

**Title Page**

**Entrepreneurial Identity Construction – what does existing literature tell us?**

Lead Author: Susanne Ollila<sup>b</sup>, Associate Professor  
Division for Management of Organizational Renewal and Entrepreneurship  
Technology Management and Economics  
Chalmers University of Technology  
41296, Gothenburg, Sweden  
+46 31 772 8414

[susanne.ollila@chalmers.se](mailto:susanne.ollila@chalmers.se)

Co-Authors: Karen Williams Middleton<sup>b</sup>, Post-Doc and Anne Donnellon<sup>a</sup>, Associate Professor  
<sup>a</sup> Babson College

<sup>b</sup> Chalmers University of Technology

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**Abstract**

**Objectives.** Research in entrepreneurship education maps the competencies, skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship (Bager 2011; Jones 2010; Mwasalwiba 2010; Sánchez 2011), exploring whether the skills taught are applicable to entrepreneurial practice (Edelman et al. 2008). However, entrepreneurial learning has not addressed how identity construction may be integrated with individual competency development for entrepreneurial action. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) emphasize that identity is central to meaning, motivation, decision-making, and other activities that can be seen as critical for entrepreneurial action. Building from a review of literature, the article explores research addressing entrepreneurship and identity, focusing on processes for identity construction. The aim of the exploration is to identify processes of entrepreneurial identity construction that can be applied to entrepreneurship education.

**Prior work.** There exists literature regarding identity and entrepreneurship, but limited publications of these areas in combination. In particular, nothing has been proposed regarding the process by which nascent entrepreneurs construct identity.

**Approach.** The key terms 'identity' and 'entrepreneurship' were used in a database search using Scopus, restricting to published articles within the social sciences/humanities. Of the resulting 161 articles, 26 were selected for further analysis, based upon relevancy to the research question. Common themes were identified.

**Results.** Many of the articles reviewed present identity as a fixed state of existence, resulting in categorizations of entrepreneurial identities (Lähteenmäki 1997; Melin 2001; Vesalainen and Pihkala 2000). These categories include entrepreneurial identity as it relates to ethnicity, gender, careers, and the family framework, and not method or process of construction. A small portion of the literature reviewed discusses themes such as narrative and storytelling as means towards shaping an entrepreneurial identity. Of these, some also propose entrepreneurial identity as constructed in the situation (Down and Warren 2008; Hytti 2003; Johansson 2004) and through socialization (Falck et al. 2010; Rigg and O'Dwyer 2012), but the question how entrepreneurial identity is constructed in the educational process has not significantly explored in the literature.

**Implications.** A review of the literature illustrates existing knowledge gaps regarding entrepreneurial identity and areas requiring additional investigation regarding entrepreneurial identity construction. This informs areas for future research while also contributing to a consolidation of entrepreneurial identity construction.

**Value.** An understanding of entrepreneurial identity and identity construction can allow for development of entrepreneurial capacity through learning and training programs. This can have an impact on the amount of entrepreneurial activity in a society, contributing to employment opportunities, new products/services, and other outcomes of entrepreneurship.

## **Introduction**

Research in entrepreneurship education maps the competencies, skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship (Bager 2011; Jones 2010; Mwasalwiba 2010; Sánchez 2011), exploring whether the skills taught are applicable to entrepreneurial practice (Edelman et al. 2008). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) emphasize that identity is central to meaning, motivation, decision-making, and other activities that can be seen as critical for entrepreneurial action. However, entrepreneurship education has not significantly addressed the process of identity construction over the course of an education nor how identity 'work' may be integrated with individual competency development. As entrepreneurship is found to constitute a plurality of sub-discourses, some of them in conflict with one another, rather than one 'grand narrative' (Johansson 2009), determining how identity work may be applied to entrepreneurship education could face several challenges.

Numerous researchers and theorists have argued and shown that identity is a social phenomenon. In psychology, Baumeister (2011) summarized his work on selfhood and identity in this way: "Identity is defined partly by one's place in the social system, including one's roles and attachments." (p. 49)... "Human self and identity become heavily infused with symbols, including names and numbers and other complex representations ... Human selves are also elaborated with narrative histories that not only record events but interpret them symbolically" (p. 50). This is reflected in entrepreneurial literature. For example, Obrecht (2004) argues that in order to act entrepreneurially, individuals are seen as requiring a set of capabilities which are personal, organizational and societal. Components influencing entrepreneurial capability include identity and knowledge (associated to the individual) as well as networks, legitimacy and locality (seen as associated to context) (Obrecht 2011). Work to develop entrepreneurial identity, while fundamentally linked to a person's biography, involves not only internal self-reflection, but also social engagement – through talk and action (Watson 2009). But when engaging socially, particularly with established social groups, individuals endeavoring to take on the role of entrepreneur are often challenged with how this role fits with existing identities and roles.

