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# Documenting ‘Essex-Boy’ as a local gendered regime

## 1. Introducing the notion of gendered entrepreneurial regimes

This article documents the existence of ‘Essex-Boy’ culture to illustrate at a theoretical level how certain forms of masculinity and entrepreneurship via the process of neo-liberalism are intertwined with and within local enterprise cultures, entrepreneurial dreams and gender regimes. This examination is important because masculinity is powerful in shaping male and female entrepreneurship in practice and is severely under-researched. Essex is a ‘geographically-bounded’ county in the south-east corner of England, situated immediately north of London. As a social construct, entrepreneurship is usually portrayed as if it is an unashamedly ‘Masculine Endeavour’ (Bruni, Gherdi and Poggio, 2005) and is said to be viewed through a “*male gaze*” (Mulvey, 1985). It is a life theme shaped by masculinity and patriarchy (Bolton and Thompson, 2002)<sup>1</sup>.

An appreciation of the masculine perspective is important because research into gender is predominantly reported from the female perspective. Thus, research on masculinity seldom features (Smith, 2010; Sundin and Tillmar, 2010) with gender becoming synonymous with female or womens’ entrepreneurship. What constitutes a masculine perspective remains vague. Nevertheless, masculinity is a complex, multi-faceted social construct, not a singular one. This dearth of direct research on masculinity within the gender-entrepreneurship discourse accentuates extant research which documents the dominance of malestream societal influences. Patient scholarship is

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<sup>1</sup> A powerful visual representation of this can be found on the book cover of “*Narratives of Enterprise*” (Down, 2006) which illustrates the masculine nature of the stereotypical representation of the entrepreneur as a middle aged, grey haired man, unsmiling yet still smug, smoking a cigar in shirt and tie set off by the now ubiquitous braces. To me it illustrates the pervasiveness of masculinity within ‘*British Enterprise Culture*’.

required to uncover forms and practices of masculinity which influence entrepreneurial actions and behaviours.

As a man and entrepreneurship scholar, I find the emerging notion of local-gender-regimes (Williams, 2002; Pascall and Lewis, 2004; Acker, 2006; and Connell, 2006), fascinating because, if masculinity shapes entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship can be viewed through the lens of a gendered regime. A gender regime is a configuration of gender relations within a particular setting such as a school, a family or a neighbourhood, or in this case a geographically mediated milieu (Essex and London). Male domination in business and entrepreneurship may result from the embeddedness of gender regimes that historically excluded women (Blake, 2005). Nevertheless, gendered regimes are important because at a local level they operate on a differential basis to transform our identities (Williams, 2006). Despite being resistant to change they accommodate change over time. During the course of the last century the major change which occurred in the nature of gender regimes, is that women have moved away from the domestic to the public sphere (Walby, 2002, p.21). Clearly, a deeper understanding of gendered regimes is helpful in achieving a clearer understanding because much of the perceived social injustice towards women occurs within specific institutions and regimes.

Ahl (2004) ably documented gender inequality in relation to how entrepreneurship discourse is socially constructed and propagated in western societies and is but one of many female entrepreneurship scholars who have criticised the male gendered nature of entrepreneurship. Conversely, Marlow (2009) critiqued the entrepreneurship literature for adopting a gender-neutral perspective and Lansky (2000) made similar criticisms in relation to how we fail to engage with theories of gender when sex differences are

researched. This is fascinating because ‘Entrepreneurship’ and ‘Entrepreneurial Behaviour’ is socially constructed as a gendered activity mediated via stereotypical representations (Smith, 2006; Down, 2006; Gupta *et al*, 2009). Yet, despite the publication of seminal books on masculinity by Bly (2001) and Keen (1992), no studies by male entrepreneurship scholars specifically tackle the masculinity- entrepreneurship interface (Burns, 1991).

Pascall and Lewis (2004) identified voice as a key element of gender regimes. Thus, I present an alternative viewpoint to the “*Stigmatized Masculine Voice*” (Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998) whilst unpicking a form of masculinity narrated as typical to a local area. One must distinguish between voice as a ‘surface’ act of speaking/being heard and its deeper level where the power of silence as discursive practices eliminates certain issues from arenas of speech and sound. To date, the masculine voice in entrepreneurship studies has been examined through a critical feminist lens (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). Ironically, within the burgeoning literature of female entrepreneurship masculine voices are silenced by virtue of exclusion and self-exclusion<sup>2</sup>. The concepts of voice and visibility go hand in hand as ‘Essex-Boy’ culture is predominantly a masculine voice.

In relation to the masculine voice, notions of culture (Middleton, 1992) and “Enterprise Culture” are viewed as masculine constructions (Corner and Harvey, 1991: During, 2005). For During (2005, p.14-16) enterprise cultures emphasise sets of specific personal and ethical qualities such as self-sufficiency, appetite for risk, individualism, creativity and a sense of adventure as well as self-control, financial expertise and

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<sup>2</sup> This issue is of crucial importance to the debate and to the silences because of the failure of the male academic/entrepreneur to engage or adjust their voice to feminist critiques, allowing the feminist viewpoint to develop exponentially without counter claims. All voices and silences contribute. *I am not advocating a critical response to the feminist critique – merely that there does appear to be a lack of engagement by male scholars with gender per se.*

management skills. In certain circumstances, an enterprise culture (and individual proto-entrepreneurial initiating dreams associated with it) may be considered a regime.

Thus to determine whether gendered social constructions influence entrepreneurship *per-se*, I analyse entrepreneurial behaviours and practices located within localized gender-regimes (Essex-Boy culture) using documentary research techniques (Scott, 1991). Essex-Boy culture is a deeply masculine enterprise culture intertwined with criminality and infused with geographic, personal and cultural elements. I become aware of this through readings in Criminology such as O'Mahoney (2000) and the t.v documentary "Britains Underworld: Essex Bad-Boys"<sup>3</sup> where it is considered part of the gangster psyche. It could be argued that the 'Essex-Boy' phenomenon and variant stereotypes are "*imaginary masculine identities*" (Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2005; Newburn and Stanko, 2005) as has been suggested of other masculine criminal identities because if you espouse the 'Essex dream' you are perhaps following an imagined reality authored by others from their narratives of lives.

This research illuminates the gendered assumptions, and privileges, on which mainstream entrepreneurship theory and practice is premised to illustrate the complexity of researching and understanding entrepreneurial behaviour and entrepreneurship *per-se* whilst highlighting the elusive nature of local enterprise cultures. The collective gender practices of individuals and networks influence the type of entrepreneurship which emerges from a particular milieu to develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the complexity of the gendered nature of entrepreneurial action and the specific roles

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<sup>3</sup> The one hour documentary can be viewed on you tube on [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O97Blrf\\_mtc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O97Blrf_mtc)

possible to men and women within particular enterprise cultures and gendered regimes. Consequentially, this research contributes towards our understanding of the (re)gendering of entrepreneurship. By offering an alternative reading on the gendered nature of entrepreneurship through a masculine lens I generate new theoretical insights adding to existing conceptualizations of gender as to how entrepreneurship experiences vary along gendered lines.

