Margins of Intervention? Gender, Bourdieu and Women's Regional Entrepreneurial Networks

Abstract
In this paper, we apply a feminist interpretation and extension of Bourdieu's theory of practice to explore the gap in our understanding between gender gap issues – the institutionalized and structural inequalities that underpin the differential access to resources by women and men – and women business owners. Drawing on an interpretivist analysis of the lived experience of women entrepreneurs who were members of women-only or open-to-all formal entrepreneurship networks, we examine their enculturation and the strategies they employ to be deemed credible players in the field. We conclude that women-only formal entrepreneurship networks have had a limited impact on helping these women overcome the isolating and individualizing effects of a gendered entrepreneurial field. Despite the promise of familiarization with and sensitization to the field, women-only formal entrepreneurship networks only serve to perpetuate and reproduce the embedded masculinity of the entrepreneurship domain in the absence of appropriate activating mechanisms or 'margins of intervention'.

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> *This transformative edge [to feminism] assumes that no emancipatory process, however partial, is ever completely subsumed or incorporated into the dominant socio-economic life conditions, to which it is attached by critical opposition. Margins of intervention remain available, albeit as virtual potential. The trick is how to activate them* (Braidotti 2022, 3).

Introduction

How do gendered dispositions (Miller 2016) produce and reproduce fields of socioeconomic production, such as entrepreneurship? Such fields depend on numerous individuals behaving in predictable mutually understood ways, organized by 'conventions', or shared assumptions (both explicit and implicit) about the 'way things are done' (Miller 2016). They also rely on particular kinds of participants, that is, those individuals with the skills and dispositions needed to maintain the fields and their conventions.

For Bourdieu (1984; 2000) these dispositions are a 'specific habitus', a set of internalized, embodied ways of thinking, feeling, and acting shaped by social structures. Viewing habitus as incorporated history, a generating principle, a modus operandi that produces the regular improvisations we call 'social practice', Bourdieu comprehends *doing gender* as 'both the action of the individual and as a socially prestructured practice' (Krais 2000, 57): what he refers to as the 'gendered and gendering habitus' (Bourdieu 1990, 11). He goes on to argue that male domination functions as an everyday structure and activity: a gendered view of the world is stored in our habitus, which is 'profoundly and inescapably shaped by a pattern of classification that constructs male and female as polar opposites' (Krais 2000, 58). In other words, 'gender is a fundamental dimension of the habitus which modifies, as do the sharp or the clef in music, all social features connected to fundamental social factors' (Bourdieu 1977, 222).

In this paper, we follow a stream of feminist appropriations and extensions of Bourdieu's work (Moi 1991, 1997; Adkins and Skeggs 2004; Krais 2000) to explain how gender affects the field-habitus relationship in the field of entrepreneurship, and to further identify the gendered nature of the field mechanisms (such as capital and doxa, which are objective structures, a medium of operation reflected in features which arise from their procedures), and field conditions (such as interest/illusio and symbolic violence, which are subjective representations of how fields are present in individuals and their repercussions) (Grenfell 2014a).

The starting point for our analysis is that despite the representation of entrepreneurship as a field of open entry (Adamson and Kelan 2017; Sullivan and Delaney 2017; Lewis 2014), women remain under-represented relative to men (Pfefferman et al. 2022; Greene and Brush 2023; OECD-GWEP 2021; Meliou and Ozbilgin 2023). Accordingly, there has been an expansion of policy initiatives aimed at addressing this underrepresentation and enhancing women's position in entrepreneurship by supporting the acquisition of a particular entrepreneurial logic (Henry et al. 2023; Henry et al. 2017; Foss et al. 2019; Harrison et al. 2020b; Ahl and Marlow 2021; Arshed et al. 2019). Thus, it is argued, for example, that by improving women's access to networks, capital and appropriate support structures and processes, their contribution and positions within entrepreneurship will be enhanced. However, despite these lofty aims, women's entrepreneurship policy, in both the developed world and

the Global South, is characterised by the 'implicit ideological premises of programs [that] tend to overestimate the empowerment potential of entrepreneurship' (Wood et al. 2021: 2), as a manifestation of a wider gender blindness in entrepreneurship (Lewis 2013).

A key element in women's entrepreneurship policies has been the establishment of formally constituted women-only entrepreneurship networks as a catalyst to the development of an entrepreneurial culture (Fritsch 2011). These are intended to serve as a mechanism to address issues of difference and diversity in the light of the homogeneity and discrimination against 'others' characteristic of competitive production systems (Ettlinger 2001). They also are intended to develop the social capital of women business owners and prospective entrepreneurs through psychic investments (those aspects of work which "get inside" the lives of women, transforming and shaping their subjectivities and relations with others: Gill 2009; Scharff 2011, 2012, 2015b; Walkerdine 2003) in particular kinds of work (i.e., entrepreneurship) as sites of personal satisfaction (Cockayne 2015).

As such, these represent 'margins of intervention' which define the scope for, or degrees of freedom of, policy interventions in a particular sphere (Semigallia 2012; Rodrik and Sabel 2020). These margins of intervention also, potentially, represent critical and creative ways in which the marginalized experience the actualization of a possible future. This future in turn is manifest as a 'reservoir of yet unrealized possibilities that cannot be brought about by dialectical opposition to the present (that is, actual) conditions. They rather need to be called forth by a collective relational endeavour of co-creation of the conditions to actualize this potential' (Braidotti 2021, 149). How and to what extent these interventions bring about these unrealised possibilities, however, remains a matter of continuing debate in entrepreneurship.

In terms of women's entrepreneurship policy, and despite the early recognition of the institutionalized and structural inequalities that underpin the differential access to resources by women and men (Yllö 1984; Perrin 2021), there is a gap in our understanding, and we are still missing 'an approach that links gender gap issues and women business owners in a coherent manner' (Greene and Brush 2023, 15). We argue that the application of a feminist interpretation and extension of Bourdieu's theory of embodied practice can provide such a link. Specifically, given the relative lack of attention directed to the experience of women in these formal entrepreneurial networks (Harrison et al. 2022b; McAdam et al. 2019; Lefebvre et al. 2015), and the advocacy of a more practice-oriented approach to policy analysis (Arshed et al. 2019), we formulate the following research question: *How do women entrepreneurs perceive the effectiveness of formal women-only entrepreneurial networks in mitigating the isolation and individualization inherent in the gendered entrepreneurial policy landscape?* In addressing this question, we draw on a gendered interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977; Adkins and Skeggs 2004). Although there has been increasing interest in Bourdieu in entrepreneurship (see for example Hill 2018; Drakopoulou Dodd et al. 2014; Spigel 2017; Meliou and Ozbilgin 2023), most of this research (including work specifically on Bourdieu and gender – (Vincent 2016; Shaw et al. 2009) has been restricted to the application of his ideas on capital and capital conversion, to the relative neglect of other aspects of his 'thinking tools' (Meliou and Ozbilgin 2023).

We make the following contributions: First, drawing on feminist readings of Bourdieu's theory of practice, we bring together feminist and Bourdieusian scholarship in entrepreneurship, two research perspectives hitherto, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Vincent 2016; Vincent and Pagan 2019; Shaw et al. 2009; Meliou and Ozbilgin 2023), addressed separately. In so doing, we extend Bourdieusian research in entrepreneurship by exploring the relationships between

field, habitus, doxa, *illusio* and symbolic violence. Second, in illuminating how formal women-only entrepreneurial networks can perpetuate and reproduce the embedded masculinity of entrepreneurship, we develop a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered doxic order as a system of presuppositions underpinning behavior in a field. Third, by highlighting the perceptions and lived experiences of women entrepreneurs, we draw attention to these relationships and demonstrate the ways in which capital and access to it might be gendered. Finally, with regards to policy implications we argue that to the extent to which women-only entrepreneurial networks are focused on equity rather than equality their potential as 'margins of intervention' will remain unexploited, and the positive implications of these will not be realised unless and until there are appropriate activating mechanisms to prevent their perpetuating and reproducing the embedded masculinity of the entrepreneurship domain.

The paper is structured as follows. In the following section, we discuss formal women-only entrepreneurship networks as an instrument of entrepreneurship policy. The next section reviews the nature of entrepreneurship as a gendered social practice, integrating recent feminist perspectives with Bourdieu's theory of practice. We then detail our research design and data analysis protocols. On the basis of this, we summarize our findings and critically reflect on the implications for a Bourdieusian understanding of gender relations and entrepreneurial action.

Entrepreneurship policy: women-only entrepreneurial networks

Networking, as a process, can be defined as the coming together of similarly minded people for the purposes of contact, friendship, and support (Brass et al. 2004), and women's business networks can be defined as 'independent, bottom-up initiatives that organize women's voices and experiences to address the status quo in the gendered world of work' (Villesèche et al. 2022: 1903). In both corporate and entrepreneurial contexts (Klyver and Terjesen 2007; Jack 2010), successful networking has been argued to positively influence career outcomes such as increased job opportunities, job performance, income, promotion and advancement and career satisfaction through the provision of access to information, enhanced visibility, social support, business leads, access to resources, collaboration opportunities, strategy-making and professional support (Singh et al. 2006). Critics of women's business networks, however, argue that while at the individual level these groups do develop support strategies that meet their member's needs, they do so at the expense of their failure to address organizational and structural inequalities (Petrucci 2020).

Research to date has consistently demonstrated the importance of networks (formal and informal) in generating social capital (Coleman 1988), providing access to knowledge, customers, suppliers and investors (Florin et al. 2003; Hoang and Antoncic 2003), and enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy and legitimacy (Arshed et al. 2019). Prior research has also demonstrated the gendered nature of entrepreneurial networking and networks (Brush et al. 2019; Foss 2010; Neergaard et al. 2005; Renzulli et al. 2000), in that men are more instrumentally active in promoting their careers while women tend to use networks for social support (Ibarra 1992; McAdam et al. 2019). As a result, the distinctive structure of women's networks makes more difficult their connection with reputable players and negatively affects their legitimacy as entrepreneurs (Avnimelech and Rechter 2023; McAdam et al. 2019).

