Participant 37 Interview Transcript

**Interviewer:**

Right before we begin our conversation, can I check whether having this interview for one hour is that OK for you; for about one hour?Alright, so let me familiarize you with my research for a bit and the purpose of this interview. I'm currently in the third year of my PhD, as you know, at Southampton Business School and I'm researching on entrepreneurial success and I look at it from a slightly philosophical angle with the role of luck, authenticity and entrepreneurial success. But the paper that I'm currently writing explores lay beliefs towards the extreme economic success of entrepreneurs. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this a bit about the data protection measures I have undertaken. This interview will be video recorded only for transcription purposes and your name will not be associated with the data that you give me. Everything will be anonymous. And I'll be the only one who will see this video interview and who will be able to read the transcript. All the data will be used only for research purposes. Can I please ask you to verbally confirm whether it's OK to still participate in this and to be video and audio recorded?

**Participant 37:**

Yep, I'm happy to participate and happy for video and audio to be recorded.

**Interviewer:**

OK. That's great. To begin our conversation, can you tell me a bit more about yourself? You can start with age, occupation and educational level.

**Participant 37:**

So, I'm 31 and. Yes, sorry, might forget some of that.  
And yeah, I work in higher education, doing international or student recruitment projects. So currently I mean UK student recruitment officer and did you need to know about my educational background? I have an undergraduate degree in BA, French and Spanish that I completed in 2013 at the University of Southampton with one year study abroad under Erasmus and Spain doing languages as well.

**Interviewer:**

That sounds fantastic. And and anything about your personal and professional life that you are comfortable sharing?

**Participant 37:**

How is it know what would be relevant but?

**Interviewer:**

It doesn't need to be relevant, it just shows a bit about your character.

**Participant 37:**

Quite. Yeah, I guess kind of, yeah, I'm. I'm quite extrovert. So with with kind of COVID and the contacts we chatted about a minute ago, but now we're recording. Yeah, I like to get out and about. And sometimes watch things like The Apprentice. That's what happened. So. And other things, you know, considering doing masters in the future. Uh, one thing, you know, I did languages, but thought actually doing some business with that would have been really helpful because I see how it can kind of go across all areas of work and just give more confidence and things. Yeah, that might be. Uh, I've got got a partner who is looking at making a career change and talks about having his own business in the future and stuff. Umm yeah, other things might come up later.

**Interviewer:**

Well, that's really interesting. And Umm, so you mentioned you were interested in having a business Masters degree. Is that because you want to develop within your career path or you would like to start your own business?

**Participant 37:**

Not not to start my own business. Really. Not thinking about that. But well, when I was doing my undergraduate, I thought in hindsight I thought it would have been good to do languages and business undergraduate. And I'm not really seriously thinking about doing a a business masters, but I have been having my eye on a masters program at intercultural communication, but that had management as a marketing as part of it. And that was not so much kind of my professional development of I think it would help with a little bit, but it's more kind of, you know, personal fulfillment, you know life goals kind of thing.

**Interviewer:**

OK. That that's really interesting. And how about your partner, you mentioned he wants to start his own business? Umm, So what kind of business does he want to?

**Participant 37:**

So he wants to go into logistics and he's currently in the military and done different logistics, training and stuff with them. But yeah, he's he's kind of, yeah, I got that kind of mindset of of starting a business. I've just, yeah, I'm just supportive of it. I don't really have a clear about it. He said I could be the secretary. I said I'll be the project manager. Thank you.

**Interviewer:**

And do you have any friends or family members who already have their own businesses?

**Participant 37:**

Not really. Don’t think so, no. And any other thing that kind of popped up now when we talked about like personal stuff is then when I finish my degree in 2013, I went to live in Mexico for a year. Boy, it's really. And one thing that struck me there was a lot of people were talking about when you graduate and we're getting a job they like. Well, if I don't get a job, I'll just start my own business. And that for me, was such a kind of. So any culture shock, but I just saw such a cultural difference that in the UK, it's maybe that reliance more on being given a job, yes, applying for it was in Mexico, it was like, well, if I if I not given a job, I'll create my own job and I'll create my own income and and that kind of initiative. And then culturally looking at it kind of how much people may be wait for things to come to them or the systems in place, the different levels of kind of legal influence or things that might. Hope people back in the UK from from starting a business versus in Mexico, however casual that might have been.

