Stockholm School of Economics
Management
20 credits (30 hp)

So You Think You Can Make A Fortune?

- The Role of Entrepreneurial Identity in the Choice to Pursue

Entrepreneurship

Abstract

While entrepreneurship is gaining ground among MBA Graduates in the US, as little as 5% pursue an entrepreneurial career after graduation. The aim of the study is to explore the effect of entrepreneurial identification in the choice to pursue entrepreneurship. Six MBA graduates in the Darden Business Incubator are interviewed, and the data is analyzed in relation to a theoretical framework of social psychology, social constructionism and decision theory. The relationship to the counter role of the general manger is explored and the concepts of Identity Talk and Entrepreneurial Passion are discussed. It is found that the respondents do identify with the entrepreneurial role and differentiate themselves from the general manger.

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Content

Introduction

When the term entrepreneurship comes to mind, "Buzzword" is not a farfetched thought. Entrepreneurship is sometimes seen as the elixir that will bring growth, prosperity and fortune to any individual, organization or society that manages to tame the power of its essence. Researchers, media and politicians (not to mention the entrepreneurs themselves) all join in the hail of entrepreneurship. Governments all over the globe seem increasingly concerned about providing the right conditions for entrepreneurship, changing policies and legislation to encourage more people to take the leap. Some even go so far as to call the Entrepreneur the hero of the century[1], referring to the fact that during the past 30 years 90% of US jobs have been created by companies younger than five years.[2] More emphasis is put on entrepreneurship in higher education, and an increasing number of business students mention *Entrepreneur* on the top of their list of desired career choices. Even traditionally desired career paths are influenced by the entrepreneurial hype and *Entrepreneurial abilities* or *Entrepreneurial experience* are often mentioned in job postings as desired qualities in a successful candidate for jobs even in consulting and banking.

An article in New York Times from last year even goes so far to call the people born between the late '70s to mid 90's the Entrepreneurial generation, and the author goes on to state: [3]

"Our culture hero is not the artist or reformer, not the saint or scientist, but the entrepreneur. (Think of Steve Jobs, our new deity.) Autonomy, adventure, imagination: entrepreneurship comprehends all this and more for us. The characteristic art form of our age may be the business plan."

Background

 The entrepreneur may well be the hero of the century, and our generation's preferred art form the business plan. But the reality of most actual entrepreneurs is far from that. Most aspiring entrepreneurs do not contribute to job creation and growth, in fact merely 40% of the companies that are started in the US survive after 6 years.[4] Half are gone already after

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[1] http://www.svd.se/naringsliv/entreprenoren-decenniets-hjalte_6654534.svd
[2] http://www.jobs-council.com/recommendations/nurture-the-high-growth-enterprises-that-fuel-new-jobs/
[3] Deresivic (2001) http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/13/opinion/sunday/the-entrepreneurial-generation.html?pagewanted=all
[4] Phillips, Kirchoff, (1989)

two and a half years.[5] And most of the companies that survive, are sole proprietors anyways, not planning to employ anyone other than themselves.[6]

While this is maybe not common knowledge, the figures are easily available for anyone who is considering an entrepreneurial career. The focus of may seem to be to get more people to start business, and why don't they actually? But considering the odds, the opposite question is called for. Why do people still want to start their business? The reasons may vary off course. For some it is a question of survival and simply finding away of making a living when there are no available options as in a study of Ugandan entrepreneurs.[7] A Swedish strategy has been to encourage people who are unemployed to start their own business when they fail to find a job.[8]

But for people who have an alternative, good career prospects with no need to find just any way to make a living this does not make sense. Imagine a group of top MBA students, graduating to go out and take high paying jobs in the corporate world. As few as 5% of the full time students of top tier MBA programs in the US found their own business after graduation.[9] A number that is not very surprising considering the odds of succeeding with your business compared to equal success in a more traditional career. Maria Halpern, Director of Student Engagement at Wharton has an idea of why entrepreneurship is still increasing as a desired career path (up from 3% in 2010):

" It's worth noting that the millennial generation, known for an overblown sense of self-worth and propensity to dream big, has recently become old enough to be MBA-eligible"

There we have them again, Generation Entrepreneur.

It seems there is an attraction in the idea of being an entrepreneur in itself. Something that find traction in research on identity theory. According to this school of thought, we act the way we do because we want to affirm our self-image. In line with this, what would drive an MBA to start a business is not the venture opportunity itself but an opportunity to fulfill themselves and to live the dream of the hero of their generation. Simply to be an Entrepreneur.

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[5] Cessy 2006
[6] Shane 2008 p. 4
[7] Bewayo 1995
[8] http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.4b7cba481279b57bec180001139/stosta.pdf
[9] http://www.thewhig.com/2012/04/14/the-rise-of-the-mba-entrepreneur-2

Aim

My intention is to investigating some of the reasons for entrepreneurship. My starting point is a group of MBA students at Darden School of Business who are pursuing entrepreneurship in the school's incubator. In the light of identity theory I will look at how they talk about themselves, and their choice to pursue entrepreneurship.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to..

 ….explore the effect of *entrepreneurial identification* in the choice to pursue entrepreneurship.

Overview

This paper has a classical structure, starting with a presentation of the theoretical framework, covering a background on nascent entrepreneurs

Form the theory a number of research questions in relation to the aim are derived, these are presented in a short section preceding the methodology section. In the methodology section the process of interviews and data processing is presented, the limitations of this as well as the theoretical framework are discussed in the following section.

After that same background information about the respondents and Darden School of Business are presented, before we get to know the six respondent's point of view. The data is presented as quotes from the interviews, divided in themes.

As we move on to the analysis, the data is put in the light of the theory, before we move on to conclusions. The paper is ended with a discussion. Interview questions, are found in attachments after the list of sources.

Theoretical Framework

Who Is The Entrepreneur?

The popular definition of an entrepreneur is somewhat close to a superhero. An underdog, who did not fit into the corporate world and with his own two empty hands he worked hard to build his fortune. Richard Branson being the ultimate incarnation of The Entrepreneur. The saga of the entrepreneur is told in magazines, movies and even history books. He is passionate, reckless, groundbreaking and will not take no for an answer. Be that as it may, the story of the man who came from nothing and now laughs all the way to the bank is not true for most entrepreneurs. Most businesses that are started do not survive the first year, and very few entrepreneurs actually end up making a fortune. *Superhero* is therefore not a sufficient definition, either in real life or for the purpose of this thesis. Before defining what *Entrepreneur* means in this context, I will go through some perspectives argued by academics in the field.

In the words of Shane (2003) entrepreneurship is..

"…an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing markets, and raw material through organizing efforts that previously had not existed"

The entrepreneur would then be the performer of these activities. The definition does not tell us if this is done within a bigger organization, or if it involves the actual start of a new venture. To break new ground, explore new opportunities – the superhero finds some vague resonance in Shane's definition of the entrepreneur.

In an overview on nascent entrepreneurship Joachim Wagner (2004) summarizes definitions and findings about entrepreneurs in the very earliest stages of building their enterprise. He refers to works of Reynolds and White (1997 p. 6) when describing entrepreneurship as a four stage process. The process is said to be divided into *conception, gestation, infancy and adolescence* with a transitional phase in between each of them. In the first transition, when

an individual starts committing time or resources to starting a new venture, he or she can be called a nascent entrepreneur. In the second transition the actual venture is started, and can be looked upon as an existing operation. Or, as in most cases, the idea is abandoned. The third and last transition occurs when the firm become established, hence goes from infancy to adolescence. In the third stage, the entrepreneur is no longer considered nascent, why Wagner chooses to focus on the first two. This goes along with the purpose of this thesis, since focus lies on how identity drives entrepreneurial action, rather than entrepreneurial success. Wagner also makes another important distinction, by excluding individuals who just prefer to be self-employed rather than having the intention of building a new venture (referred to as *latent entrepreneurs.)*

Wagner then moves on to explore how many nascent entrepreneurs there are through out the world, leaning on the results of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), an international study where 100 000 individuals are interviewed about their entrepreneurial activities. Wagner concludes that there are millions of nascent entrepreneurs on our planet (14, 689 million only in the U.S.), but is surprised by the fact that the share of nascent entrepreneurs in the population differs substantially between countries. Wagner compares Venezuela, where one in five can be considered a nascent entrepreneur to one in 111 in France.[10]

To explain these striking differences Wagner reviews a few views on the matter. He brings up a study by van Stel et. Al (2003) where a connection between economic development and innovative capacity entrepreneurship is presented: rising levels of per capita income and an innovative capacity index go along with a declining share of nascent entrepreneurs, until a certain point where the direction of he curve changes and the relationship is the opposite. In other words: the share of nascent entrepreneurs is biggest in countries with either low or high economic development, leaving the countries in between behind. According to the study this relationship holds even when you take other factors (such as previous communist rule) into account.

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[10] Numbers from the GEM 2003, as referred by Wagner. The comparable number for U.S. is one in twelve, and Sweden comes in on a modest two in 100.

In a study with a different approach Uhlander and Tulik (2004) find a weakly positive link between index of life satisfaction and entrepreneurial activity[11], and strong positive connection with enrolment in secondary education.

Wagner points out that though these both studies leave many questions unanswered, they are important since they are (to his knowledge) the only two empirical investigations looking at cross country differences in the share of nascent entrepreneurship.

In the table presented on the next page, some facts about the nascent entrepreneurs of the world are presented. From the data we can, among other things, tell that there are about twice as many male than female nascent entrepreneurs and that nascent entrepreneurship is much more common among people who know entrepreneurs than among those who do not. What causes what, is of course always a question when considering studies like this, and just like Wagner points out the table also shows that the share of nascent entrepreneurs and at the same time working full or part time is greater than for people not working or not part of labor force. Considering far more men are part of the work force than women throughout the world, it is intuitive that also the part of nascent entrepreneurs among the male population should be greater.

However, the fact still remains that men on average are twice as active in entrepreneurship as women and the connection between gender and entrepreneurship has gained both public and academic interest. Wagner brings up a study that points out that women are more risk averse than men, meaning that fear of failure plays a great role for the female population.

Going deeper into the characteristics of the nascent entrepreneur, Wagner reviews a few other studies that have been made to identify personal factors that influence entrepreneurship and concludes that they do not have much to bring to the table. His reason for this mainly being the lack of studies covering large samples, with international scopes.

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[11] Defined by Uhlander and Thurik as the share of nascent entrepreneurs plus the share of people who are owner-managers of a business less than 4 months old

These numbers show that individuals with certain background; educational, geographical, professional etc. are more inclined to pursue the entrepreneurial path than others. But it does not get down to the individual choice. We know more men than women are entrepreneurs, but what men and what women? Given that we have the "right" background, why do we decide take the plunge? Because the truth of the matter is that most people do not.

So, They Think They Can Make a Fortune?

In a world where rationality is norm individuals are expected to make choices based on reason: *"These are my preferences and therefore I choose X".* An individual seeking material wealth would hence base her career choices on the path with the highest net present value. Will I make more money starting my own business than as an employee? Ok, then I will start my own business. If not, I will stick to the corporate route.

In this very simplistic example, it is assumed that our career choice is merely an attempt to maximize our wealth. Considering that studies show that taking the leap and go off on your own will actually make most people worse off financially[12], leaves us to wonder: Are the people starting new businesses not aware of this? Possibly. Or is this not a sufficient way to explain the choice to become an entrepreneur? Most likely.

We could, off course, factor in other parameters in the equation. The rational mind of an individual might strive to maximize something else, like quality of life for instance. This would actually be a more rational reason to become an entrepreneur, since someone in a corporate job will have to make 2,5 times as much money as an entrepreneur to experience the same quality of life according to Shane[13]. Or it could be a sum of things weighed together that would affect the choice to become an entrepreneur or not.

Rationality and Preferences

Brunsson[14] points out that where rationality is norm, decision often equals choice. We tend to think that our actions are proceded by a decision. There is a thought pattern of action where the individual supposedly considers what is desirable, contemplates possible actions and then finally chooses one of them. Complementing this norm of rationality is our

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[12] Shane
[13] Shane
[14] Brunsson 2007 p. 2

intentionality, that what we want in the future guides our decision. Like in the example above we often tend to think that our actions are consequences of a decision. According to this line of thinking we should be able to figure out what preferences a person has based on what decisions she has made.[15] Brunsson points out that sometimes when rationality is questioned, it is defended with arguments of us not being able to fully understand the consequences of the alternatives so we can only make a rational decision based on our assumptions. For entrepreneurship this is true for most preferences, if you are trying to maximize your wealth you cannot know which path will make you rich in the end. Same if you are trying to maximize quality of life, the path leading there is simply too complex and you cannot know for sure what will happen in the end. (All you have is the odds, and as stated above they will be against the entrepreneurial path at least in the former case.) But in Brunsson's view, rationality is still not enough to explain how we make our decisions. Brunsson sais this assumes we are clearly defined individuals, with strong identities that are stable over time, and that we make individual, free and defined choices. Instead Brunsson think we should see decision making as a social phenomena.[16] While decision-making can precede action, it is not necessarily so and we can act and choose without having made a decision to do so.[17] However since rationality is norm, by claiming rationality we can prove that we are proper individuals making our own choices.[18]

The Social Construction of Reality

According to institutional theory reality (or "everything that passes for knowledge in society" in the words of Berger and Luckmann[19]) is socially constructed. That means that our beliefs and viewpoints are commonly created through our actions and experiences through a process that is described in "The Social Construction of Reality" from 1966. Our common beliefs and definitions are referred to as institutions, commonly created by all in society. By performing actions we reinforce the perceptions we have of reality, and in a constant interplay we are contentiously shaping our common institutions[20] All of our common concepts are formulated this way; what is good, what is evil, what it means to be a man or a

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[15] Brunsson 2007 p. 4
[16] Brunsson 2007 p. 1
[17] Brunsson 1989 p. 33
[18] Brunsson 2007 p.4
[19] Berger Luckmann 1966 p.266
[20] Berger Luckmann 1966

woman and what it is good behavior in a certain setting. And of course, what it means to be an entrepreneur.