Given this, the creation of formally established networks for women entrepreneurs as a top-down initiative represents an attempt to create for them the support generated for men by their informal same-sex groups (Gavara and Zarco 2015). This arises from the view that women entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs have not been socialized appropriately to compete in a man's world, require 'fixing' by specific policy interventions (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Ely

and Meyerson 2000; McAdam 2022) to provide them with appropriate entrepreneurial tools and skills. Most research on entrepreneurial networking has focused on the creation and functioning of entrepreneur centered, informal networks and on the ego-alter relationships within these (Jack 2005; Jack et al. 2008; Shaw et al. 2009). However, there have been far fewer studies of formal entrepreneurial networks, despite their prominence as an instrument of economic development policy, and, in particular, of gendered differences in their membership (Das and Teng 1997; Lefebvre et al. 2015; Malewicki 2005).

The aim of this paper is to add to this scant literature, by investigating the experiences of women entrepreneurs who have joined formal networks, as an illustration of the extent to which Bourdieu's theory of embodied practice provides a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial action and experience. Commentators have identified a widespread 'pragmatic approach to Bourdieu's work, one that considers it legitimate to pick and choose concepts, as opposed to adopting the whole package' (Lamont 2012, 228-229). As we show in the next section, this is certainly the case in entrepreneurship. In reacting to this, our intent is to complement the current use of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' as we seek to put Bourdieu to work, in the spirit of his own emphasis on theory-method rather than theory alone, to 'evoke his concepts as tools for thinking [our] way into empirical realities' (Gale and Lingard 2015, 1). As such, we both use his theory (and in particular his notion of habitus) and do theory, in the sense of pushing the boundaries of current theoretical knowledge and co-develop our arguments as a dialogue between the literature and our research context.

Entrepreneurship as a Gendered Social Practice
In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in and application of Bourdieu's theory, or socioanalysis, of practice across the social sciences in general (Costa and Murphy 2015) and as part of the recent practice turn in entrepreneurship in particular (Champenois, Lefebvre and Ronteau 2020; Thompson, Byrne, Jenkins, and Teague 2022). Driven by the desire to transcend a number of interconnected dichotomies (e.g., theory/practice, subjective/objective, structure/agency), Bourdieu developed some 'thinking tools', including field, habitus, capital, doxa, illusio and symbolic violence. We build on existing Bourdieusian approaches to entrepreneurship as a social and economic process embedded in complex networks of resources, power relations and institutions (Anderson, Dodd and Jack 2010; Scott, 2012; Nijkamp, 2003, Spigel 2013; De Clercq and Voronov 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Hill 2018; Karataş-Özkan 2011; Vincent 2014; Vincent and Pagan 2019), to develop a theoretical framework based on feminist interpretations of Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977; 2000; McNay 2000).

The starting point for this analysis is that, in contradistinction to the agentic individualism of neoliberalism, 'work' in contemporary society is regulated by a set of inherited and pre-existing social structures which shape the institutional *field* of professional identity, including entrepreneurial identity. We apply Bourdieu's notion of field, as an organized site of force and struggle which actors attempt to transform in the struggle for legitimacy (Pileggi and Patton 2003), to the practice of entrepreneurship as a domain in which actors maneuver and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources, through the acquisition of different types of capital. In so doing, we acknowledge Bourdieu's understanding of the social world as comprising differentiated but overlapping fields of action (the economic, the political, the legal and so on) each of which has its own logic or *habitus* as embodied social practice over time which informs and sets limits on practice, naturalizes and normalizes as *doxa* the cultural and symbolic roles embodied in the world of gendered work, and is evoked as *illusio,* the commitment of 'players'

in the field to invest in its stakes, that is, its objects of value, and to believe in the significance of the game and the benefits it promises (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

We investigate this theorization of the role and importance of preexisting structures in shaping gender relations in the context of formally established networks, both women-only and mixed-gender, as arenas in which women entrepreneurs can become acculturated into the field and learn its values, rules, and dynamics. Specifically, we examine the role gender plays in shaping how, if at all, women become credible field players through their membership of formal networks.

In terms of Bourdieu's thinking tools, much of Bourdieusian research in entrepreneurship to date has focused primarily on economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Shaw et al. 2009; Nowicka 2013; Light and Dana 2013; Pret, et al. 2015), and on social capital in particular, drawing only, in many cases, on Bourdieu's (1986) essay on 'the forms of capital' (Batjargal 2003; De Carolis et al. 2009; Ferri et al. 2009). Furthermore, much of this research makes only passing reference to Bourdieu to establish a focus on social capital (Bird and Wennberg 2014; Davidsson and Honig 2003; Foley and O'Connor 2013; Stam, Arzlanian and Elfring 2014; Román, Congregado and Millán 2013) or cultural capital (Fairchild 2010; Meek Pacheco and York 2013; Wright and Zammuto 2013; Spigel 2017). This is also consistent with the concept of gender capital as embodied cultural capital in feminist readings of Bourdieu (McCall 1992; Lovell 2000; Reay 2004; Skeggs 1997; 2004). Extended by Huppatz (2014; Huppatz 2009; Ross-Smith and Huppatz 2010) to differentiate female (gender advantage derived from the perception of having a female body) from feminine capital, gender capital can help understand gendered occupational practices, explain how gender inequality and privilege operate in particular types of work and the intersectionality of gender, class and occupation (Huppatz 2012). Gender capital is embodied (historically contingent and context-dependent dispositions cast as masculine and feminine), objectified (in the form of material and immaterial objects that are endowed with gendered properties in everyday practice) and institutionalized (such that production tasks, valorization devices and labour outputs are embedded in relational and asymmetrical conceptions of femininity and masculinity) (Matos 2018).

Relatively less attention has been paid to his concepts of habitus, field - "although it lies at the heart of his work" (Hilgers and Mangez 2014, 1) - doxa, the understanding of what is being played out in a field and the basis for the relationship between the players in that field, and *illusio*, (or 'interest'), as the interest individuals have which is defined by their circumstances and allows them to 'act in a particular way within the context in which they find themselves' (Grenfell 2014b, 152) (Bowman 2007; Drakopoulou Dodd et al. 2014; Meliou and Ozbilgin 2023; Patel and Conkin 2009; Seidl and Whittington 2014). Recent exceptions are Vincent's (2016) examination of the temporal structure of the field and how this affects access to capital(s) and of the 'man's world' of the entrepreneurship domain, and the application of Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus (but not doxa) to the study of entrepreneurs' digital networks (Smith, Smith and Shaw, 2017), which highlights the importance of habitus in shaping the context for networking behavior (Anderson et al. 2007; 2010; De Clercq and Voronov 2009; Keating et al. 2014; McKeever et al. 2014)[1].

Fields are the social spaces in which individual agency, through interactions, transactions and events, comes into play, each of which has properties that are the focus of strategic decision

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[1] In this dominant emphasis on Bourdieu's forms of capital, entrepreneurship is no different from other academic disciplines: for example, one analysis of references to Bourdieu in four leading US sociology journals concluded that 'capital' dominated as a concept (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007; Lamont 2012).

making characterized by an ongoing struggle between a community of actors for unequally distributed resources in the form of different types of capital that can be acquired, converted and/ or traded (Shaw et al 2009; Vincent, 2016). Each field is constituted by a durable network of social relations which is in constant evolution as actors compete for possession of the most appropriate forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) which is 'essential for getting ahead' (Vincent 2016, 1167), motivates actors' practice and underpins the field's structuring principles and relations (Laberge 1995). These social relations in turn rely on actors implicitly agreeing to follow 'the rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1990) by internalizing the field's structures, modus operandi and hierarchies into their habitus or socialized subjectivity. The struggle for ownership of capital is the precondition of playing the game and the determinant of an actor's position in the field. Thus, it is important for actors to develop a sense for how a field operates and to understand their place in it. Habitus, internalised via enculturation, provides each actor with a mental schema and an embodied understanding of the field's rules and how these might be applicable given their status and position (Tatli et al. 2014; McLeod 2005). Representing the 'individual embodiment of shared meaning systems' (Vincent 2016, 1167) habitus is a useful means by which to explain how fields are differentially experienced and enacted.

For Bourdieu, there is an intrinsic interplay between field, capital and habitus such that membership of a field is a para-doxal commitment to a set of presuppositions (doxa) that shapes action and behaviors (Bourdieu 1977; 1990; 2006; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Grenfell (2014a) distinguishes between field mechanisms (such as capital and doxa) which are objective structures, a medium of operation reflected in features which arise from their procedures, and field conditions (such as interest/illusio and symbolic violence) which are subjective representations of how fields are present in individuals and their repercussions. Doxa, the set of rules in a specific field, defines what is thinkable and what is capable of being said (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; 2006; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The ability to effectively operate in a field requires an actor, in this case an entrepreneur, to understand the prescribed rules of the game and how to operate within them. This has a specific implication: 'the homology between the spaces of positions and the space of dispositions is never perfect and there are always some agents "out on a limb", displaced, out of place and ill at ease' (Bourdieu 2000: 157). This is consistent with Lane's (2000) analysis of the three roles of doxa: first, it gives actions a sense of purpose and meaning; second, it ensures a time and place for everything; and third, it naturalizes and legitimizes the social roles adopted by different classes, age groups and genders. In other words, doxa is the tacit taken-for-granted aspect of social life, the feeling that actors can and ought to do no other than what they are doing. It happens when we 'forget the limits' that have given rise to unequal divisions in society: in essence, it is "an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1984, 471).

These 'thinking tools' reflect Bourdieu's ontological rejection of the binary dichotomy between structure and agency (Sterne 2010; Vandenberghe 1999; Martin and Dennis 2016) and his insistence that both entail 'bundles of relations' (Wacquant 1992: 161). There is, of course, a danger that this risks a conflation of structure and agency: for example, fields have properties that are relationally emergent from the articulations of agents and so are not properties of individuals, and our concept of margins of intervention allows for the power of agency to transform and contest local doxa, and so agency does not necessarily conform to routine. The relationship between structure and agency in Bourdieu, and the central conflation of structure and agency that this formulation risks, has been criticised from a critical realist perspective that sees agency as a quality inherent in human subjects which participates in both social

representation and social change (Archer 2012). However, Archer's critique is overstated, and she does recognise in practice that anchoring the different forms of reflexivity and the formation of concerns in different social contexts (as she does) is in effect describing the formation of habitus under a different name, leading one commentator to conclude that 'far from supporting the critical rejection of Bourdieu, her analysis nicely captures the detail and mess of habitus formation 'on the ground' in twenty-first-century Britain' (Atkinson 2014). Given this, the 'bundle of relations' perspective suggests that agency must be understood in relational terms rather than in the ontological sense as the absolute grounds of social being (McNay 2004): it is located not in any essential properties of 'the subject' or in the possession of resources (capital) but in the production of different affective capacities through the assemblages that produce human beings (Threadgold et al 2016). Agency and structure, on this view, are not a binary either/or, neither are they conflated into one construct, and agency is best viewed as part of a person's continued process of engagement with the world. Agency, on this view, is not a capacity inherent in the subject but can be thought of in terms of the capacities produced through social arrangements.

