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*Family Social Class Effects  
on Entrepreneurship*

(Efeitos da Classe Social da Família sobre o Empreendedorismo)

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## **Family Social Class Effects on Entrepreneurship<sup>1</sup>**

by Reed Nelson, Edmilson Lima and Vânia Nassif

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This paper explores the relationship between social class and entrepreneurial intention and tradition among undergraduate students in two large urban universities in Brazil. By using samples and operationalizations unique in the current literature on entrepreneurship in Latin America, we raise new questions and pose new answers about the relation between social class, family background and entrepreneurial behavior in the region.

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## **Family Social Class Effects on Entrepreneurship**

### **Introduction**

The relationship between social class and entrepreneurship is as interesting and dynamic as it is fraught with conceptual and empirical challenges. As an example, consider only the relationship between entrepreneurship and social mobility (Amorós and Cristi 2010; Solimano 2005). Different social classes are equipped with different social and cultural capital with which to formulate and execute an entrepreneurial vision. At the same time, entrepreneurial activity is well known as a means by which some persons move from one social class to another. Indeed a large proportion of the world's wealthiest persons became so through their entrepreneurial activities (Shane 2009). Yet again, wealthy entrepreneurs of lower class origins have often been snubbed in their overtures to traditional upper classes despite the fact that the wealth of some of them far exceeds that of the "old rich." Just the thorough study of how entrepreneurial behavior relates to social mobility could be the subject of several lifetime's research.

Part of the reason why the relation between class and entrepreneurship is interesting is because economic development, social class, and entrepreneurial activity appear to interact powerfully (Quadrini 2000). It is well accepted that the industrial revolution in England was carried out in large part by entrepreneurs from the middle classes (Doepke and Zilibotti 2005; Weber 1930). It is also generally believed that the size of the middle class is closely related to the economic development and growth of a country if not its rates of entrepreneurial activity (Acemoglu and Zilibotti 1997; Khras 2010). Hence the relationship between class and entrepreneurship is interesting for both purely intellectual and policy formulation reasons. The modest literature that exists relating social class and entrepreneurship contains a variety of different models of how these variables interrelate, including several diverse causal orderings among variables (Doepke and Zilibotti 2005; Galor and Weil 2000; Hansen and Prescott, 2002).

If our understanding of the relationship between class and entrepreneurship generally is tenuous, it is more so in Latin America, where entrepreneurship studies are in their infancy. Yet the importance of social class in the region, the unequal distribution of wealth and life chances, and the relative dearth of successful entrepreneurial ventures makes the study of social class and entrepreneurship especially important in the region.

The exploratory research presented here uses data from a large ( $n = 14,807$ ) survey of entrepreneurial behavior, intentions, and interests of Brazilian university students and their families from two different higher education institutions to complement what little is known about the relationship between social class and entrepreneurship in that country and to contribute modestly to the broader international debates on entrepreneurship, social class, and economic development. Our major finding is that, while the motivations and perceptions that relate to entrepreneurship vary only slightly by family social class, students' entrepreneurial intention, actual family and student involvement in entrepreneurship and the size of entrepreneurial ventures directed by students vary radically. Social class affects students' entrepreneurial intention and also the rate of enterprise formation and size of the firms of those who are in business – apparently not through classical dimensions of personality, but through the entrepreneurial tradition of family and levels of well-being, independence, and status aspiration cultivated in the family context.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Views of Social Class and their Significance for the Study of Entrepreneurship**

One of the complicating factors in the study of social class and entrepreneurship is the longstanding dissensus around definitions of social class and diversity in thinking about the origins, dynamics and effects of class. It will be necessary at the outset therefore to consider the major streams of thought around social class and their implications for research on entrepreneurship.

The earliest formal analysis of social class was Karl Marx division of members of societies into capitalists, laborers and petty bourgeoisie (Marx 1973). Capitalists owned the means of production and employed laborers to produce a surplus which they appropriated as profits. It is in the interest of the worker to minimize surplus earnings appropriated by the capitalist, as it is in the interest of the capitalist to maximize this surplus. Tension also results because capitalists control the “process and product” of the worker’s labor. This loss of control results in alienation on the part of the worker. The result of these tensions is class conflict in a variety of manifestations which change in its dynamics as the technology of production evolves. The petty bourgeoisie escapes this relation of tension by engaging in economic activities which do not require concentrated capital or the exploitation of labor. Examples would be physicians, lawyers, and other self-employed. Using strictly Marxist criteria, self-employed with no subordinates would belong to the petty bourgeoisie, while those with employees would be capitalists.

