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## Article

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# To be or not to be... self-employed: impact of family background on women entrepreneurs

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## Abstract

This paper aims to reveal entrepreneurs' patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting as a basis for entrepreneurial behavior and, thus, highlights the relevance of the entrepreneurs' embodied cultural capital. The empirical data presented in this article are based on a qualitative empirical study of twenty women entrepreneurs, their families (mothers, fathers, and siblings) and their partners, in total 100 interviews. The entrepreneurs interviewed have in principle similar institutionalized cultural capital, as all are academics and all have started a business in the fields of education, consulting, or media. However, they differ essentially in how they manage their self-employment in the sense of *doing* entrepreneurship. The results show that habitual patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting differ which helps to understand entrepreneurial behaviour. In this sense, the process of starting a business can be regarded as a demonstration of the habitus at work.

**Keywords** Embodied cultural capital · Self-employment · Entrepreneurial behavior · Habitus

## 1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship has significantly gained importance over the last decades in Western European countries. Notably, the share of solo self-employed individuals, defined as self-employed without employees, has almost doubled in the last 15 years and now accounts for around 80% of all self-employed in the United Kingdom and over 50% in Germany (Eurostat 2019). Solo self-employment is most widespread in knowledge-intensive services like IT, education, media, and consulting (Gottschall and Kroos 2007). As the majority of new ventures are started by only one person without additional employees, the entrepreneur him-/herself is of vital importance.

Notably, women are underrepresented in this group as only about 30% of all self-employed are female in Germany although they are likewise educated and competent (Eurostat 2019). To delve deeper to understand this phenomenon and its underlying principles, previous research found that women establish businesses differently to men since they act

more carefully and are less oriented to growth and economic profit (Bruni et al. 2004; Brush et al. 2009; Fehrenbach and Lauxen-Ulbrich 2006; Moore and Buttner 1997).

Further, entrepreneurs are differentiated by whether they were primarily pushed or pulled to start a business (Amit and Muller 1995; Dawson and Henley 2011; Hessels et al. 2008; Kirkwood 2009). Actors pushed to start a business may do so, for example, because of unemployment, making the new venture a necessity, whereas entrepreneurs pulled to start a business do so because they see an opportunity, perhaps to be independent and enjoy better working conditions. Pull entrepreneurs are more successful than push entrepreneurs. However, the bifurcated differentiation between push and pull factors is seen critically (Dawson and Henley 2011) since motivations to starting a business are expected to be more diverse and blended. What has not yet been investigated in this context are the effects on the design of everyday lives and the self-management capabilities required to structure daily life as an entrepreneur although it can be expected that different impetus of starting a business might lead to different forms of organization and of *doing* entrepreneurship.

Importantly, the founder's personality and, related to this, entrepreneurial behavior is decisive for the establishment and success of a business. However, entrepreneurial behavior depends not only on qualifications and skills, but also on the entrepreneur's disposition toward perceiving, thinking,

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and acting. In particular, dispositions are conceived as being decisive for entrepreneurs, as they affect personal strategies and behaviors to structure and organize work in the context of their everyday lives. So far, it has not been investigated how the habitus affects entrepreneurial behavior which is why this research question is in the center of this paper. Thus, drawing on Bourdieu (1986), the relevance of embodied cultural capital and the habitual dispositions of entrepreneurs will be focused.

This study responds to the call for more qualitative research in the field of entrepreneurship (Gartner and Birley 2002) and reports empirical findings of a qualitative study of women entrepreneurs in Germany. As men and women start businesses differently, in this paper, we focus on women. The persons interviewed have in principle similar institutionalized cultural capital, as all are academics and all have started businesses in the fields of education, consulting, or media. However, they differ essentially in how they manage their self-employment in the sense of *doing* entrepreneurship, in what is conceivable to them, as well as in their aims, and their problems.

