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DOING GENDER IN THE STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP SOCIETY PROGRAMME

Book chapter

VIGNETTE

We are entering the room with Saila, Marina said she would be a bit late. I recognise a couple of students amongst the people in the room. They were participants in an entrepreneurship course in which I was assisting. Their presence does not make my attendance here easier. I know they have already launched their business. Luckily, they are leaving the room; they are here for some other reason. We are now taking our seats. It seems that some key figures in the business community will be coaching us today because even the head of the student community is here to listen to them.

Two men, who know each other, are coming in. They look self-confident and serious, but friendly. The Big Man is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and the Handsome Man is dressed more formally. They introduce themselves as people who have much knowledge and enough experience in starting a business. The Big Man starts the coaching. He definitely has something to say. He speaks in very clear and simple language— no fillers, no hesitation. *I wish I myself could teach that way.* His PowerPoint presentation slides are black with yellow capital letters on them. *Why did I never apply those recommendations from the Academic Presentation course?* The messages on the slides are as clear as his language: 'YET ANOTHER SOLUTION LOOKING FOR A PROBLEM'. I have previously seen, heard and admired this idea, which was formulated differently and also written in capital letters: 'LOVE THE PROBLEM, NOT THE SOLUTION'. *Is there any problem we would like to solve, or are our ideas just our fantasies?*

The Big Man keeps on talking. Slide goes after slide, containing only one question each. There is no time to discuss, just time to stay focused: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM YOU ARE SOLVING? WHO HAS THE PROBLEM? WHY IS IT A PROBLEM? HAVE YOU PROVEN THE PROBLEM? HOW? WHAT SOLVES THE PROBLEM? HAVE YOU PROOF OF THE SOLUTION? WHAT IS YOUR WAY TO EXECUTE THE SOLUTION? *Oh, I am so slow. It is probably because I am too old for this student community. People here are fast and easygoing just like my 13-year-old son.*

The Big Man asks us to formulate our business ideas in one sentence. *Oh no, now it starts. Now they will tell us that our ideas suck. Because all first ideas suck.* I have heard it before in another course. Saila and I discuss and formulate the sentence. I like it. It looks much better than all our previous attempts to clarify what we are planning to do. I am pushing Saila to present it. I feel shy and hesitant to present it myself. I feel I know what will follow. She confidently announces it: 'City adventure game: learning Russian through history and mystery'. The Big Man nods and says, 'OK, thank you'. I exhale with relief: *the ideas do not suck this time.* When I feel I have calmed down my anxiety, however, I hear the leader of another team passionately and protectively explaining that people are ready to buy hemp dildos instead of plastic ones because they are more environment friendly. *Why are we not so passionate about what we do?*

The coaching continues. Now it is the turn of the Handsome Man to talk. He seems to be a little nervous at the beginning, but he gets more confident and enthusiastic whilst he gets more involved in talking about the validation steps. Step 0, step 1, step 2 … *Am I the only one who is still stuck with step 0 in which he explained what validation means?* Step 2.

MAP OUT YOUR ASSUMPTIONS, PRIORITISE THE MOST CRITICAL ONES AND CONVERT THEM INTO A HYPOTHESIS READY TO BE TESTED.

*OK, what are our assumptions?*

This is not quite clear to us. We do not have much time to discuss them. I am again cowardly encouraging Saila to talk for us. She explains that there are not enough informal and fun activities to satisfy all purposes of language learning. The Handsome Man does not look convinced. Saila is getting confused; she is blushing, looking at me for help, but I do not know how to help. I am just smiling blankly, trying to be one with the sofa I am sitting on, hoping to become invisible. She starts explaining our ideas further in her open-minded and sincere manner. She says that we would like to set up an organisation which would promote Russian language learning and friendship between Finnish people and Russian people.

I hold my breathe. *Oh no, not this. Talk only about real business things. Focus on the product. Do not reveal our unclear dreams.* And yes, the Handsome Man says it—THAT'S BULLSHIT.

*How could we come here with vague, overlapping ideas without assumptions about our customers? This place is for real businessmen, not for language teachers.* At least, I can celebrate being correct in my expectations that our idea sucks (this time, though, these were the bullshit assumptions about what a customer wishes).

