

# “New markets must be conquered”: Race, gender, and the embodiment of entrepreneurship within texts

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*The past decade has seen an exponential growth of postsecondary entrepreneurship programs. This article focuses on curriculum and training materials as they enable an analysis of the nuanced ways in which entrepreneurship and “the enterprising” are conceptualized, and how texts inform future entrepreneurs to embody the language of entrepreneurship. I situate this article within the fields of sociology, entrepreneurship education, and geography and bring a spatial analysis of race, gender, and class to a normally non-spatial area of study. Although the enterprising discourse is perceived as race, gender, and class neutral, the management and self-discipline required serve to legitimize a White, male, liberal, able-bodied subject. Whiteness is also upheld through the privileging of abstract thinking, mobility, and the mapping of Other space. Meanwhile, entrepreneurship defined as the art of exploiting opportunities and as a creative destruction of space presents a very linear understanding of place, space, and community, dehistoricizing and decontextualizing entrepreneurship; and perpetuating a colonial, imperialist view of entrepreneurship which serves to uphold a universal, unmarked, white subject. This critique aims to allow for an understanding of the complexity of entrepreneurship, space, community, and subjectivity.*

Keywords: race, gender class, enterprising subject, entrepreneurship education, postsecondary education

## « À la conquête de nouveaux marchés » : L'appartenance raciale, le genre, et l'incorporation de l'entrepreneuriat dans les textes

*La dernière décennie a été marquée par la croissance exponentielle de programmes d'études postsecondaires en entrepreneuriat. En se centrant sur les syllabus et outils pédagogiques, cet article examine de manière détaillée la conceptualisation de l'entrepreneuriat et de « l'entrepreneur ». Il s'intéresse également à la façon dont les textes fournissent les moyens aux futurs entrepreneurs d'incorporer la langue du monde de l'entrepreneuriat. Cet article s'inscrit dans les domaines de la sociologie, de la formation en entrepreneuriat et de la géographie. L'analyse permet ainsi d'aborder les questions relatives à l'appartenance raciale, au genre et à l'origine sociale sous un angle spatial dans un champ d'étude qui normalement ne les aborde pas sous cet angle. Bien que le discours sur l'entrepreneur soit perçu comme étant neutre du point de vue de l'appartenance raciale, du genre et de l'origine sociale, les modes de gestion et la discipline personnelle qui sont exigés viennent pourtant légitimer le sujet de race blanche, de sexe masculin, politiquement à droite et bien portant. La blancheur est également défendue par la mise en valeur de la pensée abstraite, la mobilité et la cartographie d'un espace de l'Autre. De même, en se définissant comme une pratique qui vise à exploiter des opportunités conduisant à la destruction créatrice de l'espace, l'entrepreneuriat renvoie à une conception très linéaire du lieu, de l'espace et de la communauté tout en contribuant à déhistoriciser et décontextualiser l'entrepreneuriat. Cette définition participe à alimenter une vision coloniale et impérialiste de l'entrepreneuriat. Celle-ci défend l'identité du sujet*

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*universel, banalisé et de race blanche. Le but de cette critique est de contribuer à la compréhension de la complexité de l'entrepreneuriat, de l'espace, de la communauté et de la subjectivité.*

Mots clés : appartenance raciale, genre, originale sociale, sujet entreprenant, formation en entrepreneuriat, enseignement postsecondaire

## Introduction

Entrepreneurship, as a discipline, has grown exponentially in the past decade in postsecondary institutions (Menzies 2009).<sup>1</sup> These institutions play a significant role in developing “an entrepreneurial advantage in Canada,” providing potential young entrepreneurs with the appropriate skills and support to start their own businesses—important for “building a global competitive advantage” (Parsley and Weerasinghe 2010, 3). Some even define entrepreneurship education as “an intrinsic human right to change the status quo,” which will enable the development of “citizen-scholars—agents of change who own, are accountable for, and put their knowledge to work for the betterment of themselves and their society” (Beckman and Cherwitz 2009, 35). For other researchers, this romanticized and somewhat distorted view of entrepreneurship is evidence of an ongoing neoliberalization of institutions of higher education, transforming the aim, purpose, and functioning of institutions to serve the market, and vocationalizing curriculum to place a strong emphasis on market skills (Rhoads and Torres 2006; Kandiko 2010; Sattler 2012).