The paper begins with an overview of research on entrepreneurial behavior and discusses the entrepreneurial self and its neglected prerequisites by introducing Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and the habitus as *modus operandi*. To understand the motivation of entrepreneurs, a practice-theoretical perspective highlighting the habitus is applied. Finally, theoretical conclusions regarding the relevance of the habitus for entrepreneurial behavior and entrepreneurship research are discussed. The paper contributes to the literature through its focus on the habitus of entrepreneurs to explain the motivations of starting a business.

## 2 Entrepreneurial behavior and the relevance of the habitus

To reveal entrepreneurs' patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting and how it affects entrepreneurial behavior, we will first give a brief overview over entrepreneurship research. To overcome the classic distinction between entrepreneurs' resources on the one hand and the entrepreneurial behavior on the other hand, we will refer to Bourdieu's work. Especially Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and the habitus of entrepreneurs will be introduced as this constitutes differences in perceiving, thinking, and acting and, thus, deals with the neglected prerequisites of entrepreneurship.

### 2.1 Entrepreneurship research: a brief overview

In the last 30 years, researchers have taken a closer look at the entrepreneur as it is central to understanding

entrepreneurship who this person is. Entrepreneurship research mainly focuses on the motivation to start a business, the ensuing process (especially entrepreneurial behavior), and the resulting success. Generally, three approaches can be distinguished.

*Neo-institutional approaches* highlight the relevance of the particular embeddedness of starting businesses in the political, economic, and social environment (the legal and economic system, but also values, attitudes, and behaviors). Research focuses on entrepreneurs' behaviors in their specific environment and on *structural* factors facilitating entrepreneurship (Thornton 1999). For example, studies following this approach emphasize the effects of the institutional environment (Baumol 1996), such as the specific configuration or structure of the labor market.

*Resource-based approaches* highlight enterprises as "a collection of productive resources" (Penrose 1995 [1959], p. 24) and search for the configuration of capabilities in terms of human capital (education, professional experience, etc.), social capital (relationship, networks) and financial capital (Afandi et al. 2017; Brush et al. 2001; Nieto and González-Álvarez 2016; Rodríguez and Santos 2009). Accordingly, resource-based approaches attribute the requirements of starting a business to the financial, social, and human capital of entrepreneurs (Blanchflower and Oswald 1998; Gedajlovic et al. 2013; McKeever et al. 2014). As a result, decisive capabilities can be exposed and differentiated. However, the relationship between relevant resources and entrepreneurial behavior cannot be explained properly by the resource-based view.

*Cognitive approaches* are person-centered and analyze the processes leading to the entrepreneur's identification of possibilities and opportunities. In this tradition of "opportunity recognition" (Shane and Venkataraman 2000), the personality and character of the entrepreneur are decisive, and typical *entrepreneurial* characteristics are performance-orientation, risk taking, assertiveness, and initiative (Brandstätter 1997; Shaver and Scott 1991). Trait approaches investigate the specific characteristics of entrepreneurs and have led to a considerable body of literature aimed at identifying an entrepreneurial profile of successful enterprise owners (Rauch and Frese 2007). Although no clearly identified set of behavioral attributes, personal characteristics, or core competences has emerged distinguishing successful entrepreneurs from the rest, some skills are clearly associated with entrepreneurial success. For example, a meta-analysis of more than 50 studies on general characteristics of entrepreneurs identified the following entrepreneurial characteristics (Timmons 1994): (1) commitment and determination, (2) leadership, (3) opportunity obsession, (4) tolerance of risk, ambiguity, and uncertainty, (5) creativity, self-reliance, and ability to adapt, and (6) motivation to excel. However, Zhao and

Seibert (2006) show on the basis of their meta-analytical review that effect sizes for each personality dimension were small and that a considerable heterogeneity exists.

Moreover, there is a considerable amount of research focusing on the familial embeddedness and its effects on self-employment (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). Relevant research shows that children are more likely to be self-employed when fathers have already been self-employed (Hundley 2006). Usually the effect is traced back to familial resources and the familial ways of living or relevant values have not been considered. Generally, “most of the early research on entrepreneurs focused on who this person was, rather than on what this person did” (Ahl 2004, p. 46).