The coaching process continues, and we have an assignment to discuss our ideas and assumptions with participants from the other teams. Marina, who has arrived a bit later then us, and Saila go to talk to a team sitting on another sofa. I keep pretending that I am inseparable from *my* sofa. Other people go, talk and discuss. I just participate absent-mindedly in discussions of ideas with other groups. At some point, the Handsome Man gives an example of a meaningful globally scalable product—a spoon which balances the trimmer of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It sounds to me like a genuinely meaningful product. 'I am an idealist as you are', he adds a bit out of context.

The coaching day is about to end. The Handsome Man is finishing his speech with supposedly inspiring lines. However, some of them sound rather frightening to me. 'A START-UP IS ABOUT WORKING HARD'. *I don't really mind.* 'FORGET ABOUT YOUR FREE TIME AND ENTERTAINMENT'. *OK.* 'REAL START-UPPERS DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN BARBEQUE PARTIES ORGANISED BY STUDENT SOCIETIES BECAUSE THEY WORK', adds the Big Man. *OK, I will survive it, as well.* 'YOU WILL EVEN HAVE TO SACRIFICE YOUR FAMILIES', continues the Handsome man. *Oh, no. That was too much. What could be so important and beautiful that I would forget about my sons?* The Big Man does not seem to agree about forgetting about his family either. However, the Handsome Man has more to say. 'IF YOU ARE NOT COMMITTED ENOUGH, YOU ARE GOING TO FEEL MISERABLE IN ONE YEAR'. *Wow, nice attempt to inspire. I have already started feeling that way.* He starts to advertise his consultancy by ending with a joke: 'DON'T WASTE ONE YEAR OF YOUR TIME; FAIL WITH US IN THREE MONTHS'.

We are leaving the building and approaching our bicycles. '*He is handsome*', I tell the girls. 'Which one? The bullshit guy?' They do not seem to share my admiration. 'Yeah, but there is such a pain in his eyes', says Saila. Marina is nodding. I am surprised to hear that. *What had happened to me if I was not able to see the pain?*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss the experience of participating in the programme, organised by a student entrepreneurship society for university students. In the spring of 2019, I considered participating in a 15-week Business Accelerator programme (the Accelerator) organised by a student entrepreneurship society in Finland, which could help, as I saw it, launch my personal entrepreneurial project. I was a doctoral student and planned to initiate a venture related to Russian language learning. I also wished to become a part of the community in which students actually transform their ideas into products. I was looking for experiential, practice-oriented learning, a learning-by-doing type of activity. I suggested that two master's students participate in the Accelerator as a team with me. We contacted the organiser of the programme, and he recommended that we participate in a Pre-Accelerator programme. The aim of the programme was to prepare participants for the Accelerator. However, during the Pre-Accelerator, we decided not to take part in the Accelerator anymore but to continue developing our project on our own. The research idea for this chapter emerged from the question my teammates and I discussed after the Pre-Accelerator was over. 'Why haven't we applied for the Accelerator?' The answer, which we all agreed on, was 'because we did not fit in'.

This experience triggered my research, in which I wanted to explain what it meant *not to fit in*. Aside from the explanation of naturally not being an entrepreneur, I first focused on the obvious reasons for the feelings of not fitting in, such as being older than the other participants and having working experience as an employed person for too long. However, the identity work that followed the participation in the Pre-Accelerator became intense as I started to research the topic and analyse my experience, pushing me to consider it through a gender lens. Thus, in this chapter, I aim to discuss a possible 'gender sub-text' (Bruni et al., 2005, p. 2) experienced and interpreted by the same person in the setting of entrepreneurship coaching.

I started this chapter with a vignette which reflects the captured emotional state experienced in the Pre-Accelerator (see also Poldner, 2020). In the text, I present a table in which I collected the coaches' utterances, which resonated with me and on which I relied to support my doubts related to becoming an entrepreneur. Then, I interpret the feeling of being a misfit through the gender lens. However, I first discuss some theoretical and methodological implications of this chapter.

DOING GENDER IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Traditionally considered a predominantly masculine activity, entrepreneurship represents an interesting field to explore issues related to gender. Bruni et al. (2005) explain that

entrepreneurship, 'while pretending to be gender neutral, comprises a gender subtext, which renders maleness invisible and thus sustains the a-critical reproduction of hegemonic masculinity' (p. 2). Much research has been carried out to understand the role that gender plays in entrepreneurial activities. At the same time, entrepreneurship is not only seen as a masculine activity; it has traditionally been researched through the lens of masculine norms and values, and a 'woman's identity is always socially constructed as "Other" with respect to the male entrepreneur' (Bruni et al., 2005, p. 29). Female entrepreneurship is often compared with male entrepreneurship, polarising the two according to industries, differences in motivation and ways of doing business. This kind of *othering* rather suggests that women entrepreneurs lack some entrepreneurial features (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) and complement male entrepreneurship.