If the field designates any social space, and its practices reflect both structure (being positioned) and agency (self-positioning), then its corollary is habitus as the expression of the combination of socially structuring dispositions and socially structured predispositions. Together, habitus and field illuminate the ways in which particular social groups engage with practice and their differentiated trajectories within fields that are inherently competitive and unequal (Colley and Frédérique 2015). This suggests that based on the knowledge of the field rules actors can make a number of choices in order to achieve their objectives, choices that are shaped by their experience and habitus. By choosing to imitate practices they observe they can follow the rules of the field more closely in order to be successful (Spigel 2013). Habitus, thus, shapes how women entrepreneurs act and respond according to the rules of the field. They draw on capital to improve their field position and in so doing can enhance their standing with respect to others, gaining credibility as a player in the field. As women entrepreneurs may be considered interlopers in the entrepreneurial field (Ahl 2004; 2006), a Bourdieusian analysis of habitus and field aids a more nuanced understanding of how they acquire understanding of it and how they negotiate and navigate their pursuit of credibility and legitimacy (De Clercq and Voronov 2009a).

Habitus and field are inseparable concepts, articulated together by *illusio* (Warde 2004; Gouanvic 2005) as the commitment of players in any field to invest in its stakes, its objects of value: "We have *stakes (enjeux)* which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an *investment in the game, illusio* (from *ludus*, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a 'contract', that the game is worth playing, that it is 'worth the candle', and this *collusion* is the very basis of their competition. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98)."

One of the challenges for entrepreneurial research, to which we respond to in this paper, is that of shifting the focus from the field-level structural argument to the micro-level of individual behavior (Ozken and Eisenhardt 2007; DeClercq and Voronov 2009; McKever et al. 2014), and to do so in a wider range of contexts, including the analysis of gendered entrepreneurial action (to date focused on capital as a field mechanism – e.g. Vincent 2016; Vincent and Pagan 2018; Marlow and Carter 2004; Shaw et al. 2009), that have not been the primary focus of Bourdieusian entrepreneurship scholarship to date (McAdam et al. 2019).

Research Context and Design

We adopt an interpretive approach that sees research as a dialogical process between theory and empirical observation, in which the researcher's judgement (cognition) plays a crucial role in interpretation, and in which the intent is the development of reflexive narratives not explanatory models or theoretical propositions (Mantere and Ketokivi 2013, 75; see also Ketokivi and Mantere 2010). As such, this has much in common with an abductive approach which as a recursive process requires both in-depth familiarity with theory and an intensive engagement with observations, in which negotiating the tension between knowing what you are interested in and remaining open to new unexpected findings is central to the research process (Timmermans and Tavoy 2022). This has been informed by three specific characteristics of a Bourdieusian perspective on research design and data collection (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014). First, we avoid simply describing the data in terms of Bourdieusian concepts (a kind of metaphorization of data reflected in 'the contemporary fashion of overlaying research analyses with Bourdieu's concepts' (Reay 2004, 431-432)). Instead, we construct the research object, that is, women's experience of participating in formal business networks, in terms of the identification of relations and their consequences, to bring fresh insight to the topic. Following Bourdieu's distinction between 'objectivation of the first order' (the analysis of objective relations in the field of study) and 'objectivation of the second order' (the phenomenological investigation itself), we summarise the character and efficacy of the networks analysed and the disparity and disadvantage of women in this field they seek to address as a basis for the contextualization of our research.

Second, in constructing the research object and rethinking it in a new way (Bourdieu 1990) we highlight the reflexive relationship between us, as researchers, and our research, recognizing that our own 'feel' or 'eye' is a critical source of knowledge, which can benefit from an empathetic resonance between the researcher and the researched (Sklaveniti and Steyaert 2019). Bourdieu, in his discussions of objectivity and subjectivity, the logic of practice in relation to the scholastic point of view, and the relation of praxis to societal transformation, turns attention to our own taken for granted commonsense understandings (Adkins 2004b) and highlights that it is vital to be 'aware of our own "locations" in the fields of possibilities as well as those of our subjects of research' (Reed-Danahay 2005, 159), recognizing that reflexivity is 'more than a pragmatic option; it is rather an epistemological necessity' (Grenfell 2014a, 224).

Third, given the difficulty of capturing a social discourse in all of its multidimensionality, and recognizing that research is a 'responsible act' (Bourdieu 1990), we use power quotes (Pratt 2008; 2009) drawn from participants' narratives to effectively illustrate our points in a dialogue between the Bourdieusian literature and our research context (Matos 2018, 3). While this does not fully overcome the researcher's unconscious, implied and occluded presuppositions (arising from their particular position in the social space, the orthodoxy of the scientific field itself and the whole relation to the social world –Bourdieu 2000), it does help the researcher and the reader to situate themselves in a social space at the same point as the respondent. It does not, however, sublimate the distance between our learned reconstruction of the respondents' world and their experience of that world. In short, our research design is built on a philosophical base of epistemologically charged analytical constructs and an empirical approach which, following Bourdieu, is structural, relational and dynamic and is based on an openness to see beyond the conventional ways of interpreting the site-specific contexts of the social world (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014). Following Bourdieu (1999) we view these as 'places of kaleidoscopic experience' which can both include and exclude (Boyne 2002, 125).

In terms of contextual framing (Baker and Welter 2018), the setting for this research is Northern Ireland, a UK region with a particularly weak economic position and low rates of entrepreneurship in general, and female entrepreneurship in particular (Hart 2008; Hill et al. 2011; Leitch, Harrison and Hill 2015a; 2015b; Harrison et al. 2020b). Levels of women's entrepreneurship in the region have consistently been significantly below the UK national average and the gap has only closed somewhat during the recession (Figure 1). Furthermore, average ratios of female to male entrepreneurial activity from 2002 to 2022 have also been lower in Northern Ireland: 43% in Northern Ireland compared to 53% in the UK, although the NI/UK gap has closed in recent years (Figure 2).

Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

In response, the regional development agency has introduced initiatives to stimulate female entrepreneurial activity and wealth creation (Marlow, Carter and Shaw, 2008) to increase the critical mass and quality of start-ups by women through addressing the structural and cultural obstacles that traditionally limit female entrepreneurial activity (Fleck et al. 2011; Conlon and Stennett 2015; Harrison et al. 2020b). InvestNI, the regional development agency, is fundamentally committed to belief in the efficacy of women's entrepreneurship: they have 'a very positive view of entrepreneurship as a career choice … [and]… increasing the level of entrepreneurial activity among women will make a huge contribution to the diversity and success of the local economy[2]'. In so doing, they inadvertently demonstrate the 'othering' of women's entrepreneurship and the superficiality of analysis and policy development (Stewart and Logan 2023) by describing it in terms that would never be applied to their male counterparts: 'Many women work part-time while setting up a business. This gives them the chance to develop their business idea while reducing the financial risk that may be involved. … Others work flexible hours in their new business to allow them to look after a home or fulfil other commitments while getting the business off the ground … Setting up a business is an exciting career option that is flexible and open to anyone. So, whether you are currently working, are taking a career break or are just starting out, you can find help to make your business idea a reality'.

One specific initiative, the focus for our analysis, was the introduction of subsidized, formal women-only business networks which were established to compensate for the absence of informal networks and thus offer nascent and more experienced female entrepreneurs' access to relevant knowledge, expertise, support and role models. In a direct embodiment of the 'confidence culture' (Orgad and Gill 2022), InvestNI advise their prospective women entrepreneurs that 'If you feel nervous about setting up a business, that's normal for everyone - don't let that put you off. A good way to build your confidence is to speak to others who have set up a business and find out what the experience is really like'. They continue: 'If you are a woman considering setting up a business, you will boost your chances of success by accessing the right networks and mentors. These are women who can share their experience of business with you and people who understand the needs of female entrepreneurs. … Women's business networks are a good way to build relationships. They offer a forum for discussion, sharing experiences, peer mentoring and practical and emotional support. Just knowing someone else

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[2] All quotations in this paragraph and the next are taken from the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website, a free service offered by Invest Northern Ireland, which is the official online channel for business advice and guidance in Northern Ireland.

is facing the same challenges as you, makes it easier to keep going. … Networking is a highly effective way to build up a business. It offers a potential market for your goods or services and can be an invaluable way of building up a client base and track record. … [Networks] … are aimed at helping women develop both personally and professionally, make connections and ultimately grow their business'.

Given this policy background, we investigate women entrepreneurs' lived experience of membership of formal business networks, as a route to accumulate capital, develop understanding of the field and gain insights into the rules of the game. However, research has consistently demonstrated the gendered nature of networking and networks (Foss 2010; Neergaard et al. 2005; Renzulli et al. 2000), with women tending to use networks for social support while men are more instrumental in promoting their careers (Ibarra 1992; McAdam et al. 2019). Given these differences, the creation of formally established networks for women entrepreneurs represents an attempt by policymakers to create for them the support men enjoy through their informal same-sex groups and to provide them with appropriate entrepreneurial knowledge, tools and skills and capabilities. (Gavara and Zarco 2015; Fritsch 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis
Our approach to sampling was purposive (Neergaard 2007; Gartner and Birley 2002; Pratt 2009) and theoretical in having the characteristics that fitted our investigation (McKeever et al. 2015). While we recognize that women who join formal entrepreneurship networks may have already perceived some bias towards them and therefore, may not be typical of the wider population of female entrepreneurs, nevertheless our interest in understanding the impact and effectiveness of such networks requires a focus on their members. Therefore, we make no universalist claims for the applicability of our research findings for women entrepreneurs in general, nor do we address the efficacy of informal vis-a-vis formal networking.