Having introduced the notion of gendered entrepreneurial-regime in section 2, I consider masculinity, enterprise-culture, dreams and local-regimes, neo-liberal theory and gender as an identity narrative. In section 3, I introduce methodology and discuss methodological challenges relating to documentary analysis. In section 4, I present documentary evidence to establish if the stereotypes have substance or are merely manufactured myth? To do this, I document geographic and historical elements of ‘Essex-Boy’ Culture; reflect on ideological and political elements of the culture; mull over gendered aspects of the gendered cultural stereotypes; and document semiotic and aspects of popular culture relating to the gendered stereotypes. Finally, in section 5, I discuss the gendered nature of ‘Essex-Boy’ culture presenting conclusions and implications for future research.

## **2. Masculinity, enterprise-culture, dreams and local-regimes**

Connell (1996) argues that there are multiple, layered, collective masculinities which are constructed differentially in different milieus, cultural settings and regimes and that these are actively constructed in symbolic masculinity suggesting different ways of doing

masculinity. For Morrell (1998) all institutions have their own gender regimes which distribute power unequally because of hegemonic-masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) which influence behaviour within regimes. Hegemonic masculinity is typically viewed as oppressive albeit, gender regimes impose and encourage particular forms of masculinity and discourage others (Frank, 2010). For a wider consideration of masculinity *per-se* see the readings of Tolson, 1977; Connell, 1987; Morgan, 1992; Kimmel, 1992; Connell, 1995; Connell, 2000; Butler, 2004; and Connell And Messerschmidt, 2005).

There are definite geographical, sectoral, spatial and/or time variations involved in the gendering of entrepreneurship and the creation of enterprise cultures (See Stam, 2010; Bosma and Schutjens, 2011; Trettin and Welter, 2011 for an insight into geographical, socio-spatial entrepreneurship research.). A classic study of enterprise culture in relation to 'place' was undertaken by Johannisson (2000) who examined the localised enterprise culture of the Swedish entrepreneurial enclave of Gnosjö. However, studying entrepreneurship and place is only but one facet of understanding localised enterprise cultures because other aspects of gender, local culture and politics lie outside the entrepreneurship paradigm and are thus proto-entrepreneurial. One must also take cognisance of the concept of flawed masculinity (Hawson, 2006) which is deeply embedded in social culture because it links into the notion of the "*bad-boy entrepreneur*" (Smith, 2003). Ignoring such hubristic flaws, or being politically correct, does not make the issue go away because gender and masculinity are present in culture prior to any consideration of entrepreneurial proclivity.

## 2.1. Enterprise culture and local-regimes:



Links between social class, social mobility, enterprise culture and entrepreneurial dreams are interesting and under researched. The Cambridge online Dictionary defines an 'Enterprise Culture' as "*a society in which personal achievement, the earning of money and the development of private business is encouraged*". This section provides an overview of the changing nature of British Enterprise Culture (see Raven, 1989; Law, 1990; Burrows, 1991; Keat and Abercrombie, 1991; Heeles and Morris, 1992; Roberts, 2001; Dodd and Anderson, 2001; Carr and Beaver, 2002; and Thompson, 2003). This is **vital** because entrepreneurial dreams form an integral part of local enterprise cultures and gender regimes. Researching enterprise cultures, entrepreneurial dreams and localised gender regimes is difficult because they are ephemeral and exist in popular consciousness; in biographies and in personal stories; and in the pages of the popular press and in literature.

Likewise, researching dreams can be problematic because as intimated by Fontana (1993), dreams are highly condensed individuated narratives or symbolic shorthand spanning an **incredible** amount of material whose meanings are mutable. Dreams are important personalised narrative forms, linking personal stories, fantasy and aspirations to the sub-conscious as transformative, internalised stories, providing the start and the finish, sustaining one on the journey. For Jung (1963, 1964), dreams are 'the stuff of life' and foster creativity. Keeping abreast of enterprise culture demands a continual reconstruction of self (Heeles and Morris, 1992).

Enterprise cultures are linked to an initiating 'Entrepreneurial Dream' **via** the spirit of action which links "*dreams and deeds*" (Anderson, 1995, p.158). However, entrepreneurial dreams come in many variations, but all act as an initiating, motivational

drama or enabling mechanism, allowing one to live the dream that may be our future (Smith, 2006). Moreover, such constructs are under researched in the entrepreneurship literature because **they** are specific to individual cultures and because one is most likely to encounter references to them fleetingly mentioned in histories or biographies, than in main stream academic journals. Nevertheless, both the deeply masculine ‘Entrepreneurial’ and ‘American’ dreams are accepted elements of the entrepreneurial construct (Catano, 2001; Smith, 2006).

## 2.2. Masculine gendered regimes:

Each specific culture appears to have their own versions of the entrepreneurial dream, thus Fallon (1994) talks of the ‘Irish dream’ of owning a race horse and a large mansion in the country; Bourgois (2002) refers to the ‘Puerto-Rican Entrepreneurial Dream’; and Davis (1987, p.186) discusses the salesman’s dream of earning the first million. The entrepreneurial dream is both the initiation and the end point of the entrepreneurial narrative – the outcome, as well as being a product of prevailing entrepreneurial rhetoric. Both narrative mechanisms act as ‘cultural scripts for propagating culturally approved stories of success and how to achieve it.

However, not all aspects of an ‘Enterprise Culture’ are desirable, moral or ethical. Since the seminal works of Warshow (1962) the ‘Gangster Dream’ has become an accepted facet of both capitalist ideology and the entrepreneurial dream. The ‘Gangster Dream’ is a variant form of masculine myth and entrepreneurial dream providing alternative masculinities (Catano, 2001, p.5). Sociologists and Anthropologists such as Blok (1971); Hobbs (1987: 1996); Bourgois (1995); and Cohen (1998) have conducted

convincing ethnographic studies which link criminal activities to entrepreneurship via localised enterprise cultures. What unites Blok's study of the Mafioso of a Sicilian Village; Hobb's two studies of working class entrepreneurship and criminality in the East End of London; Bourgois's study of Puerto Rican Crack Cocaine Dealers in New York; and Cohen's study of Jewish and Italian Gangsters also in New York – is that they deal with deeply masculine 'Macho' entrepreneurial regimes with identifiable enterprise cultures steeped in criminality and criminal practices. In such locales, the entrepreneurial and criminal dreams are entwined<sup>4</sup>. These studies also document criminal entrepreneurship (Smith, 2009). Thus although the diverse entrepreneurial typologies discussed here are heterogeneous they exist in the same socially constructed communities and are part of local social entrepreneurial cultures. Indeed, Baumol (1990) suggested that entrepreneurs and criminals emerge from the same social strata and all are capable of enacting productive, unproductive and destructive forms of entrepreneurship.