My purpose in this article is to do an analysis of entrepreneurship texts, tools that are part of vocationalization. I examine how they (re)produce enterprising subjects—that is, students as citizen-scholars and agents of change—and what can be discerned from that (re)production. Situating this article within the fields of sociology, entrepreneurship education, and geography, I bring a spatial analysis to a non-spatial area of study—entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship texts, I contend, serve as programs of conduct for student entrepreneurs-in-training—teaching ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving—that function through the manage-

ment of time, space, the body, and self-discipline (Foucault 1972). Furthermore, the prevalent definition of entrepreneurship as the art of exploiting opportunities and as a creative destruction of space when examined through the lens of what Harvey (2001) defines as cartographic imagery presents a very linear understanding of place, space, and community.

Employing a spatial lens, I also pay particular attention to subtexts of class, race, and gender that inform and underlie constructions of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur (see Smith 1990; Benschop and Doorewaard 1998). While these constructions are defined in ostensibly race- and gender-neutral ways, they are inextricably tied to geographies of whiteness—a symbolic and material connection to “spaces, places, landscapes, natures, mobilities, bodies, etc. that are assumed to be white” and legitimize a privileged white subject (Baldwin 2012, 174). I argue that, through the management of time, space, and the body, entrepreneurship texts legitimize and uphold white (largely male, although to some extent also female), ableist, and classist norms of behaviour. Whiteness is also normalized within texts in part through the teaching and privileging of abstract thinking, mobility,<sup>2</sup> and navigation of the globe (real or imagined); and through the mapping of Other spaces—a normalization of a universal, unmarked, white male subject (see Mohanram 1999; Wander et al. 1999). Meanwhile, defining entrepreneurship as a creative destruction of space perpetuates a colonial, imperialist view of entrepreneurship, in which power is localized and legitimized within a normative subject who has the right and (soon) ability to control and dictate circumstances—and the Other (Pratt 1992).

<sup>1</sup>Degree programs in entrepreneurship in Canada are primarily offered by faculties of business (84%), faculties of engineering (12%), and the remainder by other faculties (Menzies 2009).

<sup>2</sup>I use the term mobility to mean the mobile universal subject, whose mobility comes from its universality and ability to represent all humans and inhabit all spaces (see Puwar 2004).

## Entrepreneurship education

At present, there is a lack of uniformity in entrepreneurship education programs' curricula (Henry et al. 2005a, 2005b). In part, this can be attributed to disagreements about the purpose of entrepreneurship education. Some researchers assert that curricula should be linked to the learning needs of students and should vary depending on the stage of business development, such as prestartup, growth, and maturity (see Bridge et al. 1998). Some see entrepreneurship as having the ability to increase general economic prosperity—a capitalocentric goal assumed to be desired by all; therefore, they say, programs should focus on conditions that favour successful entrepreneurship (Garavan and O'Cinnéide 1994a, 1994b). Some closely link the purpose of these programs to the individual; for these scholars, therefore, curricula should promote individual self-efficacy and foster leadership, collaboration, and communication skills (see Cheung 2008). Other writers believe that certain skills are essential to teaching entrepreneurship; these include idea generating and business planning; technical and business management skills; and personal entrepreneurial skills, such as self-discipline, innovation, and the ability to take risks (see Hisrich and Peters 1998).