**Interviewer:**

Umm, so you say the UK is more restricted towards uh developing your own business?

**Participant 37:**

I think it's some kind of. So when I look at it in the context of, you know, how things happen in Mexico with people making products at home, whether that's food and then selling it. I don't know. In, in and out of all the kind of requirements you need, but I would describe it as a lot more casual in Mexico than in the UK. It's like you need a license, you need this, you know. It's not a quick option. It's like you have to go through all the view bureaucracy, that's something might just say like I'm just doing this for fun, like I'm not even gonna. It's a lot of investment in things that aren't, you know, just to start the business maybe.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, absolutely. I get your point. Now. Let's go on to explore your views on extremely successful entrepreneurs. UM, let's pin a definition of an entrepreneur at the beginning as someone who sets up a business or many businesses taking on financial risks in the hopes of profits, what do you think about this definition?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, I I agree with setting up in business. I must admit, I don't. I normally just think about it as one business and not multiple. I don't really think about. Well, I don't think about financial risk, but of course that is a big thing and. But yeah, I do see entrepreneurship as more or less secure, perhaps less. Uh. Less certain. Uh. So the idea of working for a company, you know you're likely to receive the salary every month, you're likely to know what you're getting for, what you put in. Whereas with entrepreneurship is a lot of unknowns. But yeah, that that definition. Yeah, sounds good to me.

**Interviewer:**

Great and Umm for the purposes of this interview, let's take extreme success in its economic way of describing it. So I wanted to be as objective as possible and talking about success in terms of financial success is a very close to objectivity in my mind, because success can be quite subjective for different people. So what are who crosses your mind when you think about an extremely successful entrepreneur?

**Participant 37:**

Perhaps people like Richard Branson. Uh, Alan Sugar. Desperately trying to think of some woman or some other non white middle aged men. UM. Unless I don't really feel very familiar with entrepreneurs, I kind of think a lot about, you know, this famous people that just mentioned them things. But I think a lot about kind of Instagram lifestyle or people having their businesses or but I feel like I'm a, I'm an absolute observer. I don't really understand it. I just. Look at that. I'm low. That's that's not really me, but OK. Yeah, all the famous people. That's probably it, to be honest.

**Interviewer:**

And can you describe a little bit about Richard Branson and Alan Sugar? What do you like about them? What do you dislike about them or disagree with?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, I think what I like about them is that they both seem like they've come from quite a humble background. So I'm dyslexic and reading Richard Branson story about how he didn't get GCSE's or something. He was just like dyslexic and then started his own business and things almost to kind of work around the dyslexia and that's quite inspiring for me. And then Alan Sugar again, quite, you know, from humble background. And so he kind of, you know, talks about his accent and the part of London that he's from and things. And so again like you know, feeding into kind of social mobility. And I know we're focused on the financial success but in terms of social mobility and aspiration, I would say they're probably both people who they look like they've overcome. Yeah. To. Then to then see that challenges. Yeah. Things I don't like about them. UM, well, we should. Branson had that island in the Caribbean and somewhere and. Yeah, just almost. If it's kind of extreme financial success kind of. Yeah, I mean maybe this thing comes into political ideas and things, but the idea of, you know, should you really spend all that money on an island on it makes jobs for people and stuff. But. Is there more impact you could have for kind of humble people or or kind of to change the system? But then that brings up the question like is it that's one person, is it their whole to change the system? Yes, they've got this money now, but is it not there? You know. Up to them, what they do with that. And Alan Sugar. I mean, yeah, he's definitely gone, you know, above and beyond with The Apprentice series, hasn't he? Absolutely milks that I think that would be the first thing that comes to mind with him now and.

