2 Provoking entrepreneurial thinking – Gendered embodiment and entrepreneurship education  
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Abstract

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education (EE) have significant roles in terms of societal discourses. Entrepreneurship has been seen as a promoter of growth and societal material progress. Also in Finland, entrepreneurship has been seen as a driving force of growth. However, there are some critical voices emerging as well. The idea of this paper is to understand the standing point of critical feminist theories in EE, by conducting a literature review. More specifically aim is to understand better the meaning of the body in today’s entrepreneurship education (EE). I make some reflections from a study unit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Tourism, where a debate was held consisting of provoking themes about the startup scene in Finnish Lapland.

Based on the study, it is possible to draw following conclusions: 1) Because the entrepreneur is in fact disembodied, the heroic entrepreneur is seen most often seen as a male. The identity cannot be without the body, which makes gender an essential part of entrepreneurial identity as well, whether we speak about it or not. 2) The body is the corporeal manifestation of class, which also includes other classifications besides gender, and the study proposes that it would be useful to study multiple inequalities in terms of EE.

Keywords: approach body entrepreneurship education embodiment, feminist, gender

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to understand better the meaning of the body in today’s entrepreneurship education (EE). In addition, the idea is to understand the standing point of critical feminist theories in EE, by conducting a literature review. While
numerous scholars have touched the important topic of gender and entrepreneurship, there has been rather little discussion on the matter of the body in terms of entrepreneurship and EE. (e.g. Kasperová & Kitching, 2014; Komulainen, Korhonen & Räty, 2009). Concerning EE, Varamäki, Joensuu and Viljamaa (2014) have studied the impact of entrepreneur mother or father on the entrepreneurship intentions of HEI students. However, as Kasperová and Kitching (2014, 448) state, embodiment has been taken for granted in entrepreneurial identity literature, which has left the entrepreneur disembodied. Thus, there is room for more discussions like this at hand.

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education have significant roles in terms of societal discourses. Entrepreneurship has been seen as a promoter of growth and societal material progress. Many instances promote entrepreneurship; higher education and other public institutions (HEI) for instance (e.g. Hurley, 1999, 54). Also in Finland, entrepreneurship has been seen as a driving force of growth. However, there are some critical voices emerging as well. Yet, these emerging discussions seem to remain in the background or replicate the stereotypes and generalizations that lie beneath, even when they stay unspoken. Stereotypes concerning gender or age, for instance, can be approached from many viewpoints, one of them being through feminist approach. In this paper I investigate the issue of entrepreneurship education from the viewpoint of gendered embodiment. Indeed, the viewpoint of embodiment is important, since in EE, we refer to entrepreneurial identity (e.g. Hägg 2011) as well, and it is said that identity cannot be without the body (Woodward, 1997).

As a starting point, I conducted a literature review as a desk research. In addition, I make some reflections from a study unit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Tourism, where a debate was held consisting of provoking themes about the startup scene in Finnish Lapland. One of the themes was “(Startup) entrepreneurship is not suitable for women.” The debate was held as a part of project Startup Lapland’s (ESF) teaching integration, which aims at disseminating startup knowhow in Lapland University Consortium (LUC).

The paper adds to the existing knowledge concerning the body and embodiment as well as gender in EE. Thus, the results provide enhanced understanding on how gender and the body along with feminist theories are discussed in EE studies. In addition, the paper provides insights into what kind of implications the gendered
embodiment could bring to practical EE. Incorporating the viewpoint of the body will allow us to critically inspect the way entrepreneurial identity is usually seen and promoted in theory and practice.

The structure of this paper is following. First the terms and concepts relevant to this research are introduced: EE, feminist approach and gender and the body. Chapter 2.2-2.4 introduces the concept of EE and recent research in the field of EE. The approach in the paper is feminist theories and the viewpoint they provide, by questioning the existing structures and gender norms, which are also introduced in Chapter 2.3. The introduction of feminist approach is followed by the specific terms including the notions of the body and gender. Chapter 2.5 briefly presents the methodology and the paper then continues to the findings in Chapter 2.6 and discussion in Chapter 2.7. The discussion includes recommendations for future research.

2.2 Terms and concepts

Thesaurus defines “entrepreneurship” as follows: “State of running a business with considerable initiative and risk, whereas education is related to improvement, information and learning.” As a result, entrepreneurship education (EE) would mean improving the skills in the area of business making. However, scholars usually contest this narrow viewpoint provided by dictionaries. In the light of today’s discussions, entrepreneurship is defined more broadly as a state where opportunities are recognized and pursued (Valliere, 2015, 132), but also as a state of mind and connected to entrepreneurial behavior (e.g. Gibb, 2002, 238; Hägg & Peltonen, 2013, 23).

