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Title	Constructing non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity: the case of Black men doing entrepreneurship in a predominantly white context
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/53681/
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-04-2024-0139
Date	2024
Citation	Korede, Tayo (2024) Constructing non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity: the case of Black men doing entrepreneurship in a predominantly white context. International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship. ISSN 1756-6266
Creators	Korede, Tayo

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-04-2024-0139>

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**Constructing non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity:
the case of Black men doing entrepreneurship in a
predominantly white context**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship</i>
Manuscript ID	IJGE-04-2024-0139.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Non-hegemonic masculinity, entrepreneurial masculinity, transactional masculinity, IPA, Black entrepreneurs, White women

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Constructing non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity: the case of Black men doing entrepreneurship in a predominantly white context

Abstract

Purpose:

The literature on entrepreneurial masculinity has primarily focused on how hegemonic masculinity is constructed and performed in entrepreneurship. Little is known about how non-hegemonic masculinity is performed by male entrepreneurs who do not fit the dominant and traditional form of masculinity in a specific context. Focusing on a cohort of Black male entrepreneurs who practised entrepreneurship in a predominantly white context, this paper explores how non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is constructed.

Design/methodology/approach:

The study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with nine Black male entrepreneurs living and doing business in the Northeast of England.

Findings:

The study found that Black male entrepreneurs construct a distinct form of entrepreneurial masculinity by leveraging the identity of White women to construct a respectable entrepreneurial masculinity. The form of masculinity the men engaged in is theorised as *transactional masculinity*. This is enacted through relationships with White women which is seen as a symbol of respect and social acceptance, and as a 'rite of passage' in entrepreneurship. The study presents a model of entrepreneurial masculinity to explain how transactional masculinity is constructed in relation to femininity and other forms of masculinity.

Originality:

The study theorises how non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is enacted through the concept of *transactional masculinity*. It presents a model of entrepreneurial masculinity and gives voice to the experiences of male entrepreneurial actors with non-hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial masculinity, transactional masculinity, non-hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, IPA, Black African entrepreneurs, White women

Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the role of gender in entrepreneurial research and how gender norms facilitate or constrain entrepreneurship. Studies in this area have shown that entrepreneurship is gendered biased, with prevailing masculine stereotypes (Ogbor, 2000; Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018; Hechavarria and Ingram, 2016). The embedded norms of masculinity have positioned men as the normative entrepreneurial actors, while women and individuals of other genders are expected to embrace masculine attributes to be seen as 'authentic' entrepreneurs. In response, there has been a growing stream of research by critical and feminist scholars on women's entrepreneurial activity and how femininity is performed, constructed and (re)produced in entrepreneurial discourse (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Swail and Marlow, 2018; Jones *et al.*, 2019). This discussion has been extended to other gender categories such as transgender and queer. For example, Darden *et al* (2022) have explored how transgender entrepreneurs performed gender and Wang (2024) discussed queer entrepreneurship. Yet, the conventional discourse and representation of the entrepreneur sustains the prevailing masculine norms. However, there is an implicit assumption that entrepreneurial masculinity is homogenous and that all men possess the dominant configuration of masculinity. As a result, the entrepreneurial masculinity of marginalized men remains under-researched. This article attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by examining how men who lack the prevailing masculine norms in a given context construct entrepreneurial masculinity.

Masculine norms are pervasive in entrepreneurial discourse (Hamilton, 2013). The media (Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008), society (Gill, 2014), incubation hubs (Marlow and McAdam, 2012), and investors (Edelman *et al.*, 2018) have constructed a masculine notion of the entrepreneur. The type of masculinity mostly associated with this social construction of the entrepreneur is hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that describes the 'preferred and dominant style of masculinity that exists in a given space and time' (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017, p. 42). It commands unequal gender relations and promotes men's power over women and other forms of gender and subordinate masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019). This form of dominant masculinity is assumed to be the inherent form of entrepreneurial masculinity and socially constructed as a desirable entrepreneurial property for legitimacy and success. Hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is fluid and contextual and exists in varying forms and levels (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017). However, not all men in entrepreneurship possess hegemonic masculinity. There are marginalized and stigmatized male entrepreneurs who do not meet or enjoy the idealized standard of masculinity in a given space and time. Men

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with atypical or non-hegemonic characteristics may perform entrepreneurial masculinity in a way that is different from hegemonic men. Yet, little is known about how men who do not fit the dominant masculine norms nor possess normative entrepreneurial identity due to social categories and contextual factors, such as minority status and racial identity, enact masculinity in entrepreneurship.

To address this under-research and under-theorized area of entrepreneurial research; this paper explores how non-hegemonic masculinity is enacted and performed in entrepreneurship. The study focuses on a cohort of Black African immigrant male entrepreneurs who engaged in entrepreneurship in the Northeast of England - a predominantly white society where the black identity is seen as unentrepreneurial, and Black male entrepreneurs are perceived as non-hegemonic (Korede, 2019). In particular, it focuses on how this cohort of Black male entrepreneurs enact masculinity in their relationships with White women within the business context. Mostly, the existing literature on men and entrepreneurship focuses on how White men perform and construct entrepreneurial masculinity (Hytti *et al.*, 2024; Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017; Smith, 2013). The entrepreneurial masculinity of non-White men is scarce in top-tier entrepreneurship and management journals. All entrepreneurs (irrespective of gender affiliation and subjectivity) are expected to conform and reproduce the dominant form of masculinity. This is problematic as non-male entrepreneurial actors and male entrepreneurs with subordinate masculinity may experience a lack of legitimacy and credibility in enterprise (Swaile and Marlow, 2018; Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023). The exclusion of enterprising men who do not conform to 'culturally-constructed expectations which define what a credible entrepreneurial identity constitutes' (Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023, p. 1) is an important justification for this research. Against this background, the overarching research question for this study is how do non-hegemonic Black male entrepreneurs enact and perform respectable masculinity in a predominantly white entrepreneurial context? Exploring entrepreneurial masculinity among non-hegemonic men and other forms of minoritized masculinity is important, as it provides nuanced perspectives on how marginalized enterprising men create legitimacy and gives voice to how non-hegemonic masculinity unfolds in entrepreneurship. Besides, it challenges the concept of hegemonic masculinity and gives expression to alternative forms of masculinity among enterprising men.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature on entrepreneurial masculinity and presents a typology of entrepreneurial masculinity.

