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Youth enterprise: the role of gender and life stage in motivations, aspirations and measures of success

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ABSTRACT

'Enterprise' has increasingly become part of the United Kingdom's political grammar and efforts to develop entrepreneurial traits and activities in young people have been a key strand of this policy focus. As the 2008 economic recession saw a curtailed youth labour market, enterprise emerged as an appealing policy 'solution' to youth unemployment. Traditional measures of enterprise chart the numbers of new businesses and their survival rates. This article argues these measures tell us little about new business owners: who they are, their motivations, experiences or, own definitions of success. Further, and crucially, such measures ignore the structural constraints surrounding enterprise and the range of social factors that may determine the extent of ambition, and willingness or capacity to take risks. This article argues that although gender and life stage were contributing factors, the young people's structurally disadvantaged positions emerge as the most significant feature of why the move into self-employment did not tend to increase their economic stability as promised. This provides an important insight into the real-life experiences of young people who are engaging in enterprise activities in the contemporary economic context, as well as the role of third sector organisations in overseeing the transition from education to work.

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Introduction

Over the last thirty years, the term 'enterprise' has increasingly become part of the United Kingdom's political grammar (Keat and Abercrombie 1991; Cohen and Musson 2000), routinely billed as a policy solution to structural economic and unemployment problems (Shutt and Sutherland 2003). Yet it is an ambiguous term, in part a synonym for business, but often signifying the setting up of a new business (Lundstrom and Stevenson 2005, 42). The more specific term 'social enterprise' has the added aim of delivering positive social impact (Mason 2012). As such, 'enterprise' can also embrace a set of moral values and 'wicked solutions': to be 'entrepreneurial'; 'think big', create innovative products and new market opportunities (Teasdale 2012; Young 2014; White 2017). As David Cameron described in his speech to the Conservative Conference in 2011:

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I want to focus on another value that runs deep, really deep in this party. It's about the hunger to get on in life. The spark of initiative. The courage to make your dream happen. The hard work to see it through. I'm talking about enterprise. Enterprise is vital for our economy – we all know that.

Efforts to develop entrepreneurial traits and activities in young people have been a key strand of this policy focus, particularly as youth labour market opportunities were disproportionately restricted during the economic recession following 2008 (Young 2014; NYA 2015). As young people struggled to find work that offered a liveable wage, stability, and progression opportunities, employability interventions, such as the Youth Contract, were developed to aid them into work (House of Commons 2012). For a curtailed labour market, enterprise emerged as an appealing policy 'solution' to unemployment for young people of all educational backgrounds (vInspired n.d.). Young people can create their own jobs and contribute to the economy while traditional forms of employment are not an option. What has been less acknowledged, however, is that enterprise activities may also present substantial *disadvantages*, including lack of pay and potential insecurity, which makes enterprise differentially accessible by young people according to *inter alia* gender, class and race.

National measures of the success of enterprise activities usually focus on the number of new businesses, their survival rates (number of businesses continuing to trade after e.g. 12 months) or more detailed measures that consider economic contribution, for instance profits and number of jobs created (MacDonald 1991; OECD 2012; Johansen 2013; ONS 2014). However, as this article goes on to argue, these measures tell us little about new business owners themselves: who they are, and their motivations, experiences or, own definitions of success. Further, and crucially, such measures also ignore the structural constraints surrounding enterprise and the range of social factors that may determine the extent of ambition, and willingness or capacity to take risks. The key problem with these traditional measures, therefore, is that 'failed' businesses are seen as an individual deficiency rather than a result of broader economic, social and cultural factors.

Previous research has focused on individuals traits and aptitudes required for success (Johnson 1988; Smith, Bell, and Watts 2014), the effectiveness of enterprise education (Caird 1990; Shutt and Sutherland 2003; Johansen 2013) and their contribution to economies (Waring and Brierton 2011; White 2017). Despite the policy climate, there is a lack of knowledge on *young* entrepreneurs, their motivations, how successful they feel they are in setting up their own businesses, and what their aspirations are for the future. At the same time, if enterprise is to be successful in offering a viable route into employment for young people, more evidence is needed on the challenges which may be presented to young people. To address this lacunae therefore, this paper draws on new case study research conducted during 2013–2016, as the UK economy was beginning to improve from a period of economic downturn, and opportunities for young people slowly recovering. Focussing on a scheme run by a charity that supports long-term unemployed young people into self-employment under the rubric of 'enterprise', we highlight how gender and life stage are key determinants of the motivations, ambitions, of young entrepreneurs, as well as their levels of material success.

