

Beyond Bars: The Confining Nature of Hegemonic Masculinity in Venture Accelerators

Abstract

Purpose - This paper investigates the intersectionality of entrepreneurial masculinity within the context of venture accelerators. As such, it aims to shed light on how intersecting factors influence the construction and expression of masculinity among male entrepreneurs in venture accelerators.

Design/methodology/approach - This research is based on in-depth analysis of four distinct accelerator cohort groups, employing a semi-structured interview approach. Interviewees were conducted with four accelerator managers and 52 male accelerator participants across four distinct accelerator cohort groups. Such a methodological choice is deemed instrumental in unraveling the nuanced dynamics within accelerator environments and their implications on hegemonic masculinity.

Findings - This study elucidates the nuanced ways in which men navigate the venture accelerator landscape. The findings revealed that the accelerator environment facilitated the reinforcement of traditional masculine behaviours. Whilst diversity was ostensibly valued, its acceptance decreased if it posed a challenge to male dominance or stereotypical masculine traits. Indeed, there was marginalisation of non-traditional expressions of masculinity, leading to a sense of "othering".

Originality/value - By integrating intersectionality theory into the examination of masculine dynamics within venture accelerator contexts, this study expands current understanding of venture accelerator environments and their effects on both traditional and non-traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, we highlight the impact of non-intersectional institutional norms on male entrepreneurs who deviate from traditional stereotypes. As such, we advance the understanding of venture accelerators by examining how they perpetuate and reinforce traditional masculine norms, even in environments that strive for diversity.

Keywords: Masculinity; Intersectionality; Venture Accelerators, Entrepreneurship

Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction

Venture accelerators are regarded as crucial and impactful intermediaries within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Hallen *et al.*, 2020). Whilst they may vary in approach, they share the common goal to expedite the journey of early-stage ventures to market by furnishing them with workspace, educational training, mentorship, specialised knowledge, networking opportunities, and sometimes, financial backing (Cohen and Hochberg, 2014; Hallen *et al.*, 2014). In essence, venture accelerators exist to bolster the entrepreneurial skills and resources of early-stage entrepreneurs (Moritz *et al.*, 2022). Prevailing theoretical presumptions focus upon the entrepreneurial firm as an objective unit of analysis with the support initiatives and physical benefits of acceleration viewed as impartial independent elements. However, the dominant assumption of accelerators as social and physical spaces where programme tenants, accelerator managers, and professional advisors interact in a neutral fashion has been questioned and debated (Marlow and McAdam, 2012; MacNeil *et al.*, 2022). Within the domain of entrepreneurship, there exists a normative assumption wherein gender is often equated with femininity (Ahl, 2006; McAdam, 2022), where it often becomes narrowly construed as synonymous with women's business ownership. This constricted perspective effectively obscures in depth investigations into how masculinity is enacted and subsequently contested or reinforced by men within this sphere (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017). Positioned as the default standpoint in this dialogue, masculinity undergoes a reduction, losing its discernible identity, becoming relegated to an inherent quality rather than an actively performed construct (Hamilton, 2013). Consequently, the gendered positioning of the predominant demographic within entrepreneurship remains largely unexplored. The extent to which self-employed men align themselves with the stereotypically masculine entrepreneurial role, ascribed to them solely by virtue of their gender, also remains largely unexamined (Marlow *et al.*, 2019). In order to address this, we utilise the venture accelerator context to dissect and critically evaluate manifestations of masculinity and its implications for the entrepreneurial discourse.

In considering this matter, we adopt an intersectional perspective (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1989; Dy and MacNeil, 2023; Kidney *et al.*, 2024) to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of early-stage male entrepreneurs in a venture accelerator context. As a consequence, we posit the following research question: How do intersecting identities influence the construction and expression of masculinity among male entrepreneurs in venture accelerators? In order to address our underpinning research question, we adopt a qualitative interpretive methodology utilising 56 semi-structured interviews conducted with four accelerator managers and 52 male accelerator participants across four distinct accelerator cohort groups.

In exploring this research question, we make the following theoretical contributions: First, we add to gender research in entrepreneurship as a result of our focus on the spectrum of entrepreneurial masculinity within the male gender and the implications of such on our understanding of "othering". Second, we elucidate the hegemonic masculinity experienced within the accelerator context and the impact of non-intersectional institutional norms on non-traditional male entrepreneurs. Third, we contribute to accelerator context as it relates to hegemonic masculinity. Even on occasions when the accelerator aspires to be diverse, the environment reinforces and rewards traditional masculine norms, thus acting a hindrance to diverse forms of masculinity and non-conforming gender expressions.

This paper is structured as follows: We commence by outlining the rationale for our theoretical framework followed by a discrete analysis of the key constructs – intersectionality and

masculinity within the venture accelerator context. The following section presents our methodological rationale and research design process; this is followed by a presentation of our findings. Finally, we discuss our theoretical contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Framework

The Venture Accelerator Context

Accelerators have become a popular environment for early-stage start-ups (Stayton and Mangematin, 2019; Moritz *et al.*, 2022). Accelerator types include technology accelerators, vertical specific, geography-specific, corporate, social impact, and university-affiliated, and hardware-specific (Price, 2004; Hochberg, 2015; Malek *et al.*, 2014; Bliemel *et al.*, 2019). The overarching goal of the accelerator is to reduce the time to gain start-up information and skills in order to advance the new venture to the next stage of development (Bańka *et al.*, 2022). Accelerators typically provide entrepreneurs with a three-to-five-month, community-based learning period that hyper-focuses on startup education and mentorship (Miller and Bound, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Hallen *et al.*, 2014; Hallen *et al.*, 2020). In some accelerators, entrepreneurs receive seed capital, often in exchange for a percentage of equity (Radojevich-Kelley and Hoffman, 2012; Cohen and Hochberg, 2014; Fehder and Hochberg, 2014; Kim and Wagman, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2019).

Accelerators are widely recognised as providing a new credential that enables start-ups to raise growth resources (Hallen *et al.*, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Hallen *et al.*, 2020). In addition, these founder communities enable a unique type of peer knowledge-building and entrepreneurial self-confidence (Pocek *et al.*, 2021; Dy and MacNeil, 2023). Although the presence of accelerators is deemed essential for creating a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem (Cohen and Hochberg, 2014; Hallen *et al.*, 2014), accelerators may cultivate gendered norms for behaviours and interactions (Marlow and McAdam, 2012, 2015; Brush *et al.*, 2019), at times even negatively impacting the mental health of women entrepreneurs (MacNeil *et al.*, 2022).