Since the majority of new ventures are started by one person without any further employees, “the entrepreneur’s experience, personality, perceptions and resources are formative for new venture survival and growth” (Garnsey 1998, p. 530). In trait approaches, the entrepreneur is assumed to have a particular personality that enables him or her to think and act entrepreneurially. This line of research focuses on cognitive capabilities, value orientations, and attitudes. According to Baum (1995), the entrepreneur’s personality manifests in the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to handle the challenges of self-employment. However, a broad consensus holds that entrepreneurship research needs a comprehensive model not restricted to individual factors (McKenzie et al. 2007). Instead, a behavioral approach looking at the manifestations of entrepreneurial behavior is expected to be more conducive to advance entrepreneurship research (Phan 2004; De Clercq and Voronov 2009a).

Especially the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu provides analytic tools to analyze structural aspects like the entrepreneur’s resources on one hand and the entrepreneurial behavior and its prerequisites on the other hand.

## 2.2 Bourdieu’s concept of embodied cultural capital and the habitus of entrepreneurs

Bourdieu conceptualizes resources as different forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural (Bourdieu 1986). Especially the embodied cultural capital is assumed to be the most important prerequisite for entrepreneurship as it provides the basis for different patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting, for example, how to successfully deal with uncertainty and risk. Embodied cultural capital is “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into habitus”, and refers to the “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 47). These dispositions were preconsciously absorbed in the process of primary socialization and comprise a preconscious taken-for-grantedness and routines in ordinary thinking and acting (Gorton 2000). Cultural resources affect core dispositions such as

work habits, basic learning orientations, ways of handling money and time. Hence, embodied cultural capital refer to knowledge, skills, and competences creating cultural distinction. Following Bourdieu, an individual’s capital partly defines how well that person is accepted and integrated into a particular field and able to position herself within it (see also Friedland 2009; Kerr and Robinson 2009). Thus, capital is the basis for the individual’s practical sense or as a “feel for the game” that makes agents understand “what is to be done in a given situation” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 146). Consequently, the concept of the habitus could be useful ways to analyze entrepreneurial behavior in uncertain situations (Collet 2009).

Bourdieu’s work has already been adopted in entrepreneurship research. There is literature focusing on social capital (Afandi et al. 2017; Anderson et al. 2010; Keating et al. 2014; Nieto and González-Álvarez 2016; Rodríguez and Santos 2009) as well as on issues like entrepreneurial learning (Karatas-Özkan 2011), legitimacy (Stringfellow et al. 2014), transnationality (Nicolopoulou et al. 2016; Patel and Conklin 2009; Spigel 2013), and practices like consumption (Centner 2008). However, the concept of habitus and cultural capital are only rarely addressed in entrepreneurship research (Pret et al. 2015). As an exception, De Clercq and Voronov (2009b) take an initial step toward a practice perspective on entrepreneurship. With their conceptualization of entrepreneurship as an unfolding of inevitably socially embedded everyday practices, they ask how newcomers gain legitimacy when entering a field. They point to the process of simultaneously balancing the potentially contradictory expectations of being able to fit in (as an aspect of cultural capital) and being able to stand out (as an aspect of symbolic capital), and they consider handling this tension to be a key component of an entrepreneurial habitus (De Clercq and Honig 2011). In this sense, De Clercq and Voronov (2009b) provide valuable insights into the social making of the entrepreneur and the importance of their practical sense or *sense pratique*.

Thus, the heterogeneity and diversity of entrepreneurs is manifested in their specific strategies of starting a business as entrepreneurial behavior is directly linked to the person’s habitus as *modus operandi*. As such, it stems more from unconscious dispositions and less from conscious calculation and consideration (Gorton 2000). Most entrepreneurship research typically measures entrepreneurial behavior through questionnaires (Chandler and Lyon 2001). In contrast, this study analyzes the entrepreneur’s perceptions, attitudes, and day-to-day practices through a qualitative approach focusing on the actor’s understanding and behaviors (Gartner and Birley 2002), and draws attention to the influence of the neglected embodied cultural capital of entrepreneurs and the familial dispositions.