We begin by outlining the conceptual literature on enterprise and young people. Next we consider how regional context frames local policy-making on enterprise and young people's labour market options. After outlining our methodology, we explore the individual stories of seven potential new business owners, focussing on their motivations, future aspirations and conceptions of success. We conclude that, while the young men imagined themselves as archetypal entrepreneurs, with bold ideas and a willingness to take risks, the young women were more measured, some might argue more realistic, in the scope of their ambitions. Despite this, though gender and life stage were contributing factors in ambition, the young people's structurally disadvantaged positions emerge as the most significant feature of why the move into self-employment did not tend to increase their economic stability as promised. This provides an important insight into the real-life experiences of young people who are engaging in enterprise activities in the contemporary economic context, as well as the role of third sector organisations in overseeing the transition from education to work.

Young people and enterprise

Enterprise and policy

Enterprise has enjoyed repeated attention by policy makers in recent years, due to beliefs in its potential contribution to economic development and unemployment (Caird 1990; European Commission 2004; Johansen 2013; White 2017). In the UK, a range of policies have been developed since the 1980s, designed to shift the 'so-called "dependency culture" into an "enterprise culture"' (MacDonald 1991, 255), exhibiting 'Victorian values of self-reliance and individual responsibility' (1991, 256). The 2001 New Deal had similar aspirations: that individual initiative would do more for unemployment levels than other measures (Shutt and Sutherland 2003). The Coalition Government followed this ideological trend, outlining ways to increase enterprise activities (2015). A range of initiatives were specifically aimed at increasing enterprise amongst young people, with private and third sector organisations playing a significant role in delivering these initiatives (Johansen 2013) alongside government programmes.¹

Young people and enterprise

Despite the role of enterprise in recent youth employment policy, contemporary research on young people and enterprise is scant (Geldhof et al. 2014). Government and policy reports tend to focus on measures of success, and academic work on how to increase enterprise through understanding the factors influencing motivations. Curran and Blackburn (1990) indicated that desire to run a business amongst young people was affected by gender (though less significantly than might be expected), location (i.e. potential market for product/service), parental background and social class position, with parents owning their own businesses being the most significant positive influence. During the 1990s' economic downturn, these motivations were further fuelled by attempts to escape an inaccessible labour market, (de Zwart & Warnaar 1995, Wilkinson 1997 cited in Du Bois-Reymond 1998); a finding which begs further investigation in more recent financial climates.

While national measures of success focus largely on economic outcomes, whether the business can provide a living wage is an important measure for young people. Qualitative findings from a youth enterprise scheme (Coffield and MacDonald 1991; MacDonald 1991), illustrate that there is a greater variety of outcomes for surviving businesses than statistics alone can show, which provide only a 'bare and minimal sketch of success and failure in youth enterprise' (MacDonald 1991, 265). While in his sample, only 57% of businesses 'survived', MacDonald's qualitative data provides a much fuller picture of participants' own definitions of success. In fact, very few felt successful. He categorised his participants into 'fallers', 'plodders' and 'runners'. Fallers were disappointed after their efforts did not result in viable businesses and income. Plodders were only 'getting by', uncertain about the stability and future of their businesses and that expansion, and being able to employ others was unlikely. Runners were in a better position, with a steady business and potential for growth.

A range of surveys have identified predictors for enterprise activities (Athayde 2009) and investigated interventions for increasing participation amongst young people through education (Johansen 2013; Young 2014). Meager, Bates, and Cowling's (2003) found youth participants of enterprise were more likely to have surviving businesses if they were older, white, had parents who had been self-employed, a degree, and were previously employed. Most significantly, those who were motivated by independence and lifestyle choices, rather than growth or income, were more likely to continue trading. It is important therefore to consider the full range of factors which might affect business survival, and in order to best support young people in enterprise.