Neck and Greene (2011) describe three foci (or worlds) of entrepreneurship education: the entrepreneur world, the process world, and the cognition world. The entrepreneur world attempts to define, differentiate, explain, or predict who and what a successful entrepreneur is. In this traits-based approach, the entrepreneur is often defined as an unusual and extraordinary figure with high levels of achievement, optimism, alertness, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, advanced cognitive skills, and a high tolerance for uncertainty (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). The process world gives greater attention to capital markets, growth, and performance. It focuses on planning and prediction, so students are taught opportunity spotting, feasibility analysis, understanding of resource requirements, business planning, and financial forecasting. Neck and Greene find an overreliance on this approach, since it assumes a linearity and predictability to entrepreneurship. Finally, the cognition world, a

relatively new area, focuses on teaching students how to think entrepreneurially. Using simulations and cases, instructors attempt to teach “knowledge structures that people use to make assessments, judgments, or decisions involving opportunity evaluation or venture creation and growth” (Mitchell et al. 2002, 97). This approach espouses the idea that entrepreneurship education should “prioritize teaching students not what but *how* to learn” (Williams 1993, 80, emphasis in original).

The focus on *what* is taught warrants more attention. Texts, particularly foundational ones, “disseminate a field’s canon of knowledge . . . [and] define the legitimacy of topic areas and mirror the field’s research priorities” (Ashcraft and Allen 2003, 7). Texts socialize and help to reproduce the discipline by exposing students to “the consensus underlying the dominant approach to epistemology, methodology and theory” (Ashcraft and Allen 2003, 7). But entrepreneurship texts still teach about the space of entrepreneurship and people’s relationship to it in decontextualized, dehistoricized ways. Perhaps, as Durante (2009) has proposed, we need to bring back the sociological imagination proposed by Mills (1973) which fosters reflection, critical thinking, and reflexivity skills. What does teaching students about knowledge structures reveal about the sociolegal and political implications of making decisions, spotting opportunities, or doing financial forecasting? Who are the people behind the financial forecasts and what are their motives? What are the implications of thinking about markets, spaces, places, and communities in this way? My aim in this short article is to show that entrepreneurship texts fail to acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of the space of entrepreneurship and the legitimization of a privileged (white) subject and negate the sociolegal and political implications of business.

## Methodology

This article reports part of the findings from a large research project that examined entrepreneurship programs at two postsecondary

institutions in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The project investigates various research objects, including popular media sources on entrepreneurship, class materials, and student and faculty narratives. Here, I focus on classroom materials. These consisted of eight required and 16 recommended textbooks, as well as journal articles, documentaries, short videos, internet articles, business magazines, industry websites, and classroom slides/notes. I do not see myself as exempt from perpetuating in my own classes the very knowledge and practices that I critique in this article. I therefore wish to stress that I do not intend to criticize the intentions of the texts' authors nor the faculty members who use these texts. My analysis does not account for the possible ways in which these faculty might disrupt, challenge, and resist the very texts I am critiquing. Also, my reading of entrepreneurship texts as (re)producing enterprising citizens is but one way of examining these texts. Multiple and alternative forms of analysis—including critical and counter-hegemonic analyses—are possible. I draw on Foucault's notion of internal procedures—discursive formations (the organization of disciplines) and screening among speaking subjects—as means for controlling the production of discourse. Although Foucault identifies both external and internal procedures, I rely primarily on the two identified above. Discursive formation entails the recognition of true and false propositions and the pushback of certain knowledges by disciplines. Screening amongst speaking subjects consists of rituals (qualification to speak), societies of discourse, doctrines, and social appropriation of discourses (Foucault 1972).

My analysis is twofold. First, I examine how the enterprising subject is produced: that is, how would-be entrepreneurs are taught to think about entrepreneurship, and how they should conduct themselves as entrepreneurs. Second, I show what these illustrate about the (re)production of the space of entrepreneurship and people's

relationship to place, space, and community. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the appearance of neutrality that conceals *subtexts* of class, race, ability, and gender (see Smith 1990; Benschop and Doorewaard 1998).

### **Race-ing, gendering, and class-ing the traits-based approach**

Are you the entrepreneurial type?