Max Weber, a major intellectual rival of Marx, developed a more nuanced view of social classes, which nonetheless, builds upon Marx’s original thinking in many ways. Like Marx (1973), Weber (1930) sees class as deriving from economic power, but he adds also political power and social bonds created by common cultural identities. While Marx (1973) sees ownership of the means of production as the chief causal agent in economic and social evolution, Weber (1930) attributes greater influence to markets in general and to a person’s location within markets which ultimately determine his “life chances” or access to a variety of symbolic and physical resources. Instead of differentiating between those who own the means of production and those who don’t, Weber (1930) looks at (among other things) the kinds of exchanges that members of different classes are able to make within markets. For instance, families with ample financial resources can purchase educational, medical and cultural services that differentiate them from others beyond their ownership of tools, buildings, or land that can be used to produce things. These resources in turn can also provide access to social contacts and specialized knowledge that are advantageous in several ways. Economic resources may or may not be used to occupy or reinforce membership and influence in status groups whose ability to include and exclude members, according to their definitions of value, helps to order societies hierarchically. Finally, parties mobilize persons to pressure the state to favor issues and ideas that reinforce the position of classes and status groups vis-à-vis others.

Weber (1930) not only emphasized how people are positioned within markets but also how the rationalizing forces of capitalistic markets favored those who are able to harness economic activity in systematic and predictable ways. Thus a technician or manager who is able to guide the efficient production of goods may garner as much power, honor and economic resources as someone who owns the means of production but is not able to rationally manage them.

Weber’s views lacked the simplicity and parsimony of Marx’s scheme and pose no elegant principles for typologizing and ordering classes, but subsequent work which exploits different themes in Weber’s thinking provides a number of more compact analytical options. One popular more recent approach is Bordieu’s analysis of economic, social, cultural, and

symbolic capitals. Bourdieu (1984) took elements of Weber's thought on stratification and arranged them into separate categories which he then analyzed as resources or capitals which people use to distinguish themselves from one another in a more or less constant round of negotiations to secure a space in the status order. Economic capital follows the intuitive definition of financial resources. Social capital refers to connections between individuals in the social structure which can be used to secure prestige, opportunities, or resources. Cultural capital consists of learning associated with different degrees of prestige and different technical and social abilities. Finally, symbolic capital involves the knowledge of tastes, conventions and evaluations used to signal one's location in prestige hierarchies. Different mixtures of capitals are used by different social groups and strata to maximize their degree of prestige and distinction, and different capitals are favored by different persons depending on their location in and aspirations in the class system. Bourdieu (1984) undertook sophisticated qualitative and quantitative analyses of mixtures of these different capitals in action. One of his most notable findings is the idea that early socialization imbues individuals with specific tastes and preferences which are closely aligned with social class. Thus, early on individuals learn to abhor cultural manifestations from other classes, and be moved and uplifted by the manifestations of their own class.

There are a host of other approaches to social class, most of which share some kinship with the three major approaches outlined above. Space limits will not permit even a viable enumeration here, but, for our purposes, it will be useful to make reference to a few other streams of thought about class. One interesting stream in American social thought was relatively uninterested in the causal forces creating class and more in how class is expressed via life styles. Warner, Meek and Ellis (1960) and, from political science, Banfield (1974), saw class arising out of different styles of life and society's evaluation of those styles. They tended to be heavy on description and context, but lighter on analysis. Banfield (1974), for example, claimed that classes are separated by their relative belief in their possibility to influence the environment (their locus of control, to use a psychological construct he anticipated) and by their future orientation. He was, however, less interested in how this orientation came to be.

Finally we mention the functionalist view of social class, which although currently ignored or dismissed, was highly influential during the mid-twentieth century. Functionalists believed that classes arise in response to social systems' needs for order, production, and reproduction. Societies allocate lesser or greater awards to different social functions depending on their importance, their scarcity, and inherent desirability, resulting in predictable social groupings. Thus, attempting to cure sick or dying people is difficult and inherently distasteful work but provides important value to society. As a result, physicians are allocated a disproportionate amount of income and respect in most societies. Although functionalism is criticized for its conservative bias, it would be difficult to argue that there is no relation between the supply of skills, the difficulty of tasks, their relative importance to a social system, and one's position in the social order.