Enterprise and gender

Other studies corroborate the importance of parental experience of enterprise as an indicator for motivation (Muraina et al. 2012; Johansen 2013), but on the issue of gender, opinion is divided. While gender did not emerge as significant in both Meager, Bates, and Cowling's (2003) and Muraina et al.'s (2012)

research, a substantial body of research demonstrates that gender has a powerful influence on entrepreneurship (Johansen 2013). Women often have very different aspirations for their businesses than men, often due to family roles and responsibilities (Walker and Webster 2007; Nordenmark, Vinberg, and Strandh 2012; Johansson Sevä and Öun 2015). For example, women may want a stable, small business, enabling balance between their home and working lives and flowing from their beliefs and values (Green and Cohen 1995; Marler and Moen 2005; Bunk et al. 2012; Hilbrecht and Lero 2014; Bögenhold and Klinglmair 2015); perhaps explaining Elam's finding (2014) that women are less likely to start businesses and, when they do, start very different businesses to men.

A difference between male and female-led businesses also emerges in larger surveys. Schoon and Duckworth's (2012) analysis of the 1970 British Birth Cohort found different predictors of entrepreneurship. For men it was a father being self-employed, while for women the family's socioeconomic resources were more significant. Far fewer women (14%) lead small and medium enterprises (BIS 2011), with these reflecting broader occupational patterns (Woodfield 2007) and more likely to be in service provision, particularly education, health, social work, community, social and personal activities (see also Carter and Shaw 2006). Young women's aspirations may be further constrained by the fact that they lack visible role models and that entrepreneurs are pervasively described by male-associated traits (BIS 2011; Chasserio, Poroli, and Redien-Collot 2016).

The BIS survey also found that women-led SMEs had lower turnovers, and women were less likely to feel confident at entering new markets and accessing finance (see also Dempsey and Jennings 2014). Coffield and MacDonald's (1991) study confirmed that women found it harder to gain business loans, perhaps due to a prevailing and implicit bias towards enterprise as a male pursuit. Green and Cohen critique what they refer to as the 'androcentricity' of approaches to entrepreneurship, whereby entrepreneurs are seen as inherently male (1995, 298) (see also Marlow, Carter, and Shaw 2008). That the 'Academic field of entrepreneurship is also anchored in the masculine model', and the 'stereotype of the entrepreneur is a man' (Chasserio, Poroli, and Redien-Collot 2016, 243) is evident in approaches that seek to define entrepreneurs via personality or character; demonstrating how the symbolic meaning of 'entrepreneur' is bound up with romantic traits commonly understood as 'masculine': risk-taking, adventurous, shrewd and pragmatic (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004; Ahl 2006).

The notion that successful entrepreneurs are those who take risks inflects policy discourses on youth enterprise. Enterprise is seen to require a space 'where you are allowed to fail and take risks' (NYA 2015, 10). For young people with children, there is, however, potentially a lower capacity for risk and a more visceral aversion to failure. Contrastingly, for those participants with family resources to support them, the consequences of failure can be less acute. The attributes associated with entrepreneurs may thus feel unattainable for some women, who tend to be the primary carers of children. While Lee-Gosselin and Grisé (1990) claim that self-employed women are *already* innovators: the choice to run their own business is atypical, with both personal and psychological risks; Kremel and Yazdanfar's (2015) exploration of the gendered dimensions of risk found that women were more likely to seek support to help mitigate perceived risks. However, the characterisation of risk-taking as a fundamental part of enterprise may not even be accurate: Greene and Storey's (2005) longitudinal survey found that those who were averse or neutral to risk were actually more likely to stay in business.

While Marlow and Strange (1993) emphasised that the particular disadvantages of women's labour market participation may lead them into self-employment, Green and Cohen are damning of the potential for enterprise to change the position of women:

... while self-employment offers ways of accommodating women's dual roles as mothers and professionals, it ... does little to alter their structural positions within the labour market and society more generally ... self employment in this sense can be seen as a hegemonic process – giving women the opportunity to negotiate, to feel autonomous, empowered and in control, and in doing so, ensure that existing circumstances remain essentially unchallenged. (1995, 312)

To better understand the challenges facing women entrepreneurs, Brush, de Bruin, and Welter (2009) argue that a more holistic, gender-aware framework is needed, to acknowledge family roles and responsibilities, as well as the gendered cultural environment of enterprise. Our aim in this article is to take

up this baton, but extend this through our focus on young people. Drawing together the three strands of enquiry identified above: motivations, aspirations and measures of success, usually held distinct in entrepreneurship research, we turn now to interrogate the ways in which gender intersects with lifecourse in youth entrepreneurship.