The Construction of Roles

The theories about how reality is constructed have been developed in several fields within social science. A role, in this context, is *"the expectations of behavior attached to certain societal statuses or positions"*.[21] Roles are created according to the process described in the previous paragraph, by actions performed by people around us, stories we hear and by how things are portrayed in media. The role of a mother, for instance is associated with the behavior of nurturing the child, while the role of a doctor is associated with caring for the patient etc. Roles can be present at all levels of society, it can be patterns associated with gender, age, sex or ethnicity or on a more specific level such as sister, sorority girl, baker or musician.[22]

Roles and Identity

A role becomes an identity, when we have internalized it, and made it part of what we perceive our selves to be. To make an important distinction: While the *identity* reflects the answer to the question "Who am I?" the *role* represents societies' perception.[23] Our self-schemes are all the characteristics, preferences, goals and behavior patterns that we associate with ourselves.[24] Our self conception consists of all the roles we have internalized, meaning we can have multiple identities (e.g. we can be both a mother and a doctor), and these can vary over time through identity transitions. The meaning of roles and identities are not necessarily the same to everyone, but can vary across time, culture and location.[25]

Why We Do What We Do - Identity As Driver of Action

In social psychology, derived from the same school of thought, our identity is the primary source of motivation for human behavior. This means that all of us, entrepreneurs and others, act the way we do because we are trying to verify our self-image. In other words, we

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[21] Stets & Burke 2000
[22] Howard 2000
[23] Stets & Burke 2000
[24] Howard 2000 s. 369
[25] Burke 2006

behave and make decisions according to the "role" that we have. The reason our identity is argued to be our main driver of action, is that we seek self-verification. We want to validate our self-conception by observing others' reactions to our actions. What we strive to achieve is a convergence between our self-image and the image that others have of us, since this gives us a feeling of stability and control. When we experience discrepancy between the two, we feel distressed and unsatisfied. This way our identities and our need to verify them, drive our actions and serve as base for our decisions and behaviors.[26]

Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk

Similar to social constructionism, interactionism deals with the process of how we attach meanings to objects and phenomena. According to the theory formation these symbolic meanings are developed and transmitted through social interactions.[27] In these interactions, language become an important part. The symbolic meanings of words are attributed the same way, and the words we use to describe something is essential to the formation of the meaning of that object. The interactionists emphasize that identity is constructed, negotiated and communicated through language both through various forms of media and through direct interactions with groups and individuals. The concept of *Identity Talk* is introduced as a way of describing how individuals communicate their identity through the way they talk and the words they use to describe themselves and their surrounding.[28]

Our Identity and Other's

Identities are not isolated in society but exist in relation to the institutional surrounding. In that way, identities are also related to other identities. For instance the mother as the counter-identity of the child, the student of the teacher etc.[29] The relationship to the counter role, determines how we act in relation to it. This provides directions for patterns of behavior.

Other identities play a role in our own identity formation in another way as well, through the negotiation of what or who we are *not*. Freitas et al[30] explore the role of the counter role and state that by stating what we are not, we strengthen our own identity by defining who

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[26] Stets & Burke
[27] Howard 2000 p 371
[28] Howard 2000 p 373 f
[29] Burke 1980 p 19
[30] Freitas et al 1997

we are and what we distance ourselves from. An act that also points to the ambivalence of our identities, why do we have the need to distance ourselves from a certain role? The boarders to an identity that is close to us need to be constantly negotiated, and this plays a part also when we transit from one identity to another.

Since individuals have a tendency to evaluate ourselves positively, we often think of the group that we belong to is superior to other groups. This has shown to be true in studies where groups are formed on seemingly trivial characteristics, as well as for socially relevant groups such as race, gender etc.[31] In that respect we tend to describe ourselves in positive words.

The Entrepreneurial Role and Identity

If we assume that our self-conception consists of a number of different roles we have internalized, should there not also be an entrepreneurial role in society?

As described (or rather, ridiculed) in the introduction, the common image of the entrepreneur, or the entrepreneurial role, seem to be somewhat close to a superhero. Though this might not be true, the portrayal in media contributes to the creation of the role of the entrepreneur. Murniek and Mosakowski[32] decided to take this further and set out to investigate the nature of the entrepreneurial role and identity. Even though numerous academic efforts have been made to establish the traits of entrepreneurs, this is an area that had previously been over looked.

To first establish the entrepreneurial role (the societal perception of the entrepreneur) they let a group of 225 students evaluate 45 adjective pairs (based on previous research on entrepreneurial traits) to see how an entrepreneur was perceived in relation to a general manager by the group. The results showed that the group tended to differentiate between the roles of entrepreneurs and general mangers along the lines of risk-taking, innovation and unpredictability.

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[31] Howard 2000 p 369
[32] Murniek Mosakowski

Perceived entrepreneurial traits used in role/identity instrument	*Perceived entrepreneurial traits not used in instrument*
- Risk-taking - Novel in thoughts and action - Unpredictable - Someone who makes radical changes - A visionary - Independent - Creative - Breaks rules - Intuitive - A creator - Someone who likes going it alone	- Unlimited in actions - Passionate - An initiator - Proactive - Someone who prefers action (as opposed to analysis)

The traits above are expectations associated with the entrepreneurial role, but are they true also for the perceptions of actual entrepreneurs? Apparently so. Not only did all the entrepreneurs in the study indicated that they had en entrepreneurial identity, but it also proved to be stronger than other identities tested for in the study.[33]

Entrepreneurial Self- delusion?

Though Murniek and Mosakowski found a significant difference in the roles of an entrepreneur as opposed to a general manager, it is important to point out that these are perceived characteristics, and not actual. In fact, other studies show that when comparing the results of personality tests taken by entrepreneurs with those taken by the general population, they show very little difference. Characteristics like risk averse, socially confident, novelty focused has no way near the significance for entrepreneurs as they have for white males.[34] When compared to general managers the significance of such

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[33] Murniek and Mosakowski
[34] Shane (2008)

characteristics in entrepreneurs is even smaller.[35]This is interesting in it self, but even more so in comparison with the results from the studies referred to above. We know entrepreneurs perceive themselves to be different, and that society holds the same image – but at the same time we know that they are not very different at all. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that entrepreneurs suffer from severe self-delusion, something I do not dare to argue here. But be that as it may, in the purposes of this thesis, what is interesting to study is the perceived traits and characteristics, and not the actual. Meaning that for us it does not matter weather the entrepreneurs are deceiving themselves or not, since it is their self-image and not their actual personality that is said to drive action.

Entrepreneurial Passion

Passion is often mentioned in relation to entrepreneurship, also in the academic field. According to Cardon, Wincent, Singh and Drnovsek entrepreneurial passion is essential to understanding the actions of entrepreneurs. Passion itself is described as an *intense positive emotion, whose empirical referents or objects usually involves venture related opportunities, tasks or activities and that has a motivational effect that stimulates entrepreneurs to overcome obstacles and remain engaged.* [36] They further suggest that it is a consciously accessible, intense positive feeling and that it results from activities with identity meaning and salience to the entrepreneur. They claim that passion is nothing that we are born with, rather something that we get form doing something that confirms our self-identity. The researchers go on to develop the concept of three different entrepreneurial identities, the one of the inventor, the founder and the developer. As an entrepreneur each one of these, or all of them could be salient and in that way motivate us to (or not to) engage in the tasks that corresponds to the goal of each identity. In that way, identities are a source of motivation for actions that result in social validation of self-meaning. The effects of passion would be persistence and focus to meet the obstacles that are facing the entrepreneur. The individual experiences positive feelings when their self-image is confirmed and reinforced by their actions, the consequence can sometimes be a feeling of positive reinforcement and an

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[35] Baum et al (2009) s.59
[36] Cardon et al (2007)

affirmation of success based on the own emotions rather than the actual results of the business.

The Corporate Construction

For the group that will be studied here, graduates of Darden School of Business, the alternative to a starting their own venture is typically a corporate career as a general manager in a big, American corporation. Therefore it is interesting to get a perspective in the alternative.

Robert Jackall made an extensive (and slightly dystopian) survey of corporate America in 1988. In "Moral Mazes – The World of Corporate Managers" he describes a workplace where it is not as much about the task at hand, as the social game and the politics. To have a successful career you are not only required to produce results, but live up to the image of the corporate manager. You should not have too strong opinions, always follow the norms of the corporation, spend a lot of time in the office to show your dedication. The trick to move forward according to one of the interviewed managers is to "lick upward, kick downwards", always work to make your boss look good. The social and political pressure is tough in Jackall's corporate America.

Summary

In the theoretical perspective presented above we get to know that our sense of self consist of multiple identities that in turn correspond to roles. The roles are constructed in the surrounding society and constantly developed and affirmed in our social interactions. How this process takes place is conceptualized by Burke in the following model:

Person A   Person B
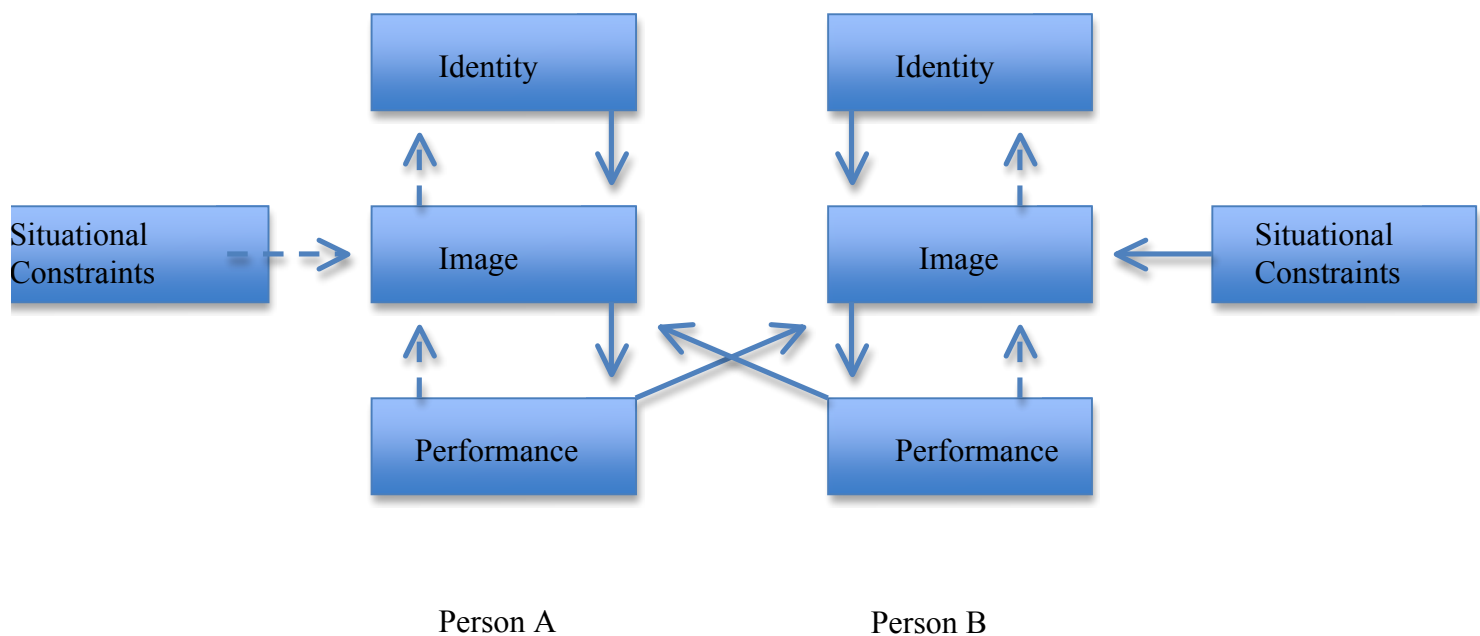
Fig. 1. Burke conceptualizes the social negotiation of the identity in an interaction between two people.[37]

When we internalize a role it becomes one of our identities, and we affirm it by our actions and by the way we talk about ourselves, so called identity talk.