Our focus is to understand entrepreneurial identity construction, from the perspective of entrepreneurship education, such that the explorative understanding can be applied to facilitating identity construction. Thus, the main purpose of this research was to explore publications on entrepreneurial identity – and the process of creating or developing entrepreneurial identity in particular – in order to see how this knowledge and understanding can inform entrepreneurship education. First we present the method through which literature was explored and reviewed. Next we present our findings from the reviewed literature, beginning with a general taxonomy before focusing on a sub-set of literature deemed more relevant to our purpose. Finally, we discuss our findings from the selected sub-set of literature as it relates to our purpose.

## **Method**

We conducted a literature search in the database Scopus, using two search terms: identity and entrepreneurship. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles in social science publications. This resulted in 160 articles. The abstracts of all 160 articles were read by the authors. Based on relevancy of the abstract to our objective of understanding of entrepreneurial identity construction 24 articles were selected for further analysis. An article was deemed relevant if the subject matter concerned a process or approach towards identity construction. The 24 articles were then equally distributed to the three authors. The articles were read in order to determine the following: what can we learn about role and identity and entrepreneurial identity construction that can be applied to provision of entrepreneurship education.

In addition to investigating the selected 24 articles, we also recognized some general themes addressed in sets of the remaining 136 articles, based on review of the abstracts. These themes, and associated articles, are presented in addition to our more detailed summary of the focus articles. A list of all 160 articles is included as an appendix to this paper (see Appendix A). References presented in relation to the review of the 136 articles not specifically chosen for discussion are not included in the reference list, but are to be found in the Appendix.

## **Limitations**

We recognize that the search in social science peer-reviewed journals within one database is a limitation to the potential literature available. However, as the purpose of the paper is not a literature review, but rather an investigation of entrepreneurial identity construction and implications for

entrepreneurial education, a bounded literature search was considered sufficient in order to inform the authors of existent discourses regarding entrepreneurial identity.

### Findings

The 160 articles found through the database search were published within the last two decades (with one exception), with more than half of the articles published within the last five years (see Figure 1.)

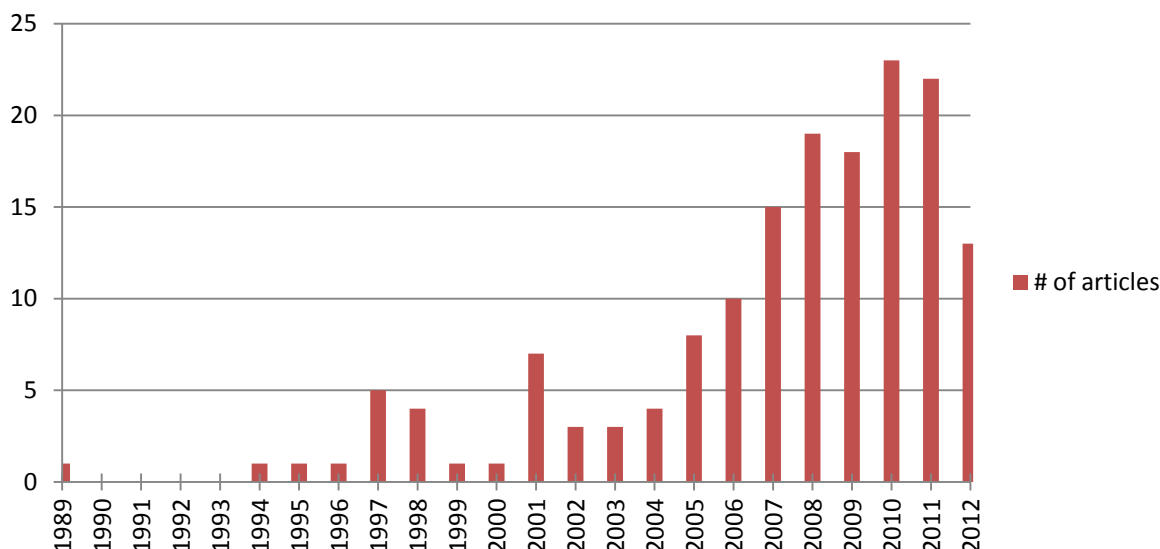


Figure 1. Distribution of reviewed literature, per year of publication

The articles were published in a broad spectrum of journals – 124 journals in total – with the majority having only one publication. 21 journals had more than one publication (see Table 1.). Ten of the selected 24 articles were found in these journals. Only two journals had more than three publications: the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, with a total of ten publications (five in 2008, one in 2009 and four in 2011), and the *Journal of Business Venturing* with five publications (two in 2007 and one each in 2006, 2008, and 2009). Five of the selected 24 articles were found in these two journals.