**Interviewer:**

But what made what made an impression to you during The Apprentice?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

What kind of role did he play or? Umm, how did you perceive him? As you know, the the main he his uh. What is his role there? Sorry, he was some kind of the the organizer of The Apprentice, right?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, it's quite straight talking. So you know where you stand with him direct and almost verging on read sometimes, but it doesn't. It doesn't feel rude. It feels like it's it's the television and. Yeah. Who? Who say, like it is kind of thing. Yes, I kind of see him as the host, but probably not the organiser of it all. He just kind of has other teams that he delegates to and they kind of get his approval or whatever for, you know, how the TV show goes.

**Interviewer:**

And do you think this kind of, UM, straight talking uh propensity and what Richard Branson so inspirational type of people do you think that goes for all extremely successful entrepreneurs or is it just the two that you mentioned?

**Participant 37:**

I don't really know. I don't know if that's kind of a skill that people develop in order to be successful. To know their mind. I mean, I don't know when I reflect on myself, when I feel like the state of flow with work. I I feel all my. I mean. Yeah, it's not that finances, but always feel that that, you know, associated with that state of flow when you become quite straight talking quick to make decisions feels good. Yeah, like you're making progress and stuff. So yeah, it it could be linked, but whether that's prerequisite that they have those personality. I am traits or you know they develop them and bring them out more.

**Interviewer:**

And what do you think? Can they develop these kind of things or is it more of a someone is born to be a leader and entrepreneur?

**Participant 37:**

I think a lot of stuff you can develop and move into. Sometimes, maybe with life experience, you know, depending on your age and what experiences you've had, confidence levels, self esteem and It would then develop it more or less at different times. I mean both of them, yeah, we talked about is it they're older than middle aged now. And which comes with a lot of life experience and maybe confidence of. Not worrying about. And asserting certain behaviours and the impact of…and whether that comes with. What? What do you call it? Male privilege. And and all those kind of things tied to that as well. Yeah, it could well be, but yeah, I do think you can develop a lot of things. And I think Richard Branston kind of acknowledging his dyslexia and how that might affect him in some ways. But then working around it of anything that's yeah, real strength.

**Interviewer:**

That's really interesting. And what do you think differentiates people like Alan Sugar and uh Richard Branson from people who don't achieve billions in entrepreneurship? So, people who just stay at some, umm, let's say mediocre level of financial success.

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, sometimes I wonder if it's like support around them. But that's one models and examples. Umm, supporting knowing how to do things, how to learn about things, you know not all 100% self taught. Sometimes you know we have our blind spots or we we kind of get knocked down a little bit and that means that people kind of just stay an area. So yeah, whether they've, you know, been able to network or. I had other people who showing them the ropes or helped them off or, you know, even if they've had the mental awareness to know that they need to delegate certain roles to other team members or you know, that they can't do it all in their strengths and weaknesses and then build a team or build. Build support accordingly so that success can be delivered as not all on their shoulders. Umm. I guess, yeah. How they scale the business.

**Interviewer:**

That's really interesting. So what you mentioned here as a key to achieving extreme success is actually other people. It's not the individual.

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, sometimes, yeah. I mean, entrepreneur, we tend to think of, I tend to think of as one person. But I think the reality is, you know, Richard Branson with his, Umm, well, I think he's got multiple businesses. But I always think of the. Uh, the virgin aeroplanes and things, you know, that isn't just one person delivering all these multiple flights and thing knowing everything about the legal frameworks, the health and safety of the engineering. So of course, yes, to bring other people in. But probably when you think about virgin, you think one person. As the entrepreneur.

**Interviewer:**

And now let's hear your thoughts on what stands behind extreme success. So I understand this next question maybe a bit difficult to answer with absolute certainty, but I would still like to get your thoughts on it. Umm, what to your understanding or opinion or knowledge made? Alan Sugar and or Richard Branson success possible? So what's stands behind their success?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, that is that is a trickle. Maybe it's a personality trait about, you know, the comfort in taking risks. And exploring things. And when something does fail or it doesn't turn out how they wanted it to or hoped it to, how they recovered from that. Umm, the word vision is coming to mind as well. You know, can they? Can they see things clearly without being bogged down in the challenges or and always the failures or, you know, when it doesn't quite work out? And that 20 resilience is another keyword. To kind of keep going with stuff and keep believing in them. You know, having that self belief to keep going. Yeah, can leave it at that.