### 3 Data and methods

The empirical findings presented in this article stem from a qualitative study conducted from 2008 to 2010. The project analyzed women entrepreneurs in Germany, exploring their motivation in starting a business by looking at their day-to-day practices and focusing on their habitus. We focused on women because they are starting businesses at increasing rates and because this focus ensures the relative homogeneity of the sample.

Twenty entrepreneurs, their families (mothers, fathers, and siblings) and their partners were interviewed with guided narrative interviews, in total 100 interviews. The sample of participants was sourced through a combination of advertising in the media and snowball sampling. The entrepreneurs were selected according to four criteria:

1. They should have an academic degree since we focus on highly skilled women starting a business.
2. They should have established their business in consulting, education, or media, as the study focuses on self-employment in knowledge-intensive industries since we expected the entrepreneur's personality in the interaction with customers of great importance in these fields.
3. They should have officially been in business for 3–18 months to ensure that the challenges of launching self-employment are present.
4. Their self-employment should not have emerged through the takeover of a family business or a franchise company.

The interviews addressed, among other things, the starting of the business, current challenges of self-employment and time management, and the use of leisure time in the family of origin. Interviews with the entrepreneurs took approximately two hours; interviews with parents, siblings, and partners rarely exceeded 90 min. In addition to the interviews, a group discussion with the family members addressed key issues of the specific families.

In accordance with the principles of qualitative research (Silverman 2013), data collection and analysis were intertwined. The analysis process relied on both individual and team analysis. At the conclusion of all the interviews of a family case, the four members of the research team collectively developed starting points for the case analysis. After listening to all the interviews of a family case and reading the corresponding transcripts, the team members individually worked out first interpretations of the relationship of familial habitus and the process of starting a business by considering the entrepreneur's and the family members' patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting as obtained in the respondents' narrations and perspectives. These

interpretations were presented in team meetings where divergent understandings were discussed in terms of communicative validation and, subsequently, either rejected or modified and further developed. In certain cases, analysis included key text passages with the help of a qualitative sequential method of analysis (Reichert 2002) or with the help of the documentary method (Bohnsack 2010) to deepen case-specific logics regarding the entrepreneur's habitus. From the interview analysis, we identified family themes as key issues of the specific families on which we focused in the family group discussion. The transcripts of the group discussion were analyzed similarly to the interview transcripts. Finally, this step further helped to deepen case-specific logics as we highlighted family themes that constitute the patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting.

In a next step, qualitative type construction was applied to identify empirically grounded types of entrepreneurs with certain characteristics (Kluge 2000). Following the principle of constant comparison, the cases of all entrepreneurs and their families were compared to each other. This comparative approach yielded a horizon regarding the interviewee's motivations and the related key issues, and we assembled detailed family case profiles. The comparison revealed parallels between the cases and showed that the logics partially manifest the same theme with variations. The entrepreneurs interviewed differ in the way they start their business and manage their self-employment and in what is imaginable and conceivable to them, as well as in their aims, and their problems. Then, the interviews were grouped with a view to their self-understandings to gather empirical regularities and to group similar cases. As a result, the empirical cases assigned can further be distinguished according to implicitness, orientation and meaning of starting a business. For the purpose of this paper, the discussion introduces two entrepreneurs and their familial environment whose strategies and entrepreneurial behavior are identified as ideal typically (Weber 1978 [1921]) with respect to the motivation and process for starting a business and distinctly contrasting entrepreneurial behavior and familial dispositions.

### 4 Empirical findings

The two cases were selected for presentation in this paper because they (1) in principal have similar preconditions as they both have a doctorate degree as institutionalized cultural capital and have founded their businesses in consulting services. Moreover, they (2) exemplify the entrepreneurial behavior of push and pull entrepreneurs (Amit and Muller 1995; Dawson and Henley 2011; Hessels et al. 2008; Kirkwood 2009), and (3) they showcase the impact of familial values on entrepreneurial behaviour.