The discussion concerning EE in Finland was, according to Kyrö (2001, 92), stirred in the 1990s, when society started noticing the importance of SMEs and the discourse was steered towards educational viewpoints. Up until then, the discourse had been in the field of entrepreneurial traits and biological heritage. (Kyrö, 2001, 92.) In the past decades, the EE concept has become more popular and it has become trivial inside educational institutions. However, different viewpoints to entrepreneurship and EE still remain without a solid consensus. Hägg and Peltonen (2013) discuss different viewpoints in Anglo-American and continental contexts. According to them, EE is seen as entrepreneurial learning – in other words, learning entrepreneurial behavior and skills – but the viewpoints vary from the Anglo-
American aim of teaching the subject or skills to the continental goal to teach behavior. (Hägg & Peltonen, 2013, 23.)

Various scholars describe the meaning of the individual’s background, identity, traits and motivations in EE (e.g. Duval-Couetil, Gotch & Yi, 2014; Farhangmehr, Gonalves & Sarmento, 2016; Hägg, 2011; Tarling, Jones & Murphy, 2016). Recently, the focus has much been in entrepreneurial self-efficacy (SE) and entrepreneurship intention (EI) (see e.g. Joensuu, Viljamaa, Varamäki & Tornikoski, 2013; Shinnar, Hsu & Powell, 2014; Westhead & Soleswick, 2016; Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007). Much of the work also relies on the theory of planned behavior (PBT) (e.g. Yang, 2013). Thus, the human aspect of EE, acknowledging a wide range of personal traits and the impact of the person’s background is solid among scholars.

In this paper, my focus is on EE that does not necessarily include the idea of founding a venture or running a business. In this sense the focus is not in the explicit understanding of entrepreneurship and skills, but in the notion of entrepreneurial behavior, where I see that entrepreneurship “includes the idea of human behavior”, as Kyrö (2001, 93) frames it. According to Kyrö, EE discussion without educational background, in other words human activity is meaningless and makes the whole conversation redundant (Kyrö 2001, 93). Due to the limitation conveyed by the other aspects mentioned in this paper (embodiment and gender), I do not reject the idea of EE being a subject of entrepreneurship skills either. Narrowing the subject would leave very little material to investigate. This paper concentrates on EE that takes place in an educational institution setting, while also acknowledging different mentoring programs and informal education as a way of learning and teaching entrepreneurship.

### 2.3 Feminist approach

Feminist thought has gained increasing attention lately especially in popular writings but also in academia. In this chapter, I introduce a few basic notions about feminist approach and feminist thought. I find these notions important because they help in gaining a general picture and the aims of the feminist approach.

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1995, 7) state that many social scientists have argued that there is no single feminist research method. Thus, there are no precisely feminist
methods for data collection nor analysis. This is confirmed by Griffin, Hennessy, Jackson and Roseneil (2000, 5), who write that feminist theory is the home of various intellectual and political affiliations and theoretical positions which exist among feminists. Thus, feminist research is multidisciplinary by nature and it is applicable in various fields of study. According to Griffin et al. (2000, 5), gender and women are emphasized in feminist research, but other identities intersecting with gender, such as class, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality have diversified and pluralized feminist theorizing. A more fundamental guideline for (critical) feminist scholars would be a general aim of changing existing power relations and inequalities. As stated by do Mar Pereira (2012, 284),

Many feminist scholars understand their work as a project of both cumulative and critical intervention in the academy: they seek not just to generate more knowledge but also, and centrally, to question and transform existing modes, frameworks and institutions of knowledge production. (do Mar Pereira, 2012.)

Indeed, feminist scholars have gained some foothold in academia (Lovell, 2000, 26). While it has been the purpose of feminist research to act as a catalyst of change, the approach has also been criticized for replicating the system with unequal power relations. However, as Lovell (2000, 27) points out, unless we think that there is an alternative, there is no purpose in unmasking the machinations of the social ‘unconscious’.