### 2.3. Essex Boy Culture:

The academic literature on 'Essex-Boy' culture is sparse (Smith, 2003). Like the male gendered enterprise cultures' and localised-entrepreneurial-dreams discussed above, the roots of this culture are difficult to research and document, because they derive from historical and cultural readings of ideas, behaviours and artifacts. This makes it difficult for researchers to identify the first time a term was used, or entered the social consciousness. The evidence for such a genre exists in the tabloid press, in books, personal stories and in shared jokes and humour, making documentary research methods

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<sup>4</sup> What is significant about all of these ethnographic studies is that they came to us via sociology and anthropology and all rely in equal measure on (hi)story and observational studies. All are in published books outside the sphere of entrepreneurship.

a very practical solution. Moreover, 'Essex-Boy' constructions exist on a stereotypical continuum of possible constructions somewhere between the fringe-criminal, entrepreneurial wide-boy and self-employed and as such may be a form of gendered identity narrative. Indeed, the sociologist Beverley Skeggs (Skeggs, 2005) has suggested that as a gendered identity the 'Essex-Girl' phenomenon is a narrated gendered identity and is a storied role into which young women of a particular class can invest themselves to generate exchange-value via affects and display understood by those individuals in a particular gender regime. Thus the 'Essex-Boy' construct is shaped in juxtaposition with a related 'Essex-Girl' identity.

Moreover, Essex enterprise culture sits alongside other cultural stereotypes and is influenced by the rise of neo-liberalist doctrine (Giroux, 2004). For example, McRobbie (2006) in reviewing the '*Yummy Mummy*' phenomenon argued that women now create their own place in a new moral economy. Furthermore, McRobbie (2008) argues that the concept of "*female individualization*" permits contemporary young women a greater agency than before. The same could be said for 'Essex-Girl'. Thus they can make an impact on society albeit how an individual of any gender is affected by neo-liberalism depends on how they are included, or excluded in the systems and gender regimes it promotes. Scholars emphasize this dynamic of inclusion and exclusion to show how neo-liberalism has profoundly different effects on different parts of society (Simpson and Price, 2010). As a consequence, of neo-liberalist policies and attitudes certain successful populations (such as 'Essex-Boy and Girl') are grudgingly rewarded, whereas unsuccessful populations such as 'Chavs' (Smith and Air, 2012) are punished and deprived of resources (Jessop, 2004). This links culture to identity and narrative.

Neo-Liberalism [explains](#) why gendered stereotyping is so pervasive, despite being regarded as one of the most dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century (Giroux, 2004, p.495). Although neo-liberalism is an economic doctrine, it has ramifications for all facets of human life because it operates at the interface of culture, power, and politics and relates to the ideology whereby capitalist, free market forces shape our cultural realities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Its fundamental premise is that the market is the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions and shapes its social constructs. Thus young men and women who aspire to follow 'Essex Enterprise Culture' as a gendered regime adopt it as a socially acceptable cultural template upon which to base their actions, behaviours and gendered narratives.

#### 2.4. Gender as an identity narrative

This section links the ideas [discussed above](#) to the ideas of enterprise culture, local gender regimes, criminal masculinity, and gender as practice via the introduction of narrative because 'Essex-Boy' culture invariably comes to us via stories. Gender is a narrative identity (McNay, 1999) and according to Williams (2002) is a narrated concept we 'try on' and as men and women we experiment with and practice gender to adopt a personalised gendered identity. Williams refers to a 'trying on' process where we select aspects of gender, race, and class structure and tailor them to mutually reinforcing, community norms which shape our identities. Gendered identity is an accomplished interactionally and is negotiated and continually renegotiated in linguistic exchange and social performance (Davies, 1989; Cerulo, 1997; Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Mishler, 1999). Mishler (1999) and Reissman (2001) question whether adult identity formation is

static, singular and continuous and suggest that identities are constituted in and through spoken discourse and via symbolic exchanges which can be regarded as visual conversations broadcasting to others how they have chosen to interpret their pasts to communicate how they want to be known. This is achieved through a dialogic, storied social process of “*Positioning*” (Bamberg, 1997) which is the assignment of fluid roles to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories (Harre and Van Langenhove, 1999, p.7). Thus their narratives are positioned within a number of broader cultural discourses, and in this case, in popular and enterprise cultures. The ‘Essex-Boy’ label may well be a form of enterprising masculine culture that can be tried for fit. Nevertheless, gender is also locally governed and the options available are locally constituted. Manifestations of localized gendered regimes such as ‘Essex-Boy and girl’ stories are important because they affect the availability and acceptability of particular forms of masculinity and entrepreneurship.

### **3. Methodology and methodological challenges**

In this exploratory study, gender forms the basis of the main theoretical framework used to make sense of the social constructions encountered but the links between social constructionism and neo-liberal culture theory (Giroux, 2004) are of particular interest. Nebulous and changeable concepts such as ‘Essex-Boy and Girl’ as gendered social stereotypes are under researched, justifying the use of ‘Documentary Research’ (Platt, 1981; Scott, 1991; Mogalakwe, 2006) to document the phenomena [making](#) it available for other scholars. Documentary research involves the use of texts, documents, media reports, newspaper article, books, film, video and photographs and innumerable other

written, visual and pictorial sources in paper, electronic, or other 'hard copy' form as source materials (Scott, 1991). The method involves an analysis of available documents using techniques of content or semiotic-analysis to identify relevant themes. Mogalakwe (2006) lists the advantages of the method as:-

- Accessibility of access to a diverse sample of material.
- The invisibility of the researcher ensuring the material is 'uncontaminated' by the preconceptions, personal values and opinions of the researcher at the point of their production.
- It allows researchers to study sensitive topics and corroborate and triangulate data to construct authenticated social realities.

This is important because 'Essex Enterprise Culture' has only ever been documented in an abstract tabloid manner. To locate documentary material, I made a thorough search of the internet using keywords such as 'Essex-Boy', 'Essex-Girl' and 'Essex-Man' selecting documents via convenience sampling because they were readily available. The readings were chosen because of their availability and convenience<sup>5</sup>. I downloaded links to numerous articles and made a list of material which resulted in the readings chosen as set out in table 1:-

**Insert table 1 here.**

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to consider what kind of knowledge is created through an analysis of the texts selected because, I was not relying on observations of a culture but readings that are a part of that culture and were written by their authors from privileged, published positions. I was working with sources that propagate the idea of 'Essex-Boy' thus convenience sampling helped me analyse what the idea is and how it is created and reproduced. It is important to separate this from claims about whether the culture exists, or how widespread it is.

These eclectic sources corroborated each other helping build up a nuanced understanding of the construct. To ensure rigour, I read the articles and subjected them to a 'Close Reading' (Amernic and Craig, 2006) to identify and draw cultural and gender based themes from the readings.

Documentary methods and techniques proved ideal for desk based research such as this *albeit* such methods are considered unscientific by some scholars because they produce interpretations *not* concrete theories. I use documentary evidence to draw on analysis of fictional and journalistic texts to conduct a narrative analysis to understand how 'Essex-Boy' has become a narrative theme, rather than using these texts to refer to a social reality. The nature of the analysis is both a realist analysis of social construction / and an exploration of the social construction *per se*. The documentary approach via cultural analysis adds value missed through the use of standard observational techniques. Documentary research is underused in entrepreneurship hence the value added by this study<sup>6</sup>.