#### 4.1 Case 1: Mareike Kunze

The first entrepreneur presented here is Mareike Kunze. She can be characterized as a pull entrepreneur as she perceives self-employment as an opportunity and enjoys better working conditions.

*“I am an entrepreneur”—The implicitness of self-employment*

Mareike Kunze<sup>1</sup> (born in 1972) is an *entrepreneur to the core*. She studied economics and obtained a doctoral degree. Hereafter, she was employed as an executive in a company to gather the experiences necessary for starting her own business. She always anticipated that she would be self-employed one day.

I was ALWAYS sure about that. I could not imagine having an employer, a boss, orienting myself to organizational structures and being in that forever. Actually, during school and college I was pretty sure that I would be self-employed one day.

Mareike Kunze is a pull entrepreneur as she consciously quit her employment to become self-employed and to being able to work autonomously. She decided to start her own business when the board of directors changed. Then, she said to herself, “Now I go with the flow”. In 2007, Mareike started her self-employment in the field of human resources development, offering consulting and coaching services. She rented office space and already acquired work orders at the beginning of her self-employment, for example from the company she was formerly employed by.

Finally, Mareike felt that she had arrived where she belonged as she regards her self-employment holistically: “It’s not just work, but a life concept”. Moreover, it seems as if her life concept was aligned to self-employment as this is her point of reference in each of her explanations.

*Doing entrepreneurship: the pursuit of autonomy*

For Mareike Kunze, the possibility of self-managing life and work is “easing the burden”, the “greatest present ever”, and she perceives this as “endless luxury, totally luxurious”. During her employment, she had to adapt to predetermined structures and squeezed herself into the “corset” of organizational structures.

From childhood on, she perceived to have always been self-determined and self-organized and have always acted independently and self-responsibly. Mareike and her family members compare her lifelong pursuit for autonomy with the figure of Pippi Longstocking, the main character in a series of Swedish children’s books. The father regards this figure

as a role model for his daughter: “Pippi Longstocking does everything differently and Mareike liked that a lot”. Mareike herself talks in the family group discussion about the fictitious figure being the most important person in her life.

If someone asked me today who has been the most important person in my life, I think I would say that this was Pippi Longstocking. And I still think she is, the older I get: A girl who goes through life with her own rules, but with common sense and humanity.

Referring to Pippi Longstocking, Mareike and her family members emphasize her pursuit of autonomy and inward orientation. She acts independently and proactively, is unswervingly oriented to her ideas, while others, even family members, had hardly any insight. The predisposition for this attitude can be traced back to her familial culture of origin.

*Autonomy as a familial value*

The pursuit of autonomy can also be found in the familial culture of origin. Mareike’s parents’ ran a thriving kiosk at a tourist attraction and were self-employed for 30 years. The parents’ work was very present in family life since the kiosk was open 15 h per day, 7 days a week during summer. All family members helped in the business. However, there were no fixed or predetermined duties the daughters had to do, the parents imposed only few requirements such as a common supper. Rather, it was important for the parents to convey that the children should “use the time well, not to fritter it” (mother) and to think about how they wanted to fill their daily lives and leisure time.

The parents themselves pursued the strategy of acting creatively as all family members were aware of the risks of self-employment and of factors that could have destroyed the parents’ source of income from one day to the next. Self-employment is rather considered positively in the family members’ narrations of both generations. The sister underlines, for example, “Well that [self-employment] means for us a bit of freedom”, because “we try to be in control of our own destiny; to create our lives’ journey and be responsible for that”.

Accordingly, Mareike and the members of the Kunze family see the pursuit of autonomy as a key issue and assume themselves as responsible for organizing their lives. In this case, we observe an intergenerational transfer of the familial value of autonomy: The family members talk about being libertarian and decisive and show a high degree of creative will and proactive behavior. Moreover, they perceive the possibility of realizing their own ideas of a good life in the context of self-employment.