We contacted and interviewed the managers/coordinators of all 11 identifiable formal business networks in the economic field, six of which were women-only networks established as part of the regional entrepreneurship strategy. Each manager facilitated access to their members, who were invited to participate in interviews with a member of the research team. We secured the participation of 17 women entrepreneurs, drawn from five networks, three women-only and two mixed-gender. The women-only networks are relatively small, have nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs. The mixed-gender networks are longer established and larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-time, dedicated staff (Table 1). Data were collected from nascent entrepreneurs whose businesses were aged less than 3 years (n = 8) (Aldrich et al. 1987), and more experienced individuals with businesses aged three years or more (n = 9) (Tables 2 and 3). We chose to use these two categories to explore the extent to which women's experience of participation of formal networks changes with the maturity of their business and their experience. This allows us to develop a more nuanced insight into the role of doxa (and its interrelations with habitus, field, and capital) in accounting for women's entrepreneurial behavior and actions.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Following Talmy (2010a; 2010b) and Liuberté and Feuls (2022) we identify two perspectives on interviewing. The first is to see the interview as a research instrument and tool for collecting information from research participants, in the form of facts, attitudes and other cognitive representations, the analysis of which allows the data to 'speak for themselves' as a reflection

of reality. The second perspective, by contrast, sees the interview as a social practice which is not a free-standing technique but a participatory encounter that invokes 'the interactional, multimodal, narrative and indirect elements and contexts that are brought into action' (Liuberté and Feuls 2022, 261) in the reflective co-creation of knowledge. From this perspective, the collection of personal interview narratives, following Bourdieu (1999), allows access to understandings that go beyond the doxa, and treats interviewees as 'practical analysts' situated at points of contradiction in structures who in order to 'survive' develop a form of self-analysis which can give them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp and to the objective structures expressed by and in these contradictions (Bourdieu 1999, 511). These narratives are not, of course, unproblematic (Reed-Danahay 2005, 130-131; Goodman 2003): even the best-informed informant 'produces a discourse which compounds two opposing systems of lacunae. Insofar as it is a discourse of familiarity, it leaves unsaid all that goes without saying … Insofar as it is an outsider-oriented discourse it tends to exclude all direct reference to particular cases … [we] … so often forget the distance between learned reconstruction of the native world and the native experience of the world, an experience which finds expression only in the silences, ellipses, and lacunae of the language of familiarity' (Bourdieu 1977, 18).

Insert Table 2 about here.

Insert Table 3 about here.

We conducted semi-structured interviews of on average one and a-half-hours at the network venues. Two members of the research team recorded the interviews that were transcribed verbatim and took field notes[3]. In total, we generated 1898 minutes of interview recordings representing 70, 264 words of transcript over 109 single-spaced pages. The resulting narratives, using pseudonyms, were treated as archetypal sense-making tools to reveal how our participants think and act as well as providing detailed insight into their worldview (Czarniawska 2004). Language through narrative provides a mechanism for social actors to make sense of their world and identifies the taken-for-granted assumptions that inform and limit their entrepreneurial thinking (Holt and Macpherson 2010; Down and Reveley 2009; Watson 2009). Throughout we were careful to ensure that we sought understanding and explanation of the women's networking behaviors, as far as possible to see the world from their point of view. Accordingly, we avoided both an unwarranted form of objectivism and a weak constructivism-based form of relativism as we sought in Bourdieu's phrase, the 'democratization of the hermeneutic' (Grenfell and Lebaron 2014). Following the procedures set out in Leitch et al. (2010) and Gioia et al. (2012), we sought to ensure the trustworthiness of our data in two ways. First, we ensured the accuracy of our interpretations via follow-up interviews six months after the initial interviews, each lasting 40min with our participants (n=28) (Morse 1991); and second, as demonstrated below we enable other researchers to determine the methodological veracity of our study by providing a traceable chain of evidence (Pratt 2009).

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[3] Field notes detailed our observations such as non-verbal cues and observations about the participants' demeanour, body language, and emotional expressions. Researchers' reflections and thoughts about the interview and any emotions or reactions expressed by the participants and how these may relate to the research topic were also noted.

The transcripts provided a rich source of data in which understanding of the entrepreneurial environment (the field), the requirement to learn and play the rules of the game, the women's own interpretation of these and their acquisition and conversion of capital, were evident. We adopted a reflexive critical methodology (Stead and Hamilton 2016; Vincent and Pagan 2019) that specifically challenges the normative and focuses on the context in which the micro-practices and relational dynamics of everyday life are embedded (Alvesson and Deetz 2001), foregrounding the relationship between those who are dominant and those who are not (Cálas et al. 2009). We conducted two cycles of analysis and employed four categories (field, capital, habitus and doxa) to assist us. During each cycle we read and re-read the narratives closely for examples of the different ways in which the women understood the field's rules and their impact on their entrepreneurial practice (Gioia et al. 2013; Gioia 2020).

In the first cycle we ascertained the interpretive potential of the narratives, providing a broad overview of how women negotiated their way around the field, how they perceived it and the strategies they adopted to play the game and acquire capital. We began by identifying statements regarding our participants' views of the world and drew on common statements to produce provisional categories and first order codes, comprising phrases, terms or descriptions used by the participants. After codes were named and categories were constructed, we reviewed the data to see which, if any fitted each category. Sometimes the revisited data did not fit with a constructed category, resulting in the either the abandonment or revision of a category. This cycle also involved the integration of first order codes and the creation of theoretical categories, thus signifying the transition from open to axial coding (Locke 2001). This was a recursive rather than a linear process as we moved iteratively between the first order categories and the emerging patterns in our data until adequate conceptual themes emerged (Eisenhardt 1989).

Once these theoretical categories had been generated, the second cycle of analysis involved a more critical interpretation of the findings as we examined the narratives for evidence of the gendering of Bourdieu's embodied theory of practice. Thus, we used "theory" to interpret, as it were, the social world of the 'woman entrepreneur' and treat theory as a perspective, a 'point of understanding to sort out the buzzing confusions and complexities of the social world' (Spicer 2008, 47). As such, the moment of doing theory becomes not one of establishing causal relations to predict behaviours and outcomes, but one of trying to generate a meaningful understanding of the entrepreneur's world. It is, in other words, an effort to understand and recover their patterns of meaning and interpretation of actions, to root out the practical knowledge of the actors as they go through the social world. The outcome is that by 'grounding knowledge in people's experiences and emotions and, simultaneously, connecting these with new ideas about what is happening, a new sense of what is 'real' is constructed' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, 43). We then organised the resultant theoretical categories into aggregate theoretical dimensions (Corley and Gioia 2004; Maitlis and Lawrence 2007). This illuminated incidents where gender was produced and re-produced within the women's reflections, thus challenging the apparently gender-neutral nature of Bourdieu's theory of embodied practice. Our final Data Structure Table is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 about here

This reflexive critical approach allowed us to obtain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the impact of gendered relations on women entrepreneurs' experiences resulting in the

development of a gender aware Bourdieusian perspective on field, doxa, illusio, habitus and capital, which we now discuss.

Findings: Woman's Entrepreneurship as a Contested Space
Our emergent framework comprises three dimensions of women's experience of the field of entrepreneurship. First, we demonstrate how the entrepreneurship field is differentiated by gender, such that habitus is formed in the midst of and structured by differential relations of power and unequal distribution of capitals. Second, we identify the importance of gender habitus, where dispositions are gendered, inherited and manifest in an embodied way of being which is shaped by interaction with the field. Third, we uncover the important role of *doxa* and *illusio*, as the participants' commitment to and belief in the rules of the game. As we will show below, this framework provides a valuable means of demonstrating the manner in which gender influences women's participation in entrepreneurial activity.

Field differentiated by gender.
In the everyday practice of engaging with entrepreneurship, there was unquestioned acceptance that men dominated the key field positions: "*entrepreneurship is still a man's world*" (Mary) while for Patricia it "is *very much a man's environment ... you have to break into that and as a woman it's very much pushing your way through*". These women accepted the masculinity of entrepreneurship, their role in it and even demonstrated an eagerness to know the rules of engagement (McAdam et al. 2019; Harrison et al. 2020b). However, it was evident that nascent entrepreneurs joined the women-only networks to counteract this masculinity, to improve their social capital by engaging with other likeminded women and to reduce the gender or entrepreneurial isolation associated with business ownership: "*I think when you are in business on your own it is reassuring to talk to other people…because you do get a bit isolated* (Cathy), while Angela noted that you get "*A lot of emotional support….especially if you are a sole trader that you are out mingling with other people*". This is consistent with the concept of gender capital as embodied cultural capital in feminist readings of Bourdieu (McCall 1992; Lovell 2000; Reay 2004; Skeggs 1997; 2004). In other words, gender capital may empower women and provide them with a sense of agency to develop and sustain their careers (Huppatz 2009) However, there is little evidence in the lived experience of our nascent women entrepreneurs to suggest that this gender capital has currency elsewhere in the entrepreneurship field.

This is reinforced in the experience of more established women entrepreneurs, for whom the motivation for joining mixed networks appeared to be the opportunity to undergo a social process of cultural alignment into the field by which to emulate certain behaviours of knowledgeable field players in the entrepreneurship arena in the hope of attaining credibility. As Maureen observed it is essential to "*get a leg up*" as "*on your own you can only go so far before hitting another wall*", while for Hilary, "*it was imperative to join XXX, it was not a question of do I like them, it needs to be done because an awful lot of business is about credibility*". While gender capital has the potential to disrupt the field, in this case entrepreneurship, by helping women draw on their feminine dispositions to negotiate and navigate its boundaries as capital-wielding subjects (Ross-Smith and Huppatz 2010), these boundaries have been established by, and the field continues to be dominated by, men, and these outcomes do not challenge the masculinist power regimes that dominate the field (Skeggs 1997).

Once in the field, the women referred to the struggles for positions, for instance, observing in mixed-gender networks how men were "jockeying for position" in the field's hierarchy. Karen,

(a nascent entrepreneur and member of a mixed network) noted that she "… *hadn't realized that there would be so much jockeying for position –it has been a real wakeup call*". Despite acceptance that the key positions were held and would always be held by men, it was still deemed important to know who occupied particular positions: "*You know who's the head, who's in the committee, who's the proactive people - you are very much aware of them*" (Patricia). "*Before joining XXX I did some mapping – to get a sense of who is out there and what they are about….*" (Joanne). Based on the lived experience of both nascent and established women entrepreneurs there is a clear recognition of the extent to which the field is differentiated by gender. This qualifies and constrains the extent to which gender capital, as theorised in feminist appropriations of Bourdieu, can actually transform women's positioning within the field (Matos 2018). In other words, our evidence suggests that women do not have access to enough economic, political, social and symbolic capital to force a redefinition of the requirements of the field (Corsun and Costen 2001): the outcomes of wielding (feminine or female) gender capital are not constitutive of transformation (as would be evidenced in overturning the power relations of the field) but merely tweak at the edges in ways that are tactical rather than strategic (Ross-Smith and Huppatz 2010).

