint of women's experience to get a better sense of what matters for women's work-related networks. Our study is clearly limited by the use of cross-sectional data. Additional research is needed to establish the causal relationships between individual and business variables and network characteristics. Finally, our sample was overwhelmingly white, and our conclusions are therefore limited to a single racial ethnic group. Studies of how the networks of women and men from other racial groups compare are much needed (e.g., McGuire 2000, 2002).

Our findings show the importance of social context to the study of women's inequality. We demonstrated that with appropriate data sets, it is possible to show the strengths that come from women's social position rather than assuming, as structural perspectives often imply, that differences between women and men always signify women's disadvantage. We confirmed that even a master status such as sex/gender can have different value in different contexts. This serves as a reminder that understanding of women's inequality is deepened when variation across social settings is taken into account. Through a fairly stringent test, we have shown both the importance and the limits of structural perspectives on gendered networks. This suggests that gender construction perspectives highlighting status and material differences between women and men should be fully integrated into studies of gender inequality.

APPENDIX
**Independent Variables for Women and for Men (means
or percentages; standard deviations in parentheses)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Owner characteristics		
Age	47.11** (11.48)	49.58 (10.37)
Education (years)	14.48 (2.14)	14.26 (2.26)
Coupled (%)	.72** (.45)	.86 (.35)
No. preteens	.41 (.78)	.54 (.92)

(continued)

APPENDIX (continued)

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Work history		
No. occupations	3.61 (2.94)	3.44 (3.44)
Years without paying job	4.57** (7.10)	.69 (1.57)
Time in field	7.58 (9.07)	8.28 (7.98)
Business characteristics		
How long had business	10.39** (10.27)	14.94 (7.12)
No. hours work weekly	45.74** (17.75)	52.12 (16.29)
Size of business	3.57** (7.43)	7.42 (11.12)
Sector (proportion male dominated)	.41** (.65)	.54 (.52)
Home based (1 = yes)	.29*** (.46)	.16 (.36)
(N)	(308)	(319)
Significance level: **.01; *.05		
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NOTES

1. As noted in the "Data and Methods" section, we ran two regression models on the combined sample of men and women. The first model included all variables except sex. In the second model, we added sex. The coefficient of sex for that model is presented in Table 1. We do not present a separate table with all coefficients from the combined sample here because it adds no additional information or explanatory power beyond what is already presented in Table 2. We also tested for interactions between sex and other owner characteristics, work history, and business characteristics and found no significant interactions.

2. We do not present results for number of kin as the dependent variable because after controlling for network size, the results are the same as the models for percentage kin, and there is more conceptual and empirical precedent for using percentage kin.

3. As with network size, we first ran combined regression models to assess the impact of owner characteristics, work history, and business characteristics on the sample as a whole. The effect of sex on each of the dependent variables is shown in Table 1, along with the change in *R*-squared after adding sex to each of the models. We also tested for interactions between sex and owner and business characteristics and found only one significant interaction, between sex and business size, for the dependent variable network size. We do not include a table showing all coefficients for the combined sample or for the interaction tests because they add no additional information or explanatory power to our analysis. Coefficients for the combined sample and interaction tests are available from the authors on request.

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