This is followed by the methodology and data analytical process. Next is the findings section, and lastly, the discussion and conclusion.

Literature review

Entrepreneurship and a typology of entrepreneurial masculinity

Entrepreneurship has been socially constructed as a discourse of power with masculine norms normalized as the dominant traits of the entrepreneur (Hamilton, 2013; Gill, 2014; Bruni et al., 2004). In other words, the prevailing identity of the entrepreneur is intrinsically linked to masculinity. The entrepreneur is expected to possess masculine attributes irrespective of gender affiliation to be perceived as legitimate and authentic (Swail and Marlow, 2018). The ideal entrepreneur is expected to be strong, a risk-taker, hard-working, smart, individualistic, competitive, aggressive, and confident (Prochotta et al., 2022; Nadin et al., 2020); attributes which connote masculinity and 'ostensibly designed to explain and reproduce the dominant ideology of the heroic rational man' (Ogbor, 2000, p. 616). Existing studies have shown that the masculine depiction of the entrepreneur is produced and perpetuated through media and societal stereotypes (Jernberg et al., 2020) and enacted through metaphors, artefacts, and entrepreneurial visual images (Smith, 2014). To reproduce this idealized standard of entrepreneurial identity, women and non-hegemonic men have to enact an acceptable identity and embrace identity work to manage and reconstruct aspects of their identity they consider lacking and inadequate. For example, women entrepreneurs in the nascent stage of entrepreneurial venture embraced masculine norms in pursuit of entrepreneurial legitimacy (Swail and Marlow, 2018). Intersectional Black African entrepreneurs embraced whiteness to compensate for their identity and access valuable entrepreneurial resources (Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023).

Entrepreneurial masculinity is not a monolithic construct. Different forms of entrepreneurial masculinities have been discussed in the literature. Yet, the dominant form is hegemonic masculinity. This may be due to the prevailing Western influence in entrepreneurial discourse and the legitimization of white masculinity as the idealized entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000; Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023). This does not suggest that all White men possess hegemonic masculinity - as the case of 'Walter Mitty' in Giazitzoglu and Down (2017). However, hegemonic masculinity is rooted in the construction of entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurship is portrayed as a manly pursuit (Smith, 2010). This is depicted by Giazitzoglu and Down (2017) in their study on White middle-class entrepreneurial men. They observed how the men's

performance of hegemonic masculinity in entrepreneurship is rooted in the ideals of status, winning and hierarchy.

Hegemonic masculinity is so dominant that it has made other forms and expressions of masculinities obscured. However, close examinations along the axes of social positionality, intersectionality and contextual factors have given expressions to alternative forms of entrepreneurial masculinities. For example, Hytti et al (2024) show how fatherhood and the prospect thereof, make men embrace hybrid hegemonic masculinity where the men appropriate feminine caring qualities while upholding unequal gender power and relation. Yet, the discourse of entrepreneurial masculinity remains oriented towards the construction of Western forms of masculinity, while other expressions of entrepreneurial masculinity are overlooked. See Table 1 to further understand the different depictions and typologies of entrepreneurial masculinity.

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Entrepreneurial masculinity and non-hegemonic entrepreneurs

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity derives its power and relevance from non-hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininity. In order words, there is no hegemony masculinity in gender discourse and relations without its relationship with subordinated and marginalized men and women. Connell argues that 'hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women' (Connell, 1987, p.183). Connell identified four specific forms of non-hegemonic masculinities: *complicit, subordinate, marginalized and protest masculinities* (Messerschmidt, 2019). He observed that different factors could make men lack or lose their hegemonic masculinity. Among others, factors which devalue masculinity and rob men of their hegemonic status include stigma, sexuality, class, race, disability, migration, age, as well as socioeconomic and political power (Rumens and Ozturk, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2019; Goffman, 2009). These factors continue to impact the entrepreneurial behaviour of marginalized men and influence the construction of non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity.

Although different and alternative forms of masculinities abide, they are not reflected in entrepreneurship literature. Most studies challenging the traditional masculine norms in entrepreneurship focus on **women's entrepreneurship** (Marlow and

Martinez Dy, 2018). Little is known about how male entrepreneurs who do not fit the idealized stereotype of the entrepreneur negotiate and construct entrepreneurial masculinity. The existing few studies at the intersection of non-hegemonic masculinity and entrepreneurship show that men who do not conform to prevailing masculine norms are disadvantaged and often feel compelled to conform and reproduce hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity. For example, the gay male entrepreneurs studied by Rumens and Ozturk (2019) conformed and reproduced normative masculine stereotypes in their businesses. Black male entrepreneurs studied by Giazitzoglu and Korede (2023) embraced whiteness and covered their black identity to (re)construct an acceptable entrepreneurial identity. Another study observed how ethnic minority male restaurant owners, whose masculinity was threatened during a crisis performed entrepreneurship (Korede et al., 2023).

However, there is still so much we do not know about the dynamics of non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity and how male entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial masculinity when their masculinity is threatened. To address this gap in knowledge, this research explores how non-hegemonic Black men who practised entrepreneurship in a predominantly white context enact and perform entrepreneurial masculinity.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how a cohort of Black African male entrepreneurs who live and do business in the Northeast of England (Newcastle upon Tyne, Sunderland, Durham, and Darlington) perform entrepreneurial masculinity. All the participants are first-generation immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who engaged in self-employment and small business ownership for at least three years. The Northeast of England is a predominantly white region, and ethnic minorities face systemic challenges to starting and running businesses. Consequently, entrepreneurship within the region is particularly 'white' and most ethnic minority businesses are excluded from mainstream entrepreneurship (Korede, 2021). According to the 2021 census, the Northeast of England is the least diverse region in England and Wales with only 7.0% of ethnic minority population (GOV.UK, 2022). Additionally, 1% of the population is Black, and 0.8% identified as African (BITC, 2023). Black-owned businesses in the region are few, relatively small and often struggle to survive (BITC, 2023).