Gender Habitus
When entering a field, an individual has their habitus, the embodied "feel" for the social situation, which facilitates the successful navigation of social environments (Bourdieu, 1990; 1994). Due to the persistent gender bias in entrepreneurship discourse women entrepreneurs, unless they acknowledge or subscribe to normative masculine standards, will continue to be viewed as lacking or as incomplete men (Ahl 2004; 2006; Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018). One of the ramifications of this, is that women, may not have an apt feel for the game: "*Women just don't know how to play the game right*" (Hilary), while Fiona remarked "*it is still a man's world in business but at least if you are a business owner there is no glass ceiling because you are your own boss but now I've changed my mind slightly because in the network you realize you're up against other issues*". In other words, for some of our respondents there was a recognition that the position of social actors in the field resulted from the capital they had accrued. Capital accrual and capital accrual strategies determine one's position, so those with more abundant capital had more dominant positions within the hierarchical structure of the field.

Accordingly, obtaining this feel for the field in order to be deemed credible players, and accruing the capital necessary to support this, is particularly challenging for women. Our respondents recognised this challenge and tried to address it through formal network membership; specifically highlighting the importance of joining a mixed-gender network. For example, Joanne observed that "*It (a women-only network) can be very limited, in that there are very few people that can help you get to the next level. So that's where you have to go into the mixed bag of affairs – the male and the female*!" For Elaine, the benefits of a mixed-gender network was through the mentoring it afforded as it provided insights into masculine taken-for-granted norms: "*the mentoring in XXX is absolutely brilliant, I get to think like a man*". In deliberately seeking out opportunities to assimilate into the field and to gain insights into its modus operandi, women shape their habitus and in turn their subsequent entrepreneurial actions and behaviours as entrepreneurs (Reay 2004). In other words, the nascent entrepreneurs were more naïve in their motivations for joining networks. By looking for opportunities to socialize, to reduce isolation and to be part of something they were potentially enhancing their social capital only, which could detrimentally impact their field position. In other words, there was a lack of strategic hierarchical positioning, both internally within networks and externally between them.

By contrast, the established women entrepreneurs, with their more highly developed and attuned habitus, were conscious of the structuring of the field and employed their own capital accumulating strategies in an attempt to increase their position in it. "*I joined XXX as I knew it would have the movers and shakers*" (Mary) resulting in the mixed-gender networks "*being very driven and a bit pressurized*" (Joanne). In contrast, the nascent entrepreneurs, with a less developed sense of habitus, were not as aware of the field's hierarchal positioning and thus less likely to engage in capital accumulating strategies to aid their field positions. Instead, they saw networks, including those which were mixed, as a way to reduce isolation and increase socialization: "*I think when you are in business on your own it is reassuring to talk to other people…because you do get a bit isolated*" (Gillian), while Susan observed, "*It's just a relief to talk to other women. The women only thing, I suppose it like being part of a sisterhood type of thing*". Despite the benefits identified in terms of reducing isolation there was concern that women-only networks were perceived as *"a talking shop for women"* (Ann) or for Cathy, "*The women-only thing, I suppose it like being part of a sisterhood type of thing*". In addition, they were considered inferior to the mixed-gender networks, "*I know lady friends of mine and men refer to it (women-only network) as 'have you got your women's meeting tonight?'* (Louise) or as Helen remarked, "*The women's network, it sounds a bit WI (Women's Institute) doesn't it…?*". Membership of a mixed-gender network, on the other hand, appeared to facilitate the accrual of symbolic capital, as summed up by Hilary "*It's part of my business and needs to be done because an awful lot of my business is about credibility… what I find with XXX (mixed group) is that they are very helpful in building a presence for you*". Network membership can therefore result in different accumulations of symbolic capital, which in turn can produce or reproduce inequality within the field.

Doxa, Illusio and Symbolic Violence
The discussion of gender capital and habitus, as evidenced by the lived experience of our respondents, goes some way to account for their position in the field. A deeper understanding comes from consideration of how these women develop a sense of the game. This is an important factor for Bourdieu and network membership endows women entrepreneurs with a better feel for it. However, given that entrepreneurship as a social field of practice is suffused with masculinity that defines and limits the underpinning discourse, it remains pertinent to ask, "How do some women manage to develop a good feel for games from which they are excluded by virtue of their sex?" (Lovell 2000, 14). Part of the answer can be found in a more detailed consideration of role played by doxa, the process through which socially and culturally constituted ways of perceiving, evaluating and behaving become accepted as unquestioned, self-evident and taken for granted (Throop and Murphy 2002, 189). Regardless of their self-perceived position in the field, the women in mixed-gender networks seem to share an acceptance of it, their role in it and the rules of engagement, which served to privilege the male experience. This was reinforced by the recognition, "*they [men] have their own language and us women need to be able to speak it*" (Patricia). Indeed, to be deemed credible the women highlighted the importance of conforming to the stereotypical image of the entrepreneur (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009); "*either your face fits or it doesn't*" (Nuala).

Doxa tends to privilege the dominant players by taking their position of dominance as self-evident and universally favourable (Duggin and Pudsey 2006; Deer 2014). Our respondents were aware of this, for as Mary commented "*you are not appointed, you're anointed by the powers that be",* while Maureen highlighted*,* "*it (entrepreneurship) is predominately controlled by men*". This is not confined to acknowledging actors' positions in the field's hierarchy but is reinforced by the decisions made, even apparently minor ones such as where

to hold a networking event. For example, Nuala noted, the "*very fact that meetings are in the XXXX [former Gentlemen's] Club, puts a particular spin on it*". In fact, holding meetings in a venue, which has been the home of a long-established, members-only private club, originally set up by and for professional and businessmen, subjects women to symbolic violence, the recognized legitimation of power, influence, prestige and honour.

The importance of gaining knowledge and understanding of the rules of the game was apparent among the more established entrepreneurs, who were strategic in identifying the key players in the field. "*It's a massive game, which you have to learn the rules. A mixed group that is where you learn rules of the game*" (Patricia). Based on this, actors can then make a number of choices to achieve their objectives. In this case, it appeared that the women choose to imitate practices they observed and follow the field rules, instead of violating them or inventing new practices. Even though Karen described the men in senior positions in the mixed-gender networks pejoratively, as 'dinosaurs', she acknowledged their expertise: "*There are dinosaurs (men) …and yet the dinosaurs have a lot to offer in experience …if only they would open up and offer that experience… I think it's a huge opportunity*". Gaining insights from such men can help women increase their own field positions: "*Because a man is taken more seriously and it depends a little bit on the powers that be, whether you are given the same credibility or not* (Denise). As such, mixed-gender networks offer the space not only to facilitate enculturation into the field where women can learn the culture, values and rules of the game in addition to the identities of those individuals and groups considered the dominant players.

Discussion

Entrepreneurship as a Gendered Field
The starting point for our analysis has been the recognition of the gendering of entrepreneurship and the underrepresentation of women as credible entrepreneurs, partly due to their lack of understanding of entrepreneurial norms and practices. We have shown that the marginal positions women occupy in informal social networks compromises their relative lack of perceived legitimacy as entrepreneurs and has stimulated the formation of women-only entrepreneurial networks. Our findings confirm the central role of the entrepreneur in creating, maintaining and developing the field. Many of our respondents understood that this required the ability to gain a thorough understanding of the rules of the game (Carter and Spence 2014; Harrison et al. 2020b), which represents the legitimation of entrepreneurs and their participation in the field: as players they know the right action to take in any given situation.

In order to explore the implications of this, we have employed Bourdieu's theory of embodied practice to provide insights about how women maneuvered in the field according to its doxa and their habitus in their pursuit of capital accumulation. Specifically, we have followed feminist applications of Bourdieu which see habitus as core, and gendered habitus as relationally constituted and socially differentiated from the opposite gender. Habitus, therefore, assumes an innate complacency that shapes gender expectations, and hence one's legitimated position in the field, according to concrete indices of the accessible and inaccessible, of what it is and is not for us (Bourdieu 2001). As such, habitus must always be seen in context and in the light of institutions, history and social order. For Krais (2006) the gender order is entrenched as masculine domination is legitimated. However, there is scope for reflexivity in that one can change one's illusio and define and improve our position (Grenfell 2014b), as we think about and act in the world, interpret it and attempt to order it via classifications, myths, ideologies (that is, our symbolic orders) and storytelling. These are linked to our social practice

and can potentially dislodge doxic attitudes and encourage social change (Krais 2006, 131). Illusio reflects the way in which field conditions make for the emergence of particular interests. However, but individual social practice is never determined according to specific rules but, as our participants recognize, is endlessly and variously negotiated according to personal circumstances: it is, in other words, represented and evidenced in regularities and trends and not in rules.

On the basis of our findings, this has four implications for the contribution our analysis makes to entrepreneurship: for our understanding of the interrelationships between habitus, doxa and field; for the development of the Bourdieusian concept of gender capital as part of the habitus; for our understanding of the gendered doxic order as a system of presuppositions that shape actions in social fields (Benson and Neveu 2005), which are shared by the dominated and the dominant as hegemonic images of binary opposites, which in turn inform the taken-for-granted stereotypes of how women and men perceive themselves and are perceived (Hüppatz 2014) and for our understanding of the basis for sustainable and impactful policy intervention to overcome the structural barriers to women's participation in entrepreneurship. In this discussion, it must be remembered that there is no simple homogeneity here: women's experiences are contradictory and heterogeneous, and in practice there are exemplars of 'subordination to domination,' examples of exerting agency and examples of conflict. On the basis of our analysis, we demonstrate that formal women-only networks, established as part of an economic development strategy, actually perpetuate and reproduce the embedded masculinity of the entrepreneurship domain.