The entrepreneurial role and identity is constructed in the same way, and differentiate along the lines of risk taking, creativity etc. By acting on the goals of our entrepreneurial identity we experience positive feelings and joy for work, and a feeling of success – the effects of entrepreneurial passion.

When defining your own identity you do it in relation to other identities and roles – so called counter roles. These determine the social pattern of action in relation to these roles, but also represent what we are *not.* Identities are also relational in the way that Individuals have

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[37] Burke (1980) p 21

a tendency to evaluate themselves positively and therefore their own group (individuals representing the same role) as superior to other groups.

In our case, the counter role is defined as the general manager, present in the environment described by Jackall. He describes a corporate America strictly

Brunsson brings in a perspective on rationality where, action and choices are not necessarily a consequence of decisions. In his view, decision is a social phenomenon just like any other, and decision-making is a social pattern constructed due to the ruling norm of rationality in our society.

Entrepreneur   General Manager
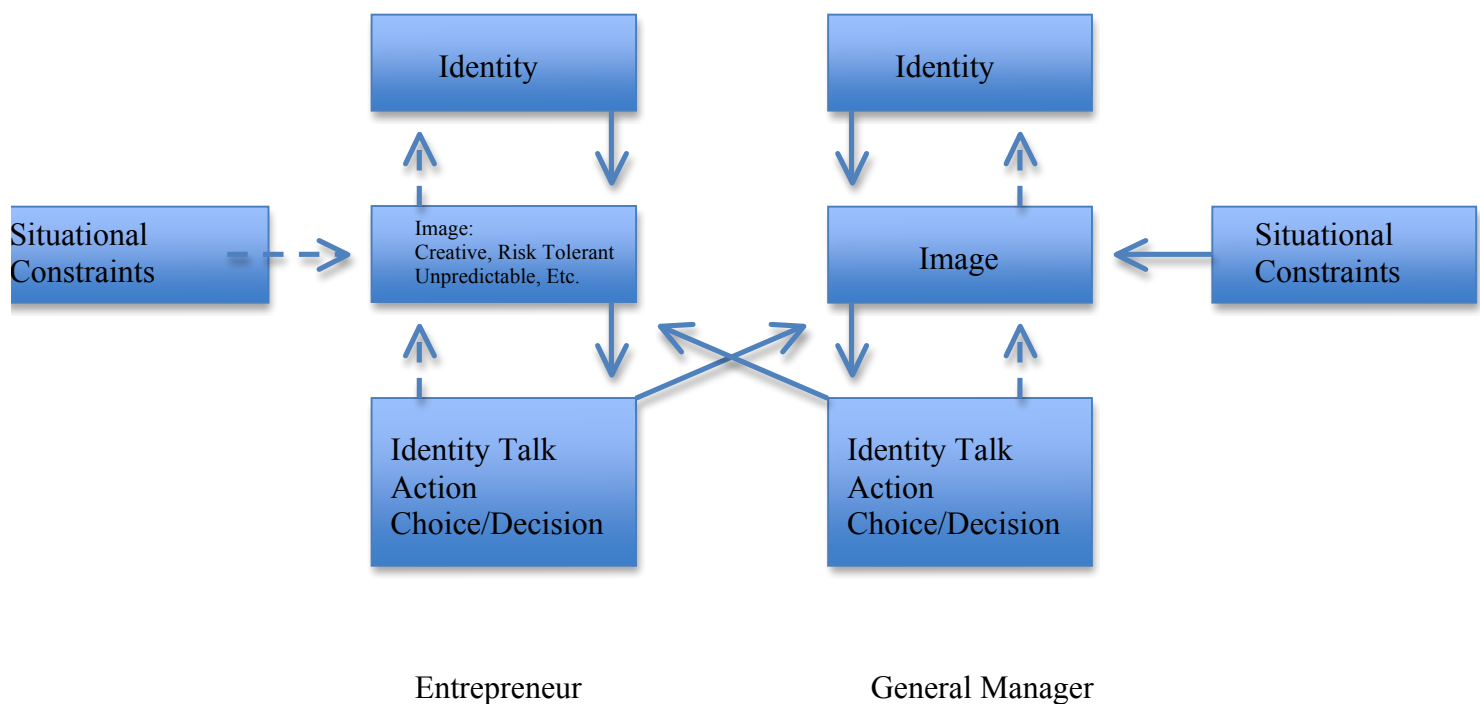
Fig.2 Burke's model developed to include the theoretical framework presented

I have summarized the theoretical framework in a model based on Burkes original presented above. The basis of the model is the social negotiation between the entrepreneur and the counter role, the general manager. The focus is on the entrepreneur and the need to affirm her identity. Burkes's performance has been divided into Identity Talk, Action and Choice/Decision.

While the entrepreneurial identity itself has been studied, there are no studies that investigate the role is has in the choice to pursue entrepreneurship. Since we know that identity drives action it is natural to assume a linkage between the two. A greater understanding of this relation will in turn give a better understanding of who becomes an entrepreneur and why.

Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore the effect of *entrepreneurial identification* in the choice to pursue entrepreneurship. From the theory we have that entrepreneurial identification is equal to internalizing the entrepreneurial role. The counter role of this specific group of entrepreneurs is defined as the General Manager, and we can expect the stories of the respondents to be affected by Identity Talk. Hence, from the theory the following research questions are derived:

- Do the respondents maintain an entrepreneurial identity?

- How does Identity talk affect the way they tell their story?

- How does the group relate to the counter role, defined as the general manager?

- What are the consequences for the respondents of maintaining an entrepreneurial identity?

Methodology

Method

Data and theory have been assimilated simultaneously. Data was gathered through interviews with the selected respondents, the material was transcribed and the data was processed. The idea has been to first establish weather the respondents have internalized the entrepreneurial role as defined my Murniek and Mosakowski through a semantic comparison. Thereafter the data was analyzed in relation to the theory.

The Respondents

A qualitative method was the natural choice for this thesis, due to the complex nature of the issues brought up. The purpose is rather understanding than explanatory.[38] It allows me to draw conclusions based on a relatively small sample, due to the information depth of the respondents.[39] The study group at Darden was a *strategic choice of respondents[40]*, meaning they are chosen on grounds of their suitability. The group is to some extent homogenous; they are close in age, have similar backgrounds, and were at the same stage in their studies, ventures and to some extent in life. Through their education they have build up a common formation of concepts and theoretical framework, they have been exposed to the same role models and (a least for some time) been part of the same social community. In that way the respondents make up an intensity sample, *"information rich cases that manifest the phenomena intensely (but not extremely)"*. The respondents have little variation in central characteristics and are therefore, according to Michael Quinn Patton[41], ideal for recognition and investigation of potential common perceptions or experiences in a homogenous group.

The sample consist of six respondents, just over half of the 11 incubates at Darden Business Incubator (DBI). Due to the homogeneity of the group, and the richness of information from the in depth interviews this small sample should be sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. The relative low number of respondents is possibly an additional limitation to the generality; however it is more important to make an adequate selection than to reach a specific number

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[38] Holveg Solvang 1997
[39] Patton
[40] Johannessen Tufte (2002) s. 83
[41] Patton (234)

of respondents.[42] To some extent case studies like these can be ground for overly simplistic conclusions and exaggerated factors in a situation.[43] But as will explained below, it is beneficial that we can assume that the respondents share more identities than just the entrepreneurial one.

Measuring the Self

When measuring identity, Burke[44] points out six theoretical properties that need to be taken in account. That..

1, …the self is composed of an organized set of identities

2,… identities are self in-role meanings

3, …that identities are defined relationally in terms of counter identities

4, …that identities are reflexive

5, …that identities operate indirectly

6, …that identities motivate social behavior

The first two properties, the fact that identities are meanings, have already been accounted for. This means that identities are meanings the individual attribute to the self[45] (as opposed to actual characteristics or traits). The implication for this study is that I should focus on how the respondents talk about themselves rather than testing their for the personality, and also to interpret their words as meanings rather than facts.

Identities are relational, not only to the corresponding role, but to other identities. Other identities that make up the self and identities that we encounter in others.[46] The first implication of this is that identities cannot be measured in isolation[47]. The meaning of identity is both the similarities with the group thought to share the same meaning, but also the thought differences with other groups. As described in the theory, the counter role of our MBA entrepreneurs according to Mosakowski and Murniek is the general manager. Therefore I have also looked at what meanings they put into this role, and how the respondents describe their differences. Identities are relational also to other identities

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[42] Johannessen Tufte (83)
[43] Guba & Lincon (377)
[44] Burke (1980)
[45] Burke (1980) p 3
[46] Bruke (1980) p 19
[47] Burke (1980) p 19

internalized by the individuals, organized in a hierarchy that makes up the self. Meaning that while we are studying the entrepreneurial identity, the respondents hold several other identities at the same time.[48] The demographics point to that the respondents have some similarities in identity, they are all the same age, have the same education and are of the same nationality. All factors that have a corresponding identity. This is partly what makes this a good group to study, as explained earlier. However there are potentially multiple other identities these individuals might hold, something that would have to be studied on an individual psychological level. Unfortunately there was no room for such an investigation in this study.

That identity is reflexive, mean that identities influence performances and these performances are assessed by the self as for the kind of identity these imply.[49] This is the basis of how identity drives action, we act the way we do to affirm our identity and view our own actions in the light of our desired identity. For my study, it implies that I should look at the respondent's stories as something that they want to be, rather than something that they are. And the actions they describe as measures to communicate their desired identity. Burke points out that it is crucial to study what individuals are trying to correct by their responses, and also what the strength of that correction.[50]

That identities operate indirectly, means that there is a conceptual difference between the identity and the self image, and that it is the self image and not the identity directly that will affect our actions.[51] The self-image is much like a idealized picture of the identity. Since it is this image, and the individual's eagerness to affirm this image through social interaction. I tis also the self-image that will determine the interaction during an interview, and therefor this has to be taken into account in the analysis according to Burke.

Burkes last point, that identity motivates social behavior, is the basis of the aim and the research question and the data collection and analysis has been focused on how this happens, and the consequences of this.

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[48] Burke (1980) p 19
[49] Burke (1980) p 20
[50] Burke (1980) p 20
[51] Burke (1980)

Interviews

The actual data gathering was conducted through one-by-one deep interviews. My ambition in the interviews was to get the respondent to talk freely within different themes, defined to make the interview material comparable within the population. The interviews were semi structured where I followed an interview guide based on previous research. The prepared questions were *Descriptive)* to record descriptions of events and experiences, *Interpretive)* about opinions, meanings, and interpretations and *Theoretical,* to reveal reasons, intentions and causality. [52]

The questionnaire (in attachment) was constructed to first map the respondent's backgrounds in relation to demographic factors, followed by questions about the process of pursuing their current venture, and then more open questions about entrepreneurship as a career choice, in general and for them as individuals. The prepared questions were all asked, but I was careful to follow the threads and leads that came up in conversation.

As pointed out by Johanessen and Tufte it is important to create a trustful atmosphere where the respondents feel they can speak freely.[53] This was clearly helped by my previous relation to the respondents. I assume they were all aware of my positive bias, resulting in open and honest answers where even provocative questions would not cause defensiveness. The fact that I had a previous relationship with the respondents meant that I could tell the difference between their *twitches* and *winks*[54], which in turn made the interviews more efficient.

Data Processing

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. All respondents were offered to read and approve the transcript of their interview, but all turned down the opportunity. The quotes from the transcribed interviews divided into themes according to the topic discussed. This procedure following the process outlined by Bruce L Berg[55]:

- *Data is gathered and made into text (transcribed)*
- *The texts are coded according to theme*

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[52] Ibid s. 96
[53] Ibid s. 98
[54] Teorell Svensson (2007) s. 102
[55] Johannessen Tufte (2002)

- *The codes are classified in themes*
- *The data is sorted according to theme to discover patterns, similarities, differences etc.*
- *The sorted data is investigated to identify meaningful patterns and processed*
- *The identified patterns are evaluated in the light of previous research and theories and "a small set of transferable knowledge is established"*

The above process simplified the processing of the rich data, and brought structure to the material. Analyzing the data from themes rather than individuals served to abstract the material, rather than go in to detail on a personal level.

Some of the themes where intentionally brought up by me, such as failure and success, how it all began and why others do not become entrepreneurs. But most themes came up in the interviews, such as passion, financials, doing a corporate job and self-expression.

We know from the theory that individuals affirm their identity through how they talk about themselves, so called identity talk. Central to the data processing has therefore been to analyze how the respondents talk about themselves and their choice, rather than establishing an accurate course of event or discovering facts about their past. Therefore I have looked at the words and expressions used to describe themselves, the entrepreneur or the people who do not pursue entrepreneurship. I have also studied how they tell their story, and what reasons they give for what they are doing. The interview is also a social interaction, and me as an interviewer is a counter-role to the respondent.

Presentation

The purpose of the relatively broad background and research overview is to give the reader a hint of my own prejudice, to put my research question into a bigger perspective and hopefully convince someone that this is an important contribution to the search of the holy grail of entrepreneurship.

One of the respondents requested full anonymity, which has a direct effect on the presentation of the material. This means that no names are mentioned, and also the pronouns he, she, him, her etc. are used randomly without correspondence to the actual sex of the respondent.