In Britain, being Black is both a political and an ideological concept (Modood, 1994). Apart from Black Caribbeans, Black Africans constitute a significant portion of the Black British ethnic group (GOV.UK, 2022). Although immigrants, all participants

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identified themselves as Black British Africans and as part of the Black British community. Though all the men were educated, their lack of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is contextual. It is based on their racial, immigration and minority statuses. Their perceived non-normative entrepreneurial identity is also specific to the place and space where they performed enterprise. It is within this context that the men’s non-hegemonic masculinity is constructed.

Sampling and data collection

The men who participated in this study were selected using purposive sampling (Levy and Lemeshow, 2008). Sampling was done as part of a wider study on Black African entrepreneurship and identity construction in the North of England, conducted between 2017 and 2019. The nine men who took part in this study were part of a larger pool of participants interviewed for a previous study. The focus on this cohort of Black male entrepreneurs emerged due to their specific construction of entrepreneurial identity in relation to White women. All the men were in a romantic relationship with White women. All the men were relatively young (ages between 25 and 33), educated and either married to a White woman (n=3) or dating a White woman (n=6). Several of the men command a level of social class, either due to their family backgrounds or having previously held a professional occupational status in their home countries. Two of the men previously worked in managerial roles with top banks in their home countries, and one of the participants had extensive professional experience as a computer engineer. In the UK, some of the participants have a high level of education at different universities. Five of the men have Masters from Russell Group universities (a select group of universities in the UK with outstanding research and teaching power) in the Northeast of England. Two of the participants hold BSc degrees from different UK universities, while the remaining two received formal education in their respective home countries. Despite their professional status in their home countries and high level of education in the UK, most of the men experienced challenges in finding professional employment and worked in low-paid jobs before pursuing entrepreneurship. This is similar to the experiences of other African immigrant men observed in previous studies, who have noted the downgrading of immigrants credentials and qualifications in the host country (Datta et al. 2009; Pasura and Christou, 2018).

The men in this study were conscious about their appearance and dressed well to impress and project a professional identity as respectable entrepreneurs. Through their appearance, they aesthetically appealed and conformed to the entrepreneurial identity of white masculinity, wearing expensive clothing and jewellery, and dressing

smart to socialize with locals. Specifically, they socialized and formed relationships with White women to gain social acceptance and support for business ventures. These White women are local women whom the men established relationships with while living, studying and doing business in the area, as well as through local pubs and clubs. Initially, the men were recruited through social networks, religious centres (churches and mosques), local gyms and an entrepreneurial hub – TusPark in Newcastle, where some of the men operated their businesses. For this research, the identified men were contacted through emails and phone calls to further explore how their relationships with White women impact on their construction of entrepreneurial masculinity.

Following a semi-structured interview, the men were asked to describe their personal experiences of masculinity in entrepreneurship. The interviews explored how the construction of masculine identity influences their business practices and how their relationships with White women impact their construction of entrepreneurial masculinity. All interviews were conducted in English language and recorded. The interviews took place at locations chosen by the entrepreneurs. All interviews were conducted in 2022 and each lasted between 40 to 75 minutes. Recorded interview data was transcribed manually for each participant. The profile of the participants is summarized in Table 2, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities.

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Data analysis

A thorough analysis of the data was done using Smith's interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA originated and gained traction as an approach to phenomenological inquiry in the field of psychology (Smith, 2011). However, it has been used widely in the field of management and specifically in entrepreneurship studies (Cope, 2011; Muñoz and Cohen, 2018). **IPA aims to explore individuals' personal experiences and their subjective interpretations (Smith, 2011).** It gives voice to participants' narratives, thereby making sense of experiences grounded in participants' accounts. While IPA offers a systematic approach to data analysis, it also maintains flexibility through its hermeneutic phenomenology, allowing for a balance between interpretation and contextualization of meanings and experiences (Larkin et

al., 2006). IPA is entirely idiographic, placing emphasis on the specific rather than the general, and thus giving voice to the meanings and primary claims of research participants (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA is appropriate for this study as it aims to give voice to how Black entrepreneurs make sense of their masculinity and understand the specific construction of masculinity among non-hegemonic entrepreneurial actors. Besides, IPA is useful for 'examining topics which are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden' (Smith and Osborn, 2015, p. 41), a relevant approach for the complex and ambiguous interplay of Black male entrepreneurs constructing masculinity in an environment where norms of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity are prevalent.

The analytic process was iterative and inductive, following Smith *et al* (2009) and in line with Munoz and Cohen (2018). The analysis involved six stages assisted by QSR NVivo 12 pro software. The data analysis focused on why they engaged in relationships with White women and how these relationships influenced their entrepreneurial identity. Specifically, it explored how their relationships with White women were perceived and interpreted as components of their entrepreneurial masculinity. The first step is to become familiar with the data. During this stage, the manuscripts were read individually. The second stage involved a free textual analysis done by highlighting and colour-coding significant excerpts from the data (Smith and Osborn, 2015). After this, the data was transferred into QSR NVivo 12 pro to better manage and organise the dataset. After that, initial codes were developed around the notions of masculinity, entrepreneurial masculinity and the interplay of masculinity, entrepreneurship, and romantic relationships with White women. Next, was the re-configuration of codes and convergence of shared experiences from which the first-order themes emerged. During the fifth stage, the researcher interpreted and contextualized themes to produce second-order themes, seeking to make sense of experiences based on the participants' narratives. Finally, in line with IPA's contextualization of meaning, the aggregate theme was developed as a theoretical explanation of the concept of entrepreneurial masculinity as performed by the men. The analytic process is presented in Figure 1. The aggregate theme and the sub-themes are presented in the findings section and later discussed.