Bourdieusian Analysis in Entrepreneurship
Our analysis differs from other entrepreneurial appropriations of Bourdieu to date in specifying the relationship between field, doxa and habitus instead of that between habitus, capital and field. The challenge for the women in our sample was three-fold. First, for them the established order is reproduced and reinforced so that the "socially arbitrary nature of power relations (e.g., classifications, values, categories, etc.)", which initially produced the doxa continue to be misrecognized (Deer 2014, 116). Second, as the comments of our participants, in both women-only and mixed-gender networks make clear, their justification of this established order informs and conditions their internalized sense of limits, their sense of reality and their aspirations. Third, the taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute doxa are powerful and appear to be the field's foundation stone, in that they determine the stability of the objective structures as they are produced and reproduced through the women's practices and perceptions. In essence, the presuppositions embedded in the doxa guide the appropriate feel for the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Our findings suggest that even interventions, such as the creation of women-only entrepreneurial networks, aimed at overcoming the masculine bias endemic in advanced capitalist systems, appear to do little to address it.

From a Bourdieusian perspective this is not surprising. He argues, for example, that the greater its autonomy and distinctiveness the more the field is produced by and produces agents who master and possess an area of specific competence (say, entrepreneurship). The more the field functions in accordance with the interests inherent in the type of activity that characterises it, the greater the separation from the laity (Bourdieu 2000) and the more specific become the capital, the competences and the 'sense of the game'. This closure is an index of the autonomy of the field. … As the field closes in on itself, the practical mastery of the specific heritage of its history, objectified and celebrated in past works by the guardians of legitimate knowledge, is also autonomized and increasingly constitutes a minimum entry tariff that every new entrant must pay. The autonomization of a domain of activity generates the doxa, an illusio that forms

the prereflexive belief of the agents of the field, i.e., a set of presuppositions that implies adherence to a domain of activity and implicitly defines the conditions of membership (Hilgers and Mangez 2014). In so doing, the barriers to entry to the field (faced, for example by women seeking to become entrepreneurs) become higher, and whatever the combatants on the ground may battle over, no one questions whether the battles in question are meaningful. The considerable investments in the game guarantee its continued existence. Illusio is thus never questioned (Heidegren and Lundberg 2010).

Gender Capital in Entrepreneurship

As our analysis demonstrates, the identification of gender capital specifically has important implications for women's networking. In general, women have less social capital than men and face problems in accumulating it, not least because of credibility issues in networks that prevent them from playing the game (Eagly and Carli 2007; Pagli and Moore 2004; Burt 1998). Specifically, our research suggests that women who join women-only networks do so in an attempt to counteract this masculinity, for example, by talking to other women and reducing isolation. However, women joining mixed networks did so because these networks were considered to offer more opportunities to be more strategic and competitive. In Bourdieu's terms, these women acknowledged the field dynamics and referred to men as "jockeying for position". Nevertheless, they still became members in order to "think like men", to increase their field positions and thus credibility. Indeed, the respondents were very aware of who the key players in the field were and were also well aware that the rules were normative, masculine and traditional. Even though the women wanted to learn the rules they never challenged or questioned the taken-for-granted assumptions on which they were based. Thus, entry into mixed networks specifically was seen as a way to learn the rules of the game from the more established players in the field. Our evidence suggests that women imitate practices they see in the networks, especially in the mixed-gender networks, which allows them to follow the field's rules closely in order for them to be what they deem to be successful. The extent to which this is likely to be successful is moot, on the basis of the Bourdieusian analysis above. Indeed, the asymmetrical value of femininity and masculinity in entrepreneurship results from the reproduction of two different forms of capital grounded in global neoliberalisation processes (Marttila 2013) and a wider cultural grammar of the inferior status of women and femininity: men's investment strategies in assertive masculinity which sets the rules of the game in the field is itself a form of gender capital that allows them to negotiate their status in entrepreneurship and in society at large (Matos 2018).

Doxa and the Perpetuation of Masculinist Entrepreneurship

For Bourdieu, as we have shown above, it is through illusio that players bring their habitus to the field and engage with the practices that constitute it. The stakes that inspire this engagement are the objects of value in the field, including values and beliefs, and illusio represents the more conscious counterpart of the tacit and unquestionable doxa of a field. That said, however, illusio is not always wholeheartedly invested by all players, and it is important to recognize the potential weakness of illusio for those (such as many of our women entrepreneurs) who sense they are somehow out of kilter with the objects of value that are at stake within the field (Colley and Frederique 2015). This suggests that future analyses of the field of entrepreneurship and its mechanisms and conditions could usefully go beyond existing discussions of *illusio* (Meliou and Ozbiglin 2023) to examine different types of illusio and their implications (Colley and Frederique 2015): this would differentiate congruent illusio (buying into the 'official' stakes of the field); weak illusio (doing things their own way); and conflict illusio (power games arising from conflict with established players). Such research could also usefully examine the

implications of the disappearing grounds for illusio as shifts in values arise from 'cross-field effects' (Rawolle 2005) from, for example, shifts in the global economy, politics and the media.

What our analysis has demonstrated is that, for women entrepreneurs, negotiating access to, acceptance in and legitimation through the field of entrepreneurship is in many respects an illustration of what Bourdieu (1998) has referred to as toxic illusio, the allure of a game that draws participants in whilst at the same time preventing them from developing a healthy distance and critical perspective about the consequences of the game for its various stakeholders and participants. There is no such thing, in other words, as a disinterested act. Across the life course socio-psychological transformation occurs through a whole series of imperceptible transactions at the borders between the tacit (projection, identification, compromise, sublimation) and the conscious. Because of affinities and disaffinities social actors gravitate to social locales which most share the values and interests of their own social provenance, views and practices – it is not so much that individuals occupy specific social fields, but they are occupied by them.

For Bourdieu, social actors are preoccupied by dispositions which orientate thoughts, actions and choices – illusio is to see ends without posing them; a future which is quasi-present because it acts there; a game which is so good that it forgets that it is a game, embedded in a totality – the dominant gender order (Connell 1987) – which is not reducible to the field. Social agents, both female and male, draw on this totality for resources to pursue their own projects of value, the realisation of which requires a point of comparison or 'imagined audience' (Graeber 2001, 87). In the case of entrepreneurial networks, this audience – the gender regime consistent with a dominant gender order – acts as an 'unequal system of value that both enables (men) and constrains (women), thereby conferring power to one … while restricting the freedom of another' (Matos 2018, 11). Stated aims and objectives are therefore never as they appear but are instead the epiphenomena of interest. Such interest is doxic in that it corresponds (or not) to a particular orthodoxy and is expressed through habitus because of the immanent structure that constitutes it in ontological relationship with field surroundings. Life trajectory is never only a conscious plan but the response to what life throws up – *illusio* is knowledge born from within the field – 'it is in my skin. I am caught: I did not choose that game I play; at the same time, I am not the subject of my actions. ….. I do not have to act to dominate or subjugate another. It is sufficient for me to express the interests of my social provenance … in order for symbolic violence to occur, because they will privilege one view of the world over another and I have no choice but to represent my own' (Grenfell 2014b, 164).

From Analysis to Policy
Recent commentators on the design and impact of women's entrepreneurship policies have reopened 'the debate on mainstream versus gender-segregated policies' (Arshed et al. 2019: 2), finding support for both positions in both the rhetoric of ecosystem stakeholders and in the analysis of specific interventions (Avnimelech and Rechter 2023), without coming to an unequivocal conclusion on the most effective basis for policy development. For Calas et al 1999) and Ahl (2006), for example, mainstreaming has its roots in the liberal feminist argument that women and men are essentially similar and equally able, and observed differences in entrepreneurial activities therefore reflect background conditions such as discrimination, gendered socialization and unequal access to resources. Gender-segregated policies, on the other hand are predicated on the argument that there are inherent differences between women and men that are not fully explained by external factors and require different policies in terms of their design, focus and delivery.

In this paper, we throw additional light on this debate through a comprehensive application of a feminist reading of Bourdieu's theory of practice, to suggest that neither the mainstreaming nor gender-segregation arguments provide a basis for robust and effective women's entrepreneurship policies (McAdam et al. 2019; Ozkazanc-Pan and Muntean 2022), leading to the continued subordination or othering of women in the ones case and to ghettoization or pink-washing on the other (Orser 2022; Harrison et al. 2020a; 2020b). It is without doubt that, notwithstanding the plethora of policy initiatives launched over several decades, severe imbalances in gender representation in the field of entrepreneurial activity have persisted over the long term (Foss et al. 2019; Ahl et al. 2023). These imbalances are deep rooted:

> At the root of under-participation in entrepreneurship and many other fields is a continuous process of role stereotyping within our society. Our society has a degree of sexism embedded within it, and these prejudices are transferred from generation to generation … [and] … influence attitudes towards suitability for entrepreneurship amongst stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Where an ecosystem is populated predominantly by one demographic it follows that bias will exist both unconsciously and consciously…. We must move away from a position of assuming that under-participation is the fault of the under-represented, towards the reality that under-participation is the fault of society (Stewart and Logan 2023, 18).

While valuable as a diagnostic rubric, however, it is at this point that one weakness of Bourdieu's theory of practice becomes evident: his analysis of the 'production and reproduction of social life lacks a convincing account of social change' (Mottier 2002, 353). Although Bourdieu does emphasise the processual nature of the reproduction of structures, it is not clear how these are produced anew or transformed (Calhoun 1993), and this emphasis on the primacy of reproduction 'inhibits the possibility of any strong theory of social change' (Lash 1993, 203). Indeed, even in his later work, where he examines gender specifically (Bourdieu 2001), his overemphasis on the constancy of the habitus 'presents a gloomy picture of the permanence of gender inequality, but no answer to the crucial questions of how this order can be transformed or women can stop being accomplices to the symbolic domination to which they are subjected' (Mottier 2002, 354). Where, in other words, are the effective 'margins of intervention' (Braidotti 2013, 3)?

