

Entrepreneurial Prototypes: Identity Construction in Entrepreneurship Education

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ABSTRACT

Questions we care about

There are an estimated 582 million entrepreneurs globally. Despite this, popular literature and social media still focus on a narrow set of stereotypes. Entrepreneurial stereotypes plague the educational environment, as they set preconceptions of what entrepreneurship is, but they are far from representative of the early-stage of venturing, or the broad spectrum of entrepreneurial careers accounted for globally. Entrepreneurial prototypes embody attributes that characterize entrepreneurs “and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” used to establish provisional selves when aiming to adopt a new professional role. Entrepreneurial prototypes can serve to provide identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible (future) entrepreneurial self. When addressing preconceptions, prototypes which include counter-stereotypical models are necessary to highlight the breadth of how entrepreneurs are understood. But, one may be challenged to identify such examples, and legitimize them relative to the strongly anchored ‘heroes’. Therefore, the question we care about is: What is the utility and what is the risk in presenting entrepreneurial prototypes in entrepreneurship education?

Approach

This paper builds upon narratives from individuals who have recently transitioned into an entrepreneurial role in the last 3.5yrs, defined as ‘early-stage entrepreneurs’. The study employed non-representative, purposeful, criterion sampling. Participants were recruited through relevant professional context/networks. Confirmed participants completed an online questionnaire and 60 minute phone interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Selected participants were coded for prototyping themes established from the literature.

Results

The participants studied sought out prototypes to help guide their identity development and practice in their entrepreneurial journey. Typical venues for such prototypes included stories of entrepreneurs as depicted via podcasts, TV shows or in person. Participants were disappointed by or resistant to stories available, as these highlighted high-profile success cases. Rather, participants sought stories of entrepreneurs that did not fall into the “heroic” stereotype, but seemed realistic and relevant to their own context. More realistic prototypes were found through personal networks, sometimes associated to institutional ecosystems. Prototyping was not exclusive to identifying representative individuals in the ‘role’ entrepreneur – such as a provisional self, but also involved prototyping the practices which were attributed to acting entrepreneurially. Socializing a new entrepreneurial identity was particularly valuable when within an entrepreneurial community, as the legitimizing expanded beyond a role-set, towards a community of practice.

Implications

There is a need to directly discuss the breadth of definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship and to engage an appropriate spectrum of prototypes to reflect them. Addressing entrepreneurial prototypes, particularly in comparison to oneself, allows for rich discussion as comparing oneself to an entrepreneurial prototype can indicate comfort levels with certain elements of being an entrepreneur and point to areas where new entrepreneurs are feeling a conflict with another existing identity. While bringing-in ‘real-life’ entrepreneurs from the community can help energize the classroom with stories of real-life experience, it is critical to be mindful to present a broad diversity of entrepreneurs (race, gender, age, personality, background, field, experience-level, etc.), as having students perceive patterns in the speakers may inadvertently aid in reinforcing entrepreneurial stereotypes. Educators can use targeted conversation helped to raise identity reflections that illustrate challenges in associating to the entrepreneurial prototype. Being able to have targeted discussions on how students can reconceptualize themselves as entrepreneurs can be helpful for strategizing with students on how to become comfortable with both their intended future selves and their existing self-concept. Educators also need to consider the impact of social media and popular culture, and train students in filtering inputs and information and find means to appropriately select prototypes that fit their particular interests and context.

Value/originality

The paper investigates the way in which preconceptions of entrepreneurship influence entrepreneurial identity development and how this can be utilized or mitigated in the classroom. The paper helps to merge role and activity mimicry in the concept of entrepreneurial prototype, and allow for entrepreneurial prototypes to be ‘future’-oriented rather than dependent upon existing societal images of entrepreneurs/-ship.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a loaded term. It is viewed and defined as a function, role, personality, competence, behavior, or performance (Casson, 2013). It is positioned in society as the means to stimulate economies, create social value, bring forth innovation, and increase employability (Baumol et al., 2007). Perhaps it is not strange then that the individuals who are to champion these endeavors are wrapped in a heroic mythology (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007, Warren, 2005). At the same time, there are an estimated 582 million entrepreneurs globally¹, with over 25 million working-age Americans as founding and/or running new ventures (GEM, 2017). That is a lot of heroes (and heroines)! The sheer number of individuals acting as entrepreneurs in society maybe suggests that the ‘heroism’ of entrepreneurs should perhaps be paralleled with that of, for example, the fireman (or -woman). This is a common enough figure in our daily lives, a figure who can be both in a professional or a voluntary role. Why is entrepreneurship so different, and why do the myths persist as the normative standard?

Maybe because popular entrepreneurship literature and social media still focus on a narrow set of entrepreneurial examples, such as Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and companies like Facebook and Google. These entrepreneurial stereotypes, in their current state, are far from representative of the early-stage of venturing, or the broad spectrum of entrepreneurial careers accounted in the GEM studies. Furthermore, such examples plague the educational environment, as they set preconceptions of what entrepreneurship is (Farny et al., 2016). The definitions and functions of ‘entrepreneur’ and entrepreneurship can be challenging for individuals in a process of becoming (Duening and Metzger, 2017). From a theoretical stance, entrepreneurial prototypes are to embody all attributes that characterize entrepreneurs “and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” (Hogg and Terry, 2000, p. 123), and can be positioned as provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) when aiming to adopt a new professional role. Use of entrepreneurial prototypes may serve to provide identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible (future) entrepreneurial self. But, similar to the ‘heroic’ entrepreneurial stereotypes mentioned (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007), entrepreneurial prototypes typically align with masculine qualities (Gupta et al., 2009). When addressing preconceptions of entrepreneurship in the classroom, introducing entrepreneurial prototypes which include counter-stereotypical models is necessary in order to highlight the breadth of how entrepreneurs are understood. However, educators may be challenged in identifying such examples, and also legitimizing them relative to the strongly anchored ‘heroes’ such as Steve and Bill (Boje and Smith, 2010). Therefore, the questions we care about in this paper is: How do individuals construct entrepreneurial prototypes when becoming entrepreneurs? What is the utility and what is the risk in presenting entrepreneurial prototypes in entrepreneurship education?

