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# “You would expect the successful person to be the man”

## Gendered symbolic violence in UK HE entrepreneurship education

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to explore power and legitimacy in the entrepreneurship education classroom by using Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological and educational theories. It highlights the pedagogic authority invested in educators and how this may be influenced by their assumptions about the nature of entrepreneurship. It questions the role of educators as disinterested experts, exploring how power and gendered legitimacy “play out” in staff–student relationships and female students’ responses to this.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A multiple-method, qualitative case study approach is taken, concentrating on a depth of focus in one UK’s higher education institution (HEI) and on the experiences, attitudes and classroom practices of staff and students in that institution. The interviews, with an educator and two students, represent a self-contained story within the more complex story of the case study.

**Findings** – The interviewees’ conceptualization of entrepreneurship is underpinned by acceptance of gendered norms, and both students and staff misrecognize the masculinization of entrepreneurship discourses that they encounter as natural and unquestionable. This increases our understanding of symbolic violence as a theoretical construct that can have real-world consequences.

**Originality/value** – The paper makes a number of theoretical and empirical contributions. It addresses an important gap in the literature, as educators and the impact of their attitudes and perceptions on teaching and learning are rarely subjects of inquiry. It also addresses gaps and silences in understandings of the gendered implications of HE entrepreneurship education more generally and how students respond to the institutional arbitration of wider cultural norms surrounding entrepreneurship. In doing so, it challenges assertions that Bourdieu’s theories are too abstract to have any empirical value, by bridging the gap between symbolic violence as a theory and its manifestation in teaching and learning practices.

**Keywords** Higher education, Gender, Bourdieu, Entrepreneurship education, Female undergraduates, Symbolic violence

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

This paper explores power and legitimacy in the entrepreneurship education classroom. It highlights the pedagogic authority invested in educators and how this may be influenced by their assumptions about the nature of entrepreneurship. It questions the role of educators as disinterested experts, exploring how power and legitimacy “play out” in staff–student relationships and how female students respond to this. Although there is a growing body of knowledge focused on the formal development and delivery

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of enterprise education in higher education (HE), little research focuses on the impact of the gendered attitudes of staff and students.

The impact of gendered constructions of entrepreneurship is an increasingly important topic within HE, given that women now account for more than 50 per cent of those attending university, but only 14 per cent of UK's small- and medium-sized enterprises are women-led (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011). Studies suggest that the rise in female undergraduates is increasingly seen as a "problem" rather than offering opportunities for students and institutions (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Leathwood and Read, 2009), highlighting the lack of capital accruing to female students in HE generally. Allied to this are suggestions that entrepreneurship educators do not consider wider, sociological issues, such as gender or ethnicity, as important within a functional, skills-driven approach to the subject (McKeown *et al.*, 2006). Previous research that has explored gender and entrepreneurship education does not consider educator attitudes and their influence curricula and often uses gender as a variable to identify differences between male and female students. Such methodologies perpetuate the notion of essential gender differences that are increasingly problematized (Ahl, 2006; Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Subsequently, this paper recognizes gender as a form of class distinction, with notions of masculinity and femininity being socially constructed concepts, underpinned by particular gendered expectations and ideals (Skeggs, 2004) rather than linked to essentialist notions of males and females.

The research also uses Bourdieu's social and educational theories to explore how symbolic power plays out in higher education institutions (HEIs), where educators can claim "naming rights" in the labeling of students (Holt, 2012) and entrepreneurs (Jones, 2014). It asks questions about the positioning of female students within gendered entrepreneurship discourses and highlights how the attitudes and assumptions of entrepreneurship educators may impact teaching and learning. This involves analysis of the interplay of habitus – or the socially constructed self (Lawler, 2004), capital – in the form of resources that confer "power, status or authority on their holders" (Maton, 2004, p. 37) and field – or the social setting in which habitus and capital operate. Bourdieu's thinking tools (Jenkins, 1992) are particularly useful in exploring gaps and silences in understandings of the gendered implications of HE entrepreneurship education because they support the analysis of the interplay between the objective and subjective and structure and agency (Swartz, 1997). This offers opportunities to consider how individuals perceive their chances of success, conceptualizing gender as a collectively ascribed class positioning, which constrains and enables the accrual of capital and how forms of capital are gendered.

The paper asks questions about the role of the educator in HE, their attitudes toward entrepreneurship education and how these might shape what is framed as agreed "knowledge" in this area. An emphasis on educator's attitudes is all the more important, given the arguments on substantial connections between a lecturer's prior experiences, how they interpret entrepreneurship and how they choose to teach the subject (Bennett, 2006). Educators are positioned as having a "feel for the game" or a sense of "practical logic" (Bourdieu, 1990) about the forms of capital and habitus required for success in particular fields, which they delineate in the curriculum. This means that an educator's feel for the game is already authorized before the students enter the classroom (Lawler, 2004). In this context, symbolic capital can be seen as the "*illusio*" in the game played in

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the intellectual field” (Lau, 2004, p. 378). This encompasses the symbolic capital of the educator, the entrepreneur and the gendered student.