The answer to this question builds on Bourdieu's acknowledgement that society is a structure defended and reproduced by mechanisms of power, in which the 'general interest' is always really a 'dominant interest'. The question, both for the subordinated interests and for those seeking, through policy interventions, to change those structures is why do they accept their place: 'why can't they see how the rationality coheres, and what it really means for them? Why don't they get the idea? Why can't they see through the mirage of the 'general' interest and understand it for what it is?' (Massumi 2015, 85). For Bourdieu (2001) the answer lies in symbolic violence as the manifestation of power and dominance, constructing and reproducing domination. This is, however, 'a subtle, euphemized, invisible mode of dominating, a concealed form of violence – the realization of a world view or social order anchored in the habitus of the dominating as well as the dominated' (Krais 2000, 58). As such, this symbolic violence implies a certain complicity on the part of the dominated as it 'can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his [sic] habitus) to feel it' (Bourdieu 1991, 51). In other words, the oppressed – in this case women – 'must identify themselves as inferior by incorporating the prevailing order' (Krais 2000, 59), adopting the world view of the dominant and a self-image shaped by the dominant. Women, in effect, become the instruments of their own domination 'by weaving ways of feeling and action that are in consonance with the power structure of

society into the habitual fabric of everyday life, where they go on working unexamined … [and] … its structure of ideas is lived – *acted out* in the everyday, without being thought out' (Massumi 2015, 85, original emphasis). Massumi goes on to connect this 'acting out' with Bourdieu's description of the habitus as systems of durable, transposable, dispositions which integrate past experiences through a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions (Ahmed 2010, 246).

This represents a significant departure from Bourdieu's habitus as the integration of past experiences, which almost by definition rules out the possibility of change. Rather, it introduces the conceptual distinction between the perception of what we are ceasing to be (the present as a record of the past) and that which we are in the process of becoming (the present as the unfolding of the virtual/ the future) that offers the margins of intervention, the multitude of ways in which the human is currently being recomposed (Braidotti 2021).

These margins of intervention serve as an opportunity space within which reflexivity can be used to contest, to enact strategy and to capture elements of reciprocal influence (Titone 2016). They call to mind the relationships between the subjects of a community the various parts of which should be imagined as being in constant interdependence and communication. This provides opportunity in particular to develop an understanding of how the 'missing people' (Braidotti 2022, 9-10) - the sexualized, racialized and naturalized minorities as well as other marginalized groups – have had to face up to uncomfortable truths through the hardships of their life circumstances. Margins of intervention provide these groups, excluded from the dominant culture, with a head start 'in the historical process of envisaging alternative worlds as well as more just and sustainable social systems. They are, in other words, epistemologically ahead of the rest: the multiple axes of oppression, hurt, humiliation and pain contain within them the creative forces that they can generate as motors of transversal and collective transformation. As a collective praxis, not an individual psychological disposition, this is an 'overflowing anticipatory force that injects much-needed doses of hope for the future, affirmative visions of possible alternatives' (Braidotti 2022, 9). These 'missing people' (women in entrepreneurship in our context) are fueled but not saturated by negative experiences, as they struggle with learning and playing by the 'rules of the game', and they demonstrate the ability to rework them collectively as 'seeds of becoming' (Braidotti 2022, 9).

In taking margins of intervention forward as the basis of both policy making and a safe space for our respondents' practices, we advocate the adoption of the concept of 'disciplined dissent' (Titone 2016), originally developed to understand the dynamics of political and class/status relationships in medieval Europe. This identifies the conservative process involved in creating a space in which it is possible to make a critique and in which those who dissent might appropriate the cultural repertoire of those in a position of authority and in so doing decentre the exercise of power and legitimize the dissenters. Based on the insights of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Bourdieu 1989; 1986) on habitus, an emphasis central to our analysis in this paper, dissent is characterized as a process that may include adaptations and modifications of cultural models and the modification of received norms and values (Titone 2016). These modifications arise out of a significant degree of familiarity with the dominant majorities through 'negotiations' with the authorities involved, through participation (even only as listeners), through the circulation of information and the development of knowledge of the social margins that could be exploited.

However, this process of disciplined dissent is not straightforward, and depends on notions of diffused power, understood as 'a means of communication between persons, based on an

asymmetrical reciprocity between those who wield it and those that are subject to it, while at the same time implying a reciprocal recognition' (Titone 2016, 11). As with Braidotti's arguments about affirmative ethics and margins of intervention, the capacity of actors to implement measures to transform the habitus is a function of their ability 'to use the normative and cultural instruments that were to hand' and of the modalities of confrontation between those who belonged and those who did not, how the 'subordinated' might react to the 'authorities'. In taking this forward, we suggest that entrepreneurship scholars consider both the concept of disciplined dissent as developed by Titone (2016) and to Coss's (2016) extension of this, which distinguishes between disciplined emulation (acting without directly challenging the social order), disciplined participation (women, in particular, accepting norms of conduct, avoiding explicit criticism of the social order and negotiating for themselves a better position in that social order), disciplined confrontation (abandoning forms of direct challenge and seeking recognition by embracing forms of action that were politically acceptable; and disciplined submission (the use of submission and negotiation strategies to achieve desired outcomes).

This multidimensional framework of disciplined dissent takes us full circle back to the role of human agency within the structural constraints of the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the specific context within which the research is being conducted. It is from such a position that 'suggestions for *actually changing policy*, such as new legislation, gender quotas, new government purchasing rules, or changes to the welfare systems – suggestions that may add value to the entrepreneurial ecosystem' (Foss et al. 2019, 421) and arguments for policy to address the 'unrealistic belief in the market mechanism, disregard of the role of entrenched gender roles and expectations, and exclusion of men's responsibility for household work' (Ahl et al. 2023, 96) can begin to activate the virtual potential of the margins for intervention.

Conclusion
Entrepreneurship as a social field of practice is suffused with masculinity that defines and limits the underpinning discourse (Ahl 2004; 2006). To be deemed credible players, entrepreneurs must demonstrate certain values and beliefs at all levels from the macro-social down to more micro levels such as the region/ space in which entrepreneurship is practised and the institutions established to assist it, such as the creation of formally constituted business networks. This can be particularly challenging for women as they must reach into a social space that offers a poor fit given their gendered characterization (Marlow and Patton 2005; Calás et al. 2009; Essers and Benschop, 2009). Accordingly, they do not easily fit the accepted model of entrepreneurship (Essers and Benschop 2009; Díaz García and Welter 2013, MacNabb 1993). As a contradiction to the natural order (de Beauvoir 1949; Butler 1990) they are regarded as 'the other' and marginalized. As interlopers in the field female entrepreneurs must engage in a process of cultural alignment to acquire the language and principles to enable them to be recognized as credible and knowledgeable field players (Lounsboury and Glynn 2001). This is challenging, for when seeking recognition as entrepreneurial actors, female entrepreneurs must negotiate the dissonance between ascribed femininity, which performs the human female, and the masculinity inherent within entrepreneurship (Bruni et al. 2004). The degree to which women entrepreneurs are socialized into the field will be influenced by their ability to incorporate into their habitus the proper know-how that will allow them to navigate that field.

We explore how women entrepreneurs construct and re-construct their understanding of the specific economic field of entrepreneurial activity. In the economic field, conducting business is the overarching objective and access to money, and indeed other resources, is prioritized and has its own value (Vincent 2016; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). We also acknowledge

that the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of actors in particular economic fields are shaped by the wider society in which they reside. Accordingly, entrepreneurship, as is manifest in terminology such as the 'enterprise society' (Burrows 1991), entrepreneuring (Steyaert 2007), the entrepreneurial era (Audretsch and Thurik 2001) or enterprise culture is constitutive of the twenty-first century zeitgeist, to such an extent that 'we are all entrepreneurs now' (Posen 2008) in an entrepreneurialised society the members of which have become 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Rose 1996).

Within this paper, we make the following contributions: First, drawing on feminist readings of Bourdieu's theory of practice, we bring together feminist and Bourdieusian scholarship in entrepreneurship, two research perspectives hitherto addressed separately. In so doing, we extend Bourdieusian research in entrepreneurship by exploring the relationships between field, habitus, and doxa. In illuminating how formal women-only networks can perpetuate and reproduce the embedded masculinity of entrepreneurship, we develop a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered doxic order as a system of presuppositions underpinning behavior in a field. Second, by highlighting the perceptions and experiences of women entrepreneurs, we draw attention to these relationships and demonstrate the ways in which capital and access to it might be gendered. On this basis, we advance a post-Bourdieusian concept of gender capital as part of the habitus. Third, in illuminating how formal women-only networks can perpetuate and reproduce the embedded masculinity of entrepreneurship, we develop a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered doxic order as a system of presuppositions underpinning behavior in a field. Fourth, we thus question the efficacy of women only networks as a key component of women's entrepreneurship policy. Drawing on an affirmative critique as the basis for constructing new ways of living entrepreneurship (Berjani et al. 2022), we view women only networks as margins of intervention and sites of disciplined dissent, with the potential for negative outcomes in terms of ghettoization, pink ghettoes and stereotype aversion on one hand, and the creation of a safe space providing opportunity for self-development and self-efficacy on the other. However, our findings highlight that the positive outcomes of women only networks will only be realised to the extent that there are activating mechanisms back into the male dominated mainstream, especially in relation to doxa and symbolic violence.

What emerges from this analysis, therefore, is a sense of doxa as deeply embedded in a field, defining and shaping its characteristics, habitus and power structures (Deer 2014). It is beyond question and, as our analysis demonstrates, players within a field tacitly agree to it simply through acting in accord with its social convention. All participants in a field share the conviction that the stakes for which they fight are valuable and that the maintenance of the field is important. Our findings demonstrate that each actor begins their activities within the field from a different starting position based on how similarly their habitus matches that of the field and how much capital they possess. Regardless of their position within the field, however, our respondents shared a silent acceptance of it, their role in it and the rules of engagement. As they learnt more of the rules of the game, whether nascent or established, our women entrepreneurs recognized more and more clearly that if they wanted to successfully attain membership of the field of entrepreneurship, it would have to be on terms set by the masculinist definition and domination of the field. A feminist rereading of Bourdieu does not necessarily transform the life chances of women seeking to enter fields, such as entrepreneurship, traditionally dominated by men, but it does provide some of the conceptual tools for understanding the challenges and barriers they face; as such, it helps question the unquestionable reality of hegemonic masculinity.

Our findings provide evidence that these biases and responses to them are very much at play in women's entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding the resurgence of an individualistic cognition-led agenda for entrepreneurship research (Shepherd and Patzelt 2018), we believe that the implication of our findings is that there remains more research to be done on the social psychology of entrepreneurship within a Bourdieusian framework of fields, habitus and dispositions. In so doing, we recognize the limitations of the research presented here. First, it is based on the lived experiences of a particular group of women entrepreneurs in a particular context at a particular point in time. Second, it presents a cross-sectional snapshot of field, habitus and capital and does not address the dynamics of how women's position has evolved and could evolve (and how various forms of capital impacted their habitus), which will be important for the development of effective policies. Third, it takes no account of the extent to which the different markets our respondents competed in had any impact on their behaviour (in terms of, for example, requiring 'stronger' form of social capital).