Within this vein, the so called “gender-neutrality,” of accelerators has been questioned with a growing body of research showing that they are male-dominated (Brush *et al.*, 2019; MacNeil *et al.*, 2022; MacNeil and McAdam, forthcoming). Initial studies have investigated incubators and accelerators as gendered organisations (McAdam and Marlow, 2010; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Marlow and McAdam, 2015; Özkazanç-Pan and Clark-Muntean, 2018). This growing body of evidence underscores how the gendered nature of incubator and accelerator environments may inhibit non-traditional entrepreneurs' ability to fully participate and garner programmatic resources (Neumeyer, 2020; Avnimelech and Rechter, 2023; Reyes and Neergaard, 2023; Balkmar *et al.*, 2024). However, less is known about the implications of hegemonic masculinity in relation to accelerator programming and its impact on traditional and non-traditional male entrepreneurs. Therefore, this paper applies hegemonic masculine theory as an analytical device to evaluate the experiences of male entrepreneurs who have participated in venture accelerators programmes. Further guided by the lens of intersectional theory of the gendered institution, this study examines “othering” as a micro-process within accelerators.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Entrepreneurship

Masculinity is a socially constructed set of learned and accepted behaviours (Kimmel and Mahalik, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is temporal and refers to the dominant style of masculinity

that exists in a given space and time. Research on hegemonic masculinity has shown how males demonstrate behaviours and external artifacts to adhere to traditional masculine norms and power structures (Giazitzoglu and Wilson, 2023; Giazitzoglu, 2024). Butler (1990) provides the perspective that gender performances must be learned and achieving socially accepted gender performances and expectations is an achievement. Characteristics that embody hegemonic masculinity are of value for competition, feeling of superiority, devaluation of others, achievement orientation and stoicism (Donaldson, 1993; Connell, 2005; Flood *et al.*, 2007)

Entrepreneurship is enacted as a masculine domain that reinforces masculinised practices of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow and Dy, 2018). Theorists present the entrepreneur as a man and one of extraordinary and domineering character; a hero, maverick or self-made man (Hanson and Pratt, 2003). Bruni *et al.* (2004a, p. 407) refer to the entrepreneur as “the conqueror of unexplored territories, the lonely hero - the patriarch”. However, this discourse only serves to celebrate the ideal entrepreneur as white, heroic and male (Ahl, 2006; Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017). As noted by Elliott *et al.* (2020, p. 46), “entrepreneurial qualities that have traditionally been associated with being a successful entrepreneur – competitiveness, self-promotion and authoritarianism – have their basis in hegemonic masculinity and have been linked with the masculine stereotype, vocabulary and metaphors”. As such this notion correlates closely to what Bruni *et al.* (2004b, p. 2) refers to as entrepreneurial masculinity whereby “entrepreneurship is a set of norms and values based on hegemonic masculinity that raises a cultural barrier against femaleness and against alternative forms of masculinity.”

As a consequence, men and masculine attributes are inherently viewed as more powerful and effective than the feminine (Hytti *et al.*, 2024) thus perpetuating a system of bias that impacts entrepreneurs that do not fit this mythical norm (Tatum, 2000). Enacted masculinity is an expected and rewarded part of entrepreneurial performance. For example, masculine behaviours are expected during pitching from both male and female entrepreneurs alike. As a result, research has shown that entrepreneurs are punished for exhibiting feminine behaviours in the pitch arena (Balachandra *et al.*, 2019). Giazitzoglu and Down (2017) illustrate how hegemonic masculinity is upheld by a group of male entrepreneurs that uphold a hierarchy that favours men leading larger, more wealth-generating businesses that demonstrate domineering behaviours.

In this paper, we contend that cultivating a dynamic and multi-faceted comprehension of the manifestations of hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity within entrepreneurship is crucial. Masculinity is the “gender of no gender” (McAdam, 2022, p. 45), the normative standard within the entrepreneurial sphere, that serves as a pivotal point for understanding the various expressions of masculinity and their enactment by male entrepreneurs. Consequently, it acts as a barrier into the investigation into the diverse and distinct manifestations of masculinity and alternative gender expressions, (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017; Marlow *et al.*, 2018). Further, although it has been broadly recognised that men must play a critical role in disrupting masculine hegemony for broad scale change (Connell, 2005), we know little regarding the levers that are either disrupting or reinforcing hegemonic norms within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017) and specifically, how accelerators (e.g., ecosystem intermediaries) are contributing to this phenomenon.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework that interrogates the intertwined nature of power and identity, recognising that lived experience is influenced by a multitude of identity dimensions and embedded power dynamics (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Born from

Black feminism in the U.S., intersectionality was first documented through the activism and writing of Sojour Truth, Francis Beale, and the Combahee River Collective, whose work exposed the embeddedness of racism in American society (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work (1989) formally introduced the intersection metaphor to the academy, highlighting a multi-axis perspective on identity, structural discrimination, and the compounding nature of oppression. Intersectionality provides a theoretical lens for scholars to examine how myriad identity dimensions such as race, gender, and sexuality create unique lived experience as well as compounded experiences of discrimination. Crenshaw's subsequent work (1991) expanded the theory by highlighting the role of social and political structures and institutions in the production of inequality.

This multi-level theoretical approach has been expanded on by feminist scholars such as Hill Collins and Bilge (2016), Dill and Zabrano (2009), and Collins (2000), who have pushed the boundaries of intersectional theory beyond the interpersonal to include the role of the structural, disciplinary, and cultural domains in power relations. These four domains provide a dynamic lens to examine how power is produced and maintained within entrepreneurship (Dy and MacNeil, 2023), providing a tool for interrogating the multitude of ways that the playing field looks different for entrepreneurs depending on their dominant or subordinate identity traits (Tatum, 2000). Previous works focused on entrepreneurship and intersectionality have primarily focused on the influence of gender and race on the entrepreneurial experience (Knight, 2016; Dy *et al.*, 2017; Wang, 2019), and have almost exclusively focused on the gendered experiences of female entrepreneurs, and their coping strategies for operating in the male-dominated, masculine context common to entrepreneurship. The investigation of how masculinity is upheld and reproduced by men within an intersectional framework is underexplored, with this under exploration even more pronounced within the domain of entrepreneurship (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017; van Merrienboer *et al.*, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

Grounded in an intersectional framework (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Collins, 2019) and guided by our underpinning research question, a qualitative interpretive methodology was deemed appropriate for investigating the lived experiences of male entrepreneurs in venture accelerators. In doing so, our research design responds to the need for more gender-aware perspectives when conducting research on male entrepreneurs' lived experiences (Hamilton, 2013). In this regard, we sought to prioritise the voices of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2014; Sprague, 2016), whilst acknowledging the co-production of gender and the researcher's role in the creation of these gendered narratives (Golombisky, 2006).