In ignoring how institutionalized power relations and staff and student legitimacy combine to create a particular classroom environment, there is a potential for us to position students as untheorized, free agents (Ball, 2003). Such approaches emphasize the primacy of agency and meritocracy and ignore the impact that HE systems themselves, in combination with social and symbolic structures, can have on student’s “choice”. Indeed, Bourdieu (2002) highlights the constraints and enablers of choices made by agents in particular fields, calling them the “choices of the habitus”. He argues that these choices are based on understandings of agents’ collectively and individually ascribed chances of success, given the capital that they bring to, and can usefully accrue in, particular fields.

The paper makes a number of theoretical and empirical contributions. It addresses an important gap in the literature, as educators and the impact of their attitudes and perceptions on teaching and learning are rarely subjects of inquiry. The way that educators frame entrepreneurship has the potential to confer a particular identity on particular students studying particular courses, (Holt, 2012) and this is linked to symbolically loaded constructions of both the entrepreneur and the student (Jones, 2014). Failure to acknowledge and explore such social constructions within entrepreneurship education can result in a HE environment that does not challenge inequalities and can perpetuate them (Ball, 2003; Naidoo, 2004). Acknowledgment and engagement with gendered constructions of entrepreneurship is crucial, given the increasing numbers of female undergraduates, the increasing emphasis placed on the embedding of entrepreneurship education across the university curriculum (Wilson, 2012) and policy imperatives for graduate entrepreneurship. The paper also addresses the silence on how students respond to the institutional arbitration of wider cultural norms surrounding entrepreneurship. This is particularly important given the symbolic links made between masculinity and entrepreneurship in the wider society (Ahl, 2006) and the power of symbolic capital, which Bourdieu (1991) sees as the one form of capital from which all others flow. Subsequently, Siisiainen (2000) argues that we should pay close attention to those who are imbued with both positive and negative forms of symbolic capital within particular fields.

Furthermore, this paper addresses broader concerns about gender and entrepreneurship research that continues to position women as deficient while excluding discussion of social structures (Hughes *et al.* 2012), and the use of individualistic discourses that place the onus on women to change, rather than calling for social structures to change. Educator assumptions and attitudes can therefore lead to an “invisible” level of interpretation and decision-making in translating these masculinized discourses of entrepreneurship into the knowledge presented to students in the classroom.

The paper begins by outlining the theories and literature drawn upon, including an overview of Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence and its links to the gendering of symbolic and other forms of capital. This is followed by an outline of the research context and methodology undertaken, leading to presentation and analysis of the data. The paper goes on to discuss the resulting implications before offering some concluding thoughts on the importance of the research and its limitations and finally making recommendations for future research.

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## Symbolic capital, gender and education

Bourdieu's social and educational theories expose the links between different forms of capital and gender and support the exploration of the reproduction of societal "norms" through symbolic capital in education. Symbolic capital describes:

[...] the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful (Jenkins, 1992, p. 144).

Symbolic violence occurs when this symbolic capital serves to perpetuate legitimacy through its misrecognition as "natural" by agents in particular fields (Bourdieu, 1979). Bourdieu suggests that "individual positions within emerging social structures are determined by both the amount and type of capital possessed by individuals and the value placed upon this capital by others" (Shaw, 2009, p. 30). The potential disadvantage inherent in the accrual of different forms of capital is further exacerbated by the gendering of capital, which places men and women in different social positions and serves to delineate the forms of capital they can, and are expected to, accrue and transform as dichotomous groups. However, it is violence that is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) because it is supported by wider societal norms that, although arbitrary, appear to be unquestionable.

The forms of capital identified by Bourdieu are economic, social, cultural (including education) and symbolic, including resources associated with socially constructed notions of masculine and feminine behaviors and abilities. These forms of capital provide a set of resources that individuals can draw upon to enhance and maintain their position in society, being "the different goods, resources and values around which power relations in a particular field crystallize" (McNay, 1999:106). All forms of capital are linked with power and legitimacy. Indeed, Bourdieu considers symbolic capital to be legitimacy, in its purest form, linked with social approval, power, influence and status (Elam, 2008, p. 20).

The cultural and symbolic capital that entrepreneurship education offers, and that students can potentially gain, is related to the knowledge, skills and "mindset" required for entrepreneurial success. Those who teach entrepreneurship and those who are *identified* as entrepreneurs in the classroom have status and symbolic capital in this setting, given their positioning as "truth-tellers" (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1994). Such acts of symbolic imposition (e.g. links between masculinity and entrepreneurship) have a profound effect when they form part of 'continuous inculcation' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 32). In this respect, the dominant discourses of masculinized entrepreneurial success are arguably part of the ongoing symbolic link between masculinity and entrepreneurship in the wider cultural context, particularly in the media (Hamilton, 2013) and in entrepreneurship theory and policy (Ahl, 2006; Jones, 2014). HE therefore provides a site for exploring the *interplay* of agency and structure because interaction in fields can help individuals to develop capital and gain resources, which in turn influences ideas about what "people like me" can achieve. Mickelson (2003, p. 374) subsequently argues that Bourdieu's theory of practice can help us explore "the ways in which social structural forces of gender, social class and race influence women's (and men's) school behaviors" and that this is linked to both internal and external engagement with social reality and the "objective relations between positions" such as teacher and student.