### **Family Social Class and Background Effects on Entrepreneurship**

The literature has identified a number of statistical effects of family social class on an individual's interest and practice in entrepreneurship. Dolton and Makepeace (1990) observed a strong tendency for graduates of elite private universities in the UK to be self-employed. Similarly, Hundley (2006) found that household income is positively correlated with the incidence of self-employment. Dunn and Holtz-Eakin (2000) observed the same type of relationship between family financial capital levels and the incidence of self-employment among young people. In another similar study, Erkkö and Zoltan (2010) noted a positive relation between the family income of an individual and her aspirations for the growth of her

enterprise.

A range of studies have sought to identify the most important factors that lead to interest in entrepreneurship. Among the variables identified, family background appears to be highly relevant, as Shao et al. (2005) found in a study which considered individual differences such as education, gender, age, and personal characteristics. In studies of university students, family background appears to have an important impact on a number of variables, including their evaluation of entrepreneurship as a career option, choice of major and choice of profession (Gurol and Atson 2006). These family effects are observed as early as adolescence (Schroeder and Rodermund 2006).

In addition to studies of a more psychological or sociological orientation, economists have identified what they call the “intergenerational transmission of preferences” (Volland 2013), which may help to identify an “intergenerational persistence” of several characteristics such as income levels and educational attainment (Bowles et al. 2005; Black and Devereux 2011; Dohmen et al. 2012). This research stream suggests that children of higher class families tend to remain in the same class, parents with higher educational levels produce offspring with higher educational levels, and parents which value entrepreneurship have children who value entrepreneurship.

The studies cited above in this section suggest more support for the *family support model* than for the *family role model* (Wang and Wong 2004) – two competing research streams which deal with the influence of family on its members’ (especially children’s) entrepreneurial attitudes. The first model focuses on different forms of incentive and support offered by the family, in addition to socialization which favors positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship. The second model focuses more on the intentional or non-intentional influence of the example of self-employed members or entrepreneurs of the family and the impact of immersion in a family life style which involves entrepreneurship. Studies related to the first stream do not presuppose the existence of self-employment or entrepreneurship, as does the *family role model*.

The tendency for higher class families to favor entrepreneurship may also be explained by the variety of financial and non-financial resources that they can offer their children (Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998). Among other possibilities, families of entrepreneurs have an easier time providing their children with capital and loans, as well as social networks which are well connected to key actors in the business world. This effect has been observed across a variety of countries (Laspita et al 2012).

In addition, studies of family background posit a strong impact for role models in moving progeny toward entrepreneurship (Krueger 1993; Matthews and Moser 1996; Shapero and Sokol 1982) as well as for the simple exposure to the business activities of the family (Carr and Sequeira 2007). Parents may inculcate entrepreneurial intentions and develop a sense of *self-efficacy* in their children through socialization which unintentionally or intentionally transmits knowledge, abilities and values favorable to entrepreneurial behavior (Spera and Matto 2007).

The literature described above suggests several possibilities for hypothesis testing. :

**Hypothesis 1:** Students from families in lower social class have less entrepreneurial intention than those from families in a superior social class.

**Hypothesis 2:** Students from lower class families present a lower rate of self-employment than those from families in a superior social class.

**Hypothesis 3:** Students from lower class families have less self-efficacy than those from families in a superior social class.

**Hypothesis 4:** Students from families in lower social class have a more external locus of control than those from families in a superior social class.

**Hypothesis 5:** Self-employed students from families in lower social class in which at least one parent is self-employed are proportionally less numerous than those from families in a superior social class in which at least one parent is self-employed.

**Hypothesis 6:** Self-employed students from families in lower social class in which at least one parent is self-employed have smaller businesses (in number of employees) than those who are also self-employed but are from a superior social class.

### **Barriers to Entrepreneurship in Lower Class Families**

The entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial activities (as self-employment or others) of lower class individuals are believed to be significantly moderated by barriers of a socio economic nature. One of these barriers comes from class impacts on social network formation. Social class and culture affect network formation for all classes (Weber 1930), but the nature of these impacts varies. Kim and Aldrich (2005) believe that one of these barriers comes from the tendency of lower class individuals to associate with people from their same social class rather than to those of higher classes, resulting in collaborative networks lacking in diversity and resources.