Research Context and Accessing Participants

In order to better understand male entrepreneurs' experiences and the masculinity of a venture accelerator cohort dynamics, empirical data were drawn from both a student-based and mixed (college-level and professional) co-ed accelerator programmes (four in total) from 2015-2017. The research sites were selected based on parameters anchored in Cohen's (2013) definition of the accelerator, which refers to accelerators as programmes that occur over a three-to-five-month period and typically train cohorts of entrepreneurs in the new venture process. Table 1 provides

background information on each accelerator, which included two collegiate accelerators, and two distinct cohort groups from a co-ed, non-profit accelerator.

Insert Table 1 about here.

In total, the study includes four accelerator managers, who are all Caucasian women, and 52 male accelerator participants, comprising an ethnicity mix of 60% Caucasian, 21% Asian/Middle Eastern/Indian, 19% African American and Hispanic/Latino as is shown in Table 2. Other background demographics relating to the accelerator participants can be found in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Data Collection

In aligning with a participant centered approach to research and practice, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were selected in order to provide nuanced insights into how intersecting factors influence the construction and expression of masculinity among male entrepreneurs within the venture accelerator context (Reinharz, 1992; Gioia, 2021). The semi-structured interview questions with the accelerator participants focused on programmes, sources of support, and areas of engagement and interaction. The interview questions explored their accelerator experience, asking, for example: How did the accelerator impact your business? What accelerator offerings were most helpful? What were not? How did the cohort experience impact you and your business? On average, participant interviews lasted for approximately forty minutes and were digitally recorded and fully transcribed to ensure accuracy of informant language. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of our data, we followed the protocol identified by Leitch *et al.* (2010), in that we provided a traceable chain of evidence (Pratt, 2009) to enable other researchers to determine the methodological veracity of our research design. Data collection consisted of two sequential phases that provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of male entrepreneurs in venture accelerators.

Phase 1 launched with in-depth interviews with two female accelerator managers. The aim of these interviews was to glean contextual information and to identify the entrepreneurial offerings of the accelerator environment and how the administrators related to gender and the early-stage, entrepreneurial development of its participants. Phase 1 also included male entrepreneurs participating in two prominent collegiate accelerators in the Northeastern United States, Accelerators A and B (see Table 2). A random sample of participants that met the criteria of current programme enrollment was selected from both accelerators. The research team interviewed 15 male entrepreneurs during this phase.

Phase 2 consisted of two distinct cohort groups from a non-profit, mixed-gender accelerator (Accelerator C) that emphasised diversity and inclusion in its programming and was in the Northeastern United States (see Table 2). Participants included college students and professionals, ranging 20-60 yrs. Phase 2 used the same semi-structured interview questions as in Phases 1 and 2. Two different cohorts from 2016 and 2017 were enrolled in the programme, which were held over four months and focused on training provided by entrepreneurial experts. All cohort members identifying as male were invited to participate. In this Phase, 37 male entrepreneurs and one accelerator manager were interviewed.

Data Analysis

In analysing the interviews, qualitative software (NVivo and QDA Data Miner) was used for coding the data and thematic analysis was used to establish qualitative rigour (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The analysis of the interview data was carried out by two members of the research team who were both highly familiarised with the interview data, with a third team member acting as a referee, which helped to establish inter-rater reliability (Armstrong *et al.*, 1997; Lee, 1999), whilst also mitigating against any potential coding disagreements. The Gioia methodology was used to capture the informant language, concepts, second order themes, and overarching dimensions (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). A comprehensive list of codes was developed based on the analysis of data during each of the two phases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Leitch *et al.*, 2010). This phased approach helped the researchers develop new codes and update the original list of codes (Dy and Agwunobi, 2019). First-order concepts were developed from inductively analysing the coded transcripts. The research team evaluated the first order concepts, looking for second order themes that emerged in relationship with areas of accelerator and masculinity constructs. As the second-order themes emerged, the researchers also evaluated each environment to identify any patterns within that were different from the other programmes or the aggregate. In addition, coded data extracts, i.e., first-order concepts, were reviewed for fit with emerging themes and dimensions (Dy and Agwunobi, 2019). These first-order concepts under each theme were assessed to ensure a logical pattern was evident. If a logical pattern did not emerge, either the theme was revised or the first-order concept was moved to another relevant theme or discarded (Tlaiss and McAdam, 2021). From the second-order themes, the aggregate dimensions from our theoretical framework were applied to ensure the data and existing theory were working harmoniously (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). In the final data analysis phase, the researchers reviewed the entire dataset to ensure that the data structure reflected the richness of the participants' voices and resulting themes. As shown in Figure 1, first order concepts were developed from participant language, second order themes reflect, and the overarching dimensions capture aggregate theory. **A claims table was used to structure pre-writing and composing (Rockmann and Vough, 2023). This final step provided evidentiary support for the findings. The claims table can be found in Appendix A.**

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Findings

This section presents the emerging themes, as illustrated with fragments of the narrative (Pratt, 2009, Rockmann and Vough, 2023). The findings from the participants indicated several different aspects to the lived experience of masculinity within the accelerator. Discussed in this section are several key themes including: traditional masculine behaviours within the accelerator context, such as a strong goal orientation with a focus on securing equity investment, an attitude that fostered survival of the fittest; the value of direct and honest criticism; and finally, non-traditional masculine behaviours exhibited within the accelerator's environment and as a result the experience of alienation and "othering".

Traditional Male Entrepreneurial Behaviours

It was evident from the analysis of our data that the accelerator environment enabled traditional masculine behaviours, with many of the male entrepreneurs in our sample exhibiting a sense of entitlement and purpose. Indeed, this "tough guy" and "bro culture" magnified a

Darwinian sense of “survival of the fittest”. As illustrated below, whilst diversity was valued, its promotion diminished if it threatened male dominance or the stereotypical masculine persona.

Sense of Entitlement and Purpose.

Many of our interviewees entered the accelerator with a dominant expectation of raising capital and acquiring equity investment: to them, their participation in the accelerator was a way to gain access to investors and attain startup funding (Stayton and Mangematin, 2019). As noted by Robert from the co-ed non-profit accelerator - “we enrolled in the accelerator hoping to find investors”. Whilst Andrew from the collegiate accelerator explained, “We are here to pitch to people who have money”. The intention was thus to leverage the accelerator’s network of investors and purposefully ‘woo’ those with sources of capital. This strategy in relation to fund-raising efforts was deemed successful by Nolan from the collegiate accelerator, “We have been successful in raising equity capital through our participation in accelerator programmes”. Whilst Will from the co-ed non-profit accelerator had success that led to other sources of funds, “Right now, we are working on finishing up raising capital. We did this by working with investors with Big Swinging Dicks”. Overall, the male entrepreneurs spoke about their determination to have entrepreneurial ventures and interestingly success was conceptualised in terms of revenues and profit (Crossen *et al.*, 2024). As Ivan from the co-ed non-profit accelerator explained, “One of our goals is to be able to work for ourselves. So, once we figure out something that is successful, we can generate revenue and sustain ourselves”. Interestingly as shown by our data, this tunnel-vision to raise money did not acknowledge the community and peer aspects of the accelerator experience.