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Much entrepreneurship research assumes that gender (masculinity and femininity) is a stable attribute of humans and can be applied uncritically to men and women as homogeneous groups (Nelson and Duffy, 2011). This view of masculinity and femininity as culturally embedded and unquestionable is reflected in sex stereotyping, gendered job segregation and organizational contexts (Patterson and Mavin, 2009). Gendered labels and assumptions interact with institutional contexts that are capable of generating a variety of enabling and constraining conditions, with the result that gender is multidimensional (Lansky, 2000), acting as a form of symbolic capital that supports and reinforces (or undermines and negatively affects) status, depending on the forms of habitus and capital that are valued in a particular field (Bourdieu, 1991). Gendered assumptions and stereotypes also act as a collective form of regulation (Skeggs, 2004) and Bourdieu (1998) argues that, throughout their lives, women and men internalize gendered expectations and this informs their choices, aspirations and dispositions (or habitus). The internalization of gendered discourses and related expectations guides individual expectations and shapes societal “norms”, resulting in the symbolic violence of unquestioned and arbitrary societal structures being accepted as “natural”.

The entrepreneurship education classroom can therefore be seen as a social space of struggle where individuals compete for status and the useful accrual and deployment of the capital related to the field. Margolis *et al.* (2001, p. 8) argue that education systems perpetuate: “an uneven distribution of cultural as well as economic capital. In the process, they endorse and normalize particular types of knowledge, ways of speaking, styles, meanings, dispositions and world-views”. Therefore, if educators do not support critical engagement in their accounts of entrepreneurship, they can perpetuate either the potential social disadvantage or lack of capital of female undergraduates given entrepreneurship’s masculine-framed foundations.

Bourdieu’s ideas on the choices of the habitus are based around what “people like me” do. In this context, such choices are informed by the behaviors, dispositions and forms of capital suggested as representing successful entrepreneurship. This paper therefore asks two questions:

- Q1. How are entrepreneurship theories, skills and behaviors presented by educators and what are the gendered implications of this?
- Q2. Do symbolic links between entrepreneurship and masculinity have an impact on how female students are positioned by staff and in turn, how they position themselves as potential entrepreneurs?

These questions are important, given the supposed gender neutrality of entrepreneurship education and suggestions that anyone can be a successful entrepreneur if they develop an entrepreneurial mind-set.

## **Methodology**

This paper recognizes entrepreneurship education as a complex encounter between educators, students and wider socio-political and socio-economic structures and critically examines examples of teaching and learning in an attempt to capture this situated complexity. It draws upon a realistic ontology in accepting that there is a reality that exists outside of our experience or knowledge. This reality consists of structures and mechanisms (including discourses) which, although we may not be aware of them or could be said to have knowledge of them, can and do inform individual and institutional

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practices. In other words, realism is about “what happens to people, regardless of their understandings” (Sayer, 2000, p. 6). The inquiry is framed by Bourdieu’s notions of the complex interaction between subject positions as relational and dependent upon the symbolic links between language and collective positioning and how this shapes notions of the capital that certain groups can accrue and transform in particular contexts.

To explore this complex encounter, a multiple-method, qualitative, case-study approach was taken (after Creswell, 1998), concentrating on a depth of focus in one UK HEI (identified by the pseudonym Northfield) and on the experiences, attitudes and classroom practices of staff and students in that institution. Yin (2009, p. 4) suggests that the case-study method is relevant where we seek to capture in-depth description of social phenomena. This method is also appropriate when the researcher believes that “contextual conditions might be highly pertinent to the phenomenon [...] (and) for research where the theory in the area is not well developed” (Zhang *et al.*, 2008, p. 323).

The qualitative data presented in this paper emerged from the case study and offer an example of how Bourdieu’s theories can and do play out on a practical level. Bourdieu’s concepts are often criticized for being abstract and difficult to apply empirically (Jenkins, 1992), and this paper challenges these criticisms by providing an example of how symbolic violence can occur in the process of entrepreneurship teaching and learning. In doing so, it bridges the gap between theory and practice and highlights the existence of symbolic violence in this setting. The interviews, with an educator and two students, therefore represent a self-contained story within the more complex story of the case study (Cope and Watts, 2000). As such, it is an empirical episode (Deverell, 2012), which heightened the researcher’s awareness and understanding of symbolic violence as a theoretical construct that can have real-world consequences.