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we present a theoretical grounding addressing identity development, building from social identity theory and provisional identities. This is followed by review of literature on entrepreneurial prototypes and suggestion of how these can be used for identity development for new entrepreneurs. Then we present the empirical base of the paper, prioritizing two selected cases that are used to illustrate entrepreneurial prototype use. The cases are discussed and compared in detail to illustrate similarities and differences. Finally

¹ Kelley, D. (2017). The 582 million entrepreneurs in the world are not created equal. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/economy-budget/323586-the-worlds-582-million-entrepreneurs-are-not-created-equal>

we reflect upon the use of entrepreneurial prototypes for identity development, including in entrepreneurship education.

Theory

In the introduction, we mentioned the ‘fireman’ as a potential representation of a figure in society that is both tangible to the everyday citizen and at the same time carries heroic qualities. While this figure is still problematic, for example in the sense that it carries a gender stereotype, it certainly differentiates from the ‘entrepreneur’ in that if we were asked to ‘name a fireman’, we would likely mention someone we know, and it is very unlikely that the majority of any random population would put forth the same four or five persons. But, if we were to ask about the qualities and attributes of this figure, we would get a common description. In this sense, ‘fireman’ is a prototype, as prototypes clarify the distinct concept of a particular group or entity (Hogg and Terry, 2000), building from theories of social identity and self-conceptualization.

Becoming an entrepreneur can be positioned as both a self-identification process and a social-identification process. ‘Entrepreneur’ is underpinned by opinions, conceptions, and perceptions of who entrepreneurs are and what entrepreneurship is. The self-constructed entrepreneurial prototypes held by individuals influence how they view entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs seen as heroic serves as a foundation of many understandings of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, Ahl, 2002, Bridge, 2017, Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007, Hytti and Heinonen, 2013, Mitchell, 1996, Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). The perspectives individuals hold of entrepreneurship and how they define it for themselves influences identity formation and social identity affiliation. These definitions underpin and can, either consciously and subconsciously, shape individuals’ constructions of the prototype of what it means to be an entrepreneur. The prevailing ‘heroic’ entrepreneurial prototype causes challenges for individuals to feel connected with an entrepreneurial identity (Mallon, 1998) and to adequately explore an entrepreneurial identity, which, in itself, can transform and change over time (Mathias and Williams, 2017). There is also significant variance in how individuals view entrepreneurial roles (Krueger, 2007), and research on entrepreneurial identity supports the need for individuals to connect their sense of self with entrepreneurship (Down and Warren, 2008, Hytti, 2005).

Social Identity

Social identity involves dynamic processes of individuals relating to “norms, stereotypes, and prototypes” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 262). Social identity theory helps to develop a concept of self through intergroup contexts, as the “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). A system of social categorizations helps the individual determine their place in society, through these groupings. Social identity rests on intergroup comparisons that seek to confirm or establish ingroup-favoring evaluative distinctiveness between ingroup and outgroup. The individual’s perceived ‘self’ is aligned with relevant ingroup prototype(s), influencing “normative behavior, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, positive in-group attitudes and cohesion, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion and empathy, collective behavior, shared norms, and mutual influence” (Hogg and Terry, 2000p. 123). This categorization produces prototype-based depersonalization of self and others and, thus, generates social identity phenomena. Prototyping in terms of social identity “relate to the original and more familiar intergroup” (Hogg and Terry, 2000, p. 121), serving as a point of comparison for establishing a perceived alignment or misalignment between oneself and the prototype. Depersonalization is distinct from de-individualism or

dehumanization – the emphasis is on imaging a more generic figure, but it is still a figure, not an object.

Provisional Identity

An identity in its initial stages is undergoing a concurrent process of self-categorization (Stets and Burke, 2000) and identity matching (Ibarra, 1999). This comparative process helps the individual to define and associate (or not) themselves to a prototype. In this paper, we build upon Social identity theory in relation to identity development rather than Identity theory, due to Identity theory's emphasis on role position and behavior, rather than the dynamic, cognitive process of self-categorization attributed to Social Identity theory.

Individuals who have explored a possible entrepreneurial identity are sensitive to seek out, closely observe, reflect upon, and pay attention to any behaviors in themselves and others that align with an entrepreneurial prototype (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The process of exploring a possible identity helps to develop a well-defined identity, strengthen a self-schema, and form a close, positive relationship with a potential future self (Ibarra, 1999, Strahan and Wilson, 2006). Individuals who engage in self-entrepreneurial role identity comparisons and claim greater similarity and congruence between themselves and their perceptions of an entrepreneur prototype will have a stronger likelihood to aspire for an entrepreneurial identity (Farmer et al., 2011). This means that the correlation between perceptions of entrepreneurial identities and the strength of an entrepreneurial possible self is significant. This potentially makes the use of prototyping particularly important for entrepreneurship, given the definitional criteria of entrepreneurship involving operating under uncertainty, but complicated by the lack of a clear role or description of 'entrepreneur'.

Entrepreneurial Prototype

Entrepreneurial prototype, as the de-personalized social identity associated to a profession or group, is currently described in more mythological terms (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007, Hundley, 2008, Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). Building on Hogg and Terry (2000) we propose an entrepreneurial prototype ought to embody attributes that characterize entrepreneurs "and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors" (p. 123) and help to serve in identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible entrepreneurial self. Entrepreneurial prototypes are argued as potentially playing a significant role in the foundation development of an entrepreneurial identity, particularly in how individuals define a possible self (Hoyle and Sherrill, 2006).