This made it impossible to tell the stories one by one, to let the reader get to know the entrepreneurs. I think this has some effect on the readability of the text, because I find their stories all very inspiring and would have liked to share them with the readers.

However, since I am reluctant to investigate the personal psychology on an individual level the presentation still serves the purpose of the research question.

Discussion and Limitations

Choosing Identity is a Privilege

Many of our identities are ones that we have not choosen; gender, age, ethnicity are given by nature and nothing we can choose. In the developed world most of us have the privilege to aspire to "find ourselves" while concepts of self-realization and self-expression are foreign to some. Just like many do not see their job as a life choice or a career, but rather a way of paying the bills. (However that does not mean there is not a role and identity related to their profession)

The group I am studying is very specific, partly a strength because they are a homogenous group with a defined counter role. There are many other identities specific to this group we can expect them to have; American, Top 10 MBA-students, young professionals etc. etc. Roles that will have implications for their life decisions, views of themselves and others as well as their career choice. The group is therefore in no way representative for all entrepreneurs, however interesting to study in relation to their classmates who did not make the same choice, and also in relation to their alternative.

Identity is Not Stable

The interviews with the respondents took place at one specific time, and provides only a snapshot. We can only hope to know what they were thinking right at that time in that situation. Identity is not stable, not over time and not over situations. One can imagine a situation where I would interview their respondents on about their identity as MBA students, where I would get different answers. As pointed out, the interview situation is also a social situation where It was clear to the respondents that it was their eventual identity as entrepreneurs I wanted to talk about, and that has reflected their answers and stories. We also do not know what their answers would be at a different point in time, or if it was a different person asking the questions.

Data

The Study Group at Darden

Darden Business School at UVA has a top ranked MBA program with a curriculum mainly focused on general management, with emphasis on ethics and entrepreneurship. The school teaches entirely through the case method, and claim to have the most rigors curriculum in the country. The Darden graduates go out to take high-paying jobs as general mangers in finance, consulting and more recently also in marketing (brand management). Average base salary for graduates from class of 08 was $103 963, and 92% received their first job offer by graduation. The school claims to have one of the leading entrepreneurship programs among all graduate schools, offering 25 electives within entrepreneurship and innovation, and 70% of the students attend these classes during their two years at Darden.[56] One of the activities established to promote entrepreneurship is the Darden Business Incubator (DBI), where Darden students and their business partners get support through the first phase of the start-up. DBI was founded in 2001 and has since then incubated close to 60 companies, of which approximately 50% are still up and running. In May 2009 11 companies entered the incubator, all receiving $13 000 in seed capital from the school. 6 of the students taking part in the program agreed to be part of my study, and were all interviewed one by one a few weeks into the summer. The respondents were four men and two women, in ages between 26 and 32. All but one were graduates of 2009, the sixth respondent was part of class of 2010. Their businesses were of various types and industries, from gift card sales through independent film production to power production in India, but all very early stage. I the words of Wagner, they were all nascent at the time, in the phases of Gestation or Infancy. Some considered the entry to the incubator as the start of the business, while others had been working on the idea for a few months. No one however claimed to have been working on his or her idea for more than 18 months. Half of the respondents had entrepreneurial experience prior to business school (started or worked on an early stage venture), while the others claimed to have none. One of the students had done traditional recruiting and accepted an offer in consulting, but not yet decided if he would show up on the starting date in November (interview was in July). The 2010 graduate was planning on

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[56] http://www.darden.virginia.edu/html/standard.aspx?menu_id=654&styleid=2&id=19976

doing recruiting the coming year, to pay the bills while he was raising money for his venture. The remaining four had not done recruiting at all, and claimed to have little or no desire to get a regular job.

Considering that the most likely choice of career for MBA graduates is general manager, it is an interesting study group from a social psychology perspective, since The General Manager is defined as one of the most important counter roles to The Entrepreneur. The interviewed group will have to relate to the role of the general manager on a regular basis, since it would be their expected career choice, since this is what their class mates are going for, what their education is focused on and also what they most likely will end up doing if they eventually would fail in their entrepreneurial ambitions.

Also from a demographic perspective they are an interesting group to study. To generalize, they are all highly skilled business people, meaning both that they should possess sufficient skills to start a business, but at the same time their opportunity cost (defined as alternative income) is very high. They are fortunate to get support from the school and the environment at the business school, but at the same time they would receive even more support if they were to look for a regular job. Even though the interviews were conducted during turbulent economic times, they are still more likely to get a high paying job (91%) than to succeed in their business (roughly 50%, if you go by the estimated survival rate of the DBI alumni companies).

Part of what makes this an interesting group to study, is that they are very early stage in their ventures. Many conventional definitions of entrepreneurs are based on the results from their entrepreneurial efforts. Have they started a business? Created a positive and sustainable cash flow? Employed people? Only two of the interviewed individuals have created tangible results of some kind in their venture (positive cash-flow, investments, finalized product development etc.), but they all still agree to be labeled "Entrepreneur"

Upside of Entrepreneurship

To start of this section, I will let one of the respondents sum up the group's general idea of reasons for entrepreneurship:

> *"So there are a few things that appeal to me about being an entrepreneur. One*
> *is the kind of, the financial upside, the other is the independence – you know*
> *free from bureaucracy, bosses and that sort of thing. The third thing is as an*

> *entrepreneur [...] I'm in a unique position to shape the values and culture of an*
> *organization."*

The independence, the potential financial upside and the opportunity to shape your own organization are things that all respondents come back to in the interviews. Needs and wishes that are generally connected to the pursuit of entrepreneurship, but does not necessarily reflect the reality for the ones who take the plunge.

In the interviews I have been trying to not only ask directly, but to ask around the concept of entrepreneurial identity by asking what drove the respondent to pursue entrepreneurship, how the decision came about, how they feel about it and how others feel about it and view their choice.

In this section, as in my own process of analyzing the data, I have categorized quotes from the interviews and chosen to present them that way. The material is rich and extensive, and my ambition has been to extract the essence in each theme and category, and at the same time let the respondent's stories come through as much as possible.

How It All Began

Not everyone in the group has a great story to tell about how they came to pursue entrepreneurship. Chip describes it as most natural; he was always the kid trying to come up with new inventions, working on gadgets for his mother's shoes or string wired his whole room at night so he could pull the light switch by just raising his arms. In his story, starting his own company was just a natural consequence of the behavior he had already established as a kid. He is now a few ventures down the road, and apart from the internship he had last summer, he has never had a steady paycheck or what he refers to as a regular job.

Jacki, who used to work in higher education administration prior to business school, claims that the idea to start her own business really came out of nowhere. She had no previous experience in entrepreneurship; no friends or family within the field and had never seen it as a career option until she took one of the compulsory entrepreneurship

classes at Darden. But the ultimate push came from the fact that when it came down to choosing her career path she saw no other option:

> *"In thinking about graduating and what I'd like to do full time I honestly could not even think of the full time job that would make me satisfied. Even if I just could think of what it would look like, I could not even picture it. And it made me really think that I need to kind of chart my own path. Well I think a big part of it was working on someone else's schedule, […] having to follow someone else's goals and someone else's ideas, even if I didn't necessarily agree with them. The whole politics, office politics, you know all those kinds of things. I think if I could have envisioned a situation where I had a position working for someone else were I was given a lot of freedom, that potentially could have worked for me. Were someone truly said: "Hey, I'm giving you the range, do whatever you are going to do", that I could have handled. I just could not even envision that job being available. Or I did not know were I would go to find something like that."*

Similar thoughts come back in the more dramatic story of Sara, who used to work in corporate finance:

> *"I was back in corporate America, and it was just realizing that I didn't necessarily like what I was doing. I didn't like the people I was working with, and didn't like what I was doing, I didn't like the bureaucracy of it all, and it was one of those things where I thought it was normal that I walked around with a to do list that was 1000 pages long with the things I wanted to research and learn and do, and possible ideas that I wanted to do. […] It was like "Research industry X, Research industry Y, know more about blah, figure out blah, talk to blah" And it was frustrating when they asked me to do something, because I couldn't do all the things that I wanted to do.*

You know I love working, all you need is a high speed Internet, air conditioning, and a telephone: I'm a happy camper. And probably access to a gym that has a good treadmill and an air-conditioned too. I'm a happy camper and.. I just want to be doing what it is I want to be doing. As long as it's kind of self-guided. And I think it was just realizing one day that I had this list, and I think that is why not everybody found work as frustrating as I did"

Sara and Jacki's stories above could be described as push-scenarios where the unattractive alternative made entrepreneurship seem like a good choice. Another story tells us the opposite, were the thought of entrepreneurship had a clear pull-effect on Nate, back when he was a pre-med student:

"When I was in college I decided that 'I don't want to be pre-med anymore I want to go into business!' There's this moment where as a freshman I was pre-med, taking all biology and chemistry classes, and my dad sent me "Rich dad, poor dad", have you read that? It's by Kawasaki, and basically this story about him growing up with two dads - a rich dad and a poor dad. The poor dad is his biological father; the rich dad is his best friend's father. And he saw the way that they looked at money and what they did and how they lived. And he was struck by the fact that his father had followed the traditional path of what people where telling them to do at this point. So: get into a good school, get good grades to get into a good college to get a good degree to get a good high paying job. And so, this is what his dad had done and he had a big salary. His poor dad, never finished school was an entrepreneur, was investing his money rather than spending it and he ended up being one of the richest men in Hawaii, he now owns something absurd like 25 -30% of the hotels. So.. Anyways, this whole story is about how he saw this disposition between this pat, that everyone is telling you to follow,

ending in not being very wealthy. And this path, that no one tells you to follow that ended up being really wealthy.

So basically I read this book and changed my whole viewpoint on things, cause that's what I've been doing. I was going to school got good grades, gone into a good college to become a doctor, right? So that week I dropped pre-med, I enrolled as a business major instead. Three weeks later I launched that advertising business. And, so I guess the rest is kind of like.. what ever…"

Gordon, who has actually accepted a job at a major prestigious consulting firm, refers to the opportunity and the unique place in time where he is now at:

"One of the reasons I'm trying to this is because I had a lot of time, lot of friends, lot of resources, wasn't that big of a deal to find a lot of people. So I had time, I would not quit a job to do this. So it seemed like a perfect experience. I see it as much as a learning experience. I also want to do this, but I also see it as a learning experience."

And about what is to come, Gordon says:

"This is a great opportunity, a great time. I'd love to start a business and I liked the idea. The job starts in October, I don't know if I'll take it. It's something like my safety net, my hope is that this works out and I won't have to take it. Or I can do them both for a while."[57]

Only respondent who actually refers to his actual business idea when talking about how he came to pursue entrepreneurship. Ed used to be an actor, and it is clear that his passion for the arts plays a big part in his decision to go at it on his own:

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[57] What do you think he ended up doing in October? Read on to cure your curiosity.

> *"I know what I love to do and I'm just trying to figure out a way to*
> *do it as efficiently as possibly and do it as quickly as possible, as big*
> *of a scale as possible."*

With one year left of business school, Ed was attempting to make a movie out of the script he had written himself, and he goes on to explain how he feels about it:

> *"You know everybody has interests or things that they are*
> *passionate about. Even if they can't put words to […] what those*
> *passions are, they exist. And for me, it's kind of a no-brainer to say:*
> *'Well, I am passionate about this. I want to do it!' Working within a*
> *corporation, you are never really doing it; you are doing some sort of*
> *function within some grander idea of what you want to be a part of.*
> *Well just go create your own part of it! Go create something […]*
> *that you can put your own stamp on! I don't know, I mean to me it's*
> *like doing corporate finance in a big movie studio, Ok great – you*
> *are around the movie studio; but you are still doing corporate*
> *finance. I mean, you are not making your own movies!"*

The Entrepreneurial Role

Not all respondents are willing to generalize about the characteristics of the entrepreneur. At some point in the conversation they all come back to the statement that everybody could be an entrepreneur, and that there are all different kinds of entrepreneurs. But when asked to elaborate they all seem to have an idea of *The Entrepreneur* as a concept, or a role. As one of the respondents puts it:

> *"To me the kind of entrepreneur I resonate with, that gets me excited, is*
> *high energy people with big ideas and big visions, who are able to pull*
> *together a whole lot of resources and are interested in building things.*
> *Things do not have to be widgets or products, but just seeing their idea*

actually turn into something. To be able to work along the ways it changes 50 million times, as it surely will. To take something from the clouds and try to make it somehow part of the earth. And those are the people that get me real excited and I also just think there's a certain element of practicalness in entrepreneurs that I really resonate with."