**Interviewer:**

Interesting. So you mentioned other people as contributing factor and you mentioned some personality traits as well. Do you think there is anything else to what?

**Participant 37:**

I think kind of from my experience when I've seen, you know, the context of higher education.The support that's available for entrepreneuring activities at universities, but one thing I'm quite interested in is and working in student recruitment and looking at kind of the advice, information and guidance that people get before coming to university. Typically you know students at 18 is kind of how have expectations or understandings been built? You know, throughout the education so far from the different contexts that they're part of, and the different networks. So, you know, family expectations and understandings of of things, and maybe even dismissiveness. And so, you know, I was at Southampton and I never thought about that. You know, they talked about having your own business, but I never thought about that. Ohh, no, actually, sorry I've been. You asked me at the beginning if you one I know has their own business and my aunts and uncle do. Yeah, they have their own business. That was kind of, UM, inherited from the grandpa. Actually, my my granddad, my maternal granddad had his own business.

**Interviewer:**

No, no, that's interesting.

**Participant 37:**

Here we go. It's anywhere we get into it a bit more. So yeah, my aunt and uncle have a horticultural business growing flowers, but they're winding that down now, but essentially the granddad who's now passed away. When my uncle mangles probably 66, I think now. Ish. Same me back from Kenya when they were, when he was about 9:00 and they set up a horticultural business here in Hampshire. And yeah, that's been going for, you know, how many years? Yeah. So there's kind of, yeah, that experience. So we're actually and and hearing about the challenges with suppliers and you know the finances of there. And I at one point I did get quite interested in that and you know different things about marketing and stuff and how what their customer bases and things. And then my my. Umm, so that was kind of. Yeah, my mom's sister, the twin, her husband, her bad business. And then my maternal grandparents, the grandfather had a jewelry business. With another person. Uh, so there were two school pickets and purses that used to be one in Southampton. I'll think about yesterday actually. So yeah, that was. Go up pretty from like around the 60s. I think they have that 60s to the 80s or so. No, probably later than that. We are used to get out of the shop. When I was, you know, a child. So they had several around Hampshire, several kind of Petersfield Southsea. And one here in Southampton there might be more, but that was, yeah, all I remember or whatever. So yeah. Gosh, actually. Yeah. Do you have, you know, entrepreneurs and my family or shopkeepers or, you know, however, we wanna call them and. Yeah. But so, Ivan, there was it was another question, wasn't it about?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah. So what made their success possible? So you mentioned personality traits. You mentioned other people and and you were thinking about any other factors, but what do you think about the idea for example? The entrepreneurial idea.

**Participant 37:**

And and what kind of way the entrepreneurial idea?

**Interviewer:**

The business idea basically. So Richard Branson had the idea to develop Virgin. So do you think that's important to have a good idea to? UM, become extremely successful? Or do you think it's not really about the idea?

**Participant 37:**

I think I I felt I'm struggling to think of the examples, but I think there was some things when the idea doesn't necessarily matter. It sometimes about the marketing or about tapping into something. I don't know. I think about, you know, some of the crazes that come for children and I don't know who's linked to this or whatever, but those fidget spinners I said when kids hold them and spin them around, the things and other trends that, you know, just explode and all children want them. And which you know as an idea, if you don't know which market you're going into or you know it's not defined or it's not. Like while targeted, it might fall flat. But. Yeah, sometimes I don't always think it's the idea. It's kind of how you approach it, how you. Well, most generate a perceived need. And and how that person can kind of manipulate always the market or you know for their success. I don't know the inside and out of of Virgin and and I've read about it, but I don't remember really why Richard Branson started it and.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, that that's really interesting. So you mentioned at the beginning that the two examples of that that you gave were Alan Sugar and Richard Branson. So did they come from humble origins? Do you think a lot of extremely successful entrepreneurs come from humble origins or do they often come from family wealth, for example, or having some prior financial standing.