The case study

Regional context

Our research was conducted on the South coast of England, in a city, 'Coastal' with a local enterprise partnership (LEP) responsible for setting an economic growth plan and deploying local, national and European funds. The recession had a particularly detrimental impact on the region's businesses, with both rates of new start-ups and their survival dropping during the period of 2007 and 2011, and with numbers yet to recover. Along with a concurrent reliance on public sector employment and contracts, recent government policy of public sector cuts is worrying for the local economy. A key strategy has thus been to roll-out an expansion of 'enterprise culture' to diversify the employment offering. To achieve this, financial support is given by the LEP to enterprise programmes offered by the third sector, as well as offering their own start-up loan scheme. Young people are a particular target group as, despite the fact that, in 2014, Coastal had one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the country (Crowley and Cominetti 2014), stable, well paid work with potential for progression is often unavailable to local young people. This is compounded by the existence of several universities in the region, with an influx of students looking for part-time work. Consequently, local young people with no/lower qualifications face reduced labour market opportunities (Green, Atfield, and Purcell 2015).

Training programme

The providers of 'Enterprising Youth' (EY) have been running the course for many years. The course is for young people who have been unemployed for at least six months, defined as working under 16 h a week. An initial four day course introduces them to the 'pros and cons' of self-employment and running a business. After the course, each participant is allocated an experienced mentor to guide them through developing a business plan or support them into another route if they decide against self-employment. They have up to 12 months to prepare their plan, which they can submit to a 'Business Panel' for small-grant funding in order to test their product or service and/or continued mentoring support. Loans of up to £2000 are also available and, although credit checks are conducted, EY will consider applicants with poor credit ratings. Despite being billed as 'enterprise', the focus of the course remained on more traditional and gendered forms of self-employment, with a garage and hairdressers the two example businesses used in exercises, rather than more innovative approaches often associated with the term 'enterprise' (Curran and Blackburn 1990).

Methodology

We engaged in participant observation of one cohort of the EY course and then conducted extensive, qualitative and periodic interviews with the participants to track their progress from October 2014 to October 2015. We also observed one 'Business Panel' and interviewed the programme trainer, mentors and key informants in the region ($n = 4$). The course we observed began with 10 participants, 2 of whom dropped out after the first day, and one with whom we lost contact with after she gave birth. While this small sample is certainly not generalizable, therefore, our understanding of our participants' learning experience on the scheme and our consequent in-depth interviews over the following year do enable us to gain deep insight into the lives of these young people during their journey into enterprise and question and problematise essentialised ideas about business survival and success (Lawy 2002). Data was analysed with an inductive, thematic approach, starting with open then selective coding focusing

on distinct and common themes in the interview transcripts and ethnographic fieldnotes. Multiple interviews at different points in the young people's journey allowed exploration of emerging themes with the participants. Supporting the literature review, three interconnected themes emerged in our analysis to which we now turn; the different ways the young men and young women spoke about their motivations, aims and future aspirations; and definitions of success.

Motivations

Many of the young people in our sample had had difficult education trajectories and had struggled to find work in the sectors they were interested in. For all the participants, self-employment seemingly offered a way of controlling their own lives, creating a working life that suited them, whether this was to fit better with their other commitments (such as parenthood), to have more independence and autonomy, to develop expertise or as a means to escape an insecure and unstable labour market. This last motivation, in particular, runs parallel with the goals of policy-makers. However, regarding the regional concerns of diversifying the local employment offering, only one of the businesses was planning on employing others and, at least initially, these would not be paid positions.

All participants had a business idea that they wanted to pursue. These were very much split along gender lines and traditional occupational segregation (Table 1).

Sam and James are affable, chatty young men who have already registered a company to produce computer games. James is creative and passionate about games' storytelling ability. Wanting to work in this sector since he was seven, he hoped to launch his career through an undergraduate programme in Computer Games Design Story Development, but the cancellation of vital story writing modules led to disappointment. After graduating, he spent long periods interning unpaid, becoming fed up with job adverts that required experience which the industry itself failed to provide:

James: I went through countless job applications ... that all said 'one year's experience' ... nobody gives a toss about your degree ... a year's experience and a published console title [is what counts].