While prototyping can be used to aid management of uncertainty, this is challenging when there is not an established socialized identity of the 'entrepreneur'; and there is lack of generalized grounding of normalized communities of practice that can act as the social groupings to guide the prototyping. There is a prevailing stereotypical image of entrepreneurs as being heroic and masculine (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, Ahl, 2002, Bridge, 2017, Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007, Hytti and Heinonen, 2013, Mitchell, 1996, Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). The heroic entrepreneur is associated with being aggressive, dominant, high achieving, independent, and risk taking (Ahl, 2002, Mitchell, 1996, Ogbor, 2000). The notion of a heroic entrepreneurial identity may not match the lived reality experienced by many entrepreneurs, which may limit full exploration of entrepreneurial identities, which can be multifaceted (Drakopoulou Dodd, 2002) and not necessarily mutually exclusive, as individuals can experience multiple entrepreneurial identities over time (Mathias and Williams, 2017). If individual do not affiliate themselves with the existing stereotypes, such as being a "heroic" entrepreneur, it can be

challenging for them to see themselves as entrepreneurs and to connect with an entrepreneurial identity.

Entrepreneurial prototypes look to characterize distinguishing values, orientations, and behaviors of entrepreneurs as a group (Hogg and Terry, 2000), in order to build a starting point of identity reflection and formation that can develop and transform over time with further group exposure (Hogg et al., 1995). With the lack of a more formalized community of practice (Wenger, 1998) or professional association, social media and public cultural opinion are main reinforcers of what constitutes the entrepreneurial role as a stereotype, despite evidence to the contrary (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). This creates some murkiness between stereotype and prototype when it comes to the entrepreneurship, and a perceived identity conflict or misalignment with an entrepreneurial prototype, if more representing a stereotype, could hinder someone from pursuing an entrepreneurial identity.

Ideally, individuals would be able to access, form, and adjust entrepreneurial prototypes based on a variety of different exposures and experiences. In this frame, different supports, such as close-circle (family and friends; an ‘entrepreneurship education cohort’; a co-founder) entrepreneurial exemplars could be significant resources in adjusting an inaccurate or misaligned entrepreneurial stereotyped prototype into a form that might have better identity harmony for the individual.

Methodology

This paper builds upon empirical data from a broader explorative narrative study of 14 new entrepreneurs, defined as individuals who have recently transitioned into an entrepreneurial role in the last 3.5 years, to align with the GEM definition of ‘early-stage entrepreneurs’ (GEM, 2017). The study employed a non-representative, purposeful, criterion sampling strategy. Data was collected and analyzed through four phases. First, pilot interviews were conducted to test and validate the interview protocol. Next, participants were recruited through relevant professional context and networks, using a recruitment script, and eligibility was confirmed through a follow-up email. Confirmed participants were sent an online questionnaire to be followed-up by a 60-minute phone interview. Interviews were semi-structured, using a protocol and only conducted after review of the online questionnaire data, which was used as a baseline for posing specific and descriptively oriented questions in the interview. The participants were also asked to metaphorically describe their entrepreneurial journey as one of the key questions in the interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

For the purpose of this paper, the transcribed interviews were reviewed to identify use of prototyping in transitioning and embodying the career position ‘entrepreneur’. From the original study, two cases were selected for their relevance to the discussion of entrepreneurial prototypes. Selection is based on similarities in regards to gender, time period in new entrepreneurial career, and general access to entrepreneurial ‘network’. We investigate their narratives to identify what understanding of entrepreneurship the individual has, what type of prototyping did engage into, and the way in which they associate this to their existing and also desired identity. The empirics build upon qualitative participant perspectives on conceptions of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial prototypes and personal accounts of identity alignment and conflict, identity management strategies, and the impacts of entrepreneurship on social supports.

Coding Themes

Coded themes for recognizing entrepreneurial prototyping were developed. First, we built upon the first principle of effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001) – and the frame ‘what I know’, ‘who I know’ and ‘who I am’ as a means to both ground in the individual’s self-concept and articulate attribute and characteristics which could then align with that of ‘entrepreneur’. We address both the previous career identity and the entrepreneurial identity, and how these relate to the self-concept, given that the participants are individuals in career transition. ‘What I know’, ‘Who I know’ and ‘Who I am’ are enriched to address prototyping qualities.

‘What I know’ is used to address self-concept relative to attributes and competence relative to career. We also consider ‘What I *need* to know’ to recognize the career transition, but also call attention to how the individual differentiates competence (what qualities do they see they already have, what qualities do they feel they lack). With ‘Who I know’, we examine the narratives to understand ways in which the individuals utilized their social network. We investigate an ‘entrepreneurial pedigree’ i.e. family members with entrepreneurial experience, as well as a role-set (Carsrud and Johnson, 1989) to explore their development of a network to help legitimize the entrepreneurial identity they are becoming (Williams Middleton, 2013). In relation to ‘Who I am’, the utilized coding themes centered on description of self (self-concept) as well as terms associated to ‘entrepreneur’: ‘heroic’ stereotypes and/or celebrity entrepreneurs, role-models, and entrepreneurial narratives found in social media.

Selected Cases

The following subsections introduce the two participants and their backgrounds. At the time of their individual interviews, both participants, Vicky and Rachel, had been in their respective new entrepreneurial roles for nine months, and both left traditional work environments that they described as feeling limiting and not aligned with their sense of self. Despite having some similarities in their cases (e.g., time since transitioning into entrepreneurship, leaving professional environments that did not suit them well), the cases of Vicky and Rachel highlight two different reactions to encountering entrepreneurial stereotypes, how each constructed entrepreneurial prototypes, and their alignment between their existing identities and an entrepreneurial identity.