The social capital of possible entrepreneurs tends to restrict the quantity, quality, and variety of financial and nonfinancial resources such as loans and social capital. In regard to financial resources, those of the lower classes enjoy limited access to formal financing by banks and therefore rely more heavily on family and friends (Cole et al. 2011). These family and friends in turn have fewer resources to spare than those of high classes, limiting further available resources.

Thus, resource barriers to entrepreneurship are self-reproducing at the lower strata of society and there are a variety of factors which limit the development of an entrepreneurial culture limiting further lower class entrepreneurial activity. The net effect appears to be a smaller incidence of entrepreneurial behavior in the lower classes (Audretsch et al 2013). In the Marxist interpretation, one could say that members of the lower class are alienated from the means of production and therefore are locked in a position of subservience to the capitalist classes. In Weberian terms, one might affirm that lower classes lack the spirit of capitalism, face less favorable markets, and do not possess the physical, symbolic and network resources common to the upper classes. In the perspective of Banfield (1974), one might say the locus of control of the lower classes is external so that they do not see the environment as permitting them to control their own destiny and submit to the control and dominance of other classes.

If on the one hand, entrepreneurship plays an important role in the reduction of poverty (Saini 2001), on the other hand, the lower classes face significant barriers to participating in the entrepreneurial dream. In the case of the Brazilian environment (and Latin American in general), which is our major concern here, there is a small middle class with ample resources and great levels of social inequality. In this setting, the growth of the middle class through entrepreneurship and vice versa would be desirable outcomes to increase prosperity and attenuate inequality, especially because the middle class tends to have higher levels of entrepreneurial intention and self-employment as the literature cited above makes clear.

This suggests that if the lower classes could somehow increase their rates of sustainable and high quality entrepreneurship, economies like those of Brazil could create a virtuous cycle of development and quality of life. As Kantis, Federico and Trajterberg (2012) argue, such possibilities highlight the importance of the currently rare studies of social class and



entrepreneurship in Latin American as a means of generating useful knowledge for entrepreneurs and policy makers.

## Data and Methods

Data for the survey presented here was obtained using the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS) questionnaire, translated and theoretically validated by experts on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education in Brazil<sup>2</sup>. The questionnaire contains 16 sets of multiple choice questions primarily employing scales of five or seven points. Among other elements, it measures perceptions of entrepreneurship education, university offerings and university environment (Souitaris, Zerbinati, and Al-Laham, 2007 – with some adaptations), entrepreneurial intentions and their determinants, including locus of control and self-efficacy (Chen, Greene, and Crick, 1998; Liñán and Chen, 2009), and a shortened scale on personal motives for career choice (Carter et al., 2003). It was made available on a website and answered online. University affiliation of students was used as a proxy for social class.

This was the first time the survey has been done in Brazil. Professors, teachers and program coordinators/directors were contacted by email and telephone and invited to help as research partners. They then either solicited student participation personally, by email, and/or made the link to the online questionnaire available on the Internet/intranet sites of their schools. Data processing included frequency analysis of responses, since the sample was configured as statistically infinite (Levy and Lemeshow, 1999), and tests of hypotheses. These tests were primarily focused on the differences between both analyzed samples and their connections with the conceptual framework presented in this paper.

Studies of entrepreneurship in Latin America to date focus on household surveys or direct appeals to business owners for data collection. Our research is different in that it sampled a large number of university students from two large but distinct institutions. One attracts lower middle class university students who are overwhelmingly the first generation which has been able to pursue a university education. The other is a traditional private university which has catered to the upper middle classes for almost a century. The distinction between these universities permitted us to operationalize social class differently and perhaps more accurately than previous studies which relied on self-report to identify the class position of respondents. It also permitted us to compare perceptions and aspirations of students whose families are involved in entrepreneurial activity with those whose families are not so involved.

Aside from the obvious benefit of triangulating different measures and sources of data, the data collection strategy adopted makes it possible to explore conceptual possibilities which earlier studies neglected. A major advantage comes from a different and likely more accurate operationalization of social class. Existing studies rely on self-reports of social class or self-reports of family income, both of which have significant weaknesses. It is well known that self-assessments of social class are highly subjective and that both higher and lower class respondents tend to place themselves in the middle class. Even if family income is reported accurately, it is generally accepted that income is a rather incomplete indicator of social class because it provides no idea of social or cultural capital. While studying at an elite or blue collar university is also an imperfect indicator of social class, we believe that it provides a useful complement to measures used in other studies.