Due to his own experience, a key motivation is to offer (unpaid) employment experience to others seeking to enter the games industry. Sam and James' business model is thus to use the talent of students to produce games:

James: It's one of our primary aims, to get them their first jobs in the industry, employ as many as we can from the money selling the game, and then bring in more students to work on their own projects ... to get a game out on the market that they can put on their CV. And then the idea is that they would be moving on to get a job.

His business partner, Sam, is a steady counterpoint to James. He was one of only four from his school to continue on to university, where he studied Business. He will be managing the accounts and business side of their partnership. Sam was unique in this group, in that self-employment was a positive choice rather than to escape from precarity. Sam saw starting the business as a faster route to 'where I actually want to be'; instead of spending years working his way to the top as an employee. As well as Sam's degree, his current lifestage affords him with a state of freedom from responsibility, including a sense of confidence and personal efficacy that enable him to take the 'risk' of starting a business:

Sam: ... really at this point of our lives there isn't that much in the way of risks ... three years down the line you could have met someone, you might be having your first child and everything.

In stark contrast to Sam's autonomy, 28-year-old Grace is the oldest of the group and married with two small children. Though academically able, she went straight into work after school. Unfortunately, her workplace was not flexible when she wanted to have children, and childcare costs have been prohibitive for a return to employment:

The problem is that I'm completely priced out of childcare ... I didn't go to university, I'm not particularly qualified, it limits my job scope, so I can't earn enough money after nursery fees to justify it ... So for the jobs that I'm qualified to do and my background it doesn't cover the cost of nursery fees, so I've been at home with the children. So I attended EY to try and establish working from home, set up a business from home.

Grace aims to build a business designing bespoke child-centred, gender-neutral artwork.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Class (inferred from interviews)	Education level ^a	Business idea	Going ahead with business?		Continuing involvement with enterprising youth	
						Y	N	Work status	Product development
James	m	22	Lower middle	Undergraduate degree	Video game production	Y		PT	Y
Sam	m	25	Working	Undergraduate degree		Y		PT	
Grace	f	28	Middle	A levels	Children's products	Y		PT	N
Lily	f	23	Middle	Undergraduate degree	Ballet costume design and manufacture	N		FT	N
Stewart	m	23	Working	GCSEs	Second hand goods	?		?	N
Palmer	m	24	Upper	Left undergraduate degree	Student book marketplace	N		Unemployed	N
Bryony	f	23	Lower middle	Left undergraduate degree	Hair extensions	Y		FT Self-employed	Y

^aGCSEs = level 1 or 2; A levels = level 3.

Product development: Returned to education, dropped out again

Work status: Unemployed

Continuing involvement with enterprising youth: Trading

Lily likewise found her lack of qualifications a barrier to well-paid work. Quiet and poised, she trained in ballet since the age of 10, completing a ballet degree by 19 and then dancing professionally. Initially reasonably successful, she was only paid per performance rather than having a full-time salary. When she decided, at 14, to fix her hopes on becoming a ballet dancer she had no knowledge of the likely labour market. Short-term contracts with no stability meant she had to take on part-time agency work on top of dancing, which was also unpredictable. Now 23, she has become fed up with just getting by:

I mean basically everyone that I know from the [ballet] schools that I went to, they're all doing short contracts, so they're not really employed the year round and they have to do other jobs in between to help pay for that as well. So it's quite difficult. So I'm not doing it anymore!

Lily has no other qualifications to fall back on and decided to set up a business making dancewear products, using her network of contacts. However, she has no experience or knowledge of making clothing, admitting:

I tried to do it myself initially ... this is going to sound really silly ... But I bought some sewing machines and I learnt to sew ... And I was trying for a lot of months. I am able to make dancewear but it's just not really professional quality.

Lily has now settled on designing, intending to have products manufactured for her.

Initially Palmer appears as the quintessential entrepreneur; energetic, confident and buzzing with ideas. At 24, he had completed two years of a Business degree, as well as a placement year in financial services. His business idea is to set up an online marketplace for students to trade textbooks. His motivations appear less clearly defined, but he seems to have a self-image of himself as entrepreneurial due to his activities running a business society at university.