The nature of phenomenological research is not to produce the truth, but a coherent and legitimate account of what participants consider to be truthful (Mir, 2018). The goal of this study is not to produce generalisability or implicit accuracy of participants' accounts. The aim is to present a coherent argument of the situated experiences of research participants and to produce meaningful theoretical

contributions through the embodied and existential discussions grounded in participants' phenomenological voices (Cope, 2005; Smith, 2011).

Insert Figure 1 around here

Findings

Transactional masculinity

The men identified the negative connotations and representations of black masculinity and their struggles to fit established masculine norms. For instance, Emeka is an immigrant from Nigeria who came to the UK as a child and has lived in Newcastle for over 18 years. He seems acquainted with several Black African men and has good knowledge of Black entrepreneurs in the region. He said: '*Black men are associated with crime and expected to end up in prison, or as footballers and not as entrepreneurs*'. Another participant, Mensah, migrated from Ghana and has lived in the region for over ten years. He runs a recruitment company in the health and social care industry in Sunderland and married a White woman. He described how a customer dismissed him when he introduced himself as the business owner. The customer said: '*Please can I see your boss the man who owns the business*'. It was against this background that the men's construction of entrepreneurial masculinity unfolded.

A theme consistent and central to the men's construction of entrepreneurial masculinity is their relationships with White women. In their construction of entrepreneurial masculinity, the men leveraged the identity of White women to transcend their blackness and marginalized masculinity. In his explanation, Emeka stated that such a relationship reduces the perception of his business as a black business.

Doing business with a Black face is limiting, and people don't trust you ... If you want to be an entrepreneur you need to look for ways to make the business work. For me, my girlfriend, a White woman, helps to ensure the business is not perceived as a black business.

The men used their romantic relationships with White women to reconstruct their non-normative entrepreneurial identity and enact a respectable form of entrepreneurial masculinity. The men gave examples of how romantic associations with White women have allowed their businesses to develop and grow. For example, they identified that their relationships with White women have allowed them access to important entrepreneurial resources and opportunities, such as getting business

support from local councils, attracting more mainstream White customers and accessing vital entrepreneurial networks. Usman, an immigrant from Nigeria, owns a photography and design business in Durham. He migrated to the UK for education and has a Master's degree in Creative Arts. Like other participants, he mentioned that relationships with White women are beneficial for business.

White customers don't normally come here for business.... they go to town and different places. Since they started seeing me with a White girl, and knowing the girl works here, I have seen some White customers coming around, and that is good for business.

Likewise, Sunny, an immigrant from Cameroon who runs a computer business in Sunderland, observed that White women are good assets for the business.

I like to date White girls because they are good assets for the business and provide support to attract White customers, which is very important for my business survival.

Data analysis indicates that the construction of masculinity among this cohort of entrepreneurs is linked to their relationships with White women. These men 'used' their relationships with White women to negotiate their identity and to construct an acceptable entrepreneurial masculinity. Besides, such relationships are used to construct a respectable masculinity among other non-hegemonic Black male entrepreneurs. For example, Mensah, prides himself in his ability to attract White customers to his business. He mentioned that he is different from other Black male entrepreneurs who only cater to ethnic customers.

No, I'm different from him (another Black male entrepreneur) ... if you look at my business, we are not limited to Black or ethnic customers alone, I do things differently.

Questioning Mensah further on how and what he meant by 'I do things differently', he said:

Because I belong here, ... this is not a 'black' business.... I'm married to a White woman. I'm better positioned for business success.

This romantic relationship is driven by entrepreneurial motive, gain and desire for belonging and acceptance. In this sense, this cohort of Black entrepreneurs 'used' their relationships with White women to achieve and further their business interests. They performed a distinct form of masculinity motivated by business gain and

personal benefit. This configuration of masculinity that exploits white female identity in exchange for business favour and social acceptance is termed *transactional masculinity*. It is perceived by the participants as a better and more respectable form of masculinity. It is used by the men to distance themselves from the notions of black masculinity and to create a distinct entrepreneurial masculinity that is closer to hegemonic masculinity. Although transactional masculinity grants the men a degree of respect and social acceptance, it does not grant them the power and privilege entrepreneurs with hegemonic masculinity possess as seen in the study by Giazitzoglu and Down (2017).

According to the analysis, participants construct transactional masculinity in two distinct ways. First, they see their relationship with White women as a 'rite of passage' in entrepreneurship, granting them access to important entrepreneurial spaces and resources. Second, they perceive such relationships as 'trendy', 'contemporary', and good for business. It is seen as a symbol of respect and status that makes them feel less marginalized and improves social acceptability. These two distinct constructions of transactional masculinity are further discussed below.

Relationship with White women as a 'rite of passage' in entrepreneurship

In their construction of entrepreneurial masculinity, the men identified their relationship with White women in a way that helps them express an entrepreneurial identity that is affirmed by others, especially by segments of the majority white population. The participants described their relationship with White women as a 'rite of passage' in entrepreneurship. They perceived it as a way to socialize into British culture and to acquire local knowledge and entrepreneurial behaviour, which helped configure and (re)construct their masculinity. In his seminal work, van Gennep (1960) describes rites of passage as an essential social interaction with a phasing which *separates* individuals from their previous identities, carries them through a period of *transition* to a new identity, and *incorporates* them into a new role or social status. In the description of their experiences, the men went through stages (separation, transition, and incorporation) synonymous with van Gennep's conception of rites of passage. The men consciously and intentionally *separated* themselves from other Black entrepreneurs and distanced themselves from the black ethnic community. They distanced themselves from non-hegemonic black masculinity which is considered unentrepreneurial in the context where they practiced entrepreneurship. They went through a period of *transition* where they embarked on an entrepreneurial journey, formed new relationships (with locals but specifically with White women) and learnt new norms of entrepreneurial masculinity. In the *incorporation* stage, the

men acquired a 'new' entrepreneurial identity and enacted a different masculinity that is seen to be different from those of their peers within the black ethnic community. The men's identity transition is similar to the liminal experience observed among women digital entrepreneurs by Kelly and McAdam (2023).