Utilising the techniques of Miles and Huberman (1994, p.44) on analyzing qualitative data, I engaged in an iterative process of coding, memoing, and writing reflective commentaries on various aspects of the rich data to stimulate deep analysis. I used content analysis, counting frequencies of words and phrases, gradually distilling them into themes before placing the reduced data into a condensed format for inspection to 'profile' stereotypical Essex men and women. Profiling entails constructing composite characteristics into categories and believable narratives akin to constructing academic

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<sup>6</sup> Researching a social phenomenon such as entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behaviour using qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews; observational techniques; ethnography; shadowing; or even historiography (Goodman and Kruger, 1988) is commonplace - however, documentary research has been conspicuous by its absence.



typologies using all known facts irrespective of their veracity. Building such profiles and making the ‘case’ for the very existence of these Essex stereotypes entailed a considerable amount of reading of internet sources, blogs and commentaries. To tell a story without too much interruption it was necessary not to get too bogged down in the minutia of documenting sources to avoid authoring a turgid historical tract. However, I was acutely aware that although I was reliant upon cultural stereotypes as heuristic devices, not all people fit the general profile. For example, ‘Essex Culture’ cannot ever represent the cultural diversity of the population of Essex because not every inhabitant of Essex will vote Tory, or fit the profile of an entrepreneurial wide-boy. One must be cautious of such stereotypes because one has to abstract the notion of ‘Essex-Boy’ as a local gender narrative from Essex itself. In Essex there are other gender regimes and other gendered narratives/practices that are part of a mixed gender regimes. Reflecting on this, the ‘Essex-Boy construct’ appeals to me as a man because of its local positioning as a gendered regime. However, I am not sure whether it is an example of one regime with multiple aspects or if there are multiple regimes. It is interesting that while this particular narrative has a place name in its title, it does not explain the place in totality.

#### **4. Documenting Essex-Boy as a gender regime or manufactured myth?**

This section focuses on works and texts which create the Essex phenomena yet how does one research and document a phenomenon that encompasses enterprise culture and wine bars and guns and gangsters? There are a plethora of evidential elements to consider including geography, history, demography, ideology, politics, semiotics and popular culture, and context. Yet, in building gendered profiles associated with ‘Essex Enterprise

Culture’ I was reliant on stereotyping and caricaturing which is problematic from a research perspective.

#### 4.1. Documenting geographic and historical elements to Essex-Boy Culture:

There is a definite geographic element to ‘Essex-Boy’ culture in that it appears to be confined to a definitive geographic area – the English county of Essex, situated to the North of London on the Thames Delta. Although traditionally and historically Essex was regarded as a predominantly rural county it has many towns and industrial areas. Larger towns include Brentwood, Basildon, Clacton, Chelmsford, Dagenham, Harlow, Ilford, and South End on Sea. Each town has a separate culture – some like Basildon and Harlow are dormitory new towns and others like Dagenham are former industrial towns.

According to social commentators and journalists such as Heffer (1990, 1991; and May, 2010), the roots of ‘Essex-Boy’ culture lie in the period after World War 2 when demographic (and political) changes led to working class families being encouraged to leave war-damaged slums in inner-city London to resettle in the ‘Home-Counties’ including Essex. [These](#) ‘Home Counties’ and in particular Kent with its hop fields have a strong connection to London, and indeed many biographies of London gangsters include nostalgic reminiscences of holidays spent at Brighton or Margate or childhood visits to relatives in such places. Stevens (1989, p.37) writes “*I believe that many East Enders bought plots for £5 during the Depression of the 1930s when farmers sold off their land in this way*”. To accelerate the change process a number of new towns such as Basildon and Harlow were built to house London overspill. Essex had long been a popular holiday destination for Londoner’s perhaps because of the proximity of the holiday resorts of South-End and Clacton to London. Industrial areas such as Dagenham and Canvey Island

also have a cultural heritage with London. With the decline of manufacture and skilled manual work in the 1980s, this group increasingly looked to self-employment (Butler, 1995).

There are definite socio-cultural aspects to 'Essex-Man'. From a historical perspective the genre evolved from an amalgamation of aspirational working class men including tradesmen and small businessmen migrating from London to settle in the suburbs / countryside (Heffer, 1990). These gave rise to various stereotypes which have become associated with the 'Essex Boy Culture' including the 'Loads-o-money' cultural stereotype; the 'Essex-Boy' Gangster stereotype; and the Essex 'Wide-Boy' entrepreneur stereotype.

**The 'loads-o-money' cultural stereotype:** This notion of the aspirational working-class-lad-turned-good as a genre was epitomised by the British comedian Harry Enfield in his stereotypical characterisation - '*Loads-o-Money*'. It became apparent to me that Enfield's character was humorous and epitomised the polarised North – South divide in Thatcher's Britain whereby the South became prosperous as a result of the Conservative led financial boom in the City of London. Alternatively, the North of Britain suffered from the confrontational politics of the era whereby the Labour party and the Unions sought to bring down the Government of Margaret Thatcher<sup>7</sup>. Load's-o-money became a symbol of the time. At football matches between London and provincial teams the fans of the London Teams used to taunt their regional peers by mimicking Enfield's character and flashing their cash to mock them. Enfield created an oppositional northern character 'Bugger-all-money' whose masculinity was based on having nothing and being

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<sup>7</sup> In email conversation with Professor Dick Hobbs.

hard. The ‘loads-o-money’ stereotype provides a link with the newspaper articles of Heffer (1990; 1991; and 2010) and has come to epitomise 1980s ‘Essex-Boy’ as a local gender-regime.

**Essex-Boy Gangster stereotype:** There was a strong link with migrants from the ‘East-End’ of London with a culture of “*ducking-and-diving*” and dodgy dealing. This element of the ‘Essex-Boy’ construct is important because of the businessman-gangster stereotype (Smith, 2003) embedded in ‘East-End culture’ (Hobbs, 1987; Morton, 2003). It became accepted practice for gangsters and petty businessmen to make money and move out to Essex. This is a common social phenomenon suggested by Barnes, Elias and Walsh (2000) whereby in the West Midlands, gangsters from Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham migrate to leafy Cheshire where they can legitimately pose as businessmen and entrepreneurs. This phenomenon is known as the ‘Green Belt Bandit’ phenomenon (Hyder, 1999). Over time criminal money was legitimized and passed down across the generations. For an overview of this culture see the works of Hobbs (1987, 1996). This alternative facet of ‘Essex-Boy’ culture is evident in the works of O’Mahoney (2000); Rugby and Thomson, 2000); O’Mahoney (2008); and Ellis and O’Mahoney (2009) who document the criminal side of the culture, narrating the tale of a gang of Essex criminal-businessmen who became high level drug dealers until brutally executed in a gangland hit. What is important is that the gangsters and businessmen who populate the story use the ‘Essex-Boy’ label as a distinctive identity, or social capital upon which to trade. Visually [this bad-boy entrepreneurial iconology](#) is symbolised by ‘Essex-Boy’ actor Ray

Winstone, famous for his portrayals of British Gangster characters<sup>8</sup>. Thus, ‘Essex-Boy’ culture and identity is an entity (or perhaps even a social or socialized capital) which can be traded on. This shadow aspect of ‘Essex Enterprise Culture’ is documented by Silvester (undated, p.3) who reported that ‘Essex-Man’ was a key player in the grey economy.