Intersectional feminist approach might be the closest we can get to pluralist feminist though. The approach takes into consideration the different identities of the individual and the intersections of the identities. One of the forerunners of the thought is Crenshaw (e.g. 2016), who has questioned the structures that define the position of black women. In this paper, I focus on gendered embodiment, but I do not reject the thought that includes other identities, such as class and ethnic background, to the discussion. In terms of entrepreneurship, Berglund (2013, 722) writes that even though entrepreneurship discourses have emphasized the various possibilities of entrepreneurial self in both entrepreneurship and employability for all of us, gender segregation is a noted phenomenon in the field of entrepreneurship (Berglund, 2013, 722). Ahl and Marlow (2012, 543) share Berglund’s view by stating that there is a gender bias in entrepreneurship discourse. I would see this as a call for a feminist intervention. This I state acknowledging the critique political
feminism has encountered. The critique claims, for instance, that feminist theorizing of patriarchy has sometimes consequentially led to using the patriarchal structures as a shortcut for creating a joined experience of oppression for all women (Butler, 2006, 51).

2.4 Body and gender

As stated above, this paper is grounded in the notion that identity is bound to the body and the body is, in the light of this paper, always gendered. However, the notions of biological gender and social gender are agreed not to be straightforward (see e.g. Butler, 2006; Butler, 1993). The terms are used and further elaborated in sociology and psychology, but in other disciplines, they are often misused or invisible. Here I clarify the meaning of the terms gender and body in the way they are seen in this paper.

It has been stated that while biological gender is defined by nature, the way would be defining gender as socially or culturally constructed. Consequently, this would mean that social gender is fluid, while sex would be restricted to the biological fact (de Bouvier, 2009). Butler (2006, 55) ponders upon the arrangement of biological and social genders. She writes that the original purpose of the division of gender into biological and social was in fact to reverse the thought that the biological gender (sex) would set us up with a fixed destiny. However, the matter of the gender is more complex and makes Butler (2009, 56–80) question how possible it actually is to divide gender to culturally constructed social and naturally given biological entities.

According to Bourdieu the body reflects the way it is maintained, fed or kept, for instance. In another words, it can reflect the person’s habitus, as being a pure manifestation of class taste. (Woodward, 1997, 110.) Now, gender can also be seen to represent a class that one is assigned to based on certain classification. Thus, the body is the home of different identities, which are on one hand, bound to biology, but on the other hand a matter of social structures as well as cultural performances (see e.g. Butler, 1990; Gregory, Johnston, Pratt & Watts, 2009). Bouvier (2009, 41–42) has concluded that in terms of discussing gender and subjectivity, being a female is seen as a personal feature, which is so profound that actually all other personal characters are built upon it, whereas being a male does not represent a special feature. Male is the absolute human type. (Bouvier, 2009, 41–42.) In this
paper I understand that viewing the body as a biological entity is simplification and as Woodward suggests:

> [...] a satisfactory analysis of human embodiment requires an appreciation of how our fleshy physicality is molded by social as well as ‘natural’ processes. In this context, the human body is important not only because it provides us with the basic ability to live, but because it shapes our identities and structures out interventions in, and classifications of, the world. (Woodward, 1997, 65.)

Thus, in this paper, I rely on the concept of gender as it is performed and structured, not strictly restricted to biology. Following de Bouvier (2009, 98), the body is the means of grasping the world, and that is why the world seems different for each of us depending on the position the world is seen from. However, de Bouvier refuses to believe that the body would bind the woman to an inevitable faith. Biological facts cannot alone define the hierarchy nor do they define the eternal role of the woman. (de Bouvier, 2009, 98.)

Some ideas concerning the gendered body in the context of entrepreneurship and EE, I have obtained while observing a class debate in the study unit Entrepreneurship and Innovations Tourism at the Lapland University of Applied Sciences. These observations were complemented by the reflective learning diaries of the students. I asked the students for a permission to use the course debate and material as research data and they signed a research consent. The debate theme was roughly framed as the startup scene in Finnish Lapland and we provided some provoking topics for the debate. One of the topics was “(Startup) entrepreneurship is not suitable for women.” During the debate, a (female) student made exclamations doubting, for instance, the consistency of female decisions because of menstrual pain. In addition, the team on the defensive side claimed that women are too emotional for entrepreneurship. Even though this paper does not concentrate solely on discourses or apply discourse analysis, I take the liberty to note that noteworthy philosophers such as Aristoteles doubted the rationality of female thinking already in the ancient Greece (e.g. Butler, 2009, 42), which would make statements like this vessels of the patriarchal world view.