Stewart, at 23, stands out from the rest of the group with a much tougher life history. He has been in gaol, left school without many qualifications, and has little support from his family. He has had a series of jobs, paid and unpaid, but has often got into trouble with his managers and had to leave. He admits he has a problem with authority, one of the reasons why self-employment has appealed:

I like being self-employed because obviously you don't have anyone to moan above you or anything so you can't get sacked from your job, obviously.

His business idea is a second-hand shop, and he has been buying and selling things casually, using websites, for a while.

Bryony went to her local university to study TV and Film Make-Up with Hair Design, mostly, she says because 'it's on the doorstep'. However, she got into difficulties in her third year while trying to write her dissertation, discovering she had dyslexia, and made the choice to leave. She has worked part-time from the age of 17 at a large retailer but, after finishing at university, she did a course in a new method of applying hair extensions. This proved very popular and she began pursuing the idea of running a business based on her new skill. Her motivation was to do this full-time and stop working in retail.

In a sample as small as ours, we can make no broader comments as to general motivations towards enterprise amongst young people, but our findings bear some resemblance to Curran and Blackburn's (1990) larger study. The available market, support from families and available resources, and gender all play a role in guiding decisions. More significant, however, was the need to escape an inaccessible labour market. Beyond this, as we see in the next section, the extent of ambitions was affected both by life stage and gender.

Constrained aspirations

The young people had starkly different capacities and resources to embark on the process of becoming self-employed, particularly with regards to the support of their families and financial reserves (Curran and Blackburn 1990). Despite all belonging to the broad category 'young people' (under 30 years old), the cohort was very diverse and at different stages of their lives. It was this diversity of life stage, in intersection with gender, as well as class, which framed, and in some cases constrained, the scope of their ambitions.

James and Sam, both well credentialised, with family support and few responsibilities, had the most ambitious goals for their businesses, with confident plans for extension beyond computer games. As James explains:

... what we are aiming for is more on the big business side where we're approaching the global market with a product that is an entertainment aspect ... Nothing I would say makes me think it won't happen ... we've still got plenty of plans outside of games as well, so if we struggle with one aspect there are other areas we can approach ... we would like to explore things like a record label so we could actually publish our own music from games ... Hopefully a few years down the line we would like to then explore film ... the big ones is games, music, film. However we are also looking into continuing comic books, so we may be able to do our own publication house.

Stewart has been chatting to market-stall holders in the town centre, asking about the rates they paid for their stalls, and investigating rents for shop space. His hopes were also expansive: for a 'very successful business' and a fleet of cars and motorcycles.

Palmer, struggling with mental health was also often very positive.

I've got a feeling that if my idea works then it's going to pay its way pretty much from the get-go.

At the same time, however, he also articulated some fear about his own capabilities

... the fear is 2 years from now it doesn't exist and where would I be there? ... in my heart of hearts I think it can work, the problem is, I'm a bit crazy and like, I have these manic depressive things going on ... any of these routes are valid but with my psychological kind of condition, possibly I won't do any of them.

In contrast to the young men, the women were more constrained in their aspirations. For example, Bryony's primary initial aim was for her business to support her so she could give up her job in retail. However, her horizons then expanded under the influence of her business mentor and she was now considering becoming a supplier, to broaden the scope of her business. The role of Bryony's mentor has been key in her success, pushing her towards a more aggressive pricing strategy:

I started off £100 cheaper but my mentor was like 'are you telling me how good they are' ... And literally he just pushes and pushes and pushes. It went from like £150 to £250 to £350, bearing in mind I buy the hair in for £150 so I'm making £200 profit!

While being able to fit her childcare responsibilities around her work were Grace's initial motivations, she also wants to expand, albeit that her vision is comparatively restricted: to produce a more varied and generic product line to sell in local shops:

So far it's looking viable ... at the moment it feels a bit out of my control, doing lots of customer commissions, mostly a portrait artist at the moment, whereas my end goal is to be an illustrator that people want to buy the work of ... I'm very much hoping that this is going to be up and running as a full-time job by then [when the children start full time education] ... I'm hoping it reaches that point ... that next year will see more growth ... hopefully.