**The Wide-Boy’ entrepreneur stereotype:** The stereotypical ‘Essex-Boy’ entrepreneur is frequently cast in the media as being a hard working, hard spending ‘wide-boy’ entrepreneur albeit there is a dearth of related academic studies. One example of an ‘Essex-Boy’ entrepreneur is Simon Dolan, cited as classic example of an Essex born entrepreneur although he no longer resides there (see his book – *How to make Millions without a degree* - Dolan, 2010). Another frequently cited example is Sir Alan Sugar who lives in Chigwell and is instantly recognisable in Britain as a typical ‘East-End barrow-boy-made-good’ (McGuigan, 2008). The brash Lord Sugar is now regarded as an ‘Essex-Boy’. For a general discussion of barrow boys and British Enterprise Culture see Boyle and Magor (2008). These labels are attached to the entrepreneurs by journalists.

#### 4.2. Documenting ideological and political elements of Essex-Boy Culture:

From an ideological perspective, the philosophical underpinning to ‘Essex-Boy’ culture is that traditionally they value money, over education which inclines them towards self-employment and thus entrepreneurship. For Silvester (undated, p. 4) they have “a

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<sup>8</sup> A ‘google images’ search locates hundreds of such images because Winstone frequently plays ‘East-End’ London gangsters and as such represents a visual stereotype of the wider ‘Essex-Boy’ genre acting as a link between the imagined reality of this sub-culture of ‘East-End trading and the narrative that has been set up and perpetuated by Winston’s images in films.

*capacity to earn, not learn*". Another facet is that of the socio-political connotations which entered social consciousness in the early 1980s as an aspirational category to describe working-class voters in the south and east of England who voted for Margaret Thatcher (Holliday and Ball, 2002). Politically, this is interesting because historically and traditionally, the Labour Party were considered the party of choice for the working classes, albeit some working class men voted Conservative [from a belief in](#) Free Enterprise. The politics of the Thatcher era changed the political landscape in Britain and in Basildon and Harlow a new generation turned their backs on old Labour politics and voted Tory (Conservative) encouraged by economic regeneration and by property ownership blurring the distinction between the classes. Thatcherite policies from 1979 to 1990 included lower taxation, control of inflation and sale of council housing stock at subsidised prices (the right to buy scheme) created an enterprise culture and brought about an era of "*Mass Conservatism*" (Holliday and Ball, 2002).

The term 'Essex-Man' was coined by the journalist Simon Heffer in his famous article "*Maggies Mauler*", in The Sunday Telegraph on 7 October, 1990. He profiled 'Essex-Man' as being "*young, industrious, mildly brutish and culturally barren*", and of course, "*breathhtakingly right-wing*". Heffer went on to describe how 'Essex-Man' "*wanted to own a rottweiler and didn't like foreigners or books*". He further described the genre as:-

*"The barrow-boy who uses instinct and energy rather than contacts and education... He is unencumbered by any 'may the best man win' philosophy. He expects to win whether he's the best man or not"*.

The ‘Essex-Man’ stereotype was useful shorthand for why Thatcherism was so successful. There is an obvious vitriolic and class based snobbishness to the observations.

For example, Heffer wrote:–

*“When one walks through the City most evenings the pools of vomit into which one may step have usually been put there by Essex Man, whose greatly enhanced wealth has exceeded his breeding in terms of alcoholic capacity. The late-night trains from Liverpool street are not lacking drunks, though Essex Man’s sense of decency means he is usually sick before boarding”.*

Journalistic writing as a style allows the writer to express issues otherwise best left unsaid due to politeness. This article tells us that in the 1980s there was a socio-political reconfiguration of the class structure brought about by the power of free market capitalism and neo-liberalism which [rewrote](#) traditional enterprise culture and values.

Over the years many journalists picked up on this theme but as society has changed so too has the profile of ‘Essex-Man’ which became blurred with the stereotype of the “*White Van Man*’ coined by the journalist Jonathon Leake (Leake, 1997) to define aggressive, self-employed traders and tradesmen. Indeed, Heffer (2010) reminiscing on his earlier writings argued that the ‘Essex-Man’ phenomenon was so powerful because working class people:-

*“...no longer needed to go to the right school or the right university to get a high-earning job in the City. Families were not trapped on grim council estates any longer, because they could (and did) buy their houses and do them up. Opportunities that had, until the early 1980s, been the province of a few were now available to the many”.*

Heffer's breathtaking critique of ‘Essex-Man’ sets up a disparaging debate around a mobile and rapidly changing working class culture via the power-laden act of ‘othering’ using difficult to justify presumptions. This is passed off as observation itself,

which is unreliable. The social processes which induced the change are related to the forces of neo-liberalism and the changing nature of British Enterprise Culture. In an obvious double-bind, the stereotypes are attempting to adhere to neo-liberal values whilst being disparaged for it.

#### 4.3. Documenting 'Essex-Boy' in popular culture:

In terms of popular culture there are emotive and nostalgic aspects to 'Essex-Boy' culture as evidenced by the memoir written by Stevens (1990) reminiscing of a childhood (and lost culture) growing up in Rainham and Walthamstow. Steven's opens his memoir with the sentence "*I am it seems, a genuine 'Essex Boy' and which has come as a surprise as I had always thought of myself as having been born in London*" illustrating that the popular usage of the term. Music, humour and popular t.v culture influence the construct. See table 2 for details:-

**Insert table 2 here.**

From this analysis and from readings from popular culture it is apparent that 'Essex-Boy' may also be a generational social construct and not a fixed construction because the 'Essex-Boys and Girls' of the 1980s and 1990s have come of age and are now grown up as 'Essex Boy' culture [encapsulates](#) celebrity status. New 'Essex' identity is a dual authored gender-regime.

Thus although the 'Essex' phenomenon is geographic by virtue of place it is also a narrative about place and space (as in masculinity, femininity and gender) instead of merely being a concrete phenomenon embedded in a place. Nevertheless, 'Essex-Boy' as a concept transcends the boundaries of Essex itself. It is a South of England phenomenon



as in the ‘loads-o-money’ and ‘white-van-man’ stereotypes. Thus it is a storied social construction, but in internet blogs and discussions the most frequent criticism is “*Is it real?*” Indeed, bloggers are divided in their opinion with one half arguing that it is real because it is represented in the media and the other half arguing that they do not know anyone who truly represents the genre.

#### 4.4. Documenting gendered aspects of Essex cultural stereotypes:

In discussing gendered-regimes it is the norm to regard them as being male dominated and thus oppressive. However, ‘Essex-Boy’ has a gendered counterpart in ‘*Essex-Girl*’ which has become a pejorative term now used throughout the United Kingdom to imply a female is promiscuous and unintelligent, characteristics jocularly attributed to women from Essex (Elliot, 2007).