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, I think that's a good one. I think sometimes I think about them coming from humble origins, but at the same time, the point I started making earlier about the level of support or encouragement that people get when they're growing up and how that sets the foundation mentally of what is possible almost so. Yeah. I think on the flip side of it, I feel like there are. Why have this perception that maybe people who have family wealth have maybe more tools to their start their own business, or more influence or whatever it might be? And so I I I mean, I don't know if I see it in terms of extremes, but it's either the most humble or the most privileged, I guess you could say. And that do well in business and I, yeah, I I don't feel like I have a huge understanding of entrepreneurs or what kind of background they might come from. But yeah, I I do definitely see it a little bit kind of in terms of extremes.

**Interviewer:**

OK, that's interesting.

**Participant 37:**

It in the middle that cause that university. It wasn't something I really considered and I now recognize that it's kind of sometimes the mental barriers that you put in place or just think, Oh no, that's not me. You're like, what idea would I even have or like almost, I don't have that kind of thinking training about how to think about things. And you know, regardless of potential or interact. Sometimes it just wasn't something that was really offered or explored. And you just stick with what you know of kind of well, you know, if I go to a company, I'll get a regular salary and. Yeah, that was maybe kind of the perception of how you go about your career.

**Interviewer:**

So do you think wealthy individuals have less barriers like this?

**Participant 37:**

Perhaps. Yeah. Psychological barriers. Perhaps I mean for me, I'm quite interested in kind of the psychology of how we limit ourselves or. And. So yeah, perhaps they have that, uh, bravery or courage and or encouragement, even when they've been growing up. Yes, I like the effects of like childhoods and how they internalize that. And then what they choose, how they choose to solve problems or you know, go about relating to the world.

**Interviewer:**

That's really interesting. And what do you think about the aspect of control? So do you think extremely successful entrepreneurs were in control over achieving billions?

**Participant 37:**

I kind of think they they probably assert control in ways that they can. In order to influence or, you know, try and grow the business or. Umm, but I guess it comes down to understanding like how well they understand what they’re operating in. What they can't like knowing what they can control as well and what they can't and become a comfortable with that. Yeah, I'm not too sure, to be honest.

**Interviewer:**

Great. UM, the next question is important for me to fully capture your thoughts on extreme success in entrepreneurship. So what do you think is Richard Branson or UM Alan Sugar's contribution to our society?

**Participant 37:**

I think probably and again going back to kind of, you know, children and building ideas of what is possible. I think Alan Sugar through is series the Apprentice has shown children. An example of being successful, we might not know about his businesses inside out, but almost through The Apprentice, the way that he, I know it's entertainment largely, but that he gives opportunities to people. To share some of that wealth or get involved, have his mentorship, his financial funding, of course as well and. But then, and we probably the The Apprentice isn't the best example of this then now it's quite dramatized. And but seeing kind of the types of behaviors or problems that people might work on it in entrepreneurial context. So when they have to do the challenges and you know the blind spots or the things that come out. Yeah, can. Can you repeat the question again, Ivan?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah. So what do you think? Is their contribution to our society, how do they contribute to us?

**Participant 37:**

Hi so yeah, I'm I'm happy with the. Richard Branson though. Not really too sure. I just see him involved in a lot of like either sporting things or. He seems kind of a bit of a role model of being quite, uh, free spirited, almost. Kind of breaking the mold, but then again like psychologically how maybe we think. Oh, that's not me. I don't really know what Richard Branson's contributed. It might come up later, but.

**Interviewer:**

And if you could change any of their contributions, what would you like to see happening?

**Participant 37:**

I think maybe the thing about the island again, probably only because I've watched the documentary about his island and stuff and. I don't know. I mean, it's quite complex topic. You know, people who have wealth going to an island for, you know, retreat. And that question. Well, if it wasn't Richard Branson providing it you up he would instead because it's not likely to be if Richard Branson doesn't provide it, then it wouldn't exist. I think someone else would snap that opportunity up. But almost seeing. Yeah. For me, I think to see the kind of impact of their success on people positively. Umm. And whatever way that might be, if that was, you know, Richard Branson channeling it into people with dyslexia. Umm, but I I don't know to be honest, I don't really have good to be researching this afterward. I don't really feel like I know. What the impact has been on Society of their their work.

**Interviewer:**

And do you think money indicate how much someone has contributed to our society? So for example, Richard Branson being a billionaire would mean that he has contributed a lot with his product services.