Table 1. Selected Cases

Participant pseudonym	Sex	Industry	Entry into entrepreneurship	Prior entrepreneurial experience
Vicky	F	Education/ Training	9 months	Freelancing, consulting, and some entrepreneurial projects
Rachel	F	Career Services	9 months	Previous project leadership and intrapreneurship

The first participant, Vicky, is a mid-career professional who has been working in the education and training fields broadly for several decades. For Vicky, her transition into entrepreneurship was a change in a work culture and leadership that caused her to resign. Vicky had been working for years at an educational organization where she was feeling settled in her work until there were key changes at the senior leadership level of the organization. There were layoffs and staff departures around her, and she struggled with the shifts in culture and management. She stated:

For me, it was a personal decision to go back into [and] to revive my consulting business because of a situation at work where I ended up reporting to someone who I did not feel I should be reporting to. His experience and his

background were not comparable to mine, and he was making decisions about my department that I did not feel that he should be making. And so, how about this? The vision of the company or the vision of the . . . organization, the vision of the organization changed, and I no longer identified with where they wanted to go and what they were doing. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018).

Vicky's transition was not planned with as much notice, and she left her former position without anything else lined up. Vicky had done some consulting work in the past, so transitioning into independent work was familiar to her, and she had a spouse who had a position her family could depend on financially. After putting in her resignation, a friend got in touch with her and asked her if she might be willing to start a business together. Because Vicky had left a toxic work environment, she was thankful to have the opportunity to keep working in an area of interest to her and to be working with a good partner. Vicky accepted the offer to partner with her friend, and the two started on the backend preparations needed to launch their company's products and services months later.

At the time of the interview, Vicky noted putting in a significant amount of time, effort, and money into her new venture since starting the venture nine months prior. Despite being experienced in her professional field, she felt the new role stretched her in less familiar directions (e.g., marketing). While she spoke to how she envisioned the work to look three years out, Vicky also noted tentative plans to potentially return to traditional employment once done her academic program.

The other case is of participant, Rachel, a young professional, transitioned to an entrepreneur of her own service-based company following years in the corporate sector. Upon graduation, she said she felt like she was doing the responsible thing by filing into a traditional corporate career path, so she worked for a large corporation and rose through the ranks over the years. However, she said she felt confined in her role, with a limited ability to learn and grow within the position. Rachel wanted to explore her interests more professionally and felt that her work limited her ability to be creative and free to explore her interests.

Concurrent with her discontent with her work, within the span of a couple years, Rachel got a divorce, moved to the city, left her corporate position, and started within a transition job at a small start-up. When that position also did not suit her, she decided to pursue an idea for a company that she had thinking about for a while. During the interview, she expressed pride in taking control of her life and prioritizing her happiness more than she ever had before.

I'm very grateful. Sometimes, I get nervous. Will it all go away or something? [...] I don't know. It's weird. I changed so much. I don't know. This is weird to put in here, but three years ago, I was married, living in the suburbs of [state] with a house and in a comfy job. So, now I'm in [the city] with the best life partner in the world, going to [a co-working program], starting my own business, meeting the most interesting people ever, and just living my own life on my own terms. So, that feels really different, and sometimes you feel like, for me, I was like, 'Oh, I don't feel like I made a lot of progress today.' Or, you know, however you think about it. But sometimes, I just have to look back and be like, 'Wow, I can't believe how much I've accomplished in the last few months, in the last year, in the last two years, in the last three years.' It really is amazing, like once you start thinking and moving ahead how fast you can

really go and change things for the better when you really want to. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018).

When reflecting on her aspirations over time, Rachel was positively optimistic and emphasized her desire to persevere in her work as an entrepreneur and to have an impact on those around her in her work.

I see myself in [city], working as a goal, but I don't necessarily want to grind myself down, like in 10, 20 years, I want to... I'm working really hard to feel proud of something I've done. I want to see it grow, I want to see other people grow, and I want to take care of myself while doing that. And I don't really—I mean, I'd love to make a ton of money or something—but I really feel good just proving myself as a woman entrepreneur, getting far, and helping other people, and sort of giving myself the means to do that. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018).

Findings

'What I know'

One starting point for 'what I know' included academic and professional preparations in an industry (including entrepreneurship). Vicky and Rachel both had completed a bachelor's degree level of higher education or above. In Vicky's case, she was currently enrolled in her second graduate program in her area of industry. Both felt a level of preparation from their prior experience in their respective fields. Vicky described her current work as being related to her previous experience and within her same industry, whereas Rachel was working within a new area that was not the same as her prior experience.

Vicky had strong experience in her field, and an interest in entrepreneurship that spanned decades. Despite having an interest in entrepreneurship as a career path throughout the span of her professional career, Vicky felt wary to make such a transition earlier in her career because of both feeling financially and professionally underprepared.

There had been a few times [I considered going into an entrepreneurial career]. There was a time that a friend mine and I were going to start a bookstore in [city], and I just didn't have the guts to quit my day job without a guaranteed income. So, I think I've always wanted to do something for myself and work for myself and have my own organization, but I've always been too trepidatious for financial reasons. I simply didn't have the background, or the backing or the savings when I was younger to do something that's this risky. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018).

When discussing her preparation for her current position, Vicky mentioned her previous consulting work. Despite having done more independent work previously, her current position was her first attempt to own and operate a business. To that end, she has been finding that she has a good preparation for the position, but there have been learning curves and high workloads that have been challenging.

When I was at [my previous organization], I felt extremely confident in my job, and I was extremely competent at what I was doing, I knew exactly what I needed to do, I knew extremely how to do what I was doing, and I felt that the negative stuff that was coming at me was undeserved. And my self-

confidence and my self-efficacy was very high. And then, starting the new role, where I had all this responsibility and I was getting kudos and accolades from the outside, on the inside I was like, 'Oh, my God, what have I done?' And I was second-guessing myself. [...] You know, there's a difference between intellectual knowledge and then feeling it. Yeah, so I was like, 'This is a big job. This is going to be a big challenge'. Then, I was like, 'Wow. Smack against the wall'. This was a wall of challenge, so that was unexpected. Also, it's taking way longer. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018).