**The Essex Girl Stereotype:** This is a variation of the dumb blonde / bimbo persona. As a social construct it is based upon social and material identity, thus ‘Essex-Girls’ are associated with having vulgar ‘Estuary English’ accents, display silicone enhanced breasts, have peroxide blonde hair, over-indulge in fake tan and are prone to promiscuity, loud verbal vulgarity and to socialising at down market nightclubs. They wear garish and **risque** clothes such as white stiletto heels. Essex-girls are described as being shallow, vulgar and stupid and have become the butt of cruel jokes because they represent acquisitive working class culture. These gendered ‘Essex stereotypes’ are based on issues of social class and social mobility. As a genre they are considered brash urban working-class escapees who resettled in Essex and it has become an accepted route for social

advancement for women to achieve celebrity status and to rise to fame through adopting an 'Essex Girl' persona. Indeed, Silvester (undated, p.17) referred to 'Essex-Girls' as "*Little Princesses*" financially shrewd and adept at getting their own way. The most important aspect of the 'Essex Girl' construct in terms of understanding 'Essex Boy' culture is that one must understand both in juxtaposition to the other because they compliment each other creating a negotiated gendered- regime.

#### 4.4. Documenting semiotic and aspects of Essex-Boy Culture:

There is a semiotic element to the 'Essex-Boy' phenomenon. May (2010) argues that in the original article by Heffer (1990) "*the accompanying illustration featured a bull-necked young man in a shiny suit standing outside his bought council house with a satellite dish on the roof and a new motor outside*". The stereotypical representation of 'Essex-Boy' is that of a 'cocky, unsophisticated masculine, laddish guy described as "*brash*" and "*confrontational*". Essex-Boy culture has evolved over the years [merging](#) into "*City-Boy*" culture (Anderson, 2006) because many 'Essex-Boy' types now work in the finance sector (see Anderson, 2006; and Smith, 2011 for a discussion of the 'City-Boy' phenomenon). What constitutes 'Essex-Man' has changed over the years. The 2012 stereotype is most likely to be portrayed wearing 'bling' such as gold earrings, and jewellery. An emphasis is placed upon clothing, artifacts and criminal culture is alluded to as in mention of rottweillers, bull necks and barrow boy culture. Moreover, Essex couples of the last decade are more likely to be influenced by popular celebrity culture. In reality the social construct consists of a variety of semiotics, and perhaps even a fusion of or merging of them.

Essex-Boy and Girl phenomenon thus form part of a proto-entrepreneurial culture in that the proverbial poor-boy-girl is expected to make good. An 'Essex-Girl' is expected to make the most of her social capital and attract moneyed men (Smith, 2010) whilst Essex-Men are expected to hustle and earn money. Figure 1 presents a conceptual model based on the analysis **and** arrived at by analyzing the documentary evidence **via** a close reading (Amernic and Craig, 2000) and by extrapolating and extracting relevant themes from the articles.

**Insert figure 1 here.**

Figure 1 demonstrates that the profile of an 'Essex-Boy' is constructed using a variety of elements including geographical location (either by birth or domicile); from Enterprise Culture (whether legitimate or not); and from socially constructed and semiotic elements including type of clothing, possessions and artifacts. It is shaped by a number of specific stereotypes including the politically inspired 'Essex-Man', financially inspired 'City-Boy' stereotypes and also via popular 'Businessman-Gangster' and 'Celebrity' cultures. The 'Essex-Girl' construct is assembled with a more negative aura as a stereotypical 'Dumb-Blonde' and are often subsumed under the WAG label (wives and girlfriends). Whatever the socio-economic mix entrepreneurial propensity and risk-taking behaviours are valued. Essex-Boy and Girl jokes feature in both gender regimes. As social constructs they come to us from popular culture television, newspapers, magazines, biographies and music. For a pictorial representation of the 'Essex-Girl' and 'Essex-Boy' phenomenon see the websites - <http://www.listal.com/list/essex-girls> and also <http://www.itv.com/essex/towie-faces/>.

According to Kingham (2007), the ‘Essex Boys’ she encountered as a prison writer are all white, loud, large and feral and read the Sun newspaper. She stereotypes them as having been brought up on the housing estates of postwar Britain by ‘salt-of-the-earth’ working-class parents who moved out of cramped terraces into spacious conurbations. Kingham speaks fondly of ‘Essex boys’ with their richly idiomatic rhyming slang. She bemoans the fact that although they are delightful to talk to, because of their vigour and robustness of humour their natural energy does not help them advance in life one iota because it is diverted into drugs, humour, charm and crime. Kingham stresses that all of these traits are short term, short-cuts to self-advancement and that ‘Essex Boys’ get what they want in the here and now.

From the iterative process described in section 3, a protean typology emerged from this process and a deeper analysis revealed several interesting facets of ‘Essex-Boy’ identity. As a narrated identity, it exists at many levels such as the physical, semiotic, ideological; and at a narrative level: See table 3 for an illustration of how the Essex Enterprise Culture is constructed and promulgated in popular culture:-

**Insert table 3 here.**

The fact that Essex Enterprise Culture exists at many levels is interesting because these levels add value individually, or collectively, as part of a personally negotiated entrepreneurial identity. They also demonstrate that it is a multi-faceted cultural phenomenon, albeit a predominantly white male dominated one and not an “*imagined masculine identity*”. Nevertheless, despite the typology and the analytic grid, many readers may fail to be convinced that the ‘Essex-Boy’ label is a universally recognised configuration, or identity, and consider it a geographical manifestation of the ‘cockney-

made-good' narrative. It is part of a wider geographically dispersed (UK Wide) form of masculine expression using cultural artifacts such as rottweiler dogs, guns, money, and bling. Essex-Boy enterprise culture is presented as a distinctly white phenomenon. Thus the 'Essex phenomenon' is a changeable 'deeply sociological', social construction influenced by many aspects of society including gender *per-se*. This analysis of Essex Enterprise Culture draws more from cultural objections and criticisms of the 'Essex' genre which has implications for the kind of knowledge which has been culturally produced. The research has uncovered how these forms of masculinity are derided more than how they are formed on the ground through texts or reports about narrative that are actually happening to the individuals involved. To remedy this would necessitate a detailed examination of the biographies to link the power of entrepreneurial dreams with local narratives of masculinity and enterprise.

However, the literature on enterprise culture is eulogistic in nature and thus when a successful businessman tells their 'Essex-Boy' entrepreneur story it may draw a picture which differs from reality by invoking anachronistic images and memories. The Britain of thirty years ago was a very different place than today when a market stall holder could not always aspire to buying a house in certain areas of London, or the Home Counties. What represented the successful middle classes then differs to what it means today.