Lily came to enterprise through lack of opportunities in the ballet labour market, a means of using her knowledge to have a more stable and secure life. She is hesitant about the possibilities, her lack of self-confidence revealed through her uncertainty of what she might do if the business doesn't work.

... Thinking of ways to make it profitable instead of just, as a hobby kind of thing ... I just want to try while I can, while I don't have any kind of commitments or dependents like at the moment it's probably the best time to try something like this. [If it doesn't work] I suppose it depends on the reason why I can't sell anything. If it's something to do with the design then I can change it. But if it's something to do with something else, like me, like if I can't sell it, then yeah, I suppose I'd have to think about doing something else ...

Lily had also thought about how to expand, but was far less positive than James and Sam about how this might work out.

The young men speak far more confidently about their hopes than the young women. Even Palmer, who acknowledges fear, is nonetheless assured in his idea and thinks his business will take off. Bryony was beginning to extend her business, and the involvement and support of her family were key to this. Seeing self-employed friends succeed and her mentor's guidance also contributed to her confidence. Lily, whose family had no experience with enterprise, was very unsure of herself and her business. Grace lies somewhere in the middle: hesitant, but with the support of her husband and her self-employed father, she was hopeful of success. Thus while gender plays a role in constraining aspiration, the picture

is nuanced by the roles that family and class also play in shaping aspirations and confidence. In the next section, we explore how successfully they feel they are progressing in these goals.

Measures of success

While EY aims to improve the skills and income of participants, they are aware of the diversity of young people's ability to make a go of running their own business. The regional manager, Gary, tells us that participants attracted to EY have often not been successful in education and have struggled to find work in a competitive market. Gary surmises that these factors are not necessarily the best prerequisites for successful self-employment. Judy, one of the volunteer mentors, a retired marketing executive, agrees and, explains that the young people have to be determined, as only:

... About one in four really does well and creates a viable and sustainable business strong enough to employ other people. About two out of four bump along, off benefits by and large, and working, feeling fairly good about themselves. And one in four bombs completely ... goes back on benefits or gets into some sort of trouble ...

While, the triumvirate Judy identifies recognises that young people will differ in terms of their success in running a business, neither she nor Gary acknowledge the social structural differences that may underpin this. Universalising 'young people' into a single category, the programme, and its measures of success, make little allowance for personal factors such as gender and life stage. Disregarding how these may frame the young people's understandings and experiences, simplistic understandings of economic success were found to predominate. This was clearly demonstrated when, during the EY course, Mary, a previous participant, who is now self-employed as a videographer, visited the group for a question and answer session. Gary started them off, asking;

Are you successful?

Mary: Depends on how you measure it! I earn about 20 k a year, [doing] 4 videos a month, some £5 and £6 K contracts.

Gary explained 'one of the things that's very hard for us on EY is to what extent to be encouraging, and to what extent to be realistic'. Many of the young people have 'big ideas and dreams', but these motivations were not always grounded in the realities of self-employment, particularly in terms of the profits they could expect in the first few years. For Gary, it was important they understood they had to 'support themselves while they're trying to create their dream'. He explains to the group that businesses that just break even are often not factoring in their own labour costs, and people end up working for £2.50 an hour, as an example. He challenged the group to think about what would count as being 'successful', asking participants to consider whether it would be better to get a job, or could they put up with earning so little, even if they loved doing it?

To bring these realities home to participants, they must complete a 'survival budget': calculate the basic funds they would need to survive per week. Gary is keen to make sure this is about the 'absolute necessities'. This does not take into account quality of life, and cutbacks were suggested, such as smoking, drinking cola or nights out. We were surprised by how small and conservative these budgets were (Table 2).

The figures can be explained by the fact that several of the young people were still living at home supported by their families. Lily for instance, claimed she didn't need any money at all, she doesn't

Table 2. Participants' Survival Budgets (EY Activity).

Participant	Estimated weekly survival budget
James	£80
Sam	£59.25
Grace	£141
Lily	£0
Stewart	£??
Palmer	Absent
Bryony	£110

spend anything, but relies wholly on her parents. Comparatively, Stewart's life was unpredictable; he wasn't sure what he needed.