Gender refers to the 'social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts' (Lindsey, 2015, p. 3). Studying gender in entrepreneurship (compared with studying women entrepreneurs) implies researching how gender is being constructed in entrepreneurship practices, which allows overcoming the presumption of gender neutrality in entrepreneurship (Bruni et al., 2005). West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest studying and understanding gender as an 'activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category' (p. 127). This approach emphasises that gender is being constantly produced and reproduced in social interaction. According to these authors, doing gender 'involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126).

The concept of *doing gender* has been applied to research entrepreneurship and highlighted how people, men and women alike, take part in (re)producing gendered practices in their everyday lives (Berglund & Tillmar, 2015). For example, Bruni et al. (2004, 2005) study *doing gender* and *doing entrepreneurship* as intertwined practices, showing how entrepreneurship is equated with masculinity. Berglund and Tillmar (2015) reveal a variety of ways of entrepreneuring through the concept of *gendered play* and emphasise that entrepreneurship cannot be seen through the lens of entrepreneurs (males) and non-entrepreneurs.

The above-mentioned papers reveal doing gender in entrepreneurial practices amongst acting entrepreneurs. In this chapter, I aim to grasp doing gender from the perspective of a participant in a student entrepreneurship society programme who is considering entrepreneurship as a career choice.

STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP SOCIETY AND LEARNING ABOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship education, with its practice-oriented approaches, is strongly supported and endorsed by authorities in Europe (Berglund et al., 2017; Jones, 2014; Laalo et al., under revision). At universities, students tend to value the action-driven, hands-on alternative to 'theoretical academic studies' (Laalo et al., under revision). Along with secondary schools and universities, entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset are promoted by student entrepreneurship societies. As the members of these societies construct their meaning, an important feature of a student entrepreneurship society is that they unite students to accumulate positive energy around the notion of entrepreneurship (Siivonen et al., 2019) for *changing the world* (Parkkari & Kohtakangas, 2018).

At the same time, entrepreneurship education has been critically discussed from the perspectives of the *cultification* of entrepreneurship (Farny et al., 2016) and reproducing masculine norms in entrepreneurship (Jones, 2014, 2015; Komulainen et al., 2020). Berglund et al. (2017) show how entrepreneurship education de-mobilises gender and promotes a *neo-masculine* subject. In turn, the research conducted by Jones (2015) reveals that 'both students and staff misrecognize the masculinization of entrepreneurship discourses that they encounter as natural and unquestionable' (p. 303). Similarly, when researching the activities of student entrepreneurship societies, Katila et al. (2019) question the promotion of a start-up entrepreneur as an ideal entrepreneur model for a student in their events and programmes.

In this chapter, I further discuss the issues related to reproducing masculine norms in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. In my case, the three-day Pre-Accelerator programme itself could not significantly influence my understanding of entrepreneurship. It has rather reflected and exposed my fears and doubts towards entrepreneurship based on my previous understanding of an entrepreneur as a *heroic* (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013) individual. Therefore, in this chapter, I try to be more focused on how I, as a participant, misrecognised masculinisation, assuming gender neutrality, and simultaneously performed gender (Bruni et al., 2005) at the student entrepreneurship society programme.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY WORK

In my research, I apply autoethnography as a methodological approach. Taking into account the variety of definitions of autoethnography and the approaches to it (Anderson, 2006; Denzin, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011), I see the definition proposed by Luuvas as the most relevant for my case. He defines autoethnography as a 'research methodology that employs conscious

becoming as a strategy for producing academic knowledge' (2019, p. 245). I got myself involved in the process of a new venture creation to become a research instrument and to observe personal identity work in the process. In entrepreneurship studies, this approach is known as enactive research. In this type of research, Johannisson (2018) understands that 'the scholar also adopts the identity of an entrepreneur and with such an amalgamated identity launches, organizes and finalizes a venture' (p. 3).

Autoethnography implies regular identity work. According to Gherardi (2015), identity work combines 'inward self-reflection and outward engagement with various discursively available social identities and discourses' (p. 652). For the purpose of my research, I keep a diary (van Burg & Karlsson, 2020) in which I make records about what is happening outside myself and reflect on what is happening inside myself. Through identity work and interpretation (Denzin, 2014), I seek to reveal and understand societal phenomena (see Poldner, 2020) by narrating myself (Gherardi, 2015).