An example of the men's identity construction is expressed in the voice of Simba, a property entrepreneur with over seven years of business ownership in the region.

I have been through many motions and struggles as a business owner. I have come to the conclusion that using African mentality and identity to do business among White people is not going to work. I changed my African name and rarely flock with other Black entrepreneurs ... I tend to align myself more with White people. I use White people within my network, especially my partner (a White woman), to get business done.

By intentionally separating themselves from other non-hegemonic Black entrepreneurs and forming close relationships with White women, the men constructed a distinct form of masculinity, which is seen as a 'rite of passage' in entrepreneurship. It is perceived to be more socially desirable and in proximity to hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity. To convey the essence of this form of masculinity as a 'rite of passage', the men described it in ways such as 'gaining entrance to the mainstream', 'a step ahead of black masculinity', and 'reducing barriers associated with Black men' in business. As a 'rite of passage', their relationships with White women conferred on them a degree of inclusion and entrepreneurial belonging. **Khumalo, an immigrant from South Africa is a financial and accounting entrepreneur.** He previously worked as a financial analysts before venturing into entrepreneurship. He described how his relationship with a White woman who is visible in the business has enhanced his entrepreneurial identity and granted him a sense of inclusion and belonging in entrepreneurship and the local community.

I have been treated differently because of my partner.... more business doors opened due to my relationship with her. LaughingI think people started to see me as a 'proper' entrepreneur and not a 'Black' entrepreneur... I hide behind her identity and use her connections to make the business work.

Relationship with White women as a symbol of respect and social acceptance

The men perceived their relationship with White women as 'trendy', a sign of achievement and something to be proud of. They used their affiliations with White women to construct a more desirable form of masculinity that is socially acceptable to the majority white population. Data suggests that Black male entrepreneurs 'used' White women as 'status symbols' and 'trophies'. They talked about making White women visible in their businesses to boost their entrepreneurial opportunities. Some of the men attended business meetings and functions with White women, going to local pubs together, in their attempt to bolster their entrepreneurial masculinity, improve their social acceptance and lower potential discrimination. Nonso, an IT professional and an entrepreneur from Newcastle who prides himself in dating White women, stated how such a relationship is good for business and grants him respect.

I like to date White women because it makes me feel less black and enjoy certain privileges accorded to a White man. Being seen with a White woman makes other guys respect you and treat you better.

By being seen with a White woman, the Black male entrepreneur believes he 'proves' to others that he has acquired legitimacy as a 'man' and concurrently as a business owner. The romantic relationship with a White woman symbolises his business acumen and a push towards hegemonic masculine status. By marrying or dating a White woman, the Black entrepreneur in this study denotes to others that he has acquired a level of success, respect, credibility, belonging and hegemony within the British culture. This is especially true if the romantic association is with a 'successful' and 'desirable' White woman 'from a good family'. Gbenga, a Nigerian immigrant who has lived in the region for over 12 years and owns a health and fitness business, explained why he is in a relationship with a White woman.

Why? Hmm ... well, it's kind of different, sexy and fashionable. It is better than going out with a Black girl. If they see you with one of them, they tend to look at you differently and give you some respect.

Apart from using White women to enact a more desirable masculinity, several of the men identified that relationships with White women grant them respect among other Black entrepreneurs and within the Black community. They mentioned that other Black men treat them with respect, and it bestows a level of hegemony within the black ethnic minority community. For example, Sunny said: *'You will be respected by others ... especially other Black men for dating attractive White girls'*. He denotes that dating 'attractive' White women makes him attractive too and respected by other non-hegemonic Black men. It is believed that the legitimacy created for the Black male entrepreneur through his romantic association with a White woman is recognised between the Black male entrepreneur and other Black men, as well as

between the Black male entrepreneur and White men. Usman said: *'They'll respect you more if you're with one of them, a White woman'*. Attachment to White women appears to help the participants construct a respectable entrepreneurial masculinity that is linked to entrepreneurial success. In this way, the men used their relationships with White women to enact a transactional entrepreneurial masculinity that they considered respectable and closer to hegemonic masculinity.

Independent of the status that relationships with White women may give, relationships with White women can be beneficial for Black entrepreneurs' businesses. For example, the White women may be 'employed' in the business to meet clients and talk to clients on the phone, thereby giving the Black business and entrepreneur a level of legitimacy otherwise lacking. Further, friends and family of the White woman may become customers or advocates of the Black business, therefore positioning the business to a wider range of new, potential White customers who would probably, otherwise, be inaccessible.

Discussion and conclusion

To better understand the nuances and dynamics of entrepreneurial masculinity, this paper explores how non-hegemonic masculinity is constructed in entrepreneurship among a cohort of Black African immigrant male entrepreneurs who practised entrepreneurship in the Northeast of England, where whiteness is predominant. The analysis sheds light on how marginalized men construct gender in entrepreneurship and how non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is performed. In addition, it extends the discourse on entrepreneurial masculinity beyond the narrow conception and representation of the entrepreneur as an individual with dominant masculinity to accommodate the experiences of men who do not fit the socially constructed notion of the idealized entrepreneur. This paper makes two important contributions to the literature on gender, masculinity and entrepreneurship. First, it introduces the concept of transactional masculinity and discusses it in relation to other forms of entrepreneurial masculinities. Based on the concept of transactional masculinity, the paper generates a model of entrepreneurial masculinity to explain how transactional masculinity relates to other forms of entrepreneurial masculinities. Second, this study contributes to knowledge by providing insights into how non-hegemonic masculinity is performed in entrepreneurship. It challenges the implicit assumption that all men possess hegemonic masculinity in entrepreneurship and explores how an alternative form of masculinity is enacted by Black entrepreneurs who possessed non-