The self-contained story in question emerged from fieldwork during an entrepreneurship module on a hospitality-related program and centers on the attitudes, understandings and teaching approach of the module leader, Richard. The discourses at play within the module are further highlighted by interviews with two students in this module, Cordelia and Jessica. Both students discuss a lecture on diversity that formed part of the module that Richard leads (and is delivered by his colleague Adam). For this to emerge spontaneously for Jessica, suggests that to her, this is a critical incident (Chell, 2004), worthy of further investigation and understanding. Critical incidents cause individuals to choose particular actions, which lead in particular directions, which impact upon individual and collective identities (Measor, 1985).

The analytical framework draws on Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice and uses discourse analysis techniques to explore the interplay of habitus, capital and field in this setting. The use of between-case and within-case analysis highlighted this particular story about the relationship among an educator, the curriculum and the students who experience that curriculum as critical to understandings of how symbolic violence plays out on a practical level. These issues emerged spontaneously and highlight how educators and students draw on gendered symbolic framings in their conceptualization of entrepreneurship. This self-contained story therefore provides useful insights into how traditional, masculinized entrepreneurship discourses are responded to in a particular HE setting.



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### **In the HE field: paying attention to teacher**

As a senior lecturer, leading a module on entrepreneurship within a non-business discipline (hospitality) Richard is positioned as legitimate, with power to delineate the knowledge base and discourses of entrepreneurship presented in the classroom. This legitimacy and power positions him as a “truth-teller” and a gatekeeper to knowledge. Here, Richard describes his understanding of entrepreneurship:

[...] entrepreneurship (is) very difficult to define [...] we try and get people to reflect on themselves. How sincerely do you want to work all the hours that God sends? How sincerely are you going to drive a business forward? Are you totally committed to this business [...] to the exclusion of all else? [...] I think there's no doubt about it, that that vision, the drive that you have to have, the ambition, the focus. I mean, often entrepreneurs are not very nice people to work for (he laughs). And of course one of the big debates that we have is whether an entrepreneur is born or made. My personal opinion is they're born (he laughs).

Although Richard acknowledges the difficulty of defining entrepreneurship, he suggests that entrepreneurs are born, that entrepreneurial ability can be measured, that there is “no doubt” that to be successful means total commitment to the “exclusion of all else” with a focus upon drive and ambition. Indeed, later in the interview he suggests that “only 5 per cent of the business population are entrepreneurs”. Although he describes opportunities for students to reflect upon their strengths, weaknesses and aspirations, this happens within a very clear framework of “right” and “wrong” responses that label students as “entrepreneurial” or “not entrepreneurial”. He suggests that a certain single mindedness is required to be successful, emphasizing an individualistic and traditionally masculinized work ethic that assumes no other external demands on a person's time, and which, we later see, one of his students (Cordelia) takes as equating entrepreneurial success with “not having children”. It is also interesting that, Richard suggests entrepreneurs are born, as he is potentially teaching something that he believes cannot be taught.

Richard's focus on the primacy of agency implies that the possession of the correct “entrepreneurial habitus” and the necessary “entrepreneurial capital” is all one needs to succeed, masking issues related to the symbolic capital inherent in the privileging of masculinity and its related symbolic economic and cultural capital. The masculinization of entrepreneurship raises questions about the perceived symbolic power of gender capital, which forms an invisible underpinning to support templates of successful entrepreneurs. It suggests that masculinity is privileged and rewarded within entrepreneurship discourses and that it is “easier” or more accepted that masculinized gender capital can be converted into the symbolic capital associated with entrepreneurship. Richard highlights this convertibility to legitimacy (Elam, 2008) between the symbolic capital of masculinity and successful entrepreneurship when he spontaneously mentions classroom gender dynamics:

Most of the entrepreneurs in this country are men. Now in a class that's 70 per cent women you can soon get a good organized chat going (laughs) “Why is that?” We're not supposed to be different but we are different. We're all supposed to be equal aren't we? (laughs.) So, there should be as many women entrepreneurs as there are men, unless there's something different about us. There's not many judges who are women, are there? There's not many managing directors [...]. So I think entrepreneurs just fit in the same category. Is it a realistic expectation that we should be the same in numbers? “Men are better entrepreneurs than women” (laughs) [...] “Why do you think that is?” Is it that you're not even going to give them the opportunity?



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Richard suggests that, because there are more male entrepreneurs, men are better at being entrepreneurs (and judges and managing directors). However, this is not couched as “Why are there more male entrepreneurs?” but “Why are men better than women?” This is a divisive approach, effectively pitting male students against female students and perpetuating dualistic notions around men and women, which can be difficult for students to challenge when they are positioned as “natural” and come from the truth-teller/lecturer. Women are also presented as passive – being “given” an opportunity rather than actively taking it. He suggests that there is scope for students to challenge and discuss these ideas, but, as we shall see in Jessica and Cordelia’s responses, this does not always happen. The use of this teaching style is also problematic given Richard’s open acknowledgment that there are many more female than male students in the class. In a majority-female course, this potentially positions the male students as more likely to be successful entrepreneurs, a form of stereotype lift (Walton and Cohen, 2003).