Finally, our analysis of the lived experience of women entrepreneurs has wider implications for women's entrepreneurship policy more generally. This embodies a number of historical and embedded assumptions, including prioritizing growth before gender equality, belief in the male norm of entrepreneurship and the assumption of women as different, and the exclusion of family and reproductive work as part of the entrepreneur's life commitment (Ahl and Nelson 2015; OECD-GWEP 2021). These assumptions in turn are reflected and perpetuated in 'false narratives', accepted discourses that limit gender equality and become mechanisms for future policy generation (Greene and Brush 2023). Accordingly, in policy design and implementation, it is important to differentiate between an equity-based approach which helps individuals and communities access the resources they need and an equal treatment regime which provides the same resources to all, and in so doing may reproduce systemic inequities (Orser 2023). As a consequence, women's entrepreneurship policies are both isolating (treating women's entrepreneurship as a singular stand-alone issue) and individualising (predicated on a deficit model where deficit is defined with respect to some assumed (male) norm.

While these policies are increasingly widely being adopted, evidence on the impact and effectiveness of women's entrepreneurship policies is either lacking or ambivalent (Henry et al. 2023). As Ahl et al. (2023) have recently established, neoliberal reforms designed to enhance women's entrepreneurship have been associated with a shift for women from low wage paid employment to low wage entrepreneurship and have helped perpetuate traditional gender hierarchies. Furthermore, given that the gender relations arising from hegemonic masculinity require constant maintenance work (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), including maintenance work to reproduce entrenched gender inequalities (Bourdieu 2001), our analysis suggests that the lived experience of women's entrepreneurship may in fact be a form of gender relations maintenance work rather than transformative empowerment. To the extent to which women-only entrepreneurial networks are focused on equity rather than equality their potential as 'margins of intervention' will remain unexploited, and the positive implications of these will not be realised unless and until there are appropriate activating mechanisms to prevent their perpetuating and reproducing the embedded masculinity of the entrepreneurship domain.

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Table 1: Background and purpose of the networks[4] studied.

	Type of Network	Yr. of Formation	Texture	Function	Purpose
WON1	Women-Only	2002	Founded by 10 female businesswomen. Formally established 2005 (i.e., Board established – funding obtained funding obtained from local development agencies). Nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To provide women with support, information, and networking opportunities.
WON2	Women-Only	2001	Received an initial budget of £5000 from local development agency to provide increased business opportunities. Nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To support and develop women's networking capability.
WON3	Women-Only	1986	Formally established in 1996, by a group of female businesswomen and academics.	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To provide information, a forum for experience sharing, and

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[4] The networks all ran on an open access membership basis.

			Funding received from local development agencies. Nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.		training courses.
WON4	Women-Only	1988/99	Established with funding obtained from local development agencies. Nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To support women going into business via signposting and providing networking, opportunities.
WON5	Women-Only	2004	Established with funding obtained from local development agencies. Nominal membership fees and are administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To support women going into business via signposting and providing networking, opportunities.
WON6	Women-Only	2003/4	Established with funding obtained from local development agencies. Nominal membership fees and are	Established as part of the Regional Entrepreneurship Strategy.	To provide women with support, information, and networking opportunities

			administered by part-time coordinators who are also entrepreneurs.		
MN 1	Mixed	1974	Established to assess the introduction of national insurance (tax) contributions and impact on small business owners. Larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-time, dedicated staff.	To help to further the interests of small businesses in a local area.	To act as a campaigning pressure group.
MN2	Mixed	2003	Initiative of local council. Larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-time, dedicated staff.	To help to further the interests of small businesses in a local area.	To support and develop businesses, and to help reduce unemployment.
MN3	Mixed	Early 1990s	Initially geared at manufacturing industry though now has broader industrial focus. Larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-time, dedicated staff.	To help to further the interests of small businesses in a local area.	To provide a forum for industry and university stakeholders to discuss knowledge transfer, and mutual problems.
MN4	Mixed	Early 1990s	Focus on individual membership not company. Larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-	To help to further the interests of small businesses in a local area.	To act as a campaigning pressure group.

			time, dedicated staff.		
MN5	Mixed	Early 1980s	Geared at manufacturing industry.

Larger with a more diverse membership base and employ full-time, dedicated staff. | To help to further the interests of small businesses in a local area. | To facilitate sharing and best practice amongst larger orgs |

Table 2: Details of Nascent Business Owners

Respondent	Network Type	Business
Angela	Women only	Exhibition/ Conference Stand manufacturer
Cathy	Women only	Inward Investor Facilitator/ Talent Management
Denise	Mixed	Training and Consultancy – Health and Wellbeing
Elaine	Mixed	Life Coach
Fiona	Mixed	Event's Organizer
Gillian	Women only	Tea and Coffee Importer
Helen	Women only	Project Management
Karen	Mixed	Life Insurance

**Table 3: Details of Established Business Owners**

Respondent	Network Type	Business
Louise	Women only	Designer – Hospitality and Leisure Industry
Mary	Mixed	Finance
Nuala	Mixed	Event's Organizer
Patricia	Mixed	Insurance Broker
Maureen	Mixed	Virtual Office Services
Susan	Women only	Beautician (chain of shops)
Ann	Women only	Business Consultancy
Joanne	Mixed	Professional Networker/ Facilitator
Hilary	Mixed	Wholesaler

Table 4: Data Structure: Inductive Analysis and Data Coding

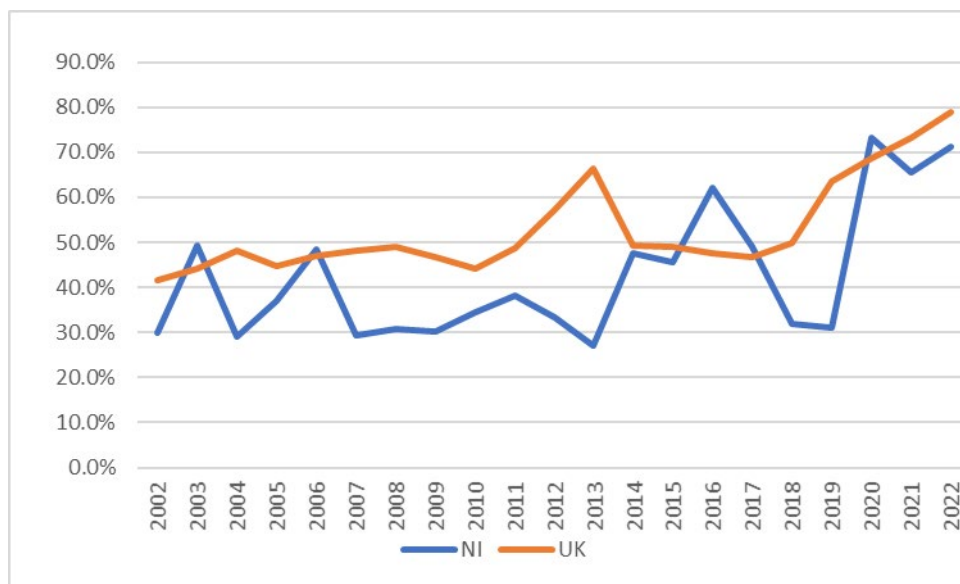| Creating Provisional Categories and first Order Codes	Theoretical Categories (2nd order themes)	Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions
Statements about entry to the field; power struggles; masculinity of the field; identifying the key movers and shakers; field structuring; eagerness to know the rules of engagement; jockeying for position.	Access to the Field Field Positions Hierarchy of the Field Cultural Alignment	*Field Differentiated by Gender*
Statements about knowing how to play the game; playing the game right; learning how to navigate the field; being mentored; increasing field positions; playing the game right.	A feel for the game Knowing how to Play the Game Capital Accumulating Strategies Symbolic Capital	*Gender Habitus*

Statements about; understanding and acceptance of field rules; abiding to the rules; recognition of dominant players; imitating male behaviours and practices; fitting in; conforming to stereotypical image of entrepreneur.	Acceptance of Rules of the Game Privileging the male experience Enculturation via Imitation Symbolic Violence	*Doxa and Symbolic Violence*

Figure 1: Total Early-stage Female Entrepreneurial Activity in Northern Ireland and the UK, 2002-2022
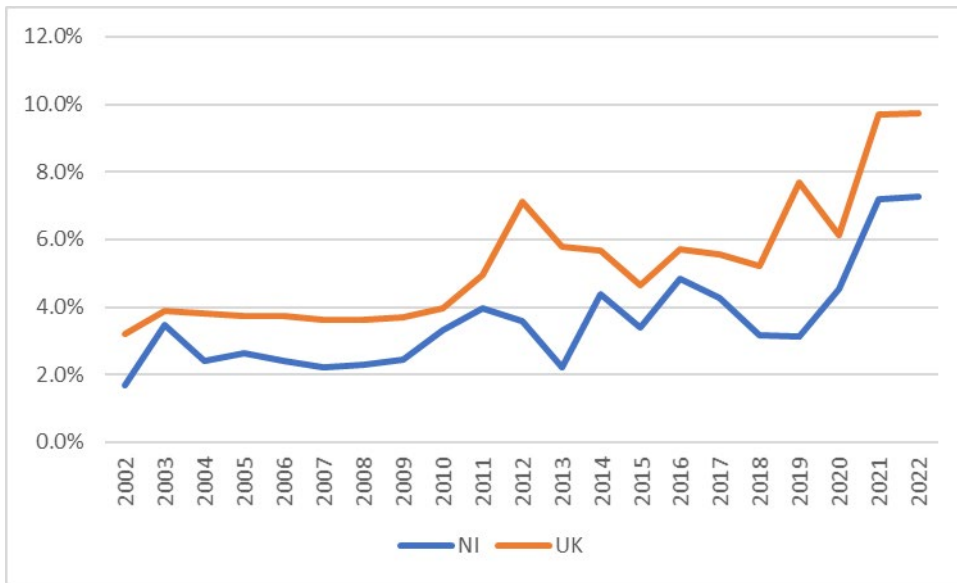
Source: GEM APS

Figure 2: Total Early-stage Female Entrepreneurial Activity as a Percentage of Male in Northern Ireland and the UK, 2002-2022

Source: GEM APS