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<sup>2</sup> Different works were already prepared based on GUESSS, like national and international reports (see [www.guesssurvey.org](http://www.guesssurvey.org)) and more academic texts (for example: Bergmann 2012; Laspita et al 2012; Lima et al. 2014; Zellweger, Sieger, and Halter 2011).

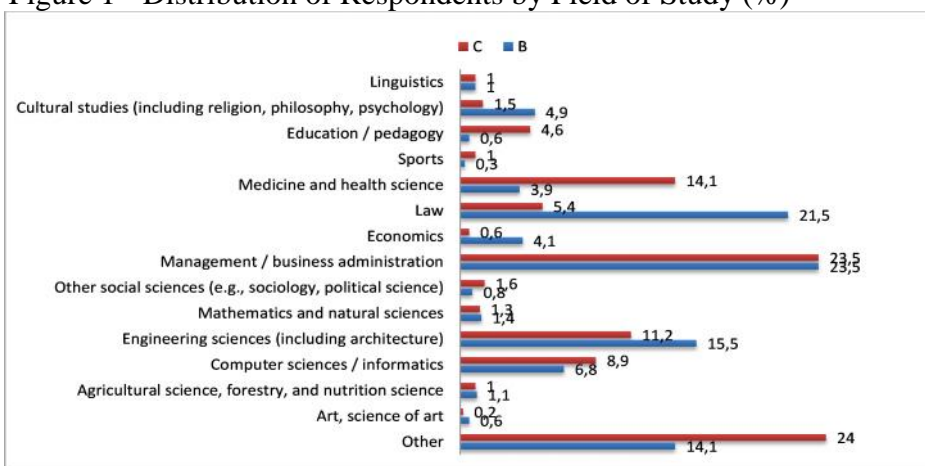
Another advantage of our particular data set is the opportunity to tap into important intergenerational effects. We asked the students both whether their parents were entrepreneurs as well as inquiring about their own entrepreneurial intentions and activities. This provides the opportunity to compare students of the same social class whose parents have an enterprise with those who do not, thus providing a window into the possible impacts of being raised in an entrepreneurial family.

The following are some of the characteristics from the two samples composed only by undergraduate students, one for each university considered, fictitiously named C (n = 13,410) and B (n = 1,397)<sup>3</sup>:

- Social class: university C students are from low medium class and those from university B high medium class students. The letters C and B to refer to the universities are inspired of a classification currently used in Brazil according to which C concerns a social class lowest than B in the social stratification.
- Age: the distribution for university C is 40.3% “under 25” range, 30.4% in the “25 through 30” range and 29.3% in the “above 30” range. For university B, the percentages are respectively 81.2%, 14.2% and 4.5%.
- Gender: both samples presented similar percentages and a predominance of women – 57.3% of the university C respondents and 56% of the university B.
- Years of study at the same university: for university C, 38% were in the first year, 27.6% in the second, 17.8% in the third, 11.8% in the fourth, 2.8% in the fifth and 2% had been studying more than five years. The percentages for university B are respectively 24%, 21.8%, 24.3%, 17.2%, 8.7% and 3.8% were studying more than five years at the same university. It is relevant to noticed that, in general, Brazilian undergraduate programs take four to five years.

The respondents’ fields of study for the two samples are detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Distribution of Respondents by Field of Study (%)



Items of questions used in GUESSS (2011).

The “other” category in the figure includes those students who did not classify their field of study in the previous categories.

<sup>3</sup> Statistical tests (U test, t test and/or Cramér’s V test) were not performed for this point until the end of the section because the presentation of frequencies here is only descriptive, not comparative.

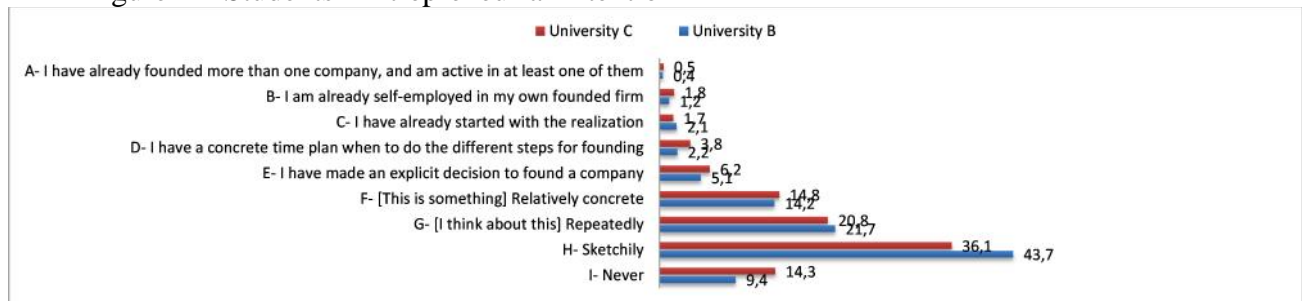
## Results

All six of the hypotheses derived from the existing literature are not confirmed, suggesting that using these methods in the Brazilian context reveals new, unexpected dynamics which merit our attention.