Later, in a learning diary another student wrote about this debate and mentioned a successful female entrepreneur. It caught my attention that the student wrote that the entrepreneur is a great mother. Intriguing, yet not surprising would be the fact
that being a woman connotes motherhood or mother (see e.g. Gordon, 2001, 5). Our society is strongly steered by neoliberalism (e.g. Hilpelä, 2010, 193) and in terms of entrepreneurship gender has very little meaning in the neoliberal worldview at least, since it is based on the thought of people being born with similar possibilities regardless of the personal background and being responsible for individual success. If this is the case, if we now emphasize the meaning of individual regardless of the gender identity, why does the word woman automatically connote motherhood and fertility (i.e. bodily issues) even in the (masculine) context of entrepreneurship? De Bouvier (2009, 44–47) has explained this kind of reaction to womanhood with the category of the other. I acknowledge that the Other Gender by de Bouvier was originally published 1949, but the arguments still seem to have a foothold even today.

Hence, these small provocations made in the classroom and the responses they received raise a question; what happens to the body when it is brought to the field of EE? How does female body relate to entrepreneurship and EE? Is the entrepreneur male heterosexual by default?

2.5 Methods

My initial hypothesis was that the database searches would not result in massive amounts of papers and therefore a narrative review was used (see Baumeister & Leary, 1997, 312) and basically aim at accomplishing a general picture of the previous research concerning EE and gendered embodiment. The goal of narrative literature review is manifold. In addition to the goal of this paper, a literature review can be used in forming new theories or evaluating the research conducted on existing ones or exposing a research gap. (Baumeister & Leary, 1997, 312.) I also expected the viewpoint of embodiment to decrease the review results and, thus, widened the perspective by including research that would emphasize the role of gender, but not necessarily include embodiment as a term.

In the first phase, I conducted the literature scanning by making an open search in two databases in English: EBSCO and Science Direct. Both searches included the same search words and the search included all fields. I first conducted a search on EBSCO, including the Business source data base and Academic source database, after which I continued by excluding articles that did not include both themes: entrepreneurship education and gender. This limited the results to 31 articles
altogether. However, a deeper examination of the articles showed me that the body was in fact still missing from a majority of the articles leaving me with five articles that deal with the issue of gendered embodiment and entrepreneurship education. Applying some additional search words resulted in no mentionable additional results. After the search in EBSCO I continued by searching Science Direct with similar terms.

The search from the two different databases resulted in altogether seven articles that deal with gender and embodiment in terms of entrepreneurship education. Indeed, a significant proportion of the entrepreneurship education research that includes gender issues uses gender as a background variable and almost all of the studies measuring the impact of gender have been produced as quantitative research. I decided to look up some specific journals that might have field-specific articles that would suit the purpose of this paper. Namely, the journals I looked into were two Finnish journals, Kasvatus and Sukupuolentutkimus. In these journals I searched for articles and studies that would incorporate both gender and entrepreneurship education. In the first phase, I collected all articles that included these themes and after that, in the second phase, I narrowed the results to deal more specifically with the subject of gendered embodiment and EE. Some of the articles in the journal Kasvatus concentrate on equality and sexuality (Lehtonen 2009) or gender and segregation (Haapala-Samuel 2010) in the field of education. However, EE as a special field is quite absent from these articles. However, the journal has published a special issue in gender issues and one of the articles focused on EE. This additional search resulted in one additional article in Finnish in addition to the prior search on EBSCO and Science Direct, since the journal Sukupuolentutkimus did not add to the results.

2.6 Findings

This chapter introduces the findings of the literature review. I introduce eight articles selected to the final sampling. The final sample for this paper is collected in List 1. Reviewed articles
List 1. Reviewed articles:


The articles in the sampling date back to a decade-long period (2004–2014) and geographically they cover the European and North-American continents. From these details, I could see that the subject of gendered issues in EE is quite new and, thus, the articles were produced quite recently. In addition, from the small sample I could draw a conclusion that the way the discussion of gender in EE is located could imply that there might be use for non-Western insights in the discussion, even though there are some intersectional takes in some of the articles. The articles were published in various business and entrepreneurship as well as educational journals. Thus, it can be concluded that the research on the theme is somewhat scattered.

It is noteworthy that the authors of the feminist branch of EE particularly focus on narrations, representation and discourses in entrepreneurship (education). In terms
of methods, the articles were practically unanimous using various texts from students (e.g. Hytti & Heinonen, 2013; Keskitalo-Foley, Komulainen & Naskali, 2007; Komulainen, Korhonen & Räty, 2009), policy papers (Jones, 2014) and other narrations (Ahl, 2007) as data, while the analyses were made by using discourse, narrative and constructivist analysis. Two of the articles explored quantitative data. Analyzing discourses and constructions is most suitable for critical feminist research while quantitative research is a common way of obtaining students’ feedback and, thus, gaining data concerning students’ opinions.