The analysis of diaries revealed two different stages of identity work related to conducting research for this chapter: the identity work experienced in the Pre-Accelerator itself and the identity work experienced in the research process.

The diary notes gave me an opportunity to capture the emotional state of participating in the Pre-Accelerator programme, presented in the vignette above, which reflects the identity work experienced in the programme. It represents an experience of spontaneous unconscious self-identification as a non-entrepreneur. According to the psychodynamic approach, identity work functions automatically and unconsciously to mitigate people's anxieties in the form of ego defences, such as denial (Brown, 2017). This identity work was triggered by the context and content of the Pre-Accelerator programme and reflected the answer to the *who am I* question in relation to the idea of being an entrepreneur acquired before coming to the programme.

The second episode (stage) of identity work started with the decision to research the experience of participating in the Pre-Accelerator. Having overcome the sensation of naturally not being an entrepreneur after participating in the Pre-Accelerator, I quickly remembered that my age and my professional experience, as well as my modest entrepreneurial ambitions, influenced my feeling of being a misfit. However, the understanding that gender matters and that what is more important is how it is being done invisibly came to me later. The identity work included discussions with my teammates about why we did not fit in, further reflections in the diary, participating in research seminars and a course on creative writing with the focus of feminine writing, reading literature and regularly communicating with my new feminist

friends. Overall, I would call it a gender awareness path, which led to the decision to analyse the experience with a gender lens and to doubt gender neutrality in entrepreneurship. However, what still surprises me is how unobvious it was for me that *gender matters*. I still wonder, 'Why hadn't I thought about it before?'

Thus, in this chapter, I seek to develop a processual understanding of doing gender in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education by moving from assuming gender neutrality into gender awareness.

REALISATION OF NOT BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE PROGRAMME

For one year, I participated in four different courses and development programmes as a doctoral student who researches entrepreneurship autoethnographically. These programmes included elements of learning about entrepreneurship, learning through entrepreneurship and learning for entrepreneurship (Heinonen & Hytti, 2010). All of them were short practice-oriented introductory courses with overlapping content (ideation, validation, pitching, testing, and so on) targeted at different audiences: two of them primarily aimed at university researchers, one at university and high school teachers and one at university students (the Pre-Accelerator).

In all these courses, the participants were involved in the activities, which made me feel uncomfortable and hesitant at first, but satisfied, or even more self-confident, after the completion of the assignment. For example, I felt uneasy advertising myself or pitching a business idea to the other participants at the beginning of the course. Another example is an assignment in which we were required to go outside the building and ask strangers whether they would buy our products at a particular price. However, our participation in the Pre-Accelerator happened to be the most challenging and most emotionally demanding experience. This course, which consisted of coaching sessions, required our active participation and the disclosure of our plans; we had to work with our real, not imaginary, ideas. I invited two people, who dedicated their time to be a team with me, and I felt partly responsible for what was going on. My teammates, Marina and Saila, were, at the time, master's students majoring in education and philology, respectively, at the same university where I am taking my doctoral studies. By the beginning of the Pre-Accelerator, Marina and I had already been tutoring and assisting as Russian language teachers for several months at the university language centre. Saila was one of the students in the Russian language course.

The Pre-Accelerator programme was organised by a student entrepreneurship society, which unites mainly students from universities but also invites young people from outside

university who are interested in developing their business ideas. The Pre-Accelerator was a newly introduced programme for those who were aiming to apply for the 15-week Business Accelerator programme. The Accelerator itself has been held for several years and helped start up dozens of firms. Many of these became well-established companies in the region, and some of them managed to expand their activities internationally. The Pre-Accelerator programme included three main coaching days with a focus on idea development, idea validation and teambuilding. On the fourth day, we could receive support in the application for the Accelerator, which we did not attend, because by that time, we had decided not to participate in the Accelerator.

The student entrepreneurship society has truly embodied the idea of entrepreneurship, which I observed during the first time I visited the building where it was located. When I went there, I could see the coworking spaces (Butcher, 2018) and closed and ajar doors with tables stating the names of the start-ups settled down behind them; I could feel this dynamic atmosphere of the society. I wanted to be part of this 'positive buzz of the start-up scene' (Siivonen et al., 2019, p. 527), to be amongst the people who see the promotion of entrepreneurship as their main goal and as the way of 'changing the world' (Parkkari & Kohtakangas, 2018, p. 154). Accordingly, the Pre-Accelerator translated the collective entrepreneurial identity embraced by the student entrepreneurship society (Siivonen et al., 2019), and I had to make efforts to fit in. Brown (2012) claims that fitting in 'is about assessing [the] situation and becoming who you need to be in order to be accepted' (p. 231). The competitive nature of the application process for the Accelerator also implied that I, and later my teammates, had to adjust to the idea of the programme, as we understood it, and to accept its rules.