Survival of the Fittest.

Several of our interviewees spoke about being strong and committed and referred to their fellow participants who they felt did not meet this standard as “weak or not fully engaged”. As encapsulated by Ralph from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, “I would have preferred to be around much more intensive people and have a more intensive programme”. In fact, the majority of the male entrepreneurs desired a competitive environment within the accelerator - “where only the fittest survive”. As stated by Aiden in the co-ed non-profit accelerator, “...without the competition, there would have been a little less pressure, and the quality of the message or our communication would have suffered”. The competitive edge also aligned with the focus toward building their respective businesses. As Bryan from the co-ed non-profit accelerator explained, “I think the competition was important for us. It had some sort of gravity to what we were working on and then some amount of focus”. In addition to wanting intensity and enjoying competition, many of the male entrepreneurs expressed their confidence and self-efficacy in their entrepreneurial capabilities. Andrew from the collegiate accelerator stated, “I always knew that I would be an entrepreneur...ideas are the easy part for me”. Whilst Mark from the collegiate accelerator associated his military experience with an ability to lead; “I already knew quite a bit about leadership due to my military experience”. A possible example of masculine bravado was from Edward from the collegiate accelerator, “I am a strappy kind of guy”. However, this survivalist mentality, however, did not serve everyone. Victor, an African American male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, explained, “The accelerator feels like being on ‘*Survivor*. I don’t think the staff would tell you that. They are completely oblivious to the fact that anyone could be having a different experience than Disneyland. It makes you feel awkward when you comment on it because you’re going to disrupt the utopian fantasy.”

The Perpetuation of Bro Culture.

The role of managers and investors in perpetuating masculine norms emerged - with Manager A from the collegiate accelerator stating, "We want everyone at a certain level. It is meant to be harsh. Reminds me of boot camp; knock them down and build them back up." Whilst Manager B from the collegiate accelerator further underscored the boot camp sentiment by explaining, "Sometimes we give them a swift kick.". Manager C from the co-ed non-profit accelerator stated, "Our mission is to get the participants ready to work with the big boys". The majority of the male entrepreneurs also wanted the feedback to be direct and critical, even harsh. Larry from the collegiate accelerator felt positively about the criticism, saying, the advisors were "all like drill sergeants...and tough. And that's good. My advisor said, you don't have a business here. How are you going to make money? So, we spent time critically re-evaluating the business". However, the value of the feedback appeared to be dependent on its source. "Even though it was honest feedback, some of the people weren't experienced in your particular industry. They would give an opinion, but their feedback wasn't helpful" (Matthew from the co-ed non-profit accelerator). In contrast, in the co-ed non-profit accelerator "lovingly critical feedback" was commonplace - with Damon from the co-ed non-profit accelerator noting "Gentle feedback, gentle critical feedback, it's great. I think to a certain degree, they need to be careful with it. The trick is that when you give feedback, you cannot always be positive".

It was evident that the majority of our participants in the collegiate accelerators valued the accelerator's high-energy culture and vibe. "We're all self-driven and motivated people and that just makes us want to work harder, otherwise you wouldn't be here in the first place", explained Gary, an Indian male from the collegiate accelerator. Furthermore, they enjoyed the "bro" environment. Male advisors were in the majority in the accelerators of this study, which aligned with the desire for male role models. The founder spoke of instances where the fellow entrepreneurs were able to bond outside the formal accelerator schedule. Gary also noted, "We play basketball on Wednesdays...it's a very fun place".

Othering Experiences of Non-Traditional Males Entrepreneurs

Minority and non-minority males spoke to negative experiences that resulted from their behaviours and identities that fell outside of masculine norms. For example, they felt judged and negatively viewed if they sought emotional support and validity from peers or accelerator stakeholders. Moreover, and as detailed below, some minority and non-minority males experienced direct and indirect discrimination.

Emotional Support.

Some participants sought community support over criticism. Victor, an African American male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, said, "You're in an environment for four months, where people are criticising your business whether it was constructive or not. I don't think this is an environment for me where your confidence is built. You end up questioning a lot of things." Garret, a gay male, from the co-ed non-profit accelerator noted, "The accelerator needs to address more of the mental aspect of entrepreneurship. It would be helpful to say at the onset, if you feel like you got in here by mistake, you don't belong here, your idea is dumb, that's just part of the journey". This demonstrates a sensitivity to the ups and downs of the entrepreneurial journey and contrasts with stereotypical bro culture and masculine expectations. Gary, an Indian male, from the collegiate accelerator stated, "When you come to this hyper-saturated community where everyone's like that, it can make you feel a little bit insecure and self-conscious at first, depending

on where you are in your journey". Charles, a Caucasian male who was part of a husband/wife team in the co-ed non-profit accelerator, stated, "This is my social and emotional support group." The need to gain recognition of entrepreneurial worthiness was a reason for participating in the accelerator. Edward, an African American male from the collegiate accelerator, noted that the accelerator helped validate his minority firm; "Any form of credibility that we could get is very important to us".

The Impact of Intersectional Diversity.

In particular, the co-ed non-profit focused on creating a diverse environment. Generally, the male entrepreneurs in this sample valued the diverse experience. "It was so neat to work with the wide cross-section of people from all aspects, people from different regions of the country, regions in the world, different backgrounds, technical and otherwise", said Nick, a Caucasian male, from the co-ed non-profit accelerator. Similarly, Seth, a Caucasian male, from the co-ed non-profit noted, "I thought that having a wide variety of different kinds of companies in the programme, was very helpful in terms of giving us perspective on how different people think about what we were doing". Chris, an African American male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, added, "the environment was very diverse, not only was it a good balance for treating men and women equally, but culturally I think there was a good balance also". Whilst Vincent, an Indian male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, agreed that the diversity was of value to his business; "we got different perspectives, people with different backgrounds, people with different experiences. What was great was to sort of get their feedback from a different perspective. Too often you are part of the same group, and you sort of hear the same stuff." Whilst the diverse environment appeared to be of high value on the surface, not everyone agreed that the nature of the accelerator was entirely inclusive.