Despite all similarities between Mareike and her family of origin, there are also differences, particularly reflected by the handling of time. The parents’ working time was determined by the kiosk, as it was open for about 15 h a day, 7 days a

<sup>1</sup> The names are pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees themselves.

week in 8 months a year. The privacy of the family only took place during the remaining time and this was clearly defended as their home was described as a “stronghold” (sister). Also Mareike pays attention to the demarcation between work and private life, but she handles time in a rather self-governed way. In contrast to her parents, who had to orientate their opening hours to the tourists’ demands, Mareike organizes her everyday life according to her will.

## 4.2 Case 2: Maxie Muster

The second entrepreneur presented in this paper is Maxie Muster. She can be characterized as a push entrepreneur as she started her own business to avoid unemployment. In this case, familial values also appear in the founding process, but in a contradictory manner and less conducive to self-employment.

*“I actually cannot state that I am a typical entrepreneur”—Stopgap self-employment*

Maxie Muster (born in 1978) is rather the *prototype of an employee*. She studied business informatics at university and obtained a doctoral degree. She aspired to be employed in a company but she could not find a job. Thus, she became self-employed with the help of government grants in 2008 and founded a consulting service. Her self-employment started poorly. Orders relating to her core business are sporadic, which is why she also works as a waitress to make some money. If her business fails, her alternative plan will be to work as an employee.

Starting a business was a “hard decision” for Maxie because of her “need for safety”. On the contrary, she would have been “happy” to have had a “permanent employment contract” for a “well-paid job” in a “well-known company”. Previously, she had never considered self-employment as an option. However, when she could not find a job, she *risked* the step and became self-employed after asking the family members for advice. In her self-perception, Maxie Muster is “NOT a typical entrepreneur” as she still has to learn “breaking away from employee-thinking” and internalizing entrepreneurialism instead.

Because I have always been an employee and that has not been bad at all. One person says now you do this, now you do that. And now I have to do EVERYTHING by myself.

Maxie Muster thinks and acts like an employee and expects others to tell her what to do next. This outward orientation is apparent throughout her biography. However, this strategy leads to difficulties in the context of her everyday life as a *forced* entrepreneur.

## *Doing entrepreneurship: outward orientation*

Maxie Muster emphasizes that she needs “a lot of discipline to structure the day” and she is “a bit too sloppy with the timing”, especially because she works from home. She sleeps in and sometimes has to finish her jobs at night. Furthermore, she becomes aware of “constantly being an entrepreneur and not only from 8 to 4”. This also implies that she “should not wait for jobs” but be proactively selling her business and acquiring orders. Maxie asks others for advice, such as her family members, as she has no ideas what entrepreneurial behavior implies. She is rather oriented to external points of reference, to others’ expectations and guidelines. This focus can be found throughout Maxie’s biography: She chose subjects in school that promised the best chances for a well-paid job.

So, I went to school and I chose subjects that could be useful in the future. At no time did I think that’s ME, I really want that. It was more that I thought this or that could be useful in a job later on. Then, I even chose my degree based on this principle and I only thought where can I make a lot of money in the future.

Consequently, her decisions have always been based on the expectation of promoting job-related or economic success mostly estimated by others. Also her field of study was not her “own decision”, rather she started a subject with good prospects and at the recommendation of her father.

He [the father] wanted me to do something where I would make good money and where I could have a good job as well.

The same is true regarding her doctorate which is something that she originally “never” wanted to do. But on her supervisor’s advice and expectations, she started to work on and finish it. Maxie sums up: “Well, that was this thing again: I slid into this, I never wanted to do it. But then I just did it”. However, Maxie’s outward orientation seems to be inappropriate in the context of her self-employment but this strategy is rooted in the familial culture of origin.