I was personally willing to be accepted to the Accelerator programme and obtain practical knowledge and experience in developing and implementing a business idea. I had realised that at times, I am too shy and prone to overthinking and that I need a push in order to overcome hesitation about implementing my own entrepreneurial project. So, I made efforts to be accepted. For example, I needed to find at least two teammates, which was a requirement of the programme. It was not easy for me to invite two people to participate; I had to overcome my hesitation and fear of being rejected. My future teammates eventually agreed to join, but I still see it as a major achievement of mine inspired by the demands of the programme. To become more in line with the programme, we abandoned my initial idea of a language summer school and focused on Marina's idea of a city adventure game. We saw it as a more appropriate idea for the Accelerator programme. During the Pre-Accelerator, we actively participated in

the assignments even though doing so felt uncomfortable at times and required going outside our comfort zones. We were trying to fit in to the entrepreneurship society.

The Pre-Accelerator was not a conventional university entrepreneurship course. It was promoted as a start-up course aimed at students who are considering pursuing globally scalable business ideas. I had not paid much attention to it and believed it was worth trying to participate in, even though we have hardly seen ourselves as global disrupters. Besides, it was the only programme organised by the society. I realise now that I got confused by equating entrepreneurs with start-up entrepreneurs (Katila et al., 2019).

The coaching itself convinced me even more that we are amongst *real entrepreneurs*. The knowledge, experience and genuinely valuable messages (about validation and testing processes, about focusing on the problem and needs of a potential customer) of the coaches and their confident way of presenting materials made them legitimate to represent the business community in our eyes. At least, I perceived the coaches as trustworthy educators and compared them to me, who is involved in identity work (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013).

At the same time, the coaches' challenging, unsettling and even suppressive (as I felt) way of communicating with us added to my discomfort. I looked at the other participants, both males and females, and I saw many of them being more passionate and enthusiastic, as well as able to respond to and argue with the coaches. Gradually, I started to feel unbearably uncomfortable and unwilling to participate; I concluded that I am not an entrepreneur.

I also analyse the experience of participating in the Pre-Accelerator from the perspective of doing gender, revealing an initial presumption of gender neutrality in entrepreneurship.

REVISING THE EXPERIENCE WITH A GENDER LENS

I recognise that my experience of gradually withdrawing, resisting to continue and feeling that I am not an entrepreneur in the Pre-Accelerator is a multifaceted phenomenon and cannot be explained by gender issues alone. For example, I mentioned above that in all action-oriented entrepreneurship courses in which I participated, I felt uncomfortable whenever I had to overcome my shyness and expose my business ideas to other participants and the teachers. So, I could have analysed my experience, for example, from the perspective of personal traits. In addition, in the Pre-Accelerator, which was organised by students for students, I felt how I was older than the others, which also influenced my feeling of being a misfit. Analysing the experience from the doing gender perspective allowed me to reconsider the meaning of personal trait and age and how I construct them in a particular situation. Age can also be understood as life experience. Lynott and McCandless (2000) show that life experience impacts

the gender role attitudes of women differently in different cohorts. Thus, age or being older means having more years of a particular experience. For example, compared with the other participants of the Pre-Accelerator, I have more years of gendered work experience (working as a teacher) and gendered family experience of being a mother.

In Table 9.1, I gathered some examples of the coaches' utterances during the second day of the Pre-Accelerator programme, which strongly resonated with me. I also added the columns 'possible message', 'correct reaction', 'message I read' and 'my reaction' to illustrate the difference between (what I see as) a 'good match' between the coaches and a participant of the programme and a mismatch between the coaches and me.

The 'possible messages' represent my interpretations of the purposes of the chosen utterances of the coaches, answering the question 'Why did they tell that?' I heard and immediately digested some of these messages during the coaching process; I understood the other messages later in the reflective and analytical phases of working on this chapter. 'Correct reaction' represents my understanding (based on readings and the experience of participating in this and other entrepreneurship courses) of how the coaches expected the participants to react to their messages. An utterance could have caused an uncomfortable feeling, but a participant is able to easily cope with it and move forward. So, the reaction could be either natural to the participant or they knew how to play the right reaction (in order to fit in) and played it. In this case, one can talk about the 'good match' between the coaches and a participant.