For example, when challenged with traditional male investment norms, the diverse environment of the non-profit accelerator was not particularly viewed as positive. Many (Caucasian) males felt the investors were biased toward women. Zachary, an older Caucasian male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator stated, "When it comes to accredited investors, there were a number of investors that were investing in woman-owned companies and that seemed to be also a little bit of a bias towards the woman owned companies". Finn, an older Caucasian male from the non-profit accelerator recalled, "There was one time that was slightly awkward for me. I was in a group of investors and startups; I was one of maybe two guys. The VCs were only interested in investing in women". There was skepticism about how the diversity was achieved. Charles, a Caucasian male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator said, "Whilst this was a diverse cohort, I am not sure what the selection process was." This points to inherent bias that some entrepreneurs felt they had more of a right to be there than others.

Overt Discrimination.

Some males experienced discrimination, whilst others *blended in* to get along with traditional males. A participant from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, Orlando, indicated that he benefited from Caucasian male advantages although he is "mixed race but I look white. I'm sensitive to these things, but I have never actually experienced racism. I look white so I look like a white guy, I get the benefit of being white". However, Lucas, a LatinX/Hispanic male in the co-ed non-profit accelerator noted, "I have a disability that is not visible. Yet, when it became visible based on my accommodations, it became a disadvantage." Other older Caucasian males described instances of experiencing ageism. Ted, one of the older Caucasian males from the co-ed non-profit

accelerator, noted that, “Age was a disadvantage in the competition. It was skewed toward the younger entrepreneurs”. Ethan, another older Caucasian male from the non-profit accelerator, said, “All of the older participants placed in the bottom third of the competition. That was not lost on us.” Minority males encountered more overt discrimination. Victor, an African American male from the co-ed non-profit accelerator, explained that there was skepticism about his qualifications, noting that there are very few people of colour in the accelerator. As expressed to him one fellow participant said, “I’m not sure if you’re here because you’re black or...”. Victor also stated that he was guided by advisors to focus on a black target market because he is black. This is an outcome with a lack of minority advisors. Furthering the feeling of “othering”, Victor also said, “I don’t want to be singled out, I don’t want the accelerator staff coming up to me and saying hey, I know you’re black are you okay? Did we say anything rude to you today because you know when we don’t think about it that way?”

Discussion

This study applies an intersectionality theoretical framework that engages hegemonic masculinity within the accelerator context and as such illuminates its impact on non-traditional male entrepreneurs. This paper concurs with extant research that recognises entrepreneurship as a hegemonic and masculinised domain (Ahl, 2006; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; McAdam *et al.*, 2019).

Historically, the profile of the quintessential entrepreneur has been represented as a white, heteronormative, male (Ahl, 2006; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Smith, 2010; Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow and McAdam, 2015), who is driven primarily by economic gain (Ahl, 2006). Literature explores how masculinised behaviours are favoured and rewarded by entrepreneurial processes and institutions (Calás *et al.*, 2009; Hechavarría and Ingram, 2016), resulting in a bias against those who do not fit this idealised profile. Therefore, entrepreneurship has largely been siloed and non-traditional entrepreneurs continue to be viewed as “other”, due to the perception that their businesses do not measure in size and scale to the average male-dominated venture (Ahl, 2006; Kubberød *et al.*, 2021; Özkazanç-Pan and Muntean, 2021). From an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), these stereotypes extend to those who do not fit with the masculinised stereotypes that are typically boasted by entrepreneurial culture (Knight, 2016). The negative implications of this “othering” for non-traditional entrepreneurs is evident across many areas of venture development including garnering social capital (Özkazanç-Pan and Clark-Muntean, 2018; Marlow *et al.*, 2019) and raising growth capital (Edelman *et al.*, 2018). Traditional masculine behaviours were an entitled participation in the accelerator, such as the intentional pursuit of funding, as opposed to validation of self-efficacy or even an idea. The lens of competition was viewed as a motivator not an inhibitor. Traditional alpha males viewed others who did not portray traditional masculine behaviours as weak or not qualified.

Our findings indicate different accelerator experiences within the male gender. The majority of the participants in this study were Caucasian males and thus, traditional masculine behaviours were enabled and exhibited. The presence and persistence of hegemonic masculinity reinforced gender relations, in terms of perceptions, norms and expectations (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Accelerator forces (including its staff) influenced masculinity construction. As noted by the accelerator's executive director comments, they managed the accelerators in a “masculine” manner. As such, the accelerator context created and maintained hierarchies which envisioned the entrepreneur as white, male, and Western (Braidotti, 2019) and stereotypically associates entrepreneurship with “male individuals creating high-growth businesses” (Crosen *et*

al., 2024, p. 44). Masculinity is taught and learnt as a performance and an art of critical, competitive spectatorship and performance. As Hickey-Moody (2015, p. 145) explains “not all men are hegemonies, and some men fare much more successfully than others in the competitive economy of gender performance that is established through hegemonic masculinity”. When entrepreneurial and competitive norms were violated, e.g., investors favouring women or accelerator entry/participation, those who identified with traditional masculine behaviours were skeptical and questioned the validity of the competitive aspect of the accelerator.

This study elucidates the ways in which men navigate the accelerator landscape. As a social and cultural practice, gender is both performed and practiced (Linstead and Pullen, 2006), enacted through doing (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and brought into being through performativity (Gherardi, 1995). Gender performances within the venture accelerator context emerged as complex and changeable depending on the audience and the impression that the individual wants to portray which concurs with other scholarly works (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Giazitzoglou and Wilson, 2023; Giazitzoglou, 2024).

Non-traditional masculine behaviours from male entrepreneurs that did not adhere to the localised, accelerator masculine code led to alienation or “othering” (Ahl, 2006). Some attempted to blend in to hide their non-traditional heritage. They desired emotional support as a form of validating their identity, idea, and recognising their feelings throughout the entrepreneurial journey. Non-traditional males did not want to call out their experienced “othering” but were troubled by the lack of inclusion. The accelerator’s environment did not recognise the lack of inclusion as the environment was neglecting the spectrum of masculinity within entrepreneurship. This lack of recognising the need for intersectionality was evident even in the accelerator that embodied diversity with its participants. In order for minority groups to benefit more from venture accelerators will require the challenging of tacit presumptions and dismantling of an entrenched masculinised culture (Godwin *et al.*, 2006).

As noted by Hamilton, (2013, p. 96), “the male experience is commonly the empirical resource for theorising entrepreneurship; furthermore, it is represented as a particular form of masculinity. This masks women’s experience, but in remaining blind to gender any understanding of what this means for masculinity is also absent”. We contribute to the expanding field of gender research in entrepreneurship, which aims to challenge the inherent gender bias in entrepreneurial discourse (Ahl, 2004, 2006; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The dominant discourse, characterised by hegemonic masculinity, assumes the typical entrepreneur to be heterosexual, white, and male, reflecting the enlightenment-based conception of 'Man' as the universal standard (Braidotti, 2021).