## *Safety as a familial value*

Also in the family of origin safety is of high value. Maxie Muster grew up with a father who enjoys being permanently employed. He perceived that he had “tremendous luck” when he found a life-time employment at university “without ever being unemployed, even for a day”. Like in the case of Mareike Kunze, the two daughters were home alone and organized their leisure time by themselves while the parents worked. In this context, Maxie perceives that she and her sister could do whatever they wanted. However, she recalls that meals and appointments, such as for music lessons and other hobbies, structured the day. In this sense, the daughters learned a “well-ordered day-to-day routine” and “to be on

time”, and the founder states “we pretty much knew what we had to do at any time”.

Generally, the father was highly involved in the biographical development of his daughters, told them what to do and exemplifies what to aspire. However, the aspirations were not fulfilled in Maxie’s case, and the father states regarding Maxie’s self-employment, “Of course it bothers me”. He reflects that “after such a career” he would have expected something different:

She did everything right that you have to do: being ambitious at school, graduating successfully, studying, PhD, semester abroad.

The father assumes correctly arranged biographical components as part of a “master plan” to lead safely to a permanent, well-paid position. In this context, self-employment is perceived as a suboptimal alternative. In this respect, already the father internalized external standards and demands of the labor market. Also Maxie’s life seems oriented towards a master plan and she pragmatically adjusts to (pre)conditions.<sup>2</sup> Her actions are based on the expectations of her father and her supervisor, and subsequently she tries to discover and adapt to the external expectations of what constitutes a *typical* entrepreneur. This strategy of realizing a predetermined biography can be assumed as a distinct form of orientation to safety.

The orientation to safety was revealed in the narrations of both generations. Thus, an intergenerational transmission of the familial value of safety can be identified.<sup>3</sup> As this value can best be pursued by having a permanent employed position—from the family members’ perspectives—Maxie is still oriented to the structural conditions of being employed.

## 5 General discussion

### 5.1 Summary of findings

This paper asked how the habitus affects entrepreneurial behavior and investigated women entrepreneurs and their families by applying qualitative methods. As a result, the entrepreneurial behaviors and the underlying patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting reveal the habitus as a *modus operandi* that substantially determines the work organization and daily lives of entrepreneurs. For example, while entrepreneurs might associate self-employment with autonomy,

<sup>2</sup> Maxie Muster chose her own pseudonym and it can be translated to *maximum pattern*, which could not have been more appropriate for the case and family logic.

<sup>3</sup> The entrepreneur’s focus on safety is even manifested in her business idea (which also constituted the topic of her dissertation).

**Table 1** Differentiation of entrepreneurs

Classification dimensions	Pull entrepreneur	Push entrepreneur
Perceiving	Self-employment means independence and autonomy	Self-employment means insecurity
Thinking	Entrepreneur to the core	Employee-like
Acting	Inward orientation	Outward orientation

others experience self-employment as insecurity and, thus, show different behaviors.

Overall, the study delivers three novel and important results regarding entrepreneurial behavior. First, the *biographical implicitness* of starting a business differs. In the case of Mareike Kunze, primary pull factors stimulate the step into self-employment since it has always been part of her life plan. In the case of Maxie Muster, push factors *force* the step into self-employment since this is basically *against her will*: It is the only alternative to avoid unemployment and has been *unimaginable* so far. Thus, the push and pull motivations to start a business are grounded in previous life courses and plans.

Second, the analyses of daily work organization reveal the entrepreneur’s patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting towards self-employment. Basically, the requirement to self-structure and organize daily life can be perceived either as *luxury* or, in contrast, as a difficult and challenging task. Mareike Kunze, with the self-perception of being an *entrepreneur*, acts autonomously, proactively, creatively, and oriented to her own ideas. Maxie Muster, representing a *prototype of an employee*, is oriented to employment, with external criteria and expectations. She notices and reflects the requirement to regulate and structure herself, but perceives this as a *burden*. She finds it difficult to maintain boundaries between work-life and life-world and acts and structures her day rather reactively.