By 'message I read', I mean my interpretation of or the subtext I read in the utterances of the coaches in the Pre-Accelerator programme. According to Herbert Blumer (as cited in Lindsey, 2015, p. 9), people do not respond directly to the world around them but to the meaning they bring to it. Thus, 'my reaction' represents my unconscious response to my immediate interpretation of the utterances and reveals a mismatch between the coaches and me in the Pre-Accelerator, which I further analyse in this chapter.

Table. The coaches' utterances at the entrepreneurship programme and reactions to them

| Utterances[1] | Possible message | 'Correct' reaction Good match | Message I read | My reaction Mismatch |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *'Your assumptions about customers are bullshit'.* | a. Prove to me that you know what you are talking about. b. Be strong, fight back. | I will work on the idea further, and I will prove it is worth doing. | Your ideas are ridiculous. Promoting language learning has nothing to do with entrepreneurship. | I knew it was a bad idea; what a shame. Entrepreneurs do not get upset when someone tells their ideas are bullshit. |
| *'Faster'.* | Stop reflecting, start acting! | I will do my best. | If you do not want to be faster and better than others, you are not an entrepreneur because entrepreneurship is about being first in the competition. | I am slow. I need time to think. I am not an entrepreneur. |
| *'You will have to sacrifice your free time, even your families'.* | Entrepreneurship takes much time; be prepared. You should prioritise. | I understand it, and I am more than determined. | You should choose between being a good mother and being a real entrepreneur. | I have children; I cannot sacrifice too much. I am not an entrepreneur. |
| *'OK, guys, if you want to do it just for fun ....' 'If you do not work enough, you will feel miserable in one year'.* | Do you really want to do it? Even when working hard, you will not be guaranteed an outstanding outcome. | It is not about having fun. I will work hard, and I will excel in a year. | Entrepreneurship is about winning or failing. Only fully dedicated people win. | I will not say I will do whatever it takes; I will survive failing. I am not an entrepreneur. |
| *'You are not as passionate about what you do as the other teams are'* | This is part of the performance. Play your role convincingly. If I do not believe you, why should investors do? | I am passionate; I will show you that. We are better than the other teams. | Your eyes should sparkle with excitement if you are an entrepreneur. | I see they are much more passionate than I am. I am not an entrepreneur. |

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[1] These utterances are not direct quotations of what the coaches said. There was no microphone or video recording in the Pre-Accelerator. These phrases are what my teammates and I remembered having heard in the programme. So, in some sense, they are refracted through the prism of personal and collective impressions gathered after the decision not to participate.

SACRIFICING FAMILY OR BALANCING?

The utterance of one of the coaches that a start-upper should be ready to sacrifice their free time and even their family was probably the most explicit instance of an outdated image of a masculine entrepreneur, which does not reflect the images constructed by male entrepreneurs themselves (Hytti & Karhunen, 2018), let alone by female entrepreneurs. Bruni et al. (2004) explain the role of the family for entrepreneurs by citing an example of two sisters who own a firm producing industrial welding machines. Routines of taking a son of one of the sisters to school and picking him up are presented as 'a daily chore that sets the cadence of organizational time' (p. 416).

Surprisingly, even though outdated, the utterance of the coach still annoyed me and reinforced my feeling of not being an entrepreneur. The message I read was that one should choose between being a good mother and being a *real* entrepreneur. The word 'sacrificing' itself adds to the *heroic* image of an entrepreneur (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). I was raised to embrace the idea that women are expected to sacrifice their career for their family, not vice versa. However, when I started to analyse the experience in an attempt to understand what sacrificing family means to me, I recalled that for five months, I had lived and studied as a doctoral student in Finland without my children being here (they stayed in Russia with their father, who is an entrepreneur) before they immigrated to live with me. So, this symbolic interaction poses something of a paradox. A coach presented an outdated image of an entrepreneur by implying that an entrepreneur should sacrifice their family. Even though I have had experience of leaving my children with their father because of my studies, I still considered the idea of sacrificing one's family for entrepreneurial ambitions unacceptable and incompatible with my beliefs. Consequently, I question my ability to become a real entrepreneur.