To test hypothesis 1, we compared the entrepreneurial intention of students identified for each university by asking “Please indicate if and how seriously you have been thinking about founding an own company”. The results for this question are presented in Figure 2 below. Minimal entrepreneurial intention is indicated by the option I, while active involvement in an ongoing venture is indicated by the option A.

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test generated a one tailed p-value of 0.225, indicating no statistical difference between each pair of percentages of the distribution. The hypothesis is therefore not confirmed.

Figure 2 – Students’ Entrepreneurial Intention



Items of questions used in GUESSS (2011).

For hypothesis 2, we used a chi-square test (chi-square = 0.143, df = 2, one tailed p-value = 0.143) which indicated that the results considered were independent, but they are contrary to the hypothesis statement. Frequencies show that 2.3% (addition of the items A and B of Figure 2) of respondents from the lower social class (university C) is already self-employed in one or more business that he/she founded. For the superior social class (university B), the homologous statistic is 1.6%.

Considering hypothesis 3, for a 95% confidence interval, tests *t* and Mann-Whitney U showed significant different means for both social classes. The hypothesis was not confirmed because the results contradict its statement – students from university C presented more self-efficacy (Table 1).

Table 1 – Students’ Self-efficacy According to a Seven-point Scale

	Mean for B	SD for B	Mean for C	SD for C	Mean difference
A- Establish and achieve goals and objectives	6.04	1.025	6.14	1.059	<b>0.10</b>
B- Generate new ideas	5.47	1.30	5.80	1.220	<b>0.33</b>
C- Develop new products and services	4.80	1.609	5.23	1.526	<b>0.43</b>
D- Perform financial analysis	4.61	1.830	5.25	1.604	<b>0.64</b>
E- Reduce risk and uncertainty	4.97	1.587	5.45	1.451	<b>0.48</b>
F- Take calculated risks	5.11	1.559	5.43	1.483	<b>0.32</b>
G*- Make decisions under uncertainty and risk	5.56	1.339	5.64	1.402	-----
H- Manage time by setting goals	5.70	1.290	5.89	1.224	<b>0.19</b>
I- Take responsibility for ideas and decisions	6.06	1.103	6.08	1.178	<b>0.02</b>
J- Start my own firm	4.58	1.861	4.96	1.851	<b>0.38</b>
K- Lead my own firm to success	4.96	1.843	5.29	1.809	<b>0.33</b>
<b>General difference</b>					<b>3.22</b>

Based on Chen, Greene and Crick (1998), but adapted and shortened, less focus on founders.

\* Items with this symbol did not show significant difference for the means.

Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed since the results for the items A, B, E and F of Table 2 did not present significant difference of the mean and the other results indicate a slight superiority (general difference of means = 0.46) of the internal locus of control for students from the lower social class. This also contradicts the hypothesis claim.

Table 2 – Students’ Locus of Control According to a Seven-point Scale

	Mean for B	SD for B	Mean for C	SD for C	Mean difference
A*- When I get what I want, it is usually because I am lucky	2.91	1.538	2.92	1.704	----
B*- I have often found that what is going to happen will happen	3.85	1.832	3.94	1.950	----
C- It is not always wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune	2.67	1.659	2.83	1.787	<b>0.16</b>
D- My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others	2.54	1.555	2.4	1.671	<b>-0.14</b>
E*- I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful people	2.36	1.502	2.36	1.676	-----
F*- In order to make my plans work, I make sure that they fit in with the desires of people who have power over me	2.41	1.548	2.38	1.739	-----
G- I am usually able to protect my personal interests	5.66	1.191	5.82	1.315	<b>0.16</b>
H- When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work	5.57	1.221	5.75	1.314	<b>0.18</b>
I- I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life	4.9	1.607	5.04	1.748	<b>0.14</b>
<b>General difference</b>	External locus of control – Internal locus of control = <b>(0.16+0.18+0.14) – (0.16-0.14) = 0.46</b>				

Based on Levenson (1973), but shortened, captures all three dimensions of locus of control: Chance/Others/Internal control.