Despite claims to the contrary, being an entrepreneur today is a highly scripted and disciplined process. As I have noted, the aim of entrepreneurship courses is to teach students “how [entrepreneurs] think, how they behave, and exactly what it is that they do so well” (McGrath and MacMillan 2000, 2). Many introductory texts begin by defining entrepreneurship and helping students understand whether they are cut out to be entrepreneurs. Students are encouraged to “profile themselves” by taking a series of tests meant to assess their motivations, aptitudes, and attitudes as aspiring entrepreneurs (Knowles 2007, 10). Self-auditing practices, such as taking tests to find where one ranks as an entrepreneur, are technologies that regulate (Miller and Rose 2008). Such tests perpetuate the idea that students are self-making works-in-progress, and reflect what they must do (in terms of behaviours and actions) in order to embody entrepreneurship. The ideal of an industrious, autonomous, disciplined, success-driven self is critiqued by many feminists as legitimizing a white, middle-class, liberal subject, negating histories of oppression; sociolegal and political systemic barriers; and social context (Ong 1999; Ahl 2002; Glenn 2002).

Self-auditing practices also teach students how entrepreneurs think *about* their surroundings. A “statement always defines itself by establishing a specific link with *something else* that lies on the same level as itself. almost inevitably, it is something foreign, something outside” (Deleuze 1988, 11, emphasis in original). For instance, what is the function of asking a question such as whether one is prepared to make sacrifices in one's family life and take a cut in pay to succeed in business? What are the “hidden elements” constituted by “the unsaid” (Foucault 1972, 124)?

<sup>3</sup>A broad range of entrepreneurship courses is offered at universities in Canada. In the academic year 2008/09, subjects covered in undergraduate and graduate courses included business plans; introduction to entrepreneurship; new venture creation and management; finance and venture capital; running a family business; innovation and creativity; consulting; international entrepreneurship; high-growth ventures; and project-based courses (Menziez 2009).

An examination of these test questions reveals that success is tied to a devaluation of family, in that entrepreneurship is presented as a state of work or space that functions beyond the family, a separation that is possible and a good, necessary sacrifice. Presenting precariousness as a rational choice that one ought to make, this discursive frame screens from view how precarious employment relationships serve the interests of employers, and how employment security is being steadily advanced through changes to labour laws and employment policies. Entrepreneurial discourse, however, dislocates analysis from the social onto the individual.

### **Disciplining thoughts, emotions, and behaviours**

Texts claim that entrepreneurs must possess a great deal of self-discipline, defined as “the fine art of cutting through the noise and being laser-focused on the purpose” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 234) to “pursue opportunities with enormous discipline” (McGrath and MacMillan 2000, 37). Would-be entrepreneurs are encouraged to “train [their] thoughts,” “upgrade [their] personal software,” and “visualize and affirm” their goals. They are told they can “train their brains to learn at a subconscious level to attract the right type of thoughts.” Success is the result of a person’s ability to “harness the power of the mind” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 62–69). Self-disciplining of thoughts and emotions “is the secret that marks the fine line between failure and flawless execution” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 234). This line of thinking is similar to what Mohanram (1999) observed in her analysis of Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological text *Science of the Concrete*, in which she focused on cartographies, embodiment, epistemology, classification, and human development. She argues that the “tropes of seeing, knowing, and classifying converge to construct the ‘engineer’ and the ‘bricoleur’” (Mohanram 1999, 7). The bricoleur, the Indigenous, non-European “scientist” has a close relationship to the natural environment and uses perception, imagination, and intuition. Meanwhile, the engineer, raced as white, works within the science paradigm, possesses abstract thinking, and is continuously located within

a metropolitan capitalist modernity—a higher-ordered form of human development (Mohanram 1999, 14–15). Becoming an entrepreneur, as described in entrepreneurship texts, requires that one harness the power of the mind (thoughts and emotions) to allow for or better predict and forecast events. This way of knowing is an embodiment that dichotomizes the mind and the body: that is, the Cartesian subject, a subject “who arrives at [the] certainty of his own existence through thought” (Seshadri-Crooks 2000, 62). Much like the engineer, the entrepreneur is located within a metaphysical space; a white (male) subject who is able to contemplate on physical things and abstract objects.