In the latest entrepreneurship studies, as well as in the academic environment, the necessity to iterate between family matters and work (entrepreneurship) is being discussed in terms of *balancing*, not *sacrificing*. Gherardi (2015) discusses four ways of authoring the female entrepreneur in the discourse of work–family balance, emphasising that 'an entrepreneurial project is part of a life plan within the pervasiveness of the discourse about work–family life balance' (2015, p. 652). Hytti and Karhunen (2018) reveal the stories of male entrepreneurs who clearly prioritised family over their entrepreneurship career when the family experienced difficult times, and they continued or started doing business after their family problems were resolved.


BEING SLOW AND UNAMBITIOUS FOR NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SCALING UP

During the coaching day, I had a feeling that we were in a hurry. The coaches were quickly introducing new concepts and rushing us during assignments. As I came to the programme to become more action oriented and less reflective, this type of coaching felt like the right way to do it. However,

I also felt I was slow and focused on irrelevant details. It came to my mind that I am just too old for this community of young, energetic, disruptive people, or this buzz (Siivonen et al., 2019). One of the coaches mentioned that start-up business is not for people who have been working in corporations for a decade or more because those people have different mindsets. This was not specifically addressed to me, but I could perfectly relate to it because I had worked in a university for ten years. In the work of Siivonen et al. (2019), they show that when the student members of an entrepreneurship society discuss their working life and careers, they picture universities and the corporate setup as examples of old working methods that hinder progress and development.

Even though the organisers of the Accelerator do not mention the programme's product focus explicitly, most of the nascent entrepreneurs in the Accelerator have been involved in creating applications for mobile devices. The hi-tech industry has traditionally been considered more attractive to and dominated by male entrepreneurs (e.g. Malach-Pines et al., 2004). Likewise, start-up businesses are also associated with new technologies, which imply quick response to changes. When the same ideas come to people in different parts of the world, it is crucially important to be the first person to introduce, customise and commercialise that idea. As Lewis Carol wrote in *Alice in Wonderland*, 'here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere you must run twice as fast as that.' Having these all in mind and comparing myself to the students or even to my own son made me feel that start-up entrepreneurship is not something for me.

Several times before and during the Pre-Accelerator, my teammates questioned whether we could reconsider our business idea. For example, as we have applied with a city adventure game, they suggested doing it on a digital platform. However, I was strongly resisting the suggestion, emphasising that I would like students (and other potential customers) to get out of their computers and go learn about the city with their eyes open. I was imagining my own kids walking on the street with devices, and it was an annoying thought. Furthermore, the idea that we would need to find a programmer seemed so complicated to me. At the same time, it became obvious to me that in the Pre-Accelerator, digitalisation is considered one of the core prerequisites for business scalability.

In the Pre-Accelerator, a coach gave us an example of a globally scalable product, which drew my attention. He was talking about inventing and producing a spoon which could balance the trimmer of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. On the one hand, there was the message of doing social good in this example; on the other hand, I thought that I could hardly get interested in the mass production of spoons, even though they may change the lives of many people because this kind of business implies too distant relationships with a customer. As a university teacher, I got used to being personally and emotionally involved in co-creating a product together with my students.

Thus, a business related to creating applications for mobile devices and a business involved with the mass production of consumer goods reflected an important feature of a business idea suitable for the Accelerator—global scalability. At the same time, my lack of understanding on how to scale up services, which implies the emotional involvement of a provider of the service, and even the lack of willingness to do it on my end felt as a lack of ambition for being an entrepreneur.

COMPETITION, PASSION AND FIGHTING

My teammates and I experienced the strongest feeling of being a misfit in the Pre-Accelerator when one of the coaches told us that our assumptions about our customers were 'bullshit'. On the one hand, I was explaining to myself why he said so by the lack of confidence on my end and the feeling that we are entering a *forbidden terrain* of the business world with our childish ideas. On the other hand, even then, I realised that this utterance in the Pre-Accelerator was not an objective assessment of our idea itself. When I observed how the coaches challenged the other teams, I could hear that their teasing way of questioning could imply something like, 'Stand up and fight for your ideas' or 'Be passionate about your idea'. I could link it to many other phrases and utterances heard in conversations between fathers and sons or in the movies about military forces and superheroes, such as 'You know I am tough on you now, so you could be stronger in the real fight', or to a famous phrase attributed to Nietzsche: 'That which does not kill us makes us stronger.'