The practicalness comes back in many of the quotes, and a lot of the time the respondents seem to concentrate on "what it takes" to be an entrepreneur, rather than describing common characteristics. *"See opportunities in obstacles, you know you are thinking about how to solve things rather than just seeing them."*

"I think, if I've learned anything in the 9 months since I started, it's that I have to be very flexible. The people I hire, the direction where we are taking the venture, to the what ever.. It's important. The risk part is important, right? Because I'm absolutely spending my money, but I think the biggest thing is you got t be adaptable. Because if you are so rigid you can't change when things are changing. And the more you learn about stuff, if you are not changing I don't think you'll ever be successful. Maybe the exception of maybe someone like my dad, or maybe someone in a professional service […] maybe an accountant, or something where there are pretty clear standards on what you do, and what kind of business you do. So maybe, OK - You don't have to be quite as adaptable. But certainly for anything that's not quite like that. Not everything is going to go your way, so if your idea sucks, you can't just cry and go home, you know. You got to get angry, solve the problem!"

"Obviously willing to tolerate risk […], has to be adventurous, has to be creative, and has to be constantly seeking a better way of doing things. And, say they arrive at an idea that they think is going to be viable and whatever: having the confidence to see it through. From start to finish. I have seen a lot of entrepreneurs literary just crash on rocks and then stop. But I have also seen very successful ones, that crash on rocks and that

throws them in a different direction. And they are amenable to those changes, it may not end up looking like, in fact I don't think it ever ends up looking like exactly what you conceived in the beginning but that's ok. So I think, being able to sort of exist within that chaos, because it will inevitably happen, is something that I always associate with entrepreneurship."

Most comments are positive, but not all. One of the respondents chooses a quote from one of the Darden entrepreneurship professors to put his finger on a less flattering side of entrepreneurship:

"I think that, I mean to get right to it and be as honest as possible. You know Phillip Sommer[58], who you know, he says it very well: Entrepreneurs are very narcissistic, it's all abut them, they think they have the best ideas and only they can do it"

It is striking to note that all interviewees state that they are entrepreneurs not only by career choice, but also as people in other situations. They claim to have the same attitude and methods no matter if it is a business decision or a crossroad in life. One respondent talks about the passion he experiences as an entrepreneur:

"For me, I think it translates to everywhere. And again, I think that's part of the nature of artists. They just sort of go headlong into everything, and I think for entrepreneurs that's probably the same thing too. They live, they take more risks. Obviously they take more risks in their professional life, and I think they choose to take more risk in their personal lives too."

But it is not only passion and risk, one entrepreneur says he "is not really a planner" and explains how that helps him as an entrepreneur. Another makes the following statement:

"…maybe I find my own kind.. I think of myself as pretty fun and outgoing and enjoying and fun to be around. Everyone is not like that, probably you could be a jerk and still do fine."

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[58] Phillips Sommer is an Entrepreneurship professor at Darden and in charge of the Darden Incubator

And on a slightly different note another aspiring entrepreneur reveals:

> *"I think it's a general entrepreneurial.. I mean I don't want to.. I don't really pay bills really well, I don't pay attention to traffic rules as I should, I don't like people telling me how to use my time. I like to even do it more than I am now. Girlfriends are tough. I mean really. Like: "I really care about you, and I also really care about doing this thing that I have in my head, I'm just going to go do that for a while".*

Yet another respondent has another perspective on how entrepreneurship and relationships affect each other:

> *"Yeah I mean I even saw that when I got engaged, wow – we are getting married and all of a sudden I go from being myself: who I don't care if I make any money for two years, like I'll scrape by, to all of a sudden to now potentially have a responsibility to someone else now. And so that event that has made me […] understand why the people who have financial responsibility to other people, why it becomes more of a rational decision or logical, money based decision"*

About Doing a Corporate Job

As mentioned above, the life in a corporate organization seems to have served as a push to pursue entrepreneurship for some of the respondents. In general, they are not as much concerned about the actual job, as the corporate environment as such. They all come back to words such as *bureaucracy and politics,* and describe how they would feel constrained in such an environment. A quote from one of the respondents puts words to what many of them seem to feel:

"I think because, it's only like you're living somebody else's idea and not your own. Not that there's necessarily anything wrong with that, it's just not something that would suit me. I wish I could tell you, but I don't know why."

The same thoughts resonate in a quote from a different respondent:

"Because at the end of the day, I don't know if this is a selfish thing or what but, you're almost lending a lot of yourself to someone's idea, bottom line or whatever you want to call it […] I think I have ideas to share and I want to figure out ways to share them. You know, more so than doing well by somebody else."

Just like the majority of the group this respondent is hesitant to take on an employment:

"I'd like to say that I will never work for someone else again. […] it goes back to that I don't like validation. I don't like having to be validated. Working for someone else forces you in a position where […] you have to get someone else's approval on what you are doing. This just doesn't work for me. I guess I have a little bit of anti authority in me. I guess I don't like the idea of someone else being able to make decisions that impact me. You know if something is right and I believe that to.. through who I am.. it would absolutely just be the worst situation possible for someone to be able to make the decisions weather I go forward on that or not. I'd be totally fine to go out there and having the market go "You are an idiot – You are wrong" but for someone who just happens to have a higher title than me telling me that would just drive me nuts."

And it seems not only to be about not getting to fulfill your own ideas and ambitions, but the setting in itself seem to be unattractive to the group:

"It would have to be a smaller company; I don't think I would do well in a very big company. It seems like in really big companies, your destiny is not really in

your own hands. And so you've got to play these kinds of career games, and you got to make alliances with the right people, and it does not seem genuine to me. And it would be very difficult for me to do. That's why basically."

A respondent describes the experience of *"jumping off corporate America"*, and what feelings arouse in hindsight:

"I feel like I maybe would have middled my whole life out. I found something that was horrific, and therefore it forced me to go take the risk and say "wow, that's not me I'm going to do the biggest craziest thing I could possibly do" right? Where everyone is like "Did she just do that?" and not be afraid of it. And once you jump off, then you're kind of like "I'm still alive!" It's one of those things were you're like "OK, Oh I'm alive!" and you change how everyone viewed you and it becomes a lot less scary, Whereas I wonder if I had found something that was "Oh.. this is so-so, it's ok, it's not bad" you just keep doing it. And then I would have really missed out on doing the thing I've done. Because it's not bad enough to leave, but it's ok."

And the same respondent elaborates:

"It was hard. And when everybody is telling you: "You are nuts, you got a really good deal, run with it!" I took the jump, and it's just funny. I felt numb in corporate America. I mean.. at first I liked it, and then the pain was just absolutely horrific and after a while of that pain, we go numb. I was numb, and ever since jumping off I've been alive again. And I think one of the scariest things about going numb, you don't even totally realize you're numb anymore. You loose awareness of numb. It's like when you are healthy, you don't realize you are healthy until you are sick and then you really appreciate being healthy. Wow, to be alive again! It's an amazing feeling. It truly is an amazing feeling, You just did not realize, where in the process am I sold and killed? It's like that frog boiling, where in the process where you the frog who died because they just kept turning it up slowly. So to be able to have actually

jumped off and be alive again, and you are just like "OMG look how amazing life is!" The lows are lower and the highs are higher. It's a crazy ride and I wouldn't give it up for a single day of going back to a much steadier, predictable, but numb existence."

One of the respondents (who actually sais he never had a corporate job) gives his opinion on corporate America:

"I will tell you how terrified I would be, knowing what I was going to do every day. I think that sounds Awful! Sounds terrible! Nothing to solve, nothing to do, that's new and different, nothing to.. that's how corporations are made. A personal corporate theory of: you build something, figure out some way to make money, put these controls on and you hire people to fill these spots because they are going to do this job, efficiently enough to make that money keeps coming in, and you have to keep them very tightly, management layers, this and that, checks and bounces, because that cash flow all has to line up this way to make it happen. So it really squeezes out the individuality completely. And it has to, that's my view about a lot of it. That's not always the way it is. I'm not saying that. But a lot of jobs are like that, and that's terrifying to me. I think it's an individuality thing and to do what you are actually good at all the time. Not just doing some job, that somebody says you need to do right now."

And it seems the respondents are reluctant to put themselves in a corporate setting even though they have created it themselves:

" I would like to grow it. And that's one thing I do like to say: If it would be very large, that's when I would feel inclined to sell it. I'm not interested of being CEO of a multimillion dollar company. I want the multimillion dollars.. Ha ha ha hahaha.. but I don't want to have to run the company to get it! Ha ha ha.. I think at that point I would have moved into a board role, as opposed

to running the business. It's just a lot of stress and exactly contrary to what the reason for I want to start a business in the first place."

Success and Failure

On the topic of success and failure, it seems definitions become important to the entrepreneurs in the survey. Success is in general tied to financial success for them, but at the same time they seem to consider it a success in it's own just to be entrepreneurs. Here is what they have to say on the subject:

"I don't really envision it as failure, I think as a typical entrepreneur, it's not as much failure as it's just something that happens. Learn from it or not. When you make bad decisions, in retrospect you will say "I knew that wasn't good, I didn't believe it and I still did it" that's a failure of listening to yourself or doing what you think is right. That I see as a failure. But now you just learn not to do that anymore. So, hopefully they get smaller. Smaller and quicker!"

"I guess it goes back to that I trust myself. I trust my instincts […] maybe too much […] but it's what's gotten me to this point. I guess my whole life […] there has not been anything that I had to really struggle through. I have not experienced that much failure up to this point. So maybe that plays into it, I have not hit the big failure moment in my life where all of a sudden failure is a reality."

Apparently, our entrepreneurs are full of confidence:

"For whatever reason I have this sense I'll be successful. That sounds arrogant maybe but I don't worry about it. I feel like what happens happens and it happens for a reason like I guess I don't put too much pressure on myself of failing. Maybe that's due to my circumstances right now where […] there is not that much to loose. […]I guess my upbringing was fairly privileged […] and maybe that's played a role."

According to this aspiring entrepreneur, magic will do the trick to ensure failure is not an option. But if even magic would fail him, there would still be a gain in having dared to follow his dreams:

> *"If what I have laid out [...] I could execute on all of it, but that's a big if because you have to negotiate so many different things in order to get those pieces neatly put into place. If I could, if I could wave a magic wand then it's sort of a no brainer. To me.*
> *With that said, let's say those things don't happen. Then it could be called a failure. [...] The idea of developing my own film project form scratch, before I had ever written anything on the page with this screenplay, was so foreign. It seemed so far away and so impossible, and from where I sit now it's more possible. And that sort of keeps me going, and that's progress. And that's enough right now. And even if this fails, and I end up sort of in a job with a studio where I'm kind of in and around these different things, and I can bring a certain level of experience by way of this stuff. By what I'm working on now, then that's ok. Because eventually, I'll be in that position where I want to be. Eventually. You hold on to that hope, so I'd be OK with it. Not happy, but..*

But what if that does not happen? Ed goes on to explain:

> *"I mean, there is certainly fear in that. But again [...] even if the entire world were to be informed, that Ed wrote a script, threw it out there and everybody said it universally sucked, and then he moved on. For me I would still be able to say to anybody "At least I did it", you know? I mean at least, I went out there and found out. And I'm not sitting in a cubicle thinking "what if?""*

Yet another respondent explains how failure is a different concept to her since she started pursuing entrepreneurship:

"Maybe that's what I love about having jumped off of corporate America [...], that I don't think in my life before that I failed all that much. A B+ was a horrific, horrific failure for me, prior to any of this. Which means you walked around really afraid of failure. And that means you are sort of minimizing the risk you are taking because you don't want to fail. So it's almost like doing something that nobody thought you should go do - expectations are broken! No one's counting on me to go do things, or living their life for them anymore. It's like they set you free and you can then go do whatever you want to do and know that people already think you are crazy, anyways. So you are no longer trying to live up to their expectations. So you kind of get over this whole idea of failure, of not wanting to fail because you are afraid of what other people think. Other people thought I was freaking nuts when I jumped off of corporate America, so I don't have to worry about people thinking I'm nuts anymore – they already do! I feel like I've since had a couple of, I don't really like the word failure, but I've stumbled and fallen a few times since then. But I'm still alive! You just have to check around, you pick yourself up and you move on and no one killed me for falling."

During an interview I point out to one of the respondents the inconsistency in her statements; on the one hand she is certain that she is going to be very successful and make loads of money in her venture – on the other hand she is well aware of the risk of failure. I ask how that comes together in her mind, and she replies:

"Because I think you got to have an unbridled optimism to be an entrepreneur. And like I said I think the answer to it is to be able to hold two opposing realities in your mind. You have got to have this unbridled optimism. If I didn't think that I was going to knock this one out of the park I wouldn't be here right now! At the same time you got to be able to look at all the risks and actually see them, so that you can protect against them. And you got to be able to see all those risks and still have the unbridled optimism that you and your team feed off. I don't know how to reconcile them, I don't try to reconcile them, I just try to see them both."

Risk and Ambiguity

Obviously full of confidence, our entrepreneurs are still aware of the risks and ambiguity associated with entrepreneurship: there is no one to state the order, you have no idea weather you will succeed or fail, make enough money to pay the bills or even put food on the table. And not only that, but you will still have to defend your choice in front of family and friends.