The idea that this is an “organized chat” suggests that Richard feels in control of this process and leads students through the discussion. It should be noted that the lectures are held in a large, formal space with over 100 students in attendance – a difficult setting for meaningful discussion. He is aware that these ideas may be “controversial”, but, given his views on the innate nature of entrepreneurial ability, it is difficult to avoid the implication that there are more male than female entrepreneurs because men and women are innately different. This creates an uncomfortable and combative classroom dynamic, which potentially enforces a sense of entitlement for male students, linking masculinity with entrepreneurial success and positioning female students as an “out-group” (Walton and Cohen, 2003). The fact that Richard is positioned as the expert gives him pedagogic authority within this “discussion” and allows him to question and deny feminized symbolic capital. It is this misrecognition of inequality as “natural” and of equality being an “unrealistic expectation” that is symbolically violent in this context.

In allying oneself with a particular approach to entrepreneurship, educators can become complicit in a form of “invisible pedagogy” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 18), positioning entrepreneurship in a particular, unspoken way, which emphasizes certain aspects of entrepreneurial theory whilst closing down other areas of debate or dissent. However, Richard’s comments and perceptions are understandable when we consider feminist criticisms that contemporary entrepreneurship theory is based on the historically exclusive study of males by males and that mainstream entrepreneurship theories reproduce masculinized ideals. Richard’s habitus, therefore, “[...] incorporates a ‘feel for the game’ that is already authorized” (Lawler, 2004, p. 123).

### **Gendered symbolic violence: paying attention to teaching**

The paper now turns to Jessica and Cordelia, two white, final year students in their early twenties on Richard’s module, and their responses to some of the gendered discourses reproduced in the module. The gendered positioning of both female students and female entrepreneurs is highlighted by their responses to a particular lecture (by Adam, Richard’s colleague) on a diversity and entrepreneurship module, where ethnic minority and female entrepreneurs are discussed and delineated. The positioning of ethnic minorities and females as different from “real” entrepreneurs is evident in this cordoning off of the subject from the main subject area (although the cohort is predominantly female) and also reflects the grouping together of women and ethnic

minorities as deficient in entrepreneurship discourses generally (Jones, 2014). Jessica and Cordelia have differing responses to this lecture, with Jessica seemingly accepting what she is told (and apparently being encouraged by it) and Cordelia rejecting what she told for its lack of “evidence” and stereotypically gendered notions. However, ultimately, they both comply with the view of entrepreneurs as being different to them, regardless of whether they are encouraged by or resistant to these representations.

Here Jessica spontaneously mentions Adam’s lecture that day:

Today they were talking about how females get on [...] he said that [...] a female entrepreneur wouldn’t be called a female entrepreneur - a female entrepreneur would be called a business owner [...] you would expect the successful person to be the man for the big entrepreneur [...]. He said [...] how there’s an increase now in the amount of females that are in leadership roles and that was really interesting and kind of motivating but I think if that hadn’t have been in I would have been like (she throws her hands up and laughs) because we got a lot of this glass ceiling, “you’ll only get so far and that’s it” last year [...] but then I don’t know, I think if I got that responsibility I wouldn’t know what to do (she laughs).

Cordelia, however, has a different view of the lecture:

It was all making a lot of assumptions to be quite honest. He was just saying how you get less females being entrepreneurs because they aren’t respected or they find it harder to get the funding because their family [...] don’t believe in them or whatever. Just [...] basically it was giving percentages that there’s less females in the workforce than there are males and he was just coming up with loads of barriers that there are to women [...]. obviously, the, glass ceiling effect and businesses find it hard to get over the different roles [...]. it was all very negative I’d say. If I was an entrepreneur I’d be like “Phh, I’ll show them!”. Even though I know I’m not, haven’t got the ability to go out there and go “Hmmm, I’m gonna show you” but I think I was more “Hmmm, whatever. I don’t think so!”:

He asked us what the barriers were to female entrepreneurs and I think a lot of them were [...] the family cultures [...] they’re expected to have children [...] so the solution would be [...] hmmm [...] to not have kids (laughs) [...]. I think it was just to show us that they’re predominantly male, I don’t know, I didn’t really understand (laughs) [...] he was talking about education and he was like “the men have got more of a drive to go to university” and we were all literally like (she mimes looking around) “What?! Are you kidding?”. He said [...] girls get better grades but boys are more [...] I don’t know, I didn’t really understand [...] (she laughs).

There are several issues to unpick here. First, there is an acknowledgment of the wider gendering of entrepreneurship with the suggestion that female entrepreneurs would be called business owners rather than entrepreneurs. This distinction between business ownership and entrepreneurship reflects views in the literature that business owners are not necessarily entrepreneurs (Stewart *et al.*, 1999) and highlights an apparent tension between being female and being accepted as an entrepreneur. Cordelia also suggests that entrepreneurship is presented as incompatible with having children – placing female students in the position of having to choose between entrepreneurship and having children in a way that is not problematic for male students and emphasizing that the traditional female role of primary career is also incompatible with being a successful entrepreneur. Such an approach ultimately frames the entrepreneurial possibilities of male and female students as different.