I knew the coaches wanted to help us and tell us that neither investors nor customers will ever care about our doubts and our personal feelings. However, at that particular moment, I could only feel shame: 'I am sorry we took your time. Our idea is indeed bullshit, and probably, I am a bullshit myself.' Although I have a similar experience from a previous course when an instructor told us that all our ideas suck, even though I was expecting and even willing to experience *real life*, I was incapable of reacting using this manner of communication. Consequently, this indecisiveness added to the feeling of not being an entrepreneur because, as I presumed, entrepreneurs do not get upset when someone tells them that their ideas are bullshit. They pull together and move forward.

Another example of a masculine discourse was provided by Blank (2013), which was also cited in one of the courses I participated in; it was a line by the famous boxer Mike Tyson, which was used to explain the lean start-up approach: 'Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth' (p. 67). On the one hand, I could recognise the valuable message about the need to regularly validate assumptions about what a customer requires and at what price they are ready to buy a product. On the other hand, illustrating the process of validation with an example of a fighting strategy made the process of validation more frightening to me. I might have sometimes felt excited when observing others (mostly males) fighting, but I have never punched anyone in the mouth.

During those moments, the Pre-Accelerator felt as a rite of passage (van Gennep, 1960), namely, an initiation to become a member of the community and to get access to the Accelerator programme, which I was obviously failing. The process implied some rituals (Farny et al., 2016) and 'mobilizing masculinities', 'the practices wherein two or more men jointly bring to bear, or bring into play, masculinity/ies' (Patricia Martin, as cited in Bruni et al., 2005, p. 31). Instead of getting involved and fighting, I distanced myself, observing and admiring others instead.

LAST REMARKS: A WOMAN COACH

One important self-observation is worth mentioning here as I came to the end of the story. As I wrote above, the third day of coaching was about teambuilding and values. It felt natural to me that the coach that day was a woman. However, that day was not the focus of my research until I started to look at my experience with the gender lens. Although the coach owned a consultancy business, to me, she looked more like another nice teacher from a university (although she had never been employed in one). I could understand her messages perfectly well and could relate them to myself. However, I perceived that day as some supplementary to the main (the second) day. Partly, it can be explained by the topics of those days (ideation and validation vs. teambuilding). However, after analysing my experience, I understand that she was too much like me to be considered a real entrepreneur in my eyes. In other words, I did not only undermine my own ability for entrepreneuring, but I also saw another woman as 'lacking and incomplete' (Ahl & Marlow, 2012, p. 543).

SUMMING UP AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this chapter, I autoethnographically traced the path from gender blindness (Lewis, 2006) towards some awareness about how gender is being done and reproduced in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. This process implied identity work triggered by strong emotions related to feeling unsettled or insecure in the Pre-Accelerator. I started from the presumption that entrepreneurship was equally accessible to both men and women and that whether a person can become a real entrepreneur was up to their personal traits and dedication. That was my understanding of gender equality in entrepreneurship discourse, which I was ready to reproduce further. However, my incapability to fit in, in combination with my willingness to launch a project and to research the process, made me analyse the experience and look for an explanation beyond the socially constructed norm of being an entrepreneur, as well as made me separate masculinity from the image of an entrepreneur in order to make it relatable to myself.

Analysing the experience of participation in a student entrepreneurship society programme with a gender lens, I sought to reveal a possible gender subtext, initially unheard, which equates

entrepreneurship with masculine entrepreneurship. In student entrepreneurship societies, an entrepreneur is often presented through a heroic masculine image (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). It can be observed in the style of coaching, which embodies decisiveness, determination and rationality, as well as in clear messages about who can and who cannot be a start-up entrepreneur. The heroic image does not always help one be involved in entrepreneurial action. Instead, a participant may feel admiration for this heroic image but experience hesitation and resistance to participate, as I felt, because becoming an entrepreneur is attributed to becoming a more masculine person. Thus, becoming a start-up entrepreneur remains a fantasised identity (Katila et al., 2019).

The stereotypes of real entrepreneurs are being reproduced not only by men themselves but also by women. As a woman, I bear understanding of real entrepreneurship as masculine entrepreneurship and not only see myself as a potential 'dis-entrepreneur' (Bruni et al., 2004, p. 426) compared with male entrepreneurs, but I may also consider other female entrepreneurs as not being entrepreneurs enough because they are not masculine enough. Interestingly, Lewis (2006) has shown that women entrepreneurs, who do not recognise gender differences to be relevant for entrepreneurship, consider feminine businesses as merely hobbies and believe that they represent a threat to the societal perception of other women entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2006).

Overall, gender awareness and overcoming the assumed gender neutrality of entrepreneurship remain important issues to be considered both in entrepreneurship education and in research.

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