> *"Yeah, and it think also what made it wild too was what I was saying in the beginning; nobody in my family or my friends are entrepreneurs. I don't even have somebody to look at as an example of how it could work. So I think in a lot of ways my family think it's a little crazy. I think they like the idea, I think they think I can handle it. But it's still a little bit uncomfortable to think of, you know, the idea that I'm going to have to pay my bills somehow. And how is that going to happen? So they are definitely very supportive about it, but it's still kind of uncomfortable feeling.. I mean I have it myself too that, I do have bills to pay. Especially if I see the summer coming to a close, I own a home and thinking about how I have to pay the mortgage, you know. Even if I cut back, I'm very good with budgeting and things like that so I feel like I could cut back on a lot of other things, but you can't cut back on a mortgage and especially given the market we are at, I would have a hard time selling the house.. so that's probably my biggest thing. Not to mention health benefits…"*

> *"You know "born to be an entrepreneur"? I think this risk thing too is.. I don't think I was always the biggest risk taker. I think I had all these other profile characteristics to be an entrepreneur, but I think the risk thing was like "eeeeehh.. I don't know.. "I didn't want the whole risk thing. I think that my experience in corporate America was really so not what I was looking for, that it pushed me right up to the end. I didn't have any other choices."*

Finances

Money is definitely an issue for all the respondents. Now they have none, but they all expect to have a lot in the future. Some say that the financial upside is one of the main reasons for entrepreneurship, and still most mention that the financial issue is the reason why many people choose not to follow their entrepreneurial dreams.

This respondent claimed throughout the interview that he was certain he would be financially successful, and that the financial upside of being an entrepreneur made it impossible for him to choose a corporate career. Still, he is aware that financial success is not a given outcome

> *"It seems to me that life isn't just about […] attaining things. If I'm going to spend the majority of my life or my time doing something that I enjoy (a), (b) that I see value in. And if that ends up making me wealthy; great! If that ends up making me middle of the pack, like work for the rest of my life. Then fine- at least I'm not miserable wile I'm doing it!"*

> *"I would say I'm not as much concerned about the money as other entrepreneurs. I'm more into changing stuff. I would like to be able to make financial resources in my life to have complete freedom. And whatever amount of money you think that is, you just have to come up with a number! You know, it's more than 10 million dollars and it's less than 20 million. But anywhere in between there is probably fine. And I think there is ambition for success in that. My success is: did we change that thing we were trying to do? You either make life better or did what ever should happen happen? A lot of the time these are tied to cash, and that's great. I like how artist make money, if you are good you can be a multi hundred millionaire, if you are really really really good. But you have to be… you're not doing it just for the money then."*

> *"Yeah, it's kind of financial success I mean like I want to be retired at 40 at the latest. I'd really like to be retired when I'm 35, in ten years, nine years I guess. That's always been a goal of mine. Like have never really thought about what it would be like not to achieve that. Never focused on that I guess."*

"I think that I certainly care, if I didn't care I probably wouldn't be in business school. And I think that happiness is probably first and foremost on my scale, in terms of what I choose to do professionally, I also think that the numbers sort of bare this out where I may not make that much money in the next five years, but I do stand to do fine ten years from now. And if I can be patient, then that's ok. So again, when I look at the other side of the coin; Lets say I'd been in a corporate job for ten years; if I think that there is a reasonably good chance that I could end up in the same place financially just by taking a very different route, again I just would never forgive myself for being a corporate guy."

Self-expression

As exemplified above the group keeps coming back to the need to do *"their own thing"*, words like *"individuality"* and *"being your self"* are frequent in the transcripts. It seems that self expression is a central factor in entrepreneurship for the respondents. The parallel between the artist and the entrepreneur is pointed out several times in the group. One respondent is talking about giving:

"I think everybody has got something to give, when you find happy people it's because they give what ever they are supposed to be giving to the world, and they are getting to do that every day. And I know from my experience in corporate America, I was not giving what I wanted to give to the world. And so that part of me, was dead, a little bit. And ever since leaving that, even though I have explored a couple of different ideas, I've been alive again. I've been me. And to me, entrepreneurship is just saying, "I'm self expressing myself" – every single day, through all of my different ideas and I don't have to worry about a whole lot of the corporate politics. Which I great because I think that can shut down part of your personality in order to fit the norm or the type that they are looking for etc. etc. So I don't have to worry about that, right. So that lost part of me becomes expressed. But then also single

one of my ventures, or my ideas; it's kind of like being an artist. I very much consider it an art form, and building something. And I'm getting to choose what it is I build. And just like with art you have the whole idea of: is it art for art's sake or art because you are hoping to sell it? You do want to put food on the table, but I think that this is self-expression too. I feel completely more self expressed as an entrepreneur because I get to wake up and do what it is I want to do everyday, and the results are mine, and the consequences are mine."

"I think I have ideas to share and I want to figure out ways to share them. You know more so than doing well by somebody else."

Being Told What To Do

"I've never liked people telling me what to do. That has always not felt good to me."

The quote above is from one of the interviews, but could have come from any of the respondents. Their opinions may differ on other issues, but when it comes to being told what to do they all agree:

"Maybe it's just that I'm really sensitive. I just love to work, can't stand other people telling me what to do. Yeah you know, it's different that I love helping other people, you know coaching is all about helping other people, so it's very different doing something that someone is telling you to do, that they are paying you to do. Or even when a friend tells you to do something, rather than when a friend asks if you can do something or when you are giving to a friend. And I guess, when I feel, it's like I'm working on what I was going to be working on. It feels like giving to the world. Like none.. I'm looking for something to spend my life doing. Something that I can hold on to my.. that I'm going to be doing weather they are paying me or not. And so it feels so much more like giving to me, rather than doing what you are told. Yeah. I didn't even like when my parents told me to empty the dishwasher. You know, or put dishes away. I'm sensitive even to how that

command is given. I want to be asked. "Hey Sara, how do you feel about cleaning the kitchen today? And then I'll probably go in and empty the dishwasher with a smile on my face. But if you tell me to unload the dishwasher, I'm probably not going to be unloading the dishwasher"

Yet another respondent explains the feeling he gets from being told what to do, he claims there is a *"natural rebellion in human nature":*

"Because at the end of the day I do feel like in most people there's an independent spirit that is in everyone. But we don't like being told what to do. I think there is a natural rebellion in human nature where you know, we don't like to have things imposed on us. And we put up with it, because you know there are trade-offs like I get my freedom being imposed in the workplace because they are paying me. Or I let my wife tell me what to do because she provides and she takes care of me and she loves me, you know. It's always trade offs, but no one is willingly going to say, "Tell me what to do! I want you to tell me what to do". I don't think anyone really feels that way, I don't think anyone really likes that."

"I like feedback. And when receiving feedback in an authentic situation, where when you disagree you can actually push back rather than just yes mam, yea mam and taking it. It just being able to, as an entrepreneur, to go out and be yourself and be equals, that we are all human and no longer selling your boss, per se. You still report to people, you still have shareholders, you still have investors, but that relationship boss-employee has never felt that good to me."

How They are Viewed

When talking about how others view their decisions to become entrepreneurs the respondents come back to both envy and admiration:

"I think people are still a little envious that […] we're able to make that decision. I think if you gave someone: "I'll pay you to go be an entrepreneur" Almost everyone would take that. So again I think it's the. You know they want it, but they don't want it enough to deal with the ambiguity and the financial risk. But they are envious of people who are able to do it."

"Yeah I think people look at entrepreneurs and they think "I would like to be that person" you know? I think it's kind of like how people look back on college kids and like "Wow, I wish I could be a college kid again". Almost like living vicariously through that person."

Another respondent points out the other side of the coin:

"I think that, they are quick to acknowledge the risks and the likelihood that you know somebody like me would fail, which is high – I will freely conceive that, but on the other hand I think there is a big part of them, and I've heard from people and I think they say this to everybody who is part of the entrepreneurship program; "I wish I could do something like that, I don't know what though" So yeah, I think it's a combination of the two."

Another one brings up the notion that some people think she could not get a job is the reason for starting her own business:

"I think besides security, honestly prestige is a big piece of it too. Saying you know, got the golden ticket I got this great job, the kind of job business school graduates want. You know, and it's very different to look at your classmates and say, "I don't know what's going to happen" I think for some of them they are excited about it, they just like the idea. Cause I've even had people say to me in the end, "I wish I could do that, I wish I could have.. you know.. that must really take a lot of courage, I wish I could do that." But honestly I think some, they don't quite get it. They are like "why wouldn't she try to get a full time job?" I think in some cases, some may feel like the reason why people have decided to go this way is because they couldn't get

the job that they wanted. So I think there is a wide range of how people
perceive the entrepreneurs in the incubator, or outside of the incubator."

One entrepreneur thinks that a lot of people find her crazy, but also points out the insignificance of her choice to the rest of the world:

"I think a lot of the time they think they are crazy. People definitely thought
I was crazy, when I was leaving corporate America. A bit of like "Aaaah…" a
bit of "I wonder if I could do that…" I think a lot of people are "yeah,
whatever that's just another person" which we are, at the end of the day.
Ha ha ha ha ha ha! I definitely don't' think we're like up on this pedestal or
something, it's just perusing a different path."

Why Others Don't Do It

So what is it that set other people back from starting their own business? The respondents talk along the lines of insecurity, risk and ambiguity:

"I think the insecurity, or the lack of security with entrepreneurship – I think
that is the scariest thing. I think with certain types of positions, it I think in
business school in particular. A lot of people come in, expecting to leave
making you know, six figures, in a position where they get a lot of respect, in
a position where they can move up even more. And entrepreneurship
generally does not give you that. At least not for a long time, you have to
put some years in, a lot of times before you are making the big money
unless you just hit a homerun. It's just not appealing to a lot of people. Not
knowing where your next paycheck is going to come from is scary. I think I'm
also lucky because I don't have any children. That's another thing that's
difficult for people; it would be hard to justify quitting your job when you
have a child to worry about."

Another claims to understand the situation that many of his friends are in:

"Ehm.. That's a good question. Just, I don't know, I know a lot of people in the corporate world who are really, really creative, and they got a lot of great ideas, and they're really talented and so many of them are like "I'd love to start my own business one day" and I doubt that any of them ever will. [..] Cause I think that, probably because to be honest, if I was in their position, if I was collecting the paychecks they were collecting I wouldn't want to start my own business either. To poor so much of my hard-earned money, into something in which the chances of actually succeeds, are so minimal. Yet, I would guess they get a lot a validation from the success that they have already experienced within the corporate lifestyle or within the corporation. And that's ok."

This respondent makes a similar point about the difficulty of giving up security when you have more responsibilities in life:

"I think for some of them it's that they are at a point in their life where they have a lot more responsibility. Maybe they feel like there is more on the line. You know, they are married, or they have kids or they have house payments. And they feel like they don't have the freedom to do it. Because the ambiguity of it and the financial […] obligations. You know, they would not be able to go for two years on no salary to see a payoff with the business. But actually one of them was kind of forced to it because he was laid off, could not find a job. I went and had drinks with him and I was like "Look we've always talked about this. You are dying to do this. You got to take this "bad time" as an opportunity. Rather than just getting down about not getting a job you could get excited about the fact that you have the freedom to actually do something. We are actually working together on a start up right now."

The financial issue comes up again when one of the interviewed entrepreneurs introduces the idea of a rational choice for some people:

"If MBA jobs were only paying 20 000 dollars a year, you might have a lot more people trying to start their own business. Cause there is less to loose, cause you are talking about the people who have ideas, but they are not executing on them, right? So I think that's a different person than the person who has ideas and is executing on them. So even if the MBA job was paying a million dollar, these people might still want to do that and that's for those reasons like I don't want to work for someone else, I want the freedom, I want to see the payoff or whatever. Right?

So that's one group of people, so then there is this other group of people who are like: yeah I kind of like the idea of that, even I have an idea and a business plan, but for me it's not worth it because I can get this amount for sure. And maybe for those people it's more of a rational choice."

One of the respondents goes back to the concept of being told what to do, and claims that some people might find comfort in that rather than having to come up with their own agenda every day:

"Most humans probably don't like being told what to do, but people have different levels of reactions, and I'm probably more sensitive to being told what to do than your average person. I think that, there is something, when you break down being told what to do into something different, because nobody likes being told what to do, right? But there is also people finding comfort, in being told what to do. I think there are two different notions of being told what to do. That one thing is, they are finding comfort, not being told what to do but in knowing what needs to be done. Right? And having some sort of structure. So they know they need to show up every day, and then they know there is going to be stuff for them to do and they don't have to think about what to do and there are a certain amount of comfort in that feeling. Where you get this feeling of "I'm being productive" and you don't have to question weather the higher order really is productive."

Another one of our respondents think it is the lack of vision that prevent people from becoming entrepreneurs:

"Ok, they may not have.. Let's take the most obvious one; they don't have a vision that they necessarily want to carry out. […] I mean, the people who I admire the most, especially in business, I could use the example of Walt Disney. Nobody could do what he did. It was a very specific vision that he had, that he knew he had to get out there. And he sort of doggedly pursued that. Until finally somebody paid attention. I doubt, that corporate guys have sort of any burning need to get something out there. So I guess, a follow-up question would be: Do I have a burning need to get something out there? Ehm, enough to make the "stupid" choices that I've made."