Entrepreneurs’ verbal and nonverbal communication competence is said to determine the success of their business: “if you are passionate enough about your vision and not afraid to articulate it, the right business partners will find you” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 166). Texts exhort students to be “flexible enough to sell the vision to whoever is willing to listen in the manner in which they want to hear it” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 166). The texts routinely note how students should organize, control, and manage space and time to communicate in a competent manner (Kawasaki 2004). For instance, when pitching an idea, students are encouraged to use “one of three power phrases... first, most widely used, or top-rated” (O’Leary 2001 as quoted in Brody and Raffa 2009, 108). Students are told to practise their delivery method using timers, mirrors, and recorders. They must also think in a very time-focused fashion (e.g., one minute for short pitches), and structure ideas in specific ways (presentations should abide by a 10/20/30 rule: 10 slides, 20 minutes, 30-point font) (Brody and Raffa 2009, 48). It is best to “use your body, not PowerPoint, to communicate expressiveness, emotion, and enthusiasm” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 63). These claims perpetuate the idea that in order to be successful, one must communicate in certain ways and be “schooled in the logistics of communication” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 102).

At issue is not only the management of the body but the politics of visibility and the subtle ways that white, able-bodied males are privileged in such practices. Campbell (2009, 5, emphasis added), in her analysis of its production,

operation, and maintenance, describes ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (*the corporeal standard*) that is projected as perfect, species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human.” Whose body is imagined when advocating for the use of mirrors and recorders or the communication of expressiveness and enthusiasm? This normative subject, although elusive and unattainable to most, is a subject linked to agility, expressiveness, enthusiasm, and a speech perfected in tone and pitch. The management of the body perpetuates ableism in that it suggests “the ways our bodies *should* be or at least strive to become” (Campbell 2009, 197, emphasis in original). With bodies needing to be more visible, the texts also assume the neutrality of skin capital (as if all students enjoy the ease of being male and white), and deny the politics of visibility that determine who is perceived as a legitimate authority (Knight 2011).

## The hidden meaning of process and cognitive worlds

### Entrepreneurs as imperialists

Despite the numerous ways entrepreneurship has been defined, the practices I have identified are endorsed in the name of a relatively universal definition. Entrepreneurship, as defined by the Harvard Business School, is “a way of *managing opportunities* over time . . . the continuous *identification and pursuit of opportunity*, the marshalling and organization of resources to *address evolving opportunities*, and the *ongoing reassessment* of needs as the context changes over time” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 266, emphasis added); a process of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities (Shane 2000; Shane and Venkataraman 2000; Sarasvathy 2001); and a process involving the “conquering of new markets” (Grnak et al. 2006, 80).

Entrepreneurship conceptualized here as marshalling resources and identifying, managing, or exploiting opportunity is in part tied to what Harvey (Harvey 2001, 220) defined as the “rational” organization of space for capital accumulation.” Entrepreneurship, much like cartography, is about “locating, identifying and

bounding phenomena and thereby situating events, processes and things within a coherent spatial frame” (Harvey 2001, 220). The rational organization of space largely functions through the use of specific tools (e.g., maps, demographic and psychographic tests, statistics, policy analysis). These measures help to determine the value and opportunity within a space.

Capital accumulation is, however, conceptualized within entrepreneurial texts through a colonial and imperialist expansionist framework. Using simulations and cases, students are shown how entrepreneurship also upsets the status quo, disrupts the accepted ways of coding things, and alters traditional patterns. As such, “change is threatening” and provokes resistance (Brody and Raffa 2009, 201). Exploitation, understood as a positive force, is most often met with skepticism. Entrepreneurs must prevail against such skepticism because it impedes progress, development, and change. These powerful traits, which contextualize and legitimize the previous definition, are tied to the idea of the entrepreneur as an “agent of change” (Knowles 2007, 11), someone driven to manipulate space, and responsible for the “creative destruction” of space (Tushman and Anderson 2004, 40) or that can improve on a process through “disruptive innovation” (Brody and Raffa 2009, 156).