Rachel participated in an entrepreneurship education competition in college that program sparked her interest in an entrepreneurial path. However, she did not pursue an entrepreneurial career until she began to realize the 'traditional' career and life path was not what she wanted from her life.

When I was in college, I really got the spark for new ideas and creating something of my own. And I always had it in me, just loving that idea of entrepreneurship. Loving ideas, coming up with ideas, but I was always sort of focused on traditional paths, like I need to get a job, I need to follow this path. You know, part of that path for me was, what I thought was get a good job, meet someone, you know, get married, do certain things like that, and I just kind of got caught up in that path of what you're supposed to do next. And it was just hard and unclear for me to say how I could even get to that entrepreneurship world, like I felt very outside of it. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018).

The 'what I know' served both Vicky and Rachel in forming an entrepreneurial prototype prior to their transitions. Vicky's prior consulting work and Rachel's experience in an entrepreneurial competition in college were noted as experiences that reinforced preparation and interest in an entrepreneurial career. While this was not the primary focus of the interviews, the experiences also seemed to serve as personal reference points for them both to build formative, first-hand conceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

In both cases, Vicky and Rachel had been interested in entrepreneurship for years, but the timing of their entry was ignited by feeling well prepared for the transition and being discontent in the previous positions. Both Vicky and Rachel used the word 'confident' or 'confidence' to describe how they are currently feeling about their work and 'what they know.'

So, I feel confident, and I feel good about myself, and I feel good about where I am, and when I see how people [do my line of work], I feel really confident about myself, because I'm like, 'Wow.' [...] So, I feel really confident about myself and my experience. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018).

I guess I feel like I have the confidence now, and the skillset to carry things out. I feel like I'm surrounded by a great network, and I just feel confident and powerful enough as who I am to carry things out on my own. Yeah, I guess I just have that extra bit of confidence now, I'm not sure how else to explain it. I just feel like I have the freedom to kind of choose whatever I want now, that I didn't have before as much (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018).

'Who I know'

Networks also influence the development of an entrepreneurial identity and an entrepreneurial prototype. Vicky grew up with several entrepreneurs in the family: her father, uncle and grandfather. While she did not discuss their influence on her own conceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, there were other friends mentioned who could have influenced her ideas of entrepreneurship. Vicky had several friends over the years who have tried to convince her to join an entrepreneurial venture with them, but because she was well positioned on this occasion financially and professionally, she was able to accept her friend's offer to partner in their current venture.

Vicky noted that her social networks remained exactly the same from when she started the venture. While Vicky did not address why her networks did not shift within her first nine months owning and operating her new venture, from the interview, it might be because she feels that she has strong support network among family and business partner. Time also has been a challenge for Vicky, as the first few months of the business were very busy. She has significant family responsibilities as a caretaker for her mother and as a mother and wife. Another reason might be that she has a strong confidence in her abilities and perspectives as a professional, and because they already had an interested client before building the projects and services, Vicky might have prioritized utilizing her skills and energy towards building the products and services before her building her networks. The rationale for the lack of change in her social networks was not clear, and she did not indicate whether this would be something she was interested in changing in the future.

In contrast, Rachel's responses indicated a different approach to reconciling existing identities with an entrepreneurial prototype through intentionally building her social network. When discussing her support networks when making the transition into entrepreneurship, Rachel noted having friends and extended family members who were entrepreneurs. When discussing her interactions with a cousin who is an entrepreneur, she started constructing a picture of an entrepreneurial prototype.

There are all these pressures [...] to be the ideal cool entrepreneur, to be like this person... you have to go to all these parties, you have to blog in this way, you have to be on Instagram, you have to have all these followers, all these things. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

Being able to identify her need for more realistic, balanced stories of entrepreneurship was paired with an active awareness that she would like more real-life entrepreneurial models as well that aligned more with how she could envision herself in her work, which could help her craft an entrepreneurial identity that was in greater alignment with her other existing and aspirational identities.

I do want to look up to someone as an entrepreneur, but I can't limit myself to just the people I see that are way up there already. And I think that's why I was looking for a women's group or something. I really wanted something that was closer and more relatable to me at that time, and I couldn't find it really. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

Rachel was actively updating and seeking real-life, attainable models of female entrepreneurs to better inform her entrepreneurial prototype to better suit her own likeness and existing

identities. In joining a female-center program at a co-working space, she was able to practice vocalizing her new entrepreneurial identity through her introductions to other entrepreneurs.

Most of the time, when [the co-working program has] a workshop, everyone goes around and introduces themselves. And that has been my favorite part, saying like, 'I'm [name], I'm the founder of [this company], this is what we do.' And just owning it a little bit. I just love introducing myself and just kind of practicing how I want to say it each time. Like all those opportunities, they have a lot of events. Every event, just to introduce myself again, feels fantastic, and I feel like that's what's helped me own it the most. Even if it wasn't [the co-working program], and I was just in a setting where I can casually introduce myself to people who mildly kind of care. It felt really good. And it even helped me own it more, so I could be more comfortable in social settings. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

Based on their interviews, Vicky's 'who I know' did not evolve since her transition into entrepreneurship. In contrast, Rachel actively built her new entrepreneur networks to support the formation of an entrepreneurial prototype that was more in line with herself. She appeared to be motivated to actively manage the formation of an entrepreneurial prototype and in order to encourage a prototype that could better align and co-exist with her existing identities (e.g., female).