## **5. Discussion, conclusions and implications.**

The theory of Williams (2002) that gender is a concept we 'try on', helps explain conflated 'crimino-entrepreneurial-identities' like 'Essex-Boy and Girl' because as a phenomenon it is a culturally sensitive and mediated narrative identity one can 'try on for

size'. One can choose to draw down on social and cultural capital from the narrative and from its association with the changing nature of what constitutes British Enterprise Culture. Accordingly, one of the implications for research, practice and society is that the notion of gendered regimes is of importance in relation to how narratives of gendered enterprise such as 'Essex Boy and Girl' arise and become part of a local or national gender regime and how this might help us to better understand enterprise culture and practice more generally. Thus a specific contribution [is](#) in distinguishing between the kind of knowledge created by analysing journalistic critiques of the Essex Boy phenomena (i.e. the text presented in detail) and biographies of those growing up as Essex Boys. The former is about how power holders interpret the phenomena; and the latter is how it shapes lives and narratives.

By giving voice to the alternative gendered stereotypes, this article enhances our understanding of proto-entrepreneurial aspects of entrepreneurship because one can be granted the status of 'Essex-Boy' by virtue of being born in Essex ([vis-à-vis Simon Dolan](#)); or one can adopt the identity as a gendered process by being domiciled in Essex ([vis-à-vis Lord Sugar](#)). Moreover, the research sheds light on the gender practices of individuals, communities and networks illustrating what types of masculinities and femininities are available in such regimes. However, it is in relation to identifying potential outcomes of such performed proto-entrepreneurial behaviours that this research makes a contribution. Essex enterprise culture is a localised, embedded discourse of institutionalised gender and socio-economic power. Whether, the 'Essex-Boy' label is a role model which many aspire to is [debatable](#) but for young men in the greater Essex-London area the label and associated stereotypes present achievable social templates for

success in which hard work and self-employment offer a viable route, whether as entrepreneur, gangster or a celebrity. However, due to the changing nature of gender regimes and British Enterprise Culture *per-se*, for young women in the same demographic grouping the label presents a viable route for them to ‘position’ themselves to engage with a recognised social success script. Irrespective of gender, one can become minor celebrities and entrepreneurs, or marry into money. If one is from a business family one will likely gravitate towards being business-owners whereas those with a heritage of gangsterism will pursue that path. Those without education or privileged social capitals can always dream of being a local celebrity. Each, in their own way, pursues their own entrepreneurial dreams; and by enacting the culture perpetuate it. All utilize their social capitals but have a choice as to whether they engage in such gendered social scripts. As social constructs, the stereotypes are a mixture of the masculine (Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998) and feminine (Simpson and Lewis, 2005).

Furthermore, this research demonstrates how discourses of gender, culture and enterprise inter-relate, reproduce and co-author possible gendered opportunities for advancement. The study highlights how local gender regimes are expressed and thereby form part of, or perhaps contribute to, local enterprise cultures. Nevertheless, Essex stereotypes form powerful cultural identities, albeit ‘Essex-Boy’ culture is perhaps more of a diffuse entity that exists in popular culture, than a concrete identity. This comparative research extends entrepreneurship theory by informing us about how entrepreneurship and associated localised and cultural practices are institutionalised and enacted differently under local gender regimes. That these readings come to us from comedy, film and books does not make them less credible.

The methodology used has documented the phenomenon, putting it on the research map but there is a need for further ethnographic research into the lives of real ‘Essex-Boys and Girls’. The journalistic and fictional documents used present stereotypical impressions and in the absence of direct evidence, inform reality<sup>9</sup>. It illustrates the depth of difference in terms of social privilege of writers such as Heffer and Kingham and amplifies the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism. It tells us how this form of masculinity has been derided perhaps because it threatens elites in a neo-liberal economy. The ‘Essex’ phenomenon is now a national institution which illustrates gender practices and narratives in action brought about by the continual struggle for gendered control of resources. The establishment derides brash Essex Enterprise Culture but the new TOWIE generation draws power from the ostentatious display of the artifacts of success which define it as a contemporary entrepreneurial or gangster identity. This is important because Essex is an ethnically diverse area. How these combine to form this particularly virile (or virulent) form of masculinity is a research question for a future study; as is - how do differing forms of masculinity support forms of enterprise and vice versa?

A limitation of documentary analysis is that the insights produced are merely one interpretation amongst many possible readings but then qualitative document analysis need not “*prove*” the “*truth*” beyond all doubt (Wesley, 2010) merely tell a good story<sup>10</sup>. Readers may well ask what this study tells us about entrepreneurship and gendered

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<sup>9</sup> Moreover, these are not the narratives of the real people. The caricatures depicted may tell us more about the prejudices of the authors of the stereotype than about the subjects they allegedly portray. Also in documenting the phenomenon, I may have perpetuated and reinforced pejorative cultural stereotypes. Yet, Heffer did not simply fabricate the phenomenon – in the best traditions of journalism (and observational research) he built his profile by people watching whilst commuting between Essex and London via train.

<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, gendered cultural identities, regimes and localised enterprise cultures’ are not always reducible to logical theoretical paradigms. Not everything which influences entrepreneurship can be explained at a theoretical or empirical level. In the meantime, such stereotypical caricatures serve to document and illustrate the nuances of gendered entrepreneurial behaviour and how masculinity frames gender theory.



regimes? The research demonstrates the changing nature of British Enterprise Culture and the role of gender in this social process. The 'Essex-Boy and Girl' stereotypes illustrate a (re)gendered social regime where as a result of neo-institutional processes both sexes have renegotiated their social position. To paraphrase Silvester (undated, p.5) they are secure in their own values; they have their own ideas about the world; and are sticking with them. Instead of following a traditional model of gentrification thesis they have the confidence to go it alone. The gendered regime and identities discussed above are not *imagined masculine identities* but exist in our social consciousness. This study therefore provides a reformulated account of gender agency which is central to understanding how men and women negotiate gendered process and social constructs and extract value from them in a neo-liberal society. [If this paper generates discussion around entrepreneurship research methods and masculinities in entrepreneurship research and raises the profile of the latter it will have made a key contribution.](#)