Conclusion

This paper explored the lived experiences of early-stage male entrepreneurs in a venture accelerator context, by posing the following research question: How do intersecting identities influence the construction and expression of masculinity among male entrepreneurs in venture accelerators? In order to address our underpinning research question, we adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology utilising 56 semi-structured interviews conducted with four accelerator managers and 52 male accelerator participants across four distinct accelerator cohort groups.

Within this paper, we make the following theoretical contributions: First, we advance gender research by expanding its scope beyond traditional feminist paradigms into the multifaceted domain of intersectionality. In doing so, we not only amplify the voices of marginalised groups but also broaden our investigation to encompass the diverse spectrum of entrepreneurial masculinity within the male gender. By acknowledging the intersecting axes of identity such as

race, class, and sexuality, we provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Second, we shed light on the concept of hegemonic masculinity within the context of accelerator programmes and examine how non-intersectional institutional norms impact non-traditional male entrepreneurs. Hegemonic masculinity results in behaviours, such as entitlement, survival of the fittest and bro culture in the accelerator context. We add to a more nuanced understanding of hegemonic masculinity by providing insights into how other markers of difference intersect or inform different performances of masculinity. We shed light on the discrimination experienced due to lack of fit (othering) with hegemonic masculinity ideals. Through in-depth analysis, we uncover the subtle yet pervasive ways in which these norms shape the experiences and opportunities available to entrepreneurs who diverge from traditional masculine archetypes. Our findings highlight the importance of recognising and challenging these hegemonic structures to create more inclusive environments for all entrepreneurs. Third, we contribute to the burgeoning literature on accelerators by exploring the role of hegemonic masculinity within these contexts. Even in environments where diversity and inclusion are espoused values, our research reveals how entrenched cultural norms often perpetuate and reinforce traditional masculine ideals. By interrogating the ways in which these norms manifest within accelerator programmes, we offer insights into the mechanisms through which they are reproduced and the implications for entrepreneurs who do not conform to these ideals. In sum, our study extends existing scholarship by integrating intersectionality into gender research, uncovering the impact of non-intersectional institutional norms on non-traditional male entrepreneurs, and examining the role of hegemonic masculinity within accelerator contexts.

The preceding discussion suggests several possibilities in terms of future work to address some of the limitations of this research. Given that entrepreneurial hegemonic masculinity has been examined across diverse settings, such as pubs and early-stage accelerators in this study, **Future research exploration could delve into other non-traditional male groups identified herein, including minorities, individuals of different sexual orientations, and various age demographics. This could elucidate the non-binary nature of masculinity.** This study initiates research that combines contextual intersectionality. Future studies could expand the application of contextual intersectionality into different environments, such as more advanced-stage accelerators like Techstars and Y-Combinator, or within the contextual framework of venture capital investment processes. Notwithstanding these limitations, this paper advances current understanding of venture accelerator environments and their effects on both traditional and non-traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity.

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TABLE 1: Background Information on Venture Accelerators

	Phase 1		Phase 2
	Collegiate Accelerator A	Collegiate Accelerator B	Non-Profit Accelerator (Two Cohorts)
Acceptance Criteria	-Alumni or College Student -Start-up idea	-College Students -Start-up idea	-College Students to Professionals -Start-up traction
Gender Mix (Man/Woman)	70M/30F	50M/50F	60M/40F
Cohort Size	70-100	15	35-40
Funding/Equity	N/A	N/A	Cash grants
Duration	Semester	6 weeks	4 months
Co-working space	✓	✓	✓
Mentors/Advisors		✓	
Content Experts	✓	✓	✓
Workshops/ Seminars	✓	✓	✓
Showcase/ Pitching Event		✓	✓
Competition	No	No	Yes
Director	Female	Female	Female

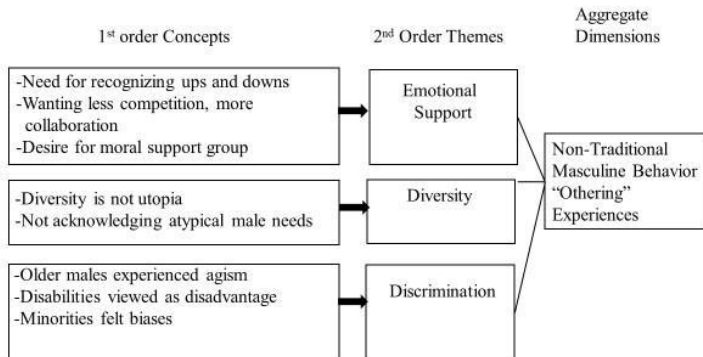
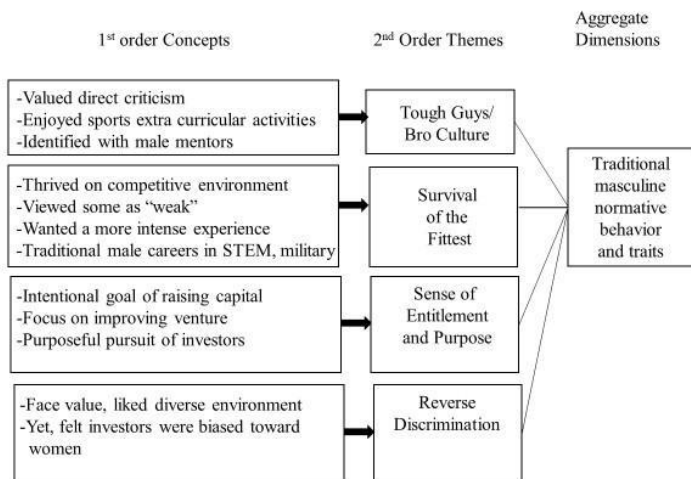
TABLE 2: Accelerator Participant Demographics

Phase 1	Ethnicity	Industry	Venture Founder	Age
Andrew	Caucasian	Entertainment	Yes	College
Branden	Asian	Social	Yes	College
Colby	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	College
Daniel	Caucasian	Healthcare	No	Grad
Edward	African American	Tech	Yes	College
Frank	Caucasian	Social	Yes	Grad
Gary	Indian	Tech	Yes	College
Harry	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	Grad
Ian	Caucasian	Cleaning/Apparel	Yes	Grad
Jack	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	College
Kevin	Asian	Social	Yes	College
Larry	African American	Tech	Yes	College
Mark	Middle Eastern	Media	Yes	College
Nolan	Middle Eastern	Healthcare	Yes	College
Oliver	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	College