'Who I am'

Within the 'who I am' area of effectuation, the two participants, Vicky and Rachel, interacted with entrepreneurial prototypes differently. Vicky noted an entrepreneurial prototype that was influenced by media stereotypes, which served as a barrier to seeing herself as an entrepreneur. Rachel recognized the potential influence of entrepreneurial stereotypes from the media and made a conscious effort minimize their impact on her working entrepreneurial prototype.

When first looking to Vicky's case, it was not clear whether or not she formed her understanding of entrepreneurs as being risk-takers (Bridge, 2017) from her experience of growing up around entrepreneurship, but the sentiment was raised on multiple occasions as a perceived deterrent for her to transition into entrepreneurship without the financial support of her husband's more dependable and consistent salary. Vicky noted feeling her role as a wife with a financially secure husband allowed her to even engage in her current career.

Without the backing of my husband, I don't think I would have ever pursued any type of entrepreneurial work. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

I do think that part of this is I am privileged that I have a husband who can help . . . Some of the advantages that we have by, 'Hey, I can start a new company because my husband can pay the bills, and we have health insurance?' (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

In viewing herself as a financially supported wife, she allowed herself to embrace a role identity of being a 'small business owner' and a 'female business owner', but she has failed to connect with being an 'entrepreneur' due to the perceived differences in her circumstances and that she perceived of 'entrepreneurs', which reflects an entrepreneurial stereotype of entrepreneurship as risk-taking.

We are female business owners. I mean, we own the business. We're partners. We've had a 70/30 split. That does feel good, to say, 'Okay, I'm a woman, and I own a business.' So, that part feels good, but yeah, I definitely feel like if we . . . a true entrepreneur should be risking probably more than we are. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

Vicky struggled to view both herself and her business partner as being entrepreneurs, largely because Vicky's entrepreneurial prototype was heavily influenced by the entrepreneurial stereotype of entrepreneurs needing to be risk-takers. Vicky mentioned her identity as a woman on several occasions both to show her perceived privileges and her challenges. Vicky perceived that she was fortunate as a married woman with a husband who could financially support the family. She also felt that same dynamic of being a married woman conflicted with being able to prioritize her initial career goals. She also felt that being a woman in her field was too easy. Overall, Vicky's framing of her privilege reinforced an orientation that entrepreneurs should be risk-takers in some sort of fashion.

Despite her long hours in the first months prior to launching her business, Vicky felt the transition was almost too easy in certain respects. She felt as though transitions into entrepreneurship should be riskier and more 'high stakes' than what she encountered being married to someone who could keep their family financially afloat as she explored entrepreneurship: For Vicky, the stereotype of risk-taking entrepreneur was what defined entrepreneurship, making her feel more comfortable describing her new professional identity as being a business owner, rather than an entrepreneur. Vicky's business partner is also a married mom with a husband who can help provide her with health insurance and steady income to pay the monthly expenses. Because of this, Vicky said she felt she was having an entrepreneurial experience through the long-hours and having a business partner, but she, personally, was challenged to refer to her activities as 'entrepreneurship' because of how comfortable her life was otherwise.

I've got two minds about it because I feel like I'm able to do something that I want to do and pursue something that I want to do because I'm a wife to someone who makes a good living, and that's almost, it's almost embarrassing because there are people out there that are really suffering for their passions, and I'm not. So, I almost feel like a fraud. Like, "Okay, you're an 'entrepreneur'". Well, sure. I fit the definition of starting your own business and creating something from nothing. Sure, that's what it is. And we're creating a product, and I developed the website. And I've done all these things, but as a woman, I almost feel like it's not . . . there's no risk. I feel advantaged or at an advantage because I'm a woman. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

Vicky used the word 'fraud' when she thought about herself as an entrepreneur. Her participation in the study actually ignited reflection of whether she might be able to embrace the identity of being an 'entrepreneur'.

I mean, when I saw your post, I was like, 'Whoa, I am an entrepreneur.' [...] I hadn't actually really thought about it because, I was like, 'Oh, wait a second.' You know? This is embedded in what an entrepreneur is. You start your own business. You put your own money out there. You take the risk, but I had not really thought about that very much.

When asked to expand upon her working conception of entrepreneurship as risk-taking further, Vicky mentioned that she did not feel her professional identity aligned with the risk-oriented entrepreneurial prototype that she imagined when thinking of well-known stereotypes of entrepreneurship.

It's like the Bill Gates story. He was a kid in his parents' garage. He wasn't doing a lot of risk. So, he got to be creative, and he got to take a bunch of the risks without really risking too, too much. And he did very, very, very well. But he's not like TOMS Shoes, where he's selling stuff and taking out loans on his credit cards and selling his shoes himself and hawking them because he has this vision of what he wants to do. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

Her comments on the founder of TOMS Shoes indicated that Vicky also conceptualized entrepreneurs along with the stereotype of the 'bootstrapping' entrepreneur. She then connected the entrepreneurial prototype with one of her prior experiences working for a company 18 years ago. She explained:

They were a group of [experts] out of [institution] that had this great idea, and then had an influx of millions and millions of dollars from venture capitalists. So, they got to take risks, but they were still pulling in a salary. It wasn't their own money that they were risking. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

At the time of the interview, Vicky had already invested \$15,000 USD of her own savings to date. However, she stated that because her family had her husband's salary coming in, it did not feel high-risk enough to be able to embrace the identity of being an 'entrepreneur'.

So, I do think that there are degrees of privilege that maybe to be a real entrepreneur you got to have . . . But I think the more real skin that you have in the game, like the more things that you're really putting yourself at risk for . . . I respect that more. (Vicky, Interview, 12 September 2018)

Vicky's sense of 'who I am' was highly influenced by existing stereotypical notions of entrepreneurs needing to engage in high-risk situations and to be feeling the initial hardship of their circumstances (i.e., the 'bootstrapping' entrepreneur). In turn, the entrepreneurial prototype she embraced did not align well with her existing identities and circumstances, serving as a barrier for her to see herself as an 'entrepreneur'.