The findings of the articles produced a convergent viewpoint to gender in EE. First, it can be concluded that the segregation between genders concerning entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial behavior and traits exists and it has implications to EE as well. All the articles confirmed this. For instance, opportunity evaluation is affected by stereotyped threat (Gupta et al., 2014) and in a similar vein; the construction of entrepreneurial self is gendered (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). The growing ground for the gender bias can be found in discourses and constructions that are reasoned, replicated, realized and reinforced in everyday activities and narrations. Hytti and Heinonen (2013, 891) see differences between genders as they write:

*Although we do not wish to overemphasise the divide between men and women in our programme and research materials, it became obvious that the identity construction and identity work processes are gendered. For the men, the heroic entrepreneur identity as such is acceptable and even self-evident, and something attainable following the acquisition of additional experience and required knowledge of entrepreneurship [...].* (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013, 891.)

Based on the findings, I must conclude that the entrepreneur in EE is in fact usually disembodied and this is because the ideal entrepreneur is usually seen as a male, whereas females do not fit the criteria. The entrepreneur is described with masculine attributes, which makes it easier for the males to benefit from EE, entrepreneurship training for instance (see e.g. Jones, 2014). In the eight articles the body is less pronounced as a term, whereas the gender is quite explicitly understood as at least partly socially constructed, having an impact on the way females identify themselves as entrepreneurs. However, if we see the body as a corporeal manifestation of the self, which includes gender, class, ethnic background,
etc., the body is featured in all the articles in this review. Ahl (2007, 690) makes a more explicit notion about the body stating:

*Elsewhere, I conclude that the discourses drawn upon in the toy story are equally present in academic entrepreneurship research, and they have the same effect in reproducing women’s secondary position in society. Research on gender and entrepreneurship typically assume that certain traits go with certain bodies, and that these traits have an explanatory power for business performance and growth. (Ahl, 2007, 690.)*

As a practical implication, based on this notion it is possible to conclude that the body has significant meaning in terms of entrepreneurship and power. In the end, the impact of the disembodied entrepreneurs are seen in the working life. A news was published recently stating that vast majority of Finnish startup managers are men (Laitinen 2017). In the background of this development are various, but one way to decrease segregation between genders in the work market could be in taking a more critical viewpoint to entrepreneurship education in the future.

### 2.7 Discussion

As said, a significant amount of EE research is based on quantitative data in which gender is used as a background variable. These studies have produced valuable evidence that the different identities, such as the gender identity of a person, have an impact on entrepreneurial intention or self-efficacy. However, within the field of EE, it is also important to gain insight into how these differences are born and why they exist. This could be produced with qualitative research which asks how or why rather than what. EE as a field of research could benefit from critical research in general. Asking why is a way of questioning our existing stereotypes. It provides new viewpoints to issues we often take for granted.

In this study, I have aimed at reinforcing knowhow on how gendered bodies are seen in EE, and there are two conclusions I am able to draw from the results: 1) the entrepreneur is actually disembodied and as such most often seen as a male. The identity cannot be without the body, which makes gender an essential part of entrepreneurial identity as well, whether we speak about it or not. 2) The body is the corporeal manifestation of class, which also includes other classifications
besides gender, and it would be useful to study multiple inequalities and their impact on the EE.

There are also practical implications of EE research that emphasizes the meaning of gender. On one hand, by naming entrepreneurship programs for women or men, for instance, we might end up replicating or reinforcing segregating stereotypes. On the other hand, unless the gender is addressed, the entrepreneur might become male by default. It might not be enough to practice EE aimed for all genders alike, because the gender bias exists in social structures. Ahl (2007, 691) has some simple, readymade suggestions for distracting the existing situation. As an example, she simply proposes that 50% of heroic entrepreneurs would be presented as women in entrepreneurial narratives. She also encourages to produce new kind of narratives for male entrepreneurs who can at the same time be caring parents. (Ahl, 2007, 691.)

In the future, producing studies that would provide alternative viewpoints to EE would be needed. Hence, the future research could include studies that take into consideration some of the intersectional positions of the entrepreneurial identities or use different ways of gaining insights to EE. For future studies, it would be important not to forget about the body either.

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