Phase 2	Ethnicity	Industry	Male Founder	Founder Age
Ralph	Greek	Tech	Yes	30s
Quincy	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	College
Steven	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	50s
Ted	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	College
Ulysses	Caucasian	Property Mgmt.	Yes	College
Victor	African American	Tech	Yes	30s
Will	Caucasian	Consumer Goods	Yes	College
Xavier	Caucasian	Cannabis	Yes	College
Zachary	Caucasian	Tech	Yes	50s
Aaron	Latinx/Hispanic	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Barry	European	Travel	Yes	College
Chris	African American	Agriculture	Yes	Grad
Damon	Middle Eastern	Healthcare	Yes	College
Ethan	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	50s
Fred	African American	Male Haircut	Yes	College
Garett	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Henry	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Ivan	African American	Gaming	Yes	College

Jasper	Caucasian	Transportation	Yes	40s
Kyle	African American	Tech	Yes	College
Lucas	Latinx/Hispanic	Hardware Tools	Yes	40s
Matthew	Middle Eastern	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Nick	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Orlando	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Peter	Caucasian	Media	Yes	30s
Robert	African American	Consumer Goods	Yes	College
Seth	Caucasian	Video/Tech	Yes	30s
Tim	Caucasian	Educational	Yes	30s
Vincent	Indian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Warren	Middle Eastern	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Aiden	Caucasian	Media	Yes	40s
Bryan	Caucasian	Healthcare	Yes	30s
Charles	Caucasian	Education/Training	Yes	30s
Finn	Caucasian	Media	Yes	50s
Hunter	Middle Eastern	Tech	Yes	College
Marcus	Caucasian	Healthcare	No	50s
Paul	Indian	Healthcare	Yes	30s

FIGURE 1: Data Structure



Appendix A: Claims Tables

Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
We enrolled in the accelerator hoping to find investors.	Robert	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Consumer Goods	Anchor/PQ	Entitlement
We are here to pitch to people who have money.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Anchor/PQ	Entitlement
We have been successful in raising equity capital through our participation in accelerator programmes.	Nolan	Collegiate	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Entitlement
Right now, we are working on finishing up raising capital. We did this by working with investors with “Big Swinging Dicks”.	Will	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Consumer Goods	Anchor/PQ	Entitlement
One of our goals is to be able to work for ourselves. So, once we figure out something that is successful, we can generate revenue and sustain ourselves.	Ivan	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Gaming	Anchor/PQ	Entitlement
I knew going into college that I wanted to be an entrepreneur. We are going to have investors give us money.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Workhorse	Entitlement
Getting investments from, you know, top tier VC firms, that was very important to us.	Edward	Collegiate	African American, Tech	Workhorse	Entitlement
Access to capital. For a lot of people, it's like, you live or die off of cash flow.	Harry	Collegiate	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Entitlement
We're also participating in Mass Challenge. We recently pitches to a big group of investors.	Ian	Collegiate	Caucasian, Cleaning/Apparel	Partial	Entitlement
We have already secured \$500k from angel investors.	Jack	Collegiate	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Entitlement
I am looking for funding.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Partial	Entitlement
I just finalised a seed round. I am a technology company and can attract investors.	Ralph	Co-ed non-profit	Greek, Tech	Partial	Entitlement
We did an investment readiness programme that they had, that really helped us attract funding.	Aaron	Co-ed non-profit	LatinX/Hispanic, Healthcare	Partial	Entitlement
The accelerator helps us solidify our financial outlook.	Damon	Co-ed non-profit	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Partial	Entitlement

Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
I would have preferred to be around much more intensive people and have a more intensive programme.	Ralph	Co-ed non-profit	Greek, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest

...without the competition, there would have been a little less pressure, and the quality of the message or our communication would have suffered.	Aiden	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Media	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
I think the competition was important for us. It had some sort of gravity to what we were working on and then some amount of focus.	Bryan	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
I always knew that I would be an entrepreneur...ideas are the easy part for me.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
I already knew quite a bit about leadership due to my military experience.	Mark	Collegiate	Middle Eastern, Media	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
I am a strappy kind of guy.	Edward	Collegiate	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
The accelerator feels like being on "Survivor". I don't think the staff would tell you that. They are completely oblivious to the fact that anyone could be having a different experience than Disneyland. It makes you feel awkward when you comment on it because you're going to disrupt the utopian fantasy.	Victor	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Survival of the Fittest
We are associated with an elite University and get to associate with smart people.	Edward	Collegiate	African American, Tech	Partial	Survival of the Fittest
We're all self-driven and motivated people and that just makes us want to work harder, otherwise you wouldn't be here in the first place.	Gary	Collegiate	Indian, Tech	Workhorse	Survival of the Fittest
In the pitch practice, you can only give critical feedback. My advisor really pushed me.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Partial	Survival of the Fittest
My advisor got right down to, "I think this is gonna fail because of X, Y, Z". It was great for me 'cause it was the first time somebody was just honest.	Kevin	Collegiate	Asian, Social	Workhorse	Survival of the Fittest
My advisor was perfect for me 'cause, right from the start, it was, like, "no BS, right? I mean, it's like, you don't have a business here".	Kevin	Collegiate	Asian, Social	Workhorse	Survival of the Fittest
Well, did you mean to give him such a bad score?	Orlando	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Partial	Survival of the Fittest
But I actually think that in terms of the development experience I would say up to the	Seth	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Video/Tech	Partial	Survival of the Fittest

when it becomes a competition, it was extremely positive.					
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Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
We want everyone at a certain level. It is meant to be harsh. Reminds me of boot camp; knock them down and build them back up.	Manager A	Collegiate	Female, Caucasian	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
Sometimes we give them a swift kick.	Manager B	Collegiate	Female, Caucasian	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
Our mission is to get the participants ready to work with the big boys.	Manager C	Co-Ed non-profit	Female, Caucasian	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
...all like drill sergeants...and tough. And that's good. My advisor said, you don't have a business here. How are you going to make money? So, we spent time critically re-evaluating the business.	Larry	Collegiate	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
Even though it was honest feedback, some of the people weren't experienced in your particular industry. They would give an opinion, but their feedback wasn't helpful.	Matthew	Co-ed non profit	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
Gentle feedback, gentle critical feedback, it's great. I think to a certain degree, they need to be careful with it. The trick is that when you give feedback, you cannot always be positive.	Damon	Co-ed non-profit	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Bro Culture
We (the guys) play basketball on Wednesdays.	Gary	Collegiate	Indian, Tech	Partial	Bro Culture
I am a male, so I probably would maybe gravitate towards the male advisors.	Gary	Collegiate	Indian, Tech	Partial	Bro Culture
I would have enjoyed more bonding activities.	Andrew	Collegiate	Caucasian, Entertainment	Partial	Bro Culture
The voting was done by the peers and for me what happened because of my technology base somewhat complicated business, I'm in the help care software it was very difficult because the was these accelerating facial crèmes this just wasn't going to get it no matter how well I did with my pitch you know.	Marcus	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Partial	Bro Culture
He forced me to think about things that I probably would have shrugged off as not important and then end up being very important.	Bryan	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Partial	Bro Culture

Commented [MM1]: Does this make sense?