Covering these needs does not seem wholly unattainable from the proceeds of a small business. For comparison, in a full-time job in 2014, an 18–20 yr old would earn £179.55 for a 35-h week on minimum wage (rising to £227.50 for over 21 yr olds) (<https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>). However, what was interesting was the divergence between EY's measures of success and those of the young people themselves. These do not necessarily wholly rely on income. While not all our participants continued on with their businesses, for those that did, money was only one aspect of a more complex picture of how they viewed success.

James and Sam were always aware that it would take time for their business to produce an income;

Sam: We both knew that we needed a part time job because we wouldn't get any money from this business until about 2 years' time.

They highlighted how they measured their achievements: a team of 20 young people working as freelancers (unpaid). James is finally working in the sector he loves. After their business panel, they secured further mentoring and won £3,800 from the LEP to assist them with employing someone. That the business was up and running and they were progressing towards these goals was currently sufficient for James and Sam, clearly vastly enjoying their experience.

Likewise, Grace saw success as being able to run her business and balance her responsibilities as a parent. This was working well for her:

Well for me, having small children, it means that I can work around [them] ... I have also been able to go to parents' evening which I wouldn't have been able to if I was in an office.

Bryony was more concerned with her income, her main goal being to leave her job in retail. Earning just enough was how she measured success.

Our participants underscore how, to measure success in this context, other, personal factors also need to be included over and above the traditional measures of survival rates and turnover. Albeit that constructions of these were framed by gender and lifestage, happiness, satisfaction and agency emerged as key to the young people's own measures of the success of their enterprises.

Conclusion: 'doing well', 'bumping along' or 'bombing'?

We caught up with the participants 12 months after the course to find out how they had progressed. Bryony, James and Sam, and Grace were the only ones continuing with self-employment. Interestingly, this group all had support from family, who could help them emotionally and financially. James and Sam were still both also working long hours in part-time jobs. Grace has been working steadily on her business and it is slowly growing, not quite taking the shape she imagined, but moving towards this. It has worked well with motherhood, and the experience and support of her partner has been helpful. However, she found her (male) mentor unsympathetic to her situation as a working mother and decided not to continue with mentorship. In some contrast, Bryony has gone from strength to strength and her business is, arguably, the most successful; her stated goal of leaving her retail job achieved. Her business is now financially viable, the EY panel quickly approving two years more mentoring.

Lily decided not to continue with her business. Instead she started working in retail and training to become a ballet teacher. Palmer was encouraged by his mentor to return to university to complete his degree. However, his struggles with newly-diagnosed bipolar disorder have curtailed his current goals, and he characterises himself as 'drifting'. We unfortunately lost contact with Stewart after our first interview and he has not maintained communication with EY.

To use Judy's terms, Bryony was 'doing well', James, Sam, Grace were 'bumping along' and the rest had 'opted out' of enterprise. James, Sam and Grace were all reasonably positive, Grace being more hesitant than James and Sam, despite making material gain from her labours. In MacDonald's study, those participants who were not 'runners' were despondent. Contrastingly, however, our participants have gained a sense of self-worth and empowerment from enterprise. Nevertheless, apart from Bryony, their

material success has changed very little. Green and Cohen (1995, 312) argue that for women, enterprise is a hegemonic process, giving the sense of autonomy without affecting structural disadvantage. Likewise, for our young people, who occupy a structurally disadvantaged position in the labour market, their economic position has not improved. Under their *own* measures of success, however, they are doing well – Grace fitting her work around her children, Sam heading up a business and James finally working in the sector he has always loved, and Bryony generating sufficient income to fully support herself.

Our research demonstrates that gender, combined with other life stage factors, play a key role in motivations, aspirations and young people's measures of success for enterprise. It was these which guided the young people's choices about the scope and risk levels of their businesses and framed their decisions about their futures. At the same time, the research has also revealed that there is little – or no – acknowledgement of the critical importance of these personal and social factors in current policy and programme delivery. If young people from all backgrounds are to be more sensitively supported in their enterprise endeavours, this needs to change.

Note

1. Including, Enterprise Champions to do talks in schools, support for Enterprise Societies in colleges and universities, funding for a Global Entrepreneurship Week, New Enterprise Allowance for job seekers wanting to start their own business and start-up loans for 18–30 year olds (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-business-enterprise/2010-to-2015-government-policy-business-enterprise>).

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