There is clearly a lack of fit between Cordelia’s sense of habitus and capital, as a female student in a largely female cohort, and it plays out in her resistance to the

apparently taken-for-granted assumptions in this lecture. The fact that this lecture comes under a “diversity” banner positions women and ethnic minorities as being “others”, symbolically reinforcing white, masculinity as the norm within entrepreneurship. Cordelia reacts to this by challenging Adam’s authority and emphasizes its negativity. However, this is uncomfortable for her, and she attempts to distance herself from this challenge by saying that she did not understand what was being said. These notions appear to be accommodated by Jessica, who suggests a more positive response.

Both Jessica and Cordelia’s responses highlight the complex interaction of habitus and capital that informs perceptions of the fit between our positioning within a field and what we are legitimized, or expected, to “do”. There is a suggestion in both excerpts that the students choose not to understand what is being said, perhaps, because the views in the lecture suggest a lack of fit between the habitus and capital that they bring to entrepreneurship that will be difficult to overcome. This is understandably affecting for them, as they both expressed a desire in the interviews to set up their own businesses in the future.

### **The subjective expectation of objective probability**

It is the combination of habitus, capital and field which delineates and constrains the choices available to those students who reject, or are denied, the label entrepreneur through their positioning as female in a setting that emphasizes the dualism of men and women and the gendered division of labor. The distinction between these students’ positive attitude to running a business, compared to their more negative views of entrepreneurship, is made more apparent in their talk around what being an entrepreneur means:

I think about money [...] taking risks [...]. I’d say they were quite lonely [...] (Cordelia).

Cordelia says “they” suggesting that it is “other” people who are entrepreneurs. When probed about where her ideas have come from she suggests that they have developed during the module:

We’ve done it in the module [...] they’re business orientated, that’s why they’ve always got money and obviously top of the hierarchy, taking risks, that’s one thing that we’ve learned from the module. We had a guest speaker last week and he was talking about how he always used to take risks and I link that with this because they like to do things off their own back, they find it hard to settle down, they move quickly on to the next thing [...].

Cordelia highlights the use of external entrepreneurs as “experts” brought in to represent the “reality” of entrepreneurship and as a template against which students can eventually judge the businesses they will work with for their assessment. The entrepreneur mentioned seemingly fits the module’s concept of “who” an entrepreneur is and “what” an entrepreneur does and is presumably brought in to reinforce the module’s framing of a real entrepreneur, as special, as a risk-taker and as constantly seeking out the next opportunity to make money. The talk by the guest entrepreneur also highlights the mythologizing of entrepreneurs as different, having certain traits which are innate rather than developing through the process of establishing and owning a business (Chell, 2008). This echoes Richard’s conceptualization of entrepreneurship and is also reflected in the module assessment, where students have to measure how entrepreneurial certain business owners and their employees are:

We've found topics about background, work experience, education and we're thinking of questions about the traits that fit into those categories. They can't all be true entrepreneurs[...] (Cordelia).

There's a lot of surveys on how you would measure how an individual is entrepreneurial [...] out of 15 characteristics they've got to choose five and obviously we know that one of the sets of characteristics are not entrepreneurial and the other ones are (Jessica).

The expectation is that entrepreneurship is evident in a set of immutable characteristics, which can be measured, something that is challenged within the entrepreneurship literature (Gartner, 1988; Chell, 2008).

An individualistic focus on personality emphasizes agency and suggests those who have the "right" traits and behaviors will be successful. The role of students as observers of others' entrepreneurial agency, rather than active entrepreneurial agents, could also be linked to the feminization of hospitality as a discipline, evident in the large number of women on the course. Cordelia is aware of the feminization of her degree subject and its potential to position both students and the discipline as deficient:

There's a handful of males on our course [...] it's just the perception it's party planning isn't it? Like you're probably prone to be gay or something if you're a party planner [...] every work force that I've worked in, all the event managers have been female [...] and all the people higher up are male.

Ironically, although Cordelia suggests that the course is not attractive to male students, and it is not a very masculinized industry, she does suggest that, in this feminized sector, the people in the "higher up" positions are male. Whilst at first Cordelia suggests this is "just the way things are", further probing uncovers an awareness that, in being positioned as "feminized", her discipline is not taken seriously. It is viewed as vocational and not academic, further undermining the gender capital linked to her position as a graduate without a "proper" degree. Indeed, feminized courses are often positioned as not being academic (Leathwood and Read, 2009), further illustrating the lack of gender capital accruing to these female students and their discipline. This also touches on changes in the UK HE sector since 1992 and the focus on widening participation which has encouraged more women to enter HE. There are suggestions that the increase in female students has led to a fall in academic standards, a "dumbing down", and that the acceptance of academically inferior females (and working class and ethnic minority students) is the cause of this (Leathwood and Read, 2009).