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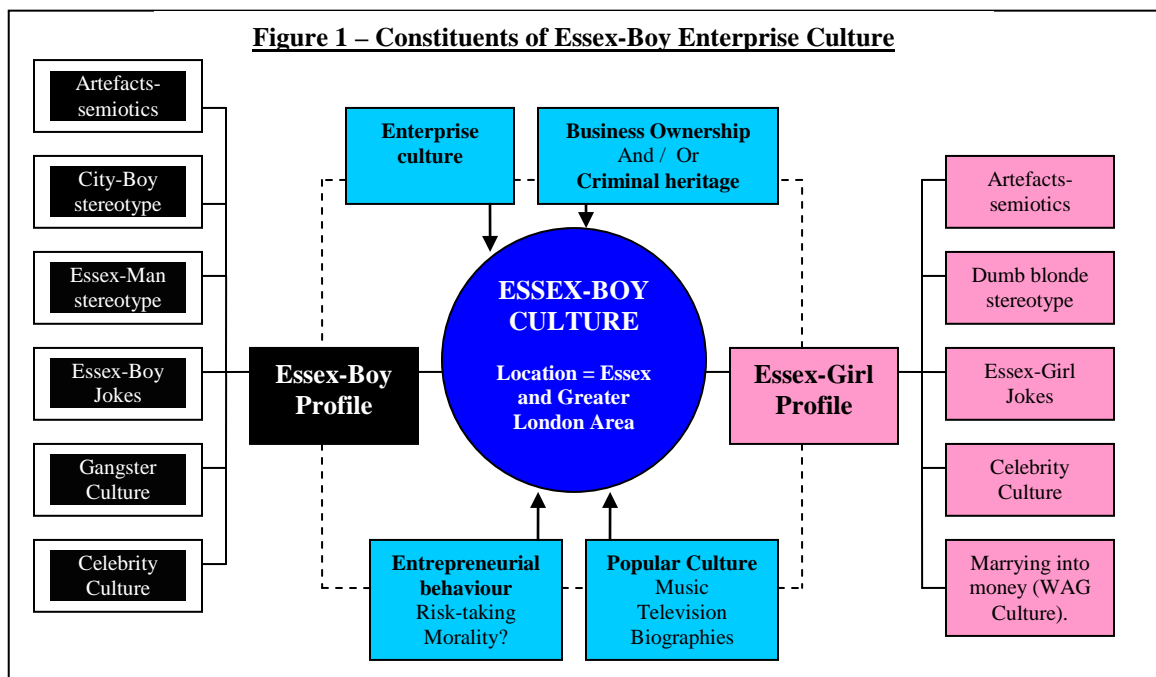
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<http://www.est1892.co.uk/forums/archive/index.php/t-2671.html> (Essex Girl Jokes)

### Figures / Images



Article	What the article contributes	What value they add
<b>A memoir</b> <b>Stevens, 1998.</b>	This memoir provided background details about the geographic construction of the 'Essex-Boy' phenomenon by an ordinary Essex-Boy born into post WW2.	The article was pivotal in linking socio-political history and various stereotypical representations found in other readings and the academic literature to the reality as understood by an ordinary man. It demonstrated that nostalgia and reminiscences' are powerful in shaping gendered regimes.
<b>The novel</b> <b>'City Boy'</b> <b>Anderson, 2006.</b>	The novel (a thinly veiled biography) provided many narratives and vignettes which linked the 'City Boy' Culture of London's financial community to many of its members with links to the 'Home Counties' including Essex.	The value added by the novel to the research lies in linking disparate stereotypical representations to 1) historical memory; and to 2) stereotypical representations such as Essex-Boy, Essex-Girl, Spivs and Barrow-Boys all of which are of interest to us in relation to understanding British Enterprise Culture.
<b>The biography</b> <b>"Essex-Boys"</b> <b>O'Mahony, 2000.</b>	This biographical True Crime book is of interest because it discusses the contemporary Crime Scene in relation to the links between the Essex and London Criminal Underworlds and also to the Essex business community.	In making these links the author Bernard O'Mahoney, himself a member of the criminal fraternity provides an apparently genuine insider account of the links. The value lies in the fact that such links are not documented elsewhere in academic work. These reminiscences add the criminal dimension to the emerging construct.
<b>Advertising Report</b> <b>The Invasion of</b> <b>Essex Men</b> <b>Silvester, undated.</b>	This advertising report was commissioned by a company to investigate the commercial potential of the then relatively new 'Essex-Man' phenomenon to commercial companies marketing products in the Essex and surrounding areas.	The report gathers a wide variety of anecdotal evidence from the popular press and from market research sources which brings 'Essex-Man' to life. This report is fascinating as it demonstrates that hard commercial decisions may have been made on the basis of the collective social construct gathered in the 20 page report.
<b>Newspaper articles</b> <b>- Heffer, 1990</b> <b>- Heffer, 1991</b> <b>- Heffer, 2010</b> <b>- Elliott, 2007</b> <b>- May, 2010.</b>	These add the media angle. Heffer's seminal articles posited the very notion of the stereotype of 'Essex Boy' and the Essex phenomenon which expanded to include Essex-Girl.	They add value by including the socio-political element to the construct and by updating the changing social construction in the popular culture as it morphed from the political through the criminal and became attached to enterprise culture.

**Table 1 – Documentary sources of 'Essex-Boy' identity**



Medium	Example	Relevance to Essex Culture
<b>Music</b>	<i>Doctor Feelgood</i> <i>Ian Dury</i>	The legendary Canvey Island band, encapsulate the feel-good factor of 1980s Britain. The Ian Jury song ‘ <i>Billericay Dickie</i> ’ narrates a lyrical cultural success story -“ <i>My given name is Dickie, I come from Billericay and I’m doing very well</i> ”. Thus the ‘Essex-Boy’ construct is infused with nostalgia.
<b>Jokes</b>	<i>Essex girl jokes</i>	Davies (2009) discusses ‘Dumb Blonde’ and ‘Essex-girl’ (and boy) jokes suggesting such jokes are funny because the subjects are canny, clever, crafty and calculating and raise their social status via legitimate competition. However, an alternative pejorative construct is aired on <a href="http://www.est1892.co.uk/forums/archive/index.php/t-2671.html">http://www.est1892.co.uk/forums/archive/index.php/t-2671.html</a> which lists 99 Essex girl jokes mainly characterized by sexual innuendo denoting promiscuity and / or coupled with accusations of low intelligence. See also ‘The Essex Girl Joke Book’ (Knights, 2009).
<b>tv. celebrity</b>	<i>TOWIE culture</i>	TOWIE is an acronym for the t.v. series, aired in 2011 and entitled “ <i>The Only Way Is Essex</i> ” documenting the lives of Essex- Boys and Girls as they ‘duck and dive’ and aspire to greater things. The men are all stereotypically ‘cheeky chappies’, to coin a British phrase, and the women are all Little Princesses’. This ‘peer group’ are now likely to be celebrities such as Russell Brand, Olly Murs or Stephen Meyer who all espouse the Essex-Boy label. As a genre they present as very well groomed, ladies’ men who conform to the stereotypical TOWIE script. They retain the ‘cheeky-chappy’ imagery associated with earlier manifestations of the construct.

**Table 2 – influences from popular culture**

Physical levels	Semiotic levels	Ideological levels	Narrative levels
- At a conceptual level as an organizing idea around which to build an identity.	- As a negotiated legitimate, localised business identity.	- As localized Ideology into which one can subsume one’s life story if one fits the criteria.	As memoir
As a gendered regime, into which one can fit either as an ‘Essex-Boy’ or ‘Essex- Girl’.	- As a criminal identity via the use of clothes and artefacts.	- As localized doxa	As biography
- As a descriptor for a localized enterprise culture	- As celebrity status and local hero	- As a socio-political statement	As a joke
- As a community of practice	- As parody to be copied or mocked.	- As a class position	As an implied insult
- As a geographic identifier signifying success.	- As caricature to be emulated and perhaps perpetuated	- As an initiating entrepreneurial dream	
	- As metaphor to make the exotic real		

**Table 3 - Levels of manifested identity in narratives of the Essex phenomenon**