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3 hegemonic masculinity due to their racial, immigration and minority identities. By so
4 doing, it gives voice to the construction of entrepreneurial masculinity among
5 marginalized men and how the interplay of identities, social categories and contexts
6 manifest diverse forms of entrepreneurial masculinity. The two contributions are
7 further discussed below.
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13 *Transactional masculinity*

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15 In the context of entrepreneurship, hegemonic masculinity is attractive. When
16 hegemonic masculinity is not achievable, men and entrepreneurs alike seek other
17 ways to perform masculinity and construct entrepreneurial identity. This paper
18 identifies transactional masculinity as a distinct form of masculinity that is performed
19 by Black entrepreneurs doing business in a predominantly white society.
20 Transactional masculinity is an attempt by non-hegemonic men to construct a
21 respectable masculine identity by using a socially desirable and acceptable form of
22 femininity. In this case, Black male entrepreneurs 'used' their relationships with White
23 women to construct a respectable entrepreneurial masculinity. They used their
24 romantic relationships with White women for business gain and to further their
25 business interests. Transactional masculinity is employed by marginalized men to
26 regain their masculinity and to position themselves towards hegemonic masculinity.
27 Although they may not attain full hegemonic status, however, it gives them a level of
28 legitimacy, respect and improved social acceptance. This configuration of masculinity
29 suppresses and downplays identity perceived to be weak or inadequate (black
30 masculinity and identity) and makes salient masculine qualities that are socially
31 desirable, such as romantic relationships with White women. As a form of
32 entrepreneurial masculinity, transactional masculinity derives its power, legitimacy,
33 and respect from the dominant and desirable form of femininity available in a given
34 context. In this study, the men developed romantic relationships with White women,
35 who were perceived as the dominant and attractive form of femininity in the context
36 where they practised entrepreneurship in exchange for business gain and social
37 acceptance.
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51 Transactional masculinity can be explained in relation to other forms of
52 entrepreneurial masculinities observed in entrepreneurship literature. In some ways,
53 all entrepreneurial masculinities are constructed in relation to femininity and other
54 forms of masculinities. As Connell argues, there is no hegemonic masculinity without
55 subordinate masculinity and femininity (Messerschmidt, 2019). Similarly, other forms
56 of entrepreneurial masculinities are constructed in relation to different notions of
57 masculinities and femininity (see Figure 2). As opposed to hegemonic entrepreneurial
58 masculinities and femininity
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masculinity, where masculinity is performed based on male dominance and superiority, transactional masculinity does not claim superiority and hegemony. It craves respect and acceptance, which grants it a dimension of social power that non-hegemonic men lack. It uses a more socially desirable form of femininity to boost its masculinity and improve its social acceptance. Indeed, the men in this study tend to protect their relationships with these White women and treat them with respect and dignity because they play an important role in their business. In relation to hybrid masculinity, transactional masculinity does not challenge, resist, or distance itself from hegemonic masculinity. Hybrid masculinity tends to challenge hegemonic masculinity by selectively drawing on socially acceptable elements of non-hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the performance of entrepreneurial masculinity (Whitmer, 2017; Hytti *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, transactional masculinity draws on desirable elements of femininity (in this study – whiteness) and distances itself from non-hegemonic masculinity. Transactional masculinity differs from non-hegemonic masculinity in that it is more respectable and has better entrepreneurial utility. Transactional masculinity distances itself from non-hegemonic masculinity in an attempt to construct a more credible entrepreneurial identity and move towards hegemonic masculinity.

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Insert Figure 2 around here

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On a wider note, this behaviour is not limited to the Black entrepreneurs studied in this research. It is observable among other sections of Black men in society, especially successful Black men and celebrities. For example, certain Black male footballers and Black male politicians in the UK (possibly in other Western countries and Brazil) tend to date or marry White women. A report suggests that 67% of Black footballers in England are in relationships with White women, either married or dating them (Rabbah, 2019). While different explanations may be offered for this, the concept of transactional masculinity provides valuable insight into this phenomenon. Transactional masculinity is enacted when non-hegemonic men seek acceptance and respect from a dominant social group. These Black footballers, though wealthy, possess non-hegemonic masculinity due to their racial and minority statuses and because they live in a predominantly white society. Therefore, to enact a respectable masculinity, aside from their fame and money, they leveraged the identity of White women to construct a more socially desirable masculinity (Clayton and Harris, 2004; Meszaros, 2017). It could be that the Black male entrepreneurs in this study attempt to copy successful Black footballers and celebrities and reproduce how those they perceived to be successful enact and reconstruct black masculinity. Although Black

men may leverage the identity of White women to construct a more desirable masculinity, it does not shield them from discrimination and racism in society.

Non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity

Masculinity is a hierarchical construction rooted in the notions of power, dominance and privilege. Besides, it is influenced by multiple, complex, and contextual intersecting categories. As presented in this study, non-hegemonic Black men who lacked the power and status that other men enjoyed enacted a distinct and alternative form of masculinity. Although there is a growing stream of research on entrepreneurial masculinity, the discourse and theoretical development are still largely focused on white, middle-class, heterosexual men (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017). However, there is still so much to be known about how the interplay of identity and different contextual factors influence the performance of masculinity among men. To better understand how non-hegemonic men construct masculinity requires more research that considers how diverse and multiple identities, including how contextual factors and forces shape entrepreneurial masculinity. This will challenge the monolithic construction of masculinity in entrepreneurial discourse and give voice to other forms and conceptualizations of entrepreneurial masculinity.