Third, the comparison of the two familial cases reveals that in one example the family members can easily establish a self-determined structure and organization of their daily life and life course. In contrast, in the other example perceive predetermined structures and external expectations as safety and find it difficult to create their own structure. Interestingly, the familial values become manifest in entrepreneurial acting. The underlying patterns can be reconstructed as *strategies of the habitus*, which reproduce unconscious practices. Bourdieu argues that the habitus becomes operative as a generative principle of perceptions, thoughts, and actions. The habitus influences essentially what occurs in the horizon of the imaginable, what belongs to unquestioned deep convictions, what is perceived as legitimate, and what behaviors are considered to be appropriate, and in this sense the habitus directly affects the entrepreneurial behavior. Table 1



links the patterns of perceiving, thinking and acting to the different entrepreneurs.

A closer look at the patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting—the embodied cultural capital—of entrepreneurs reveals that these structuring principles are constitutive for entrepreneurial behavior.

## 5.2 Conceptual contributions

Entrepreneurship research views family background as important for entry decisions, but the mechanism that carries this is more than just memory, traits, social and economic capital. Using the example of women entrepreneurs in Germany, this study addresses this void and extends the entrepreneurship literature by focusing on the embodied cultural capital. The study elucidates that the habitus functions as a “modus operandi” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 52) and influences entrepreneurial behavior. The decision to start a business implies that the entrepreneur enters a field in which specific expectations exist concerning the *how*. Dominant *rules of the game* are not explicitly verbalized but seem to reside in a tacit understanding between the players. Depending on the habitus developed, some practices are experienced as natural whereas others are inconceivable. Consequently, entrepreneurs are equipped with specific patterns of perceiving, thinking, and acting, which will be deployed in new situations. In the end, entrepreneurial behavior depends on the entrepreneurs’ dispositions and, consequently, on their embodied cultural capital as the *hysteresis effect* implies that in changed circumstances, the habitus continues even when it is no longer adequate (Bourdieu 1990; Kerr and Robinson 2009).

However, the analysis revealed a remarkable heterogeneity of entrepreneurs. In this sense, push and pull entrepreneurs not only differ regarding their impetus to start a business but also regarding their entrepreneurial behavior and their underlying habitus (Amit and Muller 1995; Dawson and Henley 2011; Hessels et al. 2008; Kirkwood 2009). Consequently, entrepreneurial success does not depend on a string of attributes like initiative, decisiveness, creativity, and risk-taking (Schumpeter 1934). Rather, the habitual dispositions of perceiving, thinking and acting are decisive, and with this, a relational perspective on individuals (Tatli et al. 2014). Thus, employing a relational sociology like Bourdieu’s helps us decenter the individual entrepreneur as unit of analysis. That is, individuals themselves are not static entities but also relationally and processually redefined in and through social interaction.

Moreover, by applying a qualitative empirical approach drawing on the perspective of entrepreneurs, we addressed the fact that motives for starting a business can be ambiguous (Dawson and Henley 2011). As an in-depth study, this empirical investigation potentially reduces recall biases and

reveals that although the decision to start a business can be a combination of push and pull factors, the actor’s narrations are dominated by either perceived necessity or opportunity. Thus, starting a business is less about conscious decisions and push or pull motivations but rather about unconscious prerequisites.

## 5.3 Limitations and perspectives for further research

The study findings must be considered in light of its limitations. First, the findings emerge from a qualitative empirical study that uncovered the relevance of the entrepreneur’s habitus and the motivation to start a business. While the study has provided insights into a previously neglected area, it is limited to a highly specific sample of 20 women entrepreneurs and their families in knowledge-intensive fields of employment. Future studies could try to compare the findings of women entrepreneurs to those regarding men.

Second, the strategies of the habitus can be seen as familial heritage, which could be a resource or an obstacle for entrepreneurs. However, the intergenerational transmission of family culture is expected to be relational since one cannot necessarily assume that values, orientations, and resources are transferred from one generation to another (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1991). Rather, the familial cultural heritage has to be accepted and adopted by the heirs. In fact, entrepreneurship research as well as support services for entrepreneurs to further educate them could apply more habitus-sensitive approaches. Altogether, this study has shown that the push or pull motivations to start a business and the entrepreneurial behavior are a demonstration of the habitus at work.

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