"I think people settle a lot of the time. With wives.. ha ha or..They get in situations where it's just a good enough solution vs. the optimal.. You know of doing what they want to do. I think people don't do what they want to just because they are just scared… I don't know if it's of falling on your ass or just failure in general. Maybe that's more of what it is."

"You know it is hard. There's not like a switch, it takes a lot of time to do. Even just to start it, like to go to.. How do I incorporate an LLC..? And if you don't know you'll spend a lot of time with lawyers. Cause it really is a multi headed hydra, as soon as you start. What market? How much are you going to sell it for? Who are you going to sell it to? How are you going to make it? If somebody came in here and told me, they had a good idea I'd just pepper them with questions like that until they were like "I don't want to do this, this seems really, really hard""

Analysis

The Entrepreneurial Role

Both when asked directly, and when talking around it the respondents describe the entrepreneur as someone we recognize from Murniek and Mosakowski. The words of the respondents tell the tale of the rebellious risk taker:

• *Confident*
• *Creative*
• *Flexible*
• *Fun*
• *Resourceful*
• *Risk tolerant*
• *Narcissistic*
• *Outgoing*
• *Rule breaker*
• *Rebellious*
• *Anti-authoritarian*

With support form the theory we can assume that these are not true characteristics of entrepreneurs, but the description reflects the respondent's idea of the entrepreneurial role. Again, weather these are the true characteristics or not is irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis, but as mentioned before most studies show that there is very little ground for a personality distinction between entrepreneurs and the rest of the population.

We can note that the list of characteristics seems to go beyond the professional role. Fun, outgoing and narcissistic for instance are all traits that will most definitely affect also you personal life and determine how you will act in other situations than pure work situations. Something that is confirmed by statements from the respondents, for instance by the man who said to have trouble with traffic rules (rule breaking) and not wanting to prioritize his girlfriend in relation to his own agenda (narcissistic).

Their Identity as Entrepreneurs

All respondents agree that they identify themselves as an entrepreneur. When telling the stories of how they came to call themselves entrepreneurs some relate to episodes of their upbringing, like the girl who did not want to be told to unload the dishwasher or the boy who invented things out of his mother's hangers. According to their stories seems they were destined to become entrepreneurs already then.

In the presentation of the data, I noted that the respondents had a tendency to focus on "what it takes" to be an entrepreneur, rather than "what it is" to be an entrepreneur. A wording that assumes that being an entrepreneur is more difficult than the alternative.

From the theory we know that it is expected to evaluate your own group positively, and that is what we see here as well. Although one of the respondents point out that she does not view entrepreneurs are up on a pedestal, there are several signs that point to an overall positive view of the entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs are the people coping with the challenges, giving to the world and changing the world. It definitely has a more positive ring to it than the shackled rule followers they contrast themselves too.

Like stated above, only one of the respondents mention a business idea as part of the reason for becoming an entrepreneur. In all other cases the choice to pursue the entrepreneurial path came before a perceived business opportunity. And that is a contradiction right there: How can you be entrepreneur without a venture? Even now, when they each have something that could be defined as a venture, they still have not created any tangible results and by most definitions they would therefore fall out of the classification. They would not be entrepreneurs but unemployed, graduates with an ambitious hobby or, thanks to Wagner - nascent entrepreneurs. The point is, they considered themselves entrepreneurs even before that.

Their descriptions of entrepreneurs makes up a list of characteristics along the lines of those associated with the entrepreneurial role according to Murniek and Mosakowski. Following the logic of that, if an entrepreneur is not defined by her venture but by a set of characteristics it would make us believe that entrepreneurship is a personality type. Our respondents do not agree to that either because when asked, they can all mention a few other occupations, that they do not consider entrepreneurial, where you would expect to find people with the same characteristics. And, as cited above, research show that there is no support for personality differences between entrepreneurs and general managers.

It seems our respondents are entrepreneurs simply because they define themselves as entrepreneurs. This confirms the theory that they have internalized the entrepreneurial role and they have an entrepreneurial identity that drives their actions. But is this what drove them to become entrepreneurs?

The Social Constructions of Recruiting

The social construction of the general manager and the corporate environment intensifies the minute you start business school. Not only through in class discussions and cases but just as much through recruiting. Job-hunting starts basically the minute you enter business school, there are scheduled activities, lectures, meet-and-greets where students are offered (and expected) to network with potential employers right from the first semester at Darden. Though these events might seem fairly casual, the students have been drilled in how to behave at these occasions. How to dress, how to introduce yourself and how to talk about you career ambitions. These activities are intensified during recruiting, first for your summer internship and then in your final year for your full time job after graduation. Though academic results, experience, proficiency tests and interviews are of major importance, emphasis is also put on these social events. Drug test and credit checks are come il faut, but some recruiters go to great extents in checking your social background. When living on campus at Darden, I had my door knocked on to be interviewed about my neighbor, as part of her recruitment process for a summer internship.

This is to describe the institutional pressure that job hunting entails for a graduate. This is where the role of the *Successful Candidate* is constructed and this is how the image of a corporate job is created. In this setting there is very little room for creative and anti authoritarian rule breakers.

The Corporate Route

The typical MBA graduate job is characterized by a laid out career plan and strictly defined responsibilities and tasks. It is common to start on a rotational program in the company, and then after a year or so move on to a position where you will stay one or two years before getting promoted, to a higher salary, a new title (such as senior in front of your previous one) and some more responsibility. Still within a pretty defined structure and hierarchy. There are exceptions from this, of course, but if it is not the truth it is at least the truth as

you perceive it as an MBA graduate. And this is what has shaped the role of the *General Manager* for the respondents. The respondents give a clear view of the situation as a general manager. Dealing with the politics, the mundane day-to-day work, having to work on someone else's agenda not getting to live out their dreams.

This is reflected in the words they use to describe a corporate setting:

•   *Games*
•   *Politics*
•   *Not in charge of your own destiny*
•   *Stress*
•   *Squeezes off individuality*
•   *Mundane*
•   *Security*
•   *Comfortable*
•   *Cushioned*
•   *Golden Shackles*

Much of this finds resonance in the view on corporate America that is presented by Jackall. We recognize the constant dealing with politics, norms and expectations. Having to perform on other levels than just the job.

 Even though it could seem like quite a nice job (and it is indeed the most desired job for many graduates); the high salary, the interesting projects you get to work on, all the organizational support you get to perform your tasks and deal with your responsibilities. Not to mention the budget at hand to put your strategies into reality. The respondent themselves even agree that it is a comfortable setting in many ways. In spite of all this, the respondents seem to think that all those general managers would like to do something else in stead. The career choice is presented like a trade off; *there is a rebellion in everyone, nobody likes being told what to do.* If it only were not that risky and ambiguous, more people would take a chance on the entrepreneurial route. For the steady paycheck, the golden shackles, most of us are ready to trade off some freedom and creativity. And that is why more people are not going for the entrepreneurial career according to the respondents.

Confining With Your Role

To refresh our memory on how identification connects to action; we tend to act the way we do because we are trying to align our self-image with the impression other people have of us. If we identify with entrepreneurial role, we want the surrounding world to associate us with that role as well. If our self-image differs from the view other people have we feel misunderstood, insecure and frustrated. One option in this situation is to alter your self-image due to people's expectations of you. To try to fit in to the norm and the role and adapt to the surrounding. The other option is to tackle this by performing actions that will establish our identity to other people. To establish your identity as entrepreneur you will take risk, break rules etc. – Actions that the surrounding community associate with the entrepreneurial role.

Picture one of our respondents before she decided to pursue entrepreneurship, planning to make her career in an average corporate setting, most likely as a general manager. This could be before or during business school, but the same expectations will be facing her. There are several descriptions of similar situations from the interviewed entrepreneurs; they felt numb being told what to do, struggling with the politics, being micromanaged and not getting to work on what they want, the way they want it. Many mentioned a frustration about having to "fit" the norm. All signs of frustration due to a discrepancy between the role and the identity.

Altering Expectations

Being able to identify with the entrepreneurial role, and acting upon it, changes what the world expects of you. You are no longer the general manager that you do not confine with, but something else, where the expectations are altered. By choosing to pursue entrepreneurship, you are choosing the entrepreneurial identity, and signaling to the surrounding world that they cannot expect you to fit the norm. You will break rules, and not follow directions. This is not only true for the professional setting, but for the private as well. By choosing this path you are not only telling your boss that you are not going to listen to him anymore, but also your parents, friends, partner that they cannot expect you to bring in that six digit salary or keep adding titles to your linked in profile.

It seems the interviewed entrepreneurs think that this is what is stopping a lot of people of becoming entrepreneurs. But it also seems it is part of the reason for some of them to become entrepreneurs. They describe a relief of no longer being trapped in the net of others, a feeling of being alive and able to breath. But also a reason not to confine with some of the rules of society. Like the respondent who claimed that he is neither good with girlfriends nor traffic rules, he is simply too absorbed by his own entrepreneurial ambition. Apparently nothing he is ashamed of, but rather a sign of his entrepreneurial passion.

Failure

There are several aspects of failure in entrepreneurship. First, there is the risk of failure you are facing in your venture. If you fail to get funding, fail to get your product out on the market etc. The kind of failure when you do not know how to pay your bills, have to call your parents for support or simply take a corporate job after all. As we know from the introduction, this is the most probable outcome of a venture. The respondents are aware of this in varying degrees, some fully recognize the risk that they might fail their venture while some cannot picture it. All have however decided to try their luck as entrepreneurs anyways and in that way choose to live with the risk.

The second aspect of failure, is the kind when you fail to live up to expectations. When somebody gives you a task you fail to perform, or your work is simply not good enough in the eyes of your boss. This kind of failure seem to be central to some of the respondents. Remember the entrepreneur who told the story about how a B- was a horrific failure in her past, but now as an entrepreneur she feels like she cannot fail any more. Just to dare to choose the entrepreneurial path is a win, and also nobody is expecting anything from her anymore and therefore she cannot fail. Another respondent stated that he would rather have the market prove him wrong than his boss telling him off, a sign of the same feeling. While being an entrepreneur exposes you to the risk of failure in one aspect, it protects you from it in the second aspect.

The Role of the Counter role

When talking about what they *are*, the respondents seem more interest in what they *are not*. They are *not* good with rules (or girlfriends for that matter), they do *not* fit in, they do *not* like being told what to do. They are *not* general managers.

They general manager is described as:

• *Comfortable*
• *Lacking a vision*
• *Risk averse*
• *Settled*

It is worth noting that the descriptions of the general manager are much less complex than the ones of the entrepreneur. Possibly a consequence of that more time was spent talking about entrepreneurs during the interviews, but also a sign of our tendency to evaluate ourselves and our own group as superior to others.

As Freitas et al states, our own identity is strengthened by defining what we are not. The boarders to other roles are constantly negotiated, and this process becomes more important when the roles are close to our own identity. Like explained before the respondents in our group need to constantly relate to the general manager, and while they have many similarities (or because of just that) they feel a need to distance themselves from it.

In the respondents view, the general manager is very much restricted by their role. While the entrepreneurial role, constructed in the same way, seem to give more freedom. Part of the entrepreneurial role is that you are expected to surprise, be creative, come up with your own solution and break rules.

If you do not make money or drive an old car, it is not because you tried and failed in a corporate world but because you are pursuing your entrepreneurial dream. If you are not following traffic rules or give your girlfriend the attention she deserves, it is not because you are a bad person but because you have a higher purpose in life and you are simply so passionate about what you do that you cannot really be expected to think about the mundane everyday things.

Entrepreneurial Passion

While talking about passion, only one of the respondents talk about being passionate about their actual business idea. This confirms the theory by Cardon et al, stating that passion comes from reinforcing your self-meaning rather than a feeling that is connected to your actual venture. The respondents all take great joy in being entrepreneurs, and while they where complaining a lot about the administration and the day-today job associated with a corporate job, nobody mentions the administrative hassle it means to be working for yourself. Again a confirmation that passion gives joy in your work. Cardon et al also brought up the feeling of success you can get from affirming your self-image. Without creating actual success (sales, growth etc) our entrepreneurs are feeling successful doing what they think they are supposed to be doing. It seems passion is not what makes people become entrepreneurs, it is what keeps them going.

Self Fulfillment

Changing the world, giving to the world, fixing things on the market. The respondents refer to a higher purpose of their entrepreneurship. Some of them compare entrepreneurs to artist, using creativity to express themselves. For an outsider, it is hard to find resonance in these ideas in their ventures. From film making, to gift cards and wedding invitations. What are they actually doing for the world? Nothing wrong with their ideas, just not in line with what you would normally associate with giving to the world. When giving an example of how he is making a difference, one of the respondents mentioned how he can decide for himself what paper to use for the gift cards his company is producing. Obviously an important issue for him, but in a bigger perspective it seems somewhat trivial. Again it seems like the higher purpose of their entrepreneurship has little to do with their venture, and more with them living their dream, getting to make their own decisions and affirming their self-meaning and identity.

Do they think they can make a fortune?