Just as Rachel had actively built her entrepreneurial networks to intentionally shape an entrepreneurial prototype that aligned with her existing identities, Rachel also engaged in identity reflections that allowed her to protect her aligned entrepreneurial prototype. From the interview, Rachel noted feeling a distinct difference between how she sees herself and how she views the entrepreneurial stereotypes reinforced by the media. Rachel discussed how she had historically enjoyed watching and listening to media on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. However, when making her own transition into entrepreneurship, she chose to stop consuming entrepreneurship media for a period of time in order to find her own identity as being an entrepreneur.

You know what's funny about [the TV show,] 'Shark Tank?' I actually used to love that show, and I still do. But I, literally, didn't even want to watch it for two months [after becoming an entrepreneur] because I was like, 'Ugh, I can't...' And I even love the podcast 'How I Built This', like absolutely love it, know every episode, but I even stopped listening to that for a month or two because I just wanted the pressures of what everyone else says you should be off of me for a bit. And now, I love it and will listen to it and love all that stuff because I've kind of given a little bit of peace to just do my own thing. Don't feel like you have to follow everyone else's magic formula necessarily. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

In her initial months starting her new role of being an entrepreneur, Rachel felt the media depictions of entrepreneur made her feel pressured to question herself and her ability to navigate into entrepreneurship, signaling that she intentionally adjusted her consumption of media on entrepreneurship as a means to allow her entrepreneurial prototype to align with her existing identities.

Within the interview, Rachel noted being able to consume media on entrepreneurship again now that she felt more established in her work and within her entrepreneurial networks, but she seemed to noted actively monitoring such impacts on her identity. Rachel seemed to value more realistic, authentic stories of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship that showed struggle and development throughout the process of being an entrepreneur.

If you listen to 'How I Built This', my favorite part of it is, you know, 'We started off with nothing.' You know? Or the people who are super genuine and honest and will be like, 'Yeah, it's still tough' or whatever. Or the ones, afterwards, where it, you know it's like a new launch entrepreneur, where they kind of talk about their really scrappy story, and how they're still figuring it out. Like those make me feel good. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

Rachel actively grappled with the pressures from comparing herself with how the entrepreneurial stereotypes would approach entrepreneurship, noting that she wanted to focus her attention on putting forth a great business and product.

But it hit me, and I was like, 'Wait, let me just focus on having a great business before I try to make myself this person'. It's really not about me; it's about having a great product. That's what I really want. So, I mean, it may not be the right way or maybe other people found success in that way, but I think I'm just trying to learn as much as I can from other people. But not necessarily follow this exact path of, 'Do all these things, and be an entrepreneur superstar'. I don't know if I need to do it that way. (Rachel, Interview, 13 September 2018)

Rachel's active reflections and modified consumption of entrepreneurship media served to protect the more favorable, aligned entrepreneurial prototype she was crafting. This identity work seemed to be motivated, at least in part, by her desire to remain as an entrepreneur and have her business to be successful.

Discussion

When looking to the impact of Rachel’s efforts to build her network (‘who I know’) and minimize the discord between her existing identities and her entrepreneurial prototype (‘who I am’), Rachel framed these efforts as being helpful for her to embrace her new entrepreneurial role (see Table 2). Rachel actively sought out resources to help her prototype her own entrepreneurial identity. She actively positioned these images with her identity development and practice in her entrepreneurial journey. In contrast, from Vicky’s interview, it was difficult to note significant changes based on how she framed these three areas before the transition and at the time of the interview at month nine of being an entrepreneur (see Table X). For both participants, the typical ‘resources’ for prototyping included stories of entrepreneurs as depicted via podcasts, TV shows, or in person.

When comparing the approaches of Vicky and Rachel in how they navigated their new role, it is possible to see different in which prototyping resources were utilized and valued. In Vicky’s case, the prevalence of ‘entrepreneur’ as ‘risk-taker’ and as ‘bootstrapper’ were predominant mental models, reinforced through stereotypes like the founder of TOMS Shoes, Blake Mycoskie. In fact, Vicky utilized comparisons between Bill Gates and Blake Mycoskie to emphasize her view that entrepreneurship needing to be not only about ‘risk-taking’ but ‘high risk’ and ‘bootstrapping’. She used these entrepreneurial stereotypes to compare herself and her business partner, framing that they were closer to the story of Bill Gates than to Blake Mycoskie. She dismissed the version of ‘entrepreneur’ closer to her own in stating that Bill Gates did not risk enough to be considered an ‘entrepreneur’, especially compared to Blake Mycoskie’s story. Vicky also compared her different identities she holds—wife vs. entrepreneur—to highlight how she was not an ‘entrepreneur’.

Table 2. Comparative Findings

		Before transition			At time of interview		
		What I know	Who I know	Who I am	What I know	Who I know	Who I am
Vicky	Strong/ High						
	Moderate	X	X		X	X	
	Weak/ Low			X			X
Rachel	Strong/ High						X
	Moderate	X			X	X	
	Weak/ Low		X	X			

On the other hand, Rachel viewed the media portrayals of entrepreneurs as inspirational, but also demotivating at times. She also chose to filter the entrepreneurial stereotypes in order to build a better suited entrepreneurial prototype for her own use. She positioned the ‘Shark Tank’ prototypes relative to the ‘real-life’ entrepreneurs, and associated herself with the latter as a way to also dismiss the stereotypes she felt came with the ‘Shark Tank’ version. She spoke of a desire to instead hear stories of entrepreneurs that did not fall into the ‘heroic’ stereotype, but rather stories that seemed realistic, representing a smaller-scale of entrepreneurial activity. To this end, Rachel joined a co-working mentoring program with fellow female entrepreneurs, in order to surround herself with models to support the formation of an entrepreneurial prototype that looked more like herself.