**Participant 37:**

I don't know really. Sometimes the questions of tax come up and tax avoidance. And you know, I think if yeah, a lot of people, nobody quite thoughts on this but maybe more so now in the cost of living crisis and things. That if they have X amount of money, why aren't they contribute to it? Why don't they contributing it to the system but at the same time when we hear about the way that government public finances are are spent. You, you do understand why they might not want to contribute in that way and to some extent, if there are systems in place to allow them to almost choose how they contribute or not, whether that's some tax avoidance or whatever, and they choose to contribute in another way. Are we always like to disagree with that and? Yeah, if you don't agree with how the government is spending the money, particularly if it's not going to people who as a society we might deem as in need.

**Interviewer:**

That's great. And the next question may sound slightly controversial. Some people would say that luck plays an important role in extreme entrepreneurial success, and some people would even hold the very extreme view that entrepreneurs are just lucky to be to become billionaires and they don't deserve their profits. What would you say in response to this?

**Participant 37:**

They think we're really agree with that to be honest, because I think. Maybe when one once we see them as entrepreneurs with this, you know, financial success, we see the kind of. Almost end products or or kind of. You know after like all the kind of ups and downs and things we see them at a high point, but actually everything that's taken to get there, do we do we look at that story do we kind of appreciate that as well do we value that part too. And I don't always think it's luck. There might be certain things that. Institutional things, societal things which have lent favour to their success. Whether that's you know through gender. And ethnicity, the different systems that are at play there, which maybe facilitate the you know success more. I don't know. It's one of those things then, ethically, how did they come about their success and is that something? This is society. People generally agree with or not. Yeah. I think one of the things you know in Southampton for example is quite often some quite flashy cars and sometimes thinking how do people have those cars or how do they afford them, you know, is it all a bank loan? Do they actually live in some, you know, horrible accommodation. But then again, that's a values based system. That is the house more important than the car. Do you want to have? A good possession for yourself. Or do you want to have it to show the people, in which case the car might be more successful. But sometimes we think we know where do, where do they get that money from? To have that car? Is it? Is it dirty money? Almost. How did they get it was. What's the kind of background on that? So yeah, I I don't think it's all. I don't think it's all about luck, but I I do think it's, yeah, probably been a a big journey to get there. And.

**Interviewer:**

And what is? What is your definition of luck? How do you understand luck in this situation?

**Participant 37:**

Think almost when things go in people's way so they try something and it comes more easily than not. And I think from my kind of experiences, sometimes you feel like when you go for job interviews or. You know how things almost align. And come with ease rather than constant challenge, and I don't know if I would call it luck or most, and it depends kind of, you know, philosophically what. How you look at things, if it's, you know, meant to be that time that you get it or if you're not meant to have those things at that time because you're meant to be doing some other personal growth or whatever it might be. Yeah. Sorry, Ivan. Can you can you say the question again?

**Interviewer:**

And so the question was, what is your definition of luck? How do you perceive luck?

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, yeah, I would say probably probably like that. Like the ease of the ease of getting things.

**Interviewer:**

Great and. Do you think that, luck has an important part in entrepreneurial success? Or do you see it as a very minor contribution?

**Participant 37:**

Think it might? It might contribute to it. Yeah, I don't know what to what extent though.

**Interviewer:**

Great. I really appreciate your willingness to express your thoughts on everything. So far I've got one last question. So is there anything else about entrepreneurial success that you would like to share? And I didn't ask.

**Participant 37:**

Don’t really think so? Umm, just that you know, it's interesting how some people make it bigger and you know, and is it beyond what they planned for or expected? And some people stay at humble or mediocre levels. And yeah, what? What maybe are the drivers behind that? Yeah, you're gonna have me. Yeah. Make a documentary. How I want to watch one now.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, I'm planning to record a video with my findings and I'll send that to all participants. Yeah. So instead of sending you a a big paper with 30 pages of some scientific evidence, that probably is not gonna interest many people. I just decided that a video format is more suitable.

**Participant 37:**

Yeah, sounds great.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, I'll do that and send it to you when I finish the paper.