Both Cordelia and Jessica underplay the worth of education in relation to entrepreneurship, suggesting that, like Richard, they too believe that entrepreneurs are born and not made:

I don't think you could teach someone who's not an entrepreneur to be an entrepreneur (Cordelia).

I think it's a certain type of person [...] some people can just do it very naturally. I think that it's a certain personality trait [...] (Jessica).

This highlights student understanding of entrepreneurship as immutable, measurable and possessed by certain special individuals. In the classes observed, white, middle-aged and supposedly uneducated males, such as Alan Sugar and Richard Branson, are used as unquestionable representatives of real entrepreneurs and as

benchmarks for success. Added to this is the fact that students are learning “about” entrepreneurship rather than being prepared “for” entrepreneurship. This delineation of entrepreneurs suggests an encouragement of the primarily female cohort to view entrepreneurship as special and found in “others”.

Student’s understandings of entrepreneurship are therefore based on a series of tightly defined, non-negotiable “rules” regarding the “traits” that delineate “it”, that there is a “right” way to be entrepreneurial and that students who deviate from this may fail the module. The module assessment further highlights the very real power of the educator and their ability to encourage and reward a feel for the game in students that reflects, upholds and privileges the educator’s legitimacy in this setting. This is a form of symbolic violence, which makes female students complicit in their seeming acceptance of a world view that ultimately denigrates them.

### **Business owners NOT entrepreneurs: do people like you become entrepreneurs?**

Me? No I don’t think so, I don’t think I’ve got that thing [...] the just “keep going, keep going”.

I think that if I got to a stage where if I was successful [...]. I’d be happy so I don’t think I would make a very good entrepreneur (Jessica).

I think it would be my own business rather than “I’m gonna be massive” and I will only do the one thing. I wouldn’t concentrate on just being successful (Cordelia).

Jessica seems surprised to be asked this question. Cordelia voices the idea that there is a difference between business ownership and entrepreneurship and that entrepreneurship means “being successful”. Jessica does aspire to setting up her own business but feels that, although she has worked before starting her degree, she needs to gain more experience. When she talks about the sort of company that she would like to own she downplays her ambition, talking of setting up a “little company”. She goes on to outline her view of the sort of business that she imagines herself owning:

I don’t want it to be massive [...] it’s something that would make me enough money but would be manageable. I don’t know how entrepreneurial that makes me really [...]. Enough for me to be happy, to make a lot of money - it’s sustaining control [...] as soon as it starts to go out of control I’d want to reign it back in again.

As somebody who has no familial role models, one could infer that her notions around entrepreneurship come from a combination of external discourses and the framing of entrepreneurship that she has been exposed to on this particular module. She says that she “hasn’t really thought about it before”, suggesting that before participating in the module she had not really engaged with either the concept of entrepreneurship or the possibilities it might hold. However, despite their negative views about their own entrepreneurial potential, both Jessica and Cordelia do aspire to business ownership, and this differentiation between business owners and “true” entrepreneurs does appear to be partly based upon what they have learnt in this module.

Given that, in Adam’s lecture, there is a suggestion that female entrepreneurs are not in fact considered to be entrepreneurs but are positioned as business owners, it does seem that the framing of “true” entrepreneurship on this module does influence the objective possibilities of these students. The module does not offer opportunities for

students to challenge or critique commonly held notions around gender and entrepreneurship and seemingly perpetuates and reproduces discourses of entrepreneurs as special and naturally talented. This leaves both staff and students in a difficult and contradictory position of teaching a subject that they believe cannot be taught and learning a subject that they believe cannot be learnt. Ultimately, both Jessica and Cordelia comply with the representations of entrepreneurship within the module, seemingly accepting their positioning as potential business owners not entrepreneurs, in the deficient realm of the feminine (Marlow, 2002), studying a feminized and academically undervalued discipline. This positioning suggests that their collectively ascribed feminine habitus is incompatible with the entrepreneurial habitus delineated on the module. This may explain why they choose to position themselves as business owners rather than entrepreneurs and is a powerful example of the practical impacts of symbolic violence, where arbitrary norms become unquestionable and accepted as “natural”.

### Discussion and implications

The themes and tensions outlined above highlight the singular complexity of entrepreneurship education, with its issues of educator authority and the gendered delineation of entrepreneurial legitimacy, entrepreneurial capital and the entrepreneurial habitus. The analysis and discussion of this data bridges the gap between theory and practice and illustrates how female students’ futures are arguably linked to the collectively ascribed, and gendered, symbolic habitus and capital that they bring to the classroom.