As indicated in this research, hegemonic masculinity is still an attractive form of masculinity that certain non-hegemonic entrepreneurs tend to recreate. Although they may not attain it, they create their version of hegemonic masculinity because of the personal and psychosocial need for acceptance, approval and belonging. The men in this research did not challenge or resist idealized masculine norms, rather, they conform and tend to reproduce it. In a different study, even male entrepreneurs with hybrid masculinity 'do not make a notable departure from hegemonic masculinity' (Hytti *et al.*, 2024, p. 266). It shows the prevailing dominance and power of hegemonic masculinity. Yet for these entrepreneurs whom hegemonic masculinity is unattainable, they are excluded from entrepreneurial discourse and opportunity, and their entrepreneurial potential is limited due to the social construction of their masculinity (Rumens and Ozturk, 2019). More research is required to understand how entrepreneurs with non-hegemonic masculinity construct an alternative version of entrepreneurial masculinity. This will provide further insights into the different ways non-hegemonic men construct masculinity, causing distinct, novel and a more critical form of entrepreneurial masculinity to emerge. For example, how do non-hegemonic Black entrepreneurs who cannot attract or develop relationships with White women construct entrepreneurial masculinity? What about Black gay entrepreneurs or how a Black entrepreneur's relationship with a White woman in a predominantly black

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society is perceived? Exploring how marginalized men, due to multiple identities and different contextual, situational, and geographical factors, enact masculinity in entrepreneurship would add rich debate to how non-hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is performed. More importantly, it will challenge and break the domination of hegemonic masculinity in entrepreneurial discourse.

Research implications and limitations

This study affirms existing entrepreneurship studies that have observed the role of enacting credible entrepreneurial identity and the various ways entrepreneurs seek legitimacy for themselves and their ventures (Swail and Marlow, 2018; Bruni et al., 2004; Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023). It affirms the importance of identity in entrepreneurship and the necessity of constructing an acceptable and respectable entrepreneurial identity. Besides, this article provides an empirical account of how men respond to the marginalization of their masculinity in entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the existing debate on gender and entrepreneurship. The study has important implications for policy and practice. Through its analysis, the study has demonstrated the dynamic construction of entrepreneurial masculinity; in practice, entrepreneurs who seek approval and legitimacy may learn to leverage external resources to improve their social acceptance and entrepreneurial offerings.

Policymakers, including local entrepreneurial and incubator centres, should look beyond the entrepreneurial offerings of marginalized entrepreneurs to provide additional support on how they can negotiate identity barriers and social exclusion at both personal and enterprise levels. This will give marginalized entrepreneurs the required insight on how to negotiate identity barriers and cope with social exclusion. Besides, previous research has observed the importance of mentoring to support Black entrepreneurs in creating credible identity in entrepreneurship (Giazitzoglu and Korede, 2023); this paper suggests that policymakers should ensure the diversification of such mentoring to include locally established entrepreneurs and institutions that can lend their legitimacy to non-hegemonic entrepreneurs to aid their credibility and acceptance in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

This research does not claim generalisability and is limited in context, space, and time. The study was carried out in a predominantly white context in the Northeast of England, a part of England with more than 90% white population, according to the 2021 UK census (GOV.UK, 2022). As such, this research may not apply to other parts of the UK with a more diverse population and a significant number of Black people, such as London. Also, the study is limited in time. The Northeast of England may become more diverse in years to come due to immigration, and Black entrepreneurs

may be less compelled to leverage the identity of White women to construct entrepreneurial masculinity. Besides, the study did not investigate how these White women perceive the relationship or what they gain from romantic relationships with Black male entrepreneurs. Lastly, all the men who participated in the study were first-generation immigrant entrepreneurs. Therefore, the evidence provided is limited by their recent immigration status. A more established Black entrepreneur or a second-generation immigrant entrepreneur may have a different account.

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Table 1: A typology of entrepreneurial masculinity

Forms of entrepreneurial masculinity	Description	Depiction of entrepreneurial masculinity	Authors
Hegemonic masculinity	An ideological and dominant form of masculinity that is widely accepted and culturally idealized in a given space and time.	• Power and unequal gender relations • Dominance • Patriarchal • Hierarchical • Physical strength • Heterosexuality	Mendick et al (2023) Giazitzoglu and Down (2017) Hamilton (2013)
Heroic masculinity	The idea that entrepreneurs are unique individuals with special and masculine abilities	• Creative agent– engages in creative destruction e.g. Henry Ford • Adventurous • Courageous • Risk taker • Gifted individuals • Inventors • Captain of industry • Figurehead of the capitalist culture	Hytti and Heinonen (2013) Johnsen and Sørensen (2017)
Entrepreneur as self-made man	The portrayal of the entrepreneur with individualistic masculine traits rooted in the self.	• The harder you work, the luckier you become • American ideology of success • Self-efficacy • Smart • Self-reliance • Rags to riches mentality • Individualism	Mulholland (2003) Catano (2000) Gill (2013)
Hybrid masculinity	A form of masculinity which allows men to distance themselves from the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity while continuing to reproduce unequal gender differences and hierarchies.	• Caring • Emotional • Inclusive • Counter-hegemonic • Incorporates selective feminine qualities • Retains dominant features of hegemonic masculinity	Whitmer (2017) Hytti et al (2024)
Non-hegemonic masculinity	A subordinate and marginalized form of masculinity	• Lacks normative masculine stereotypes observed in hegemonic masculinity • Minoritized status and identity	Giazitzoglu and Korede (2023) Rumens and Ozturk (2019)

Source: Author

Table 2: Profile of entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs (Pseudonyms)	Business	Location	Relationship with white femininity	Age	Country of origin
Nonso	IT	Newcastle	Dating	25	Nigeria
Bobbi	Media and entertainment	Darlington	Dating	31	South Africa
Emeka	Software service	Newcastle	Dating	30	Nigeria
Mensah	Recruitment	Sunderland	Married	31	Ghana
Sunny	Computer service	Sunderland	Dating	27	Cameroon
Gbenga	Health and fitness	Darlington	Dating	33	Nigeria
Simba	Property and facility service	Newcastle	Dating	31	Zimbabwe
Khumalo	Financial service	Newcastle	Married	33	South Africa
Usman	Photography	Durham	Married	27	Nigeria

