

“...authors maintain that research on women entrepreneurs suffers from a number of shortcomings. These include a one-sided empirical focus (Gatewood, Carter, Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2003), a lack of theoretical grounding (Brush, 1992), the neglect of structural, historical, and cultural factors (Chell & Baines, 1998; NUTEK, 1996), the use of male-gendered measuring instruments (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990), the absence of a power perspective, and the lack of explicit feminist analysis (Mirchandani, 1999; Ogbor, 2000; Reed, 1996).” (Ahl, 2006)

Again, it is beyond the scope of this literature review to discuss gender and research theory (e.g., gender-biases in research design, survey instruments, and assumptions regarding what constitutes firm performance). It suffices to say, these are important areas of inquiry that require substantially more attention within research and discussions about SME policy and programs.

Finally, readers are alerted to systemic biases within the academic review process, and hence the research presented throughout this report. It is well-known that academic and trade journals favour those studies that report ‘significant’ differences. This lends to the possibility of over-reporting of gender differences and under-reporting of similarities. Bias may, of course, also enter into the search and selection procedure and into the selection of reported findings. For example, readers are likely to tire of references to my own work. For this I apologize.

Given the methodologies employed in this literature, it is conceivable that some studies were overlooked in the search phase of the literature review. Scholars also report a general absence of research about women’s entrepreneurship (Brush, 1992; Brush & Edelman, 2000; Gatewood, Carter, Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2003; Terjesen, 2004; Bruin, Brush, Friederike, 2007). For example, Bruin *et al.* (2007) report that studies about women’s entrepreneurship account for approximately 6 to 7 percent of publications since 1994 across the top eight refereed entrepreneurship journals. Ahl (2006) also reports that that of the articles examined in her recent review of the literature, 64 percent originate in the United States and 80 percent from the Anglo-Saxon sphere.

Fortunately, Canadian researchers ‘punch above their weight’ with respect to both the quality of studies about women entrepreneurs and the volume of work that has been published over the last 20 years. This observation is illustrated in the bibliography of more than 140 Canadian studies about women entrepreneurs (Appendix B).

The next section presents an overview of Canadian statistics pertaining to the participation rates of women business owners and self-employed women.