Symbolic violence requires complicity – in that both the dominated and the dominant co-create an environment where the “natural” order is not challenged or questioned (Krais, 1993). The student and staff experiences and attitudes outlined are underpinned by a shared understanding of entrepreneurship – that entrepreneurship requires certain (masculinized) traits and that only special people can be entrepreneurs. These shared understandings suggest a certain feel for the game that forms an invisible pedagogy or hidden curriculum which is taken for granted and naturalized. The term pedagogy refers to “deliberate attempts to influence the knowledge and identities produced within particular social settings and relationships” (Giroux, 1989). In this setting, the explicit pedagogy actively reproduces a specific version of entrepreneurship, whilst the hidden curriculum reinforces this through the examples and discourses drawn upon, the emphasis on students observing entrepreneurs rather than becoming entrepreneurs and other situational cues (Murphy *et al.*, 2007), which suggest that male students are ultimately more likely and able to pursue entrepreneurship. Such hidden forms of pedagogic action have the potential to reinforce wider cultural symbolic links between entrepreneurial legitimacy and white, western males who are positioned as more able to transform the symbolic and cultural capital of their education, ethnicity and masculinity into the economic and cultural capital inherent in being collectively positioned as entrepreneurial.

Elam (2008, p. 35) suggests that this directly relates to the choices women make regarding traditionally masculinized roles, saying:

In terms of a discriminatory outcome, women may face strict penalties of legitimacy in the competition for male-linked occupational positions, particularly in the case of world-views, and ultimately practices, that contradict dominant views. In terms of social action, the



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conditions of fit between gendered habitus and prevailing field definitions may well influence perceptions of opportunities and self-assessments relative to those perceptions.

The asymmetry of capital accrual and conversion and its gendered effects on graduates is further highlighted by Sayer (2005) who argues that forms of capital tend to be closely related for men but are less so for women, which can make it difficult for female graduates to convert their cultural and educational capital into economic capital.

A question remains: if we accept that highlighting and challenging the unspoken masculinized foundations of entrepreneurship education is important, how do we “bring gender in” (Lewis, 2006) in a sensitive way that allows debate and dissent to come from the student’s lifeworld rather than from staff assumptions about student’s abilities and aspirations?

Critical pedagogy (after Freire, 1970) aims to unmask and challenge the hidden curriculum and may provide a useful starting point for educators who wish to critically engage with the socio-political norms suggested in the current economic, individualistic and meritocratic rationales for entrepreneurship education. At the moment, female students’ futures are arguably linked to the collectively ascribed and gendered symbolic capital that they bring to higher education. Critical pedagogy could open up opportunities for students and staff, offering the means for them to work together, to co-produce knowledge which highlights and contextualizes the diversity and possibilities of entrepreneurship education. Critical pedagogies can also challenge neoliberal discourses around meritocracy and the positioning of certain groups as deficient, and as making poor choices, in relation to entrepreneurship.

However, in explicitly bringing gender into the classroom and actively challenging these hidden discourses, educators are also put in the position of emphasizing comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs in such a way as to perpetuate the women’s positioning as deficient. Emphasizing the symbolic links between masculinity and successful entrepreneurs could be seen as encouraging female students to develop entrepreneurial capital through actively downplaying and overcoming their collectively feminized position, further denigrating the feminized gender capital. Educators could challenge this through critical approaches to cultures and institutional structures and how they impact the positioning of women and the framings of success or failure. In this way, we could draw attention to how systems and structures may have to change, rather than on how women as a collective social class need to change.

### **Concluding thoughts**

This paper addresses an important gap in the literature, as educators and the impact of their attitudes and perceptions on teaching and learning are rarely subjects of inquiry. It also draws attention to the potential for entrepreneurship education to negatively impact those students who are positioned as deficient. In doing so, it bridges the gap between theory and practice in identifying how Bourdieu’s theories can highlight the symbolically violent, real-world repercussions of an uncritical approach to entrepreneurship education. It also offers some suggestions for how educators might reflect on their role in reproducing taken-for-granted ideas of entrepreneurship and how this might be addressed through an emphasis on critical pedagogy.

However, this research is highly contextual, and, although the issues outlined emerged from the setting and do highlight the complexity of teaching and learning

interactions in this institution, it remains to be seen whether these are reflected in other HE settings and disciplines. For this reason, future research should explore how educators translate wider cultural views around entrepreneurship into the curriculum and how their own attitudes and experience may influence the knowledge they consider legitimate in this field. Action research focused on developing critical pedagogies within entrepreneurship education – that highlight the historical, political and social underpinnings of entrepreneurship theory, policy and practice – would also help us to understand whether opening up these areas to challenge and interrogation may position entrepreneurs and “deficient” groups in more enabling ways .

Failure to acknowledge and address these issues means that, as educators, we run the risk of perpetuating taken-for-granted notions, which are not settled (Pittaway and Cope, 2007) and are contested by critical researchers, effectively closing down opportunities for students and staff to challenge them in the classroom. This has the potential to negatively affect the aspirations of female students who now make up over 50 per cent of undergraduates within a sector that is increasingly encouraged to embed entrepreneurship education throughout the curriculum. It is also time to reflect on how we bring gender in (Lewis, 2006) in a way that encourages all of our students to find their own place within the discourses of entrepreneurship mobilized in the classroom and to emphasize the possibilities rather than the deficiencies of particular groups.

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