Figure 1: Analytic process

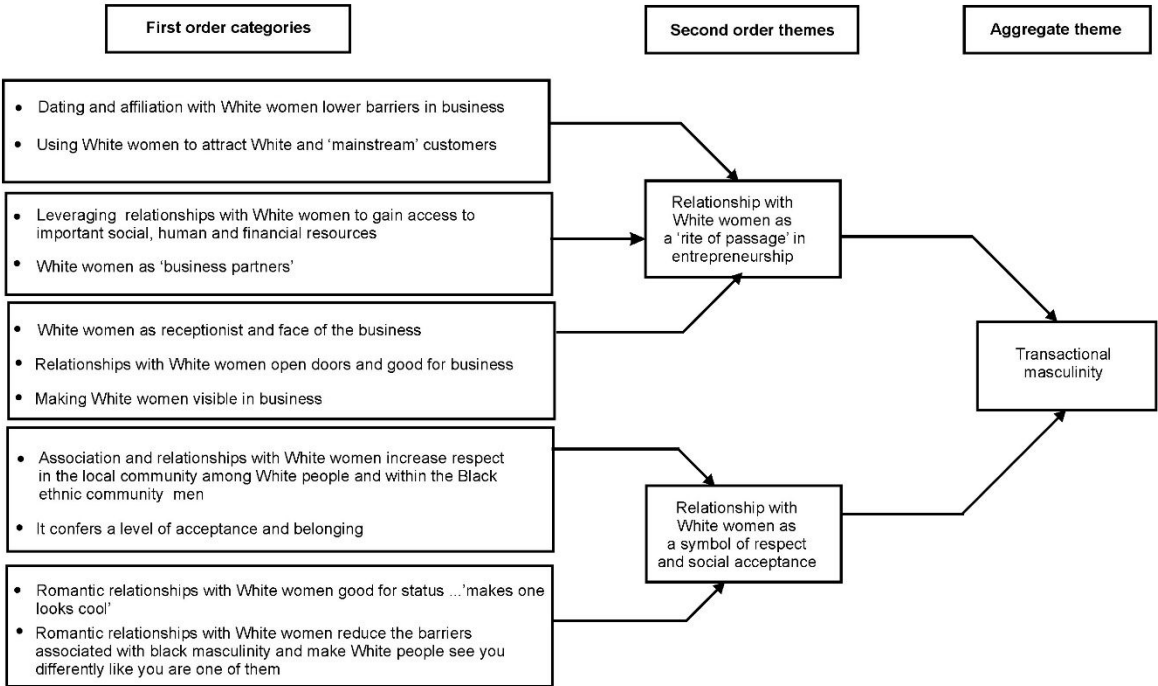
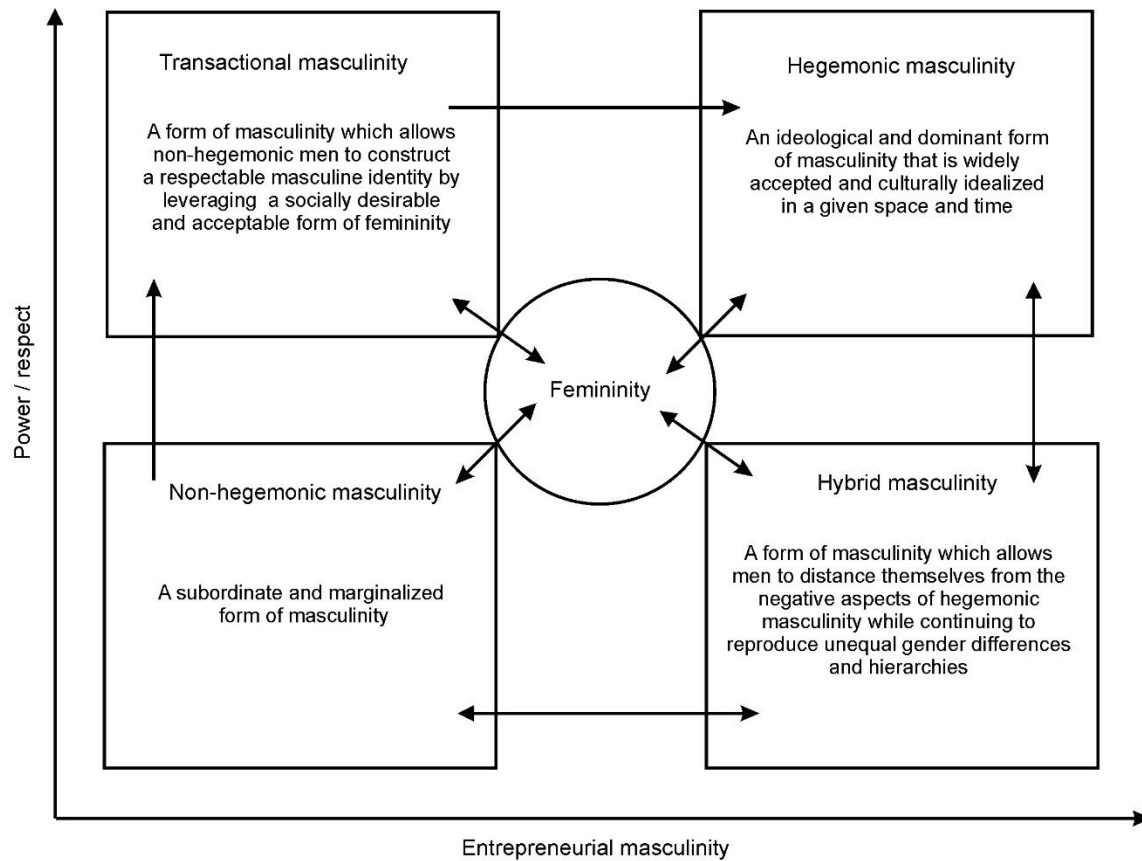


Figure 2: A model of entrepreneurial masculinity



Source: Author