Because I think at first we kind of came of as goofy and then probably the second weekend we decided, hey let's really try to get the most out of these, let's act like we are like established businessmen.	Xavier	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Cannabis	Workhorse	Bro Culture
One of the startups was a solution for new mothers, to me it was a little more scattered and not necessarily directly relevant to our business.	Damon	Co-ed non-profit	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Workhorse	Bro Culture
I think it held a lot of people back from actually hearing constructive criticism, and I think it also made people kind of nervous about sharing negative or constructive feedback with teams.	Henry	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Workhorse	Bro Culture
I am a straight white male.	Zachary	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Bro Culture
Some people competed in the finals but did not meet the requirements of the programme, like attending weekends.	Henry	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Partial	Bro Culture
I felt like the down selection process and the semi-finals where you self-compete, I think it's a good thing.	Jasper	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Transportation	Partial	Bro Culture

Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
You're in an environment for four months, where people are criticising your business whether it was constructive or not. I don't think this is an environment where your confidence is built. You end up questioning a lot of things.	Victor	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Emotional Support
The accelerator needs to address more of the mental aspect of entrepreneurship. It would be helpful to say at the onset, if you feel like you got in here by mistake, you don't belong here, your idea is dumb, that's just part of the journey.	Garett	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Emotional Support
When you come to this hyper-saturated community where everyone's like that, it can make you feel a little bit insecure and self-conscious at first, depending on where you are in your journey.	Gary	Collegiate	Indian, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Emotional Support
This is my social and emotional support group.	Charles	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Education/Training	Anchor/PQ	Emotional Support

Any form of credibility that we could get is very important to us.	Edward	Collegiate	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Emotional Support
So, it was very helpful to use that sort of like a light in the darkness guiding me.	Ulysses	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Property Management	Workhorse	Emotional Support
I've been in lots of groups and retreats and conferences over the years and I've, on a number of occasions, had to call out typically older white men who just take all the time and that didn't happen a lot, but it definitely happened. I think that some awareness of that would be helpful because as I said to these men in other contexts and I didn't really see opportunities to, or need really to bring it up in front of the whole group but time is a resource like every other resource and it's typically taken by those with more privilege, just unconsciously. They just, it's an entitlement thing. It's possible that it could be a thing that should be addressed.	Garret	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Workhorse	Emotional Support

Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
It was so neat to work with the wide cross-section of people from all aspects, people from different regions of the country, regions in the world, different backgrounds, technical and otherwise.	Nick	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
I thought that having a wide variety of different kinds of companies in the programme, was very helpful in terms of giving us perspective on how different people think about what we were doing.	Seth	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Video/Tech	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
The environment was very diverse, not only was it a good balance for treating men and women equally, but culturally I think there was a good balance also.	Chris	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Agriculture	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
We got different perspectives, people with different backgrounds, people with different experiences. What was great was to sort of get their feedback from a different perspective. Too	Vincent	Co-ed non-profit	Indian, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality

often you are part of the same group, and you sort of hear the same stuff.					
When it comes to accredited investors, there were a number of investors that were investing in women-owned companies and that seemed to be also a little bit of a bias towards the women owned companies.	Zachary	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
There was one time that was slightly awkward for me. I was in a group of investors and startups; I was one of maybe two guys. The VCs were only interested in investing in women.	Finn	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Media	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
Whilst this was a diverse cohort, I am not sure what the selection process was.	Charles	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Education/Training	Anchor/PQ	Intersectionality
It is a very open environment. We learn from other teams and share our diverse experiences.	Frank	Collegiate	Caucasian, Social	Workhorse	Intersectionality
Exposure to different events and people.	Colby	Collegiate	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Intersectionality
It's a very broad community.	Ian	Collegiate	Caucasian, Cleaning/Apparel	Partial	Intersectionality
I come from a non-profit background, so, I've always worked towards something more mission-driven.	Frank	Collegiate	Caucasian, Social	Partial	Intersectionality
It was a huge source of frustration because it's a long process with a lot of time, and I watch people say things that no one really knew better than the analyser.	Ethan	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Workhorse	Intersectionality
The environment, the décor, was oppressive. I was very much drained.	Chris	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Agriculture	Partial	Intersectionality
One main thing that we had to do is score and because of my deflection I couldn't score, I had to bring somebody with me to score. People with disability are a disadvantage.	Lucas	Co-ed non-profit	LatinX/Hispanic, Hardware/Tools	Workhorse	Intersectionality
I voted for people that I was more familiar with.	Robert	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Consumer Goods	Partial	Intersectionality
More diverse judges.	Matthew	Co-ed non-profit	Middle Eastern, Healthcare	Partial	Intersectionality
Sometimes the immediate reaction from a particular perspective point of view. It feels like this is an incredibly safe place and it's okay for me to say things that are not quite safe. I was	Peter	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Media	Partial	Intersectionality

just like, I got to roll now I felt, "Oh, I'm sorry for you." Now you're scared.					
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Quote	Informant	Accelerator	Demographics	Quadrant/Text	Theme
...mixed race but I look white. I'm sensitive to these things, but I have never actually experienced racism. I look white so I look like a white guy, I get the benefit of being white.	Orlando	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Healthcare	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
I have a disability that is not visible. Yet, when it became visible based on my accommodations, it became a disadvantage.	Lucas	Co-ed non-profit	LatinX/Hispanic, Hardware/Tools	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
Age was a disadvantage in the competition. It was skewed toward the younger entrepreneurs.	Ted	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
All of the older participants placed in the bottom third of the competition. That was not lost on us.	Ethan	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
I'm not sure if you're here because you're black or...	Victor	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
I don't want to be singled out, I don't want the accelerator staff coming up to me and saying hey, I know you're black are you okay? Did we say anything rude to you today because you know when we don't think about it that way?"	Victor	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Tech	Anchor/PQ	Overt Discrimination
So that's just all about taking the bias out of taking the out of the whole thing, just making it more fair across the board.	Zachary	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Overt Discrimination
There was an overt bias towards tech companies.	Henry	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Partial	Overt Discrimination
I feel there is a little bit of a disconnect of the people who have experience.	Aiden	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Media	Partial	Overt Discrimination
I felt like a fish out of water.	Henry	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Tech	Workhorse	Overt Discrimination
It leans itself towards the natural human tendencies.	Robert	Co-ed non-profit	African American, Consumer Goods	Partial	Overt Discrimination
I'm slightly mobility challenged, I was in an accident a few years ago so getting back and forth, there were these times, but it was just tough to get in and out back and forth often.	Peter	Co-ed non-profit	Caucasian, Media	Workhorse	Overt Discrimination