Addressing the Role of Identity in Entrepreneurship

There are implications for the existing perceptions and influences of entrepreneurial stereotypes, and entrepreneurship educators can serve a more intentional role in helping students build entrepreneurial prototypes. In the two cases presented, the entrepreneurs communicated feeling a disconnection between their perceptions of themselves or their circumstances with their perceptions of an entrepreneurial stereotype. This serves to note the importance of entrepreneurship educators to address the conceptions of entrepreneurship – what it is and isn't, and who it is and isn't.

Because identity serves as notable part of the transition into entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial prototypes can have significant power on new entrepreneurs as they are making sense of their own professional identities. Individuals have a need to view themselves positively as being competent and capable individuals (Baumeister, 2011, Goodman and Hoppin, 1990) and as being socially accepted and valued (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). While individuals can be acting in entrepreneurial positions, if they perceive that certain elements do not align with their conceptions or expectations, it may hinder their ability to form an associated identity. Entrepreneurial prototypes serve to characterize a possible self for the individual (Hoyle and Sherrill, 2006) and reconcile the self with a future identity.

Entrepreneurship educators need to help students understand the role of identity in entrepreneurship. Educators can assign reflective writing exercises in order to have students engage in the metacognitive process of thinking about their thinking, which helps students achieve a deeper appreciation of their experiences and learning (Martinez, 2006). Writing exercises that reflect on their entrepreneurial preconception and identify their entrepreneurial prototypes can help students evaluate their resources and deficits for possible future identity as an entrepreneur. Educators also need to consider the impact of social media and popular culture, and train students in filtering inputs and information and find means to appropriate select prototypes that fit their particular interests and context.

Diverse Entrepreneur Models and Mentors

Entrepreneurship educators can also emphasize the influence of social supports in framing how new entrepreneurs form entrepreneurial prototypes. When thinking to the value of understanding the role of entrepreneurial prototypes on aspiring and new entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship educators have the ability to support students in making sense of entrepreneurial stereotypes, helping them embrace what is useful from them and discarding what might seem to cause an identity conflict. Developing prototypes presents challenges, as they can be self-selected and limited to the dominant 'heroic' stereotypes. Thankfully, aspiring and new entrepreneurs have the opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial prototype for themselves that aligns their existing identities, which can be supported through exposure to entrepreneurs that counter prevalent entrepreneurial stereotypes.

Entrepreneurship educators can help to provide students with diverse models and mentor networks. Exposing students to diverse, local entrepreneurs who are at earlier stages within their career might help students view entrepreneurship as being more attainable. Helping students to connect with diverse entrepreneur mentors can help them create sustainable relationships with entrepreneurs. These efforts can support students gaining a more nuanced perspective of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in real life, which serves to balance and counter the entrepreneurial stereotypes portrayed through the media.

Validating an Entrepreneurial Prototype

Educators can help students to socialize an entrepreneurial identity, as a way to validate an entrepreneurial prototype. In this aspect, prototyping was not exclusive to identifying representative individuals in the 'role' entrepreneur – such as a provisional self (Ibarra, 1999), but also involved prototyping the practices which were attributed to acting entrepreneurially, building on the process perspective of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2016). When looking to practice for activities that foster identity reflection and exploration, socialization helped individuals gain comfort in acting as their future entrepreneurial self. Practicing activities such as elevator pitches was not only helpful for honing selling, but enabled storytelling, allowing to craft and legitimize their developing entrepreneurial identity.

Socializing a new entrepreneurial identity was particularly valuable when within an entrepreneurial community, as the legitimizing expanded beyond a role-set (Carsrud and Johnson, 1989, Williams Middleton, 2013), towards a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Hearing students voice their pitches and introductions can help educators have better understandings of where they should have targeted discussions with a student. Educators can use targeted conversation helped to raise identity reflections that illustrate challenges in associating to the entrepreneurial prototype. Being able to have targeted discussions on how students can reconceptualize themselves as entrepreneurs can be helpful for strategizing with students on how to become comfortable with both their intended future selves and their existing self-concept.

Implications and Future Research

Different ways entrepreneurs can be understood include functional conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as 'risk-takers' or 'innovators'), role conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as 'founder' or 'business owner'), personality conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as 'extroverted' or 'creative'), competence conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as "skilled at business"), behavioral conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as 'motivating' or 'taking responsibility'), and performance conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as 'wealthy' or 'reputable'). These conceptions reflect the various definitions and perceptions that are held about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but they also contribute towards how individuals construct entrepreneurial prototypes. Prototype development can both contribute to and limit identity reflection and development.

Given the breadth of definitions of entrepreneurs (and entrepreneurship), as demonstrated by Casson (2013), we need to engage an appropriate spectrum of prototypes to reflect them. Similar to the new entrepreneurs of the study, students, as aspiring and nascent entrepreneurs enter into entrepreneuring with biased and differentiating conceptions and definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Thus, it is important for entrepreneurship educators to spend adequate time with students reflecting on who entrepreneurs are and what entrepreneurship is. Addressing entrepreneurial prototypes, particularly in comparison to oneself, allows for rich discussions in the classroom. For educators, bringing these conceptions to the forefront of conversation can help identify the existing biases and assumptions that exist amongst their students, as comparing oneself to an entrepreneurial prototype can indicate comfort levels with certain elements of being an entrepreneur and point to areas where new entrepreneurs are feeling a conflict with another existing identity. And while bringing-in 'real-life' entrepreneurs from the community can help energize the classroom with stories of real-life experience, it is critical to be mindful to present a broad diversity of entrepreneurs (race, gender, age, personality, background, field, experience-level, etc.), as having students perceive patterns in the speakers may inadvertently aid in reinforcing entrepreneurial stereotypes.

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