\* Items with this symbol did not show significant difference for the means.

Repeating the pattern, hypothesis 5 was not confirmed as data used for its test are statistically independent (chi-square = 3.566, df = 2, one tailed p-value = 0.084), but contradict the hypothesis. Among the respondents, 4,137 students (30.9% of n = 13,410) have at least one parent self-employed in his(her) own enterprise and are from the lower social class considered (university C). 2.6% of them are also self-employed in one own business and 0.7% has already founded more than one business and operates at least one of them. For the superior social class considered (university B), the respective results are 725 students (51.9% of n = 1,397), 1.5% and 0.6%.

The last hypothesis, number 6, is also not confirmed since the necessary data used to test it are not independent in the comparison between the two social classes (chi-square = 33.446, df = 18, one tailed p-value = 0.0075). Additionally, the distribution of answers show mixed results. They are unclear to claim the size superiority for business of students with at least one self-employed parent in one social class or the other.

## Discussion

The degree of theoretical dissensus around entrepreneurship and class coupled with different operational definitions of class and the sharp departure of our results from dominant understandings in the entrepreneurship literature suggest that there is ample room for rethinking the social class dynamics of entrepreneurship for the Brazilian (and maybe also Latin American) case. Such efforts should seek explanations for the significant differences in results obtained from different samples and operationalizations of key variables and the possible policy implications of these distinct results. If, for instance, it is indeed true that low and high middle class university students in Brazil are similar in locus of control, self-efficacy and other individual variables bearing on entrepreneurial behavior, entrepreneurship education and support services need not be specially adapted for or targeted at the lower classes. Similarly, a fuller understanding of the greater frequency of self-employment and the larger size of upper class enterprises *vis-à-vis* the greater entrepreneurial interest and intention of lower class university students is likely to yield both conceptual and policy formation dividends, given the clear economic importance of entrepreneurial behavior to the economies of Latin America (Kantis, Federico and Trajterberg 2012).

One possible explanation that we advance here is that lower middle class students have a greater desire to improve their economic lot than upper middle class students and perceive self-employment as a likely path to social mobility. The “push” of entrepreneurship by necessity usually observed on the part of the lower social class may account for the higher level of entrepreneurial intention on the part of students from the lower middle class university. The upper middle class students of university B, on the other hand, are less likely to feel the “push” effect created by the need for greater financial independence and social mobility and are more motivated by the intrinsic rewards of entrepreneurship or pressure to continue a family legacy.

That said, it is important to remember that lower class university students are still somewhat in the minority, so that our blue collar university sample represents persons who, to a degree, have overcome class barriers to seek high education. Because former studies have considered social class in general, unmoderated by education, the peculiarities of our particular samples need to be taken into consideration, especially when analyzing the lower class contingent. In other words, there is likely a strong sorting effect predisposing the sample from university C toward greater ambition, self-discipline, and interest in social mobility. Such a preselection effect would be much smaller for the students of university B.

## Conclusions and Implications

The study of social class has a long and diverse history marked by sharp debates and ideological polarization. The role of entrepreneurship in the evolution and mobility of social classes is of clear importance but is still imperfectly understood, especially in the Latin American context with its historically polarized class structure and low social mobility. While the modest contribution we offer here is of limited scope, we find it fascinating that entrepreneurial involvement and the size of the enterprises created by the parents of students at the universities studied should vary so greatly while other variables related to locus of control, self-efficacy and even the motivations for undertaking entrepreneurial activity should exhibit so little variance in the same samples. A number of theoretical interpretations of this result could be advanced using a variety of theoretical orientations, but it seems to us that, independently of one's conceptual proclivities, it is difficult to escape the impression that parental success at founding and growing an enterprise has propelled families into the upper middle class and provided their children with the opportunity to study at an elite private university without greatly altering their orientation toward family, locus of control or self-efficacy. Even indicators of family support and approval of entrepreneurial activity appeared similar, but space will not permit discussion of these results here. The possibility that, controlling for educational attainment and entrepreneurial activity in Brazil moves subsequent generations into higher classes without altering important individual variables traditionally assumed to be impacted would appear to be real and significant.

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