Do the respondents think they will laugh all the way to the bank in a few years time? They all mention the potential financial upside with entrepreneurship. While one jokes about the

multimillion dollars, another sets a ballpark where he thinks he would be comfortable and one is planning to retire in a not too distant future. However it seems like none of them really find this realistic. At least not with the venture they are currently working on. The projections they have for their businesses does not equal the fortune they are planning on making, and the respondents are rather talking about the financial shortcomings of their situation. They all recognize the risk of what they are doing, and one even think that magic is necessary to make his dreams come true. It might be money that they are after, and surely they would all enjoy the multimillion dollars if they came their way. But if it was money that they were after they would be better of choosing a different path, and they are seemingly aware of that.

The aim for riches is also part of the entrepreneurial role. You are expected to be after the big money, and in that way you can legitimize your choice. A great upside explains why you are willing to take risk and this will rationalize your choice in the eyes of others. Like Brunsson stated, we have to keep up the appearances of rationality to prove that we are proper individuals making free choices. In that perspective the fortune is not what made you make the choice, or even what keeps you going it is rather a statement that will further affirm your entrepreneurial identity, Identity talk if you will.

What's in the Choice?

There is an obvious attraction in the social freedom of the entrepreneurial role as opposed to the constraints of the corporate setting. But to say that the entrepreneurs have chosen entrepreneurship because of the social freedom would be to fall in the trap of intentionality and rational choice, saying that we can derive the preferences of a person from her choices. We know from Brunsson that we cannot assume that an action was initiated by a decision, but we should rather view it as a social phenomena. And as a social action, the choice too should be driven by a need to confirm our identity and self-image. And the described decision as a way to communicate this choice. Identities are not stable over time, so in terms of identity entrepreneurship is not a life choice. We know that the respondents have internalized the identity for now, but we also know that most of them will be out of business in a few years time. It is not likely that they will maintain their entrepreneurial identity when they are no longer in business since that would cause distress if they are not able to affirm their self-image through entrepreneurial action. Depending on what they decide on doing

later in life they will transition in to another identity, maybe the one as general manager. We can also not assume that they always had an entrepreneurial identity in the past. But rather that they have transitioned into their entrepreneurial identity from another one. We know that some of them were working in traditional jobs before, so it is not unlikely that they identified with the entrepreneurial manager before.

Summary

On the following page I have summarized the findings from the analysis in a developed version of Burke's model of social negotiations. The main dynamic is the one between the entrepreneur and the general manager as before. Entrepreneurs are trying to differentiate from their counter-role through identity talk, actions and choices.

The situational constraints consist of both the construction of the corporate world, and other social constraints from family, friends, partners or society as a whole.
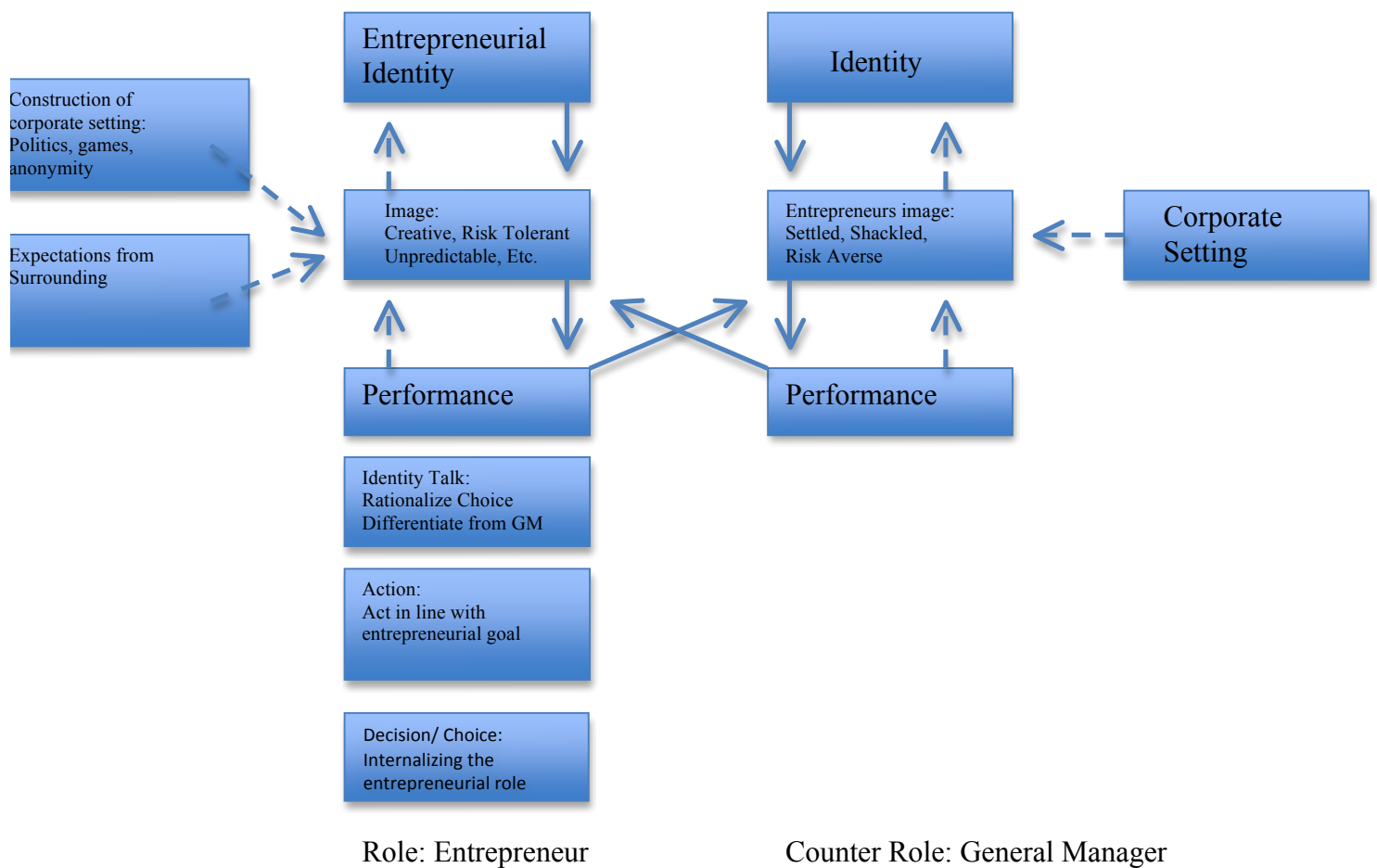
Role: Entrepreneur   Counter Role: General Manager

Fig 3. The figure develops the model presented earlier, summarizing the analysis.

Conclusions

Do the respondents maintain an entrepreneurial identity?

The study confirms that the respondents hold an entrepreneurial identity and that the role as they describe it is similar to the one presented my Murniek and Mosakowski.

How does Identity talk affect the way they tell their story?

According to the presented theory identity drives action since humans feel unbalanced when our identity is not in line with they way others view us. We act to bridge the gap between these two. Hence, the entrepreneurial identity would drive us to act according to what is expected from the entrepreneurial role. (Risk taking, creativity, rule breaking etc.). The study also suggests that the entrepreneurial role also affect how the respondents present themselves and talk about their choice, Identity talk. As an example we can note have the respondents are rationalizing their choice by communicating that they think they will be more financially successful as entrepreneurs than as general managers.

How does the group relate to the counter role, defined as the general manager?

The main counter role of the entrepreneur is the general manager. Its most important function for the entrepreneur is to define what they are *not*, when describing what they are the respondents often relate to the general manager who is described as risk averse, lacking visions and comfortable in their current corporate situation. Other counter roles are the ones close to you, family, friends and life partners. These are the roles who will question or approve of your life choices and the entrepreneurial identity will affect the interactions with these roles.

What are the consequences for the respondents of maintaining an entrepreneurial identity?

By maintaining an entrepreneurial identity the respondents break free from expectations from the corporate world as well as expectations in other social settings. Characteristics attributed to the entrepreneur, such as rule breaker and creative will allow for a wider

variety of behavioral patterns than would the General Manger. A consequence of maintaining an entrepreneurial identity is therefore a greater degree of social freedom.

Also, maintaining an entrepreneurial identity allows for experiencing entrepreneurial passion. Feelings of joy, or even success comes from pursuing actions that confirm the identity.

How does the entrepreneurial identity play a role in choosing to become an entrepreneur?

So why do they then become entrepreneurs? Even though they recognize the potential financial upside, the also recognize the risk and that a great fortune is not a likely outcome of their efforts. Even though passion is recognized as a force of entrepreneurship, it is not an inherited trait that drives them to start their own venture but something that keeps them going. It seems instead that entrepreneurship is a way to free themselves from expectations. By identifying with the entrepreneurial role they are given a lot of freedom, freedom in their personal life as well as in their professional life. But since it cannot be assumed that this was the reason for them to pursue entrepreneurship, there is still a piece missing in how identity plays a role in the choice to pursue entrepreneurship.

In this the entrepreneurial identity seems to be of major importance for the entrepreneurs. If it was not because they *felt like* entrepreneurs, there would be very few reasons to call them that. The entrepreneurial role and identity is a way to explain to the world what they are doing, or rather *not* doing. By affirming their entrepreneurial identity they feel they are expressing themselves, and the passionate feelings they experience when doing this keeps them motivated through out the process.

Discussion

When rational choice has been discarded, and we cannot assume that are choices are based on intentionality we have very little to go by when trying to find out the reasons for a choice, such as the choice to pursue entrepreneurship. In the study it was concluded that the choice too is a social action that is driven by our need to affirm our identity. To say that we pursue entrepreneurship because we are trying to affirm our entrepreneurial identity is a catch 22 that will not get us much further. Instead we must assume that there was another identity preceding the present one. How this transition happens, the one from something else to an entrepreneurial identity, is something that will need to be studied in the future.

This is an interesting issue to study, since it would give further understanding to differences in likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurship in different demographic groups. As Wagner pointed out, there are major differences in for instance the propensity to pursue entrepreneurship among men and women. Identity could be a key not only to understanding why this is so, but also making a change in that matter.

What other roles can you internalize at the same time as the entrepreneurial without too much conflict? For instance, an entrepreneur was described to be narcissistic in the study. Can you be narcissistic and a mother? It is a possibility off course, but how is it viewed in society?

How we portray the entrepreneur in media, education etc. will contribute to the construction of the role. The words we choose will include or exclude individuals with identities compatible with our descriptions. And if the entrepreneur truly is the hero of our generation, we better hope she does not have *"overblown sense of self-worth and propensity to dream big".*

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Attachement 1 – Imapact of Factors

Impact of selected factors on nascent entrepreneurship (29 GEM countries, 2001)

Factor	Share of nascent entrepreneurs in total population of all countries
Gender:	
Men	9.3%
Women	4.2%
Age:	
18 – 24 years old	8.0%
25 – 34 years old	7.9%
35 - 44 years old	7.5%
45 – 54 years old	5.2%
55 – 64 years old	4.5%
Contact with entrepreneurs:	
Know an entrepreneur: Yes	11.6%
Know an entrepreneur: No	5.1%
Perception of business opportunities:	
Good opportunity for business: Yes	14.5%
Good opportunity for business: No	4.3%
Business skills:	
Have skills to start a business: Yes	13.8%
Have skills to start a business: No	2.4%
Fear of failure:	
Failure fear NOT a problem: Yes	8.5%
Failure fear NOT a problem: No	4.1%
Family's economic future:	
Family future looks: Better	10.5%
Family future looks: Same	4.4%
Family future looks: Worse	3.3%
Country's economic future:	
Country future looks: Better	8.6%
Country future looks: Same	5.1%
Country future looks: Worse	6.3%
Educational Attainment:	
Graduate program experience	5.4%
Beyond secondary school	7.6%
Secondary school degree	8.4%
Not completed secondary school	5.7%
Labor force status:	
Working full or part time	8.4%
Not working: Homecare, unemployed	4.3%
Not in labor force: Retired, student	3.4%
Relative household income:	
HH income in upper third for country	7.9%
HH income in middle third for country	6.9%
HH income in lower third for country	6.1%

Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2001 Summary Report (Reynolds et al. 2001, p. 32)

Attachement 2 - Background Questions

Age:
Sex:
Previous experience
    Industry
    Position
    Sales
    Management
Education
Entrepreneurial experience
    Own venture?
    Failure/Success?
Nationality
Graduated
Entrepreneurs in family:
Know entrepreneurs:

About the venture:
    Industry
    Basic idea
    Business model
    Partners
    Employees
    How long
    Financing
    Cash flow
    Business plan
    Milestones
    Goals?

Future:
    In five year?
    This business?

Carreer:
    Did you look for other jobs?
    Have an offer?

Attachment 3 - Open Questions

When did you decide to start your own business?

Have you questioned your decision?

What were some of the aspects you considered?

What comes to mind when you hear the word entrepreneurship?

How would you describe the typical entrepreneur?

What do you think makes a successful entrepreneur?

What do you think holds people back in starting their own business?

Are entrepreneurs different from other people in any way?

Would you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?

        Why or why not?

How does that make you different in any way?

How do you view success?

What is your view on failure?

Do you think you will be more financially successful as an entrepreneur than otherwise?