The references to the rational organization of space in entrepreneurship texts can be read in relation to Pratt’s (1992) work on colonial travel writing, which gives the example of Linnaeus’s classification system, which was said to have brought order to the natural chaotic world as a result of abstract thinking. This subject defined itself by cataloguing others. Within entrepreneurship texts, students are encouraged to imagine their relationship to Other spaces as one that will require them to disrupt or manipulate it in some way, in order to bring about nontraditional patterns of spatial organization. This practice also inherently speaks of a mobile universal subject, “a subject who is able to take anyone’s place, to occupy any place” (Mohanram 1999, 15). Would-be entrepreneurs are encouraged to see opportunities by perceiving communities as inherently lacking, struggling, deficient, and in need of saving—thus imagining their engagement with the community primarily as a relationship of missionary-like colonial exploitation. This is

problematic. As Harvey (2001) has aptly noted, geographical knowledge (real or imagined) has been used to mobilize for specific purposes. If entrepreneurs imagine their engagement with community as one based primarily on lack, they risk reifying practices of inequality and denying community-led endeavours. Cartographic imagery, aided by formal and mental maps, contributes to the “formation of personal and political subjectivities” (Harvey 2001, 221)—a dominant, privileged, white subject position, in particular. We do not ask students to reflect on the epistemological underpinnings of their pursuit of knowledge in relation to the Other, or to question why they are the ultimate knowers of right and good practices, nor do we ask them to contemplate the politics of their looking as part of the legacy of the colonial and imperial gaze (Pratt 1992). The cartographic imagery within entrepreneurship texts contributes to the formation of a subject/student who feels legitimized in their conquests and maintains a white saviour complex (Heron 2007).

Harvey also argues that the mental maps embedded in our consciousness can often produce a new cartographic consciousness, one that can allow us to see ourselves in different positions within various world maps: “changing the map of the world can change not only our modes of thought about the world but also our social behaviours and our sense of well-being” (Harvey 2001, 221). In terms of its purpose or significance, entrepreneurship is rarely talked about as a supplement to another income or an only (and perhaps undesired) employment choice. African American blues and jazz singers are entrepreneurs for whom *discovery* and *exploitation* did not well describe their endeavours: rather, their entrepreneurial paths may be better described as comprising a desire for freedom, the politicization of life, and shelter from white supremacy (Davis 1998). Introducing entrepreneurs such as these, who are not in keeping with the dominant narrative, would allow students to broaden their understanding of entrepreneurship; it would encourage them to think about the complexity of macro perspectives (histories of oppression, systemic exclusion, globalization, geometries of power, and politicization of entrepreneurship) in relation to the micro perspectives (networks, alliances, identities, and

movements) of entrepreneurship. If we reform our mental maps of spaces, we may ultimately reform the idea and practice of entrepreneurship, creating not only greater inclusivity but also more creativity.

## Conclusion

This article is an analysis of the growth of entrepreneurship programs in postsecondary institutions and an examination of the (re)production of the enterprising subject. Using the works of scholars who employ spatial theories of race, I pay particular attention to the internal procedures (discursive formation and screening among speaking subjects) as expressed in entrepreneurship texts. Becoming an entrepreneur is an endeavour that requires a great deal of self-work. I show how students are encouraged to see their thoughts and behaviors as problem-solving opportunities. Discipline—being able to control one’s thoughts and think abstractly—is a measure of success but is argued here to be a normalization of whiteness. Furthermore, disciplining communication and scripting performance both assume a gender, class, and race neutrality that fails to acknowledge skin capital. Finally, the conceptualization of entrepreneurship as the exploitation of opportunities frames entrepreneurship as a practice of domination and control. Teaching the organization of space (i.e., the manipulation of space) upholds a universal subject who possesses a sense of nobility and saviourship; this absolves students from having to think about the potential violence in the claiming of Other spaces. My critique of entrepreneurship texts is meant to complicate how students think about entrepreneurship, space, and their subject positions in relation to both.

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