Table 1. Journals publishing two or more of the 160 articles

Journal	Number of Articles	Years in which articles published
<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business</i>	10	2008, 2009, 2011
<i>Journal of Business Venturing</i>	5	2006, 2007, 2008, 2009
<i>Education + Training</i>	3	2011, 2012
<i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i>	3	2008, 2010
<i>International Small Business Journal</i>	3	2004, 2009, 2011
<i>Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development</i>	3	2005, 2006, 2007
<i>Asian Ethnicity</i>	2	2008, 2009
<i>Commentary</i>	2	2007, 2009
<i>Entrepreneurship and Regional Development</i>	2	1997, 2010
<i>Gender, Work and Organization</i>	2	2004, 2010
<i>History of the Family</i>	2	2001
<i>Journal of African History</i>	2	1998, 2008
<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	2	2001, 2011
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	2	1995, 2011
<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities</i>	2	2009, 2012
<i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>	2	2004, 2009
<i>New Community</i>	2	1996, 1997
<i>Organization</i>	2	2005, 2008
<i>Organization Science</i>	2	2009, 2011
<i>Scandinavian Journal of Management</i>	2	2001, 2005
<i>Tourism Management</i>	2	2012

From the 136 articles not specifically addressing the process of entrepreneurial identity construction, two different “clusters” could be found: articles addressing the identity of the individual and articles addressing the identity beyond the individual such as the firm, industry or nation.

The majority of the articles having the individual identity in focus were studying issues such as *Owner identity and founder identity* (see e.g. Cucculelli and Marchionne, 2012; Di Domenico and Miller, 2012; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Hallack, Brown and Lindsay, 2012; Lichtenstein, Dooley and Lumpkin, 2006; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Webb Ketchen and Ireland, 2010; Salvato Chirico and Sharma, 2010); *Gender* (see e.g. Baron, Markman and Hirska, 2001; Blim, 2001; Blumberg, 2001; Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004; Curli, 2002; Eddleston and Powell, 2008; Essers Benschop and Doorewaard, 2010; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Godwyn, 2009; Najafizadeh and Mennerick, 2003; Nilsson, 1997); and *Race, ethnicity and religion* (see e.g. Anderson, Dana and Dana, 2006; Arcand, 2012; Chan, 1997; Constantin Goschin and Dragusin, 2008; Dana, 2010; Fanthorpe, 1998; Heberer, 2005, 2008; Jacobsen, 2007; Landa, 1999; Murray, 2007; Panayiotopoulos, 1996; Pecoud, 2004; Smart, 2003; Teixeira and Lee, 2009; Wee and Wah, 2006; Werbner, 2002). In certain cases, articles addressed both gender and race/ethnicity, in which case we grouped the relative to the primary theme. Some articles also investigated entrepreneurial identity among *Managers and academics* (see e.g. Choi and Gray, 2008; Lamy and Shinn, 2006; Llewellyn, Lewis and Woods, 2007).

Articles focusing beyond the individual identity addressed issues such as *National identity and regional identity* (see e.g. Bell, 2012; Boyle and Hughes, 1994; Grieshop, 2006; Huang and Hong, 2007; Loda, 2006; Lorey and Poutet, 2011; Scully, 1997); *Industry identity and sector identity* (see e.g. Bruno and Charles, 2008; Couzy and Dockes, 2008; Grimes, 2010, Kankaanranta et al, 2006; Popp, 2003; Rowe et al, 2004; Vesala, Peura, and McElwee, 2007; Vesala and Vesala, 2010); and *Firm identity* (see e.g. Abimbola and Kocak, 2007; Ireland and Webb, 2007; Michael, 2007; Smith et al, 2010).

### **Articles on the process of entrepreneurial identity construction**

In this section we will give short summaries of the articles on process that we argue can inform us about the published knowledge about how entrepreneurial identity is constructed that could be of value for entrepreneurial identity work within entrepreneurship education.

#### *Socialization and collectivity part of Entrepreneurial Identity Construction*

Falck, Heblich and Luedemann (2010) argue that an entrepreneurial identity results from an individual's socialization. According to their quantitative studies of students, having an entrepreneurial peer group has a positive effect on an individual's entrepreneurial intentions. The authors argue that having an entrepreneurial identity is not something that can be taught in one academic term-period even if the academic course is very practice oriented. They argue that the essential attribute of entrepreneurship's “will to conquer” is part of a person's identity that gradually develops out of background and experience.

Focusing on nascent entrepreneurial groups, Wry, Lounsbury and Glynn (2011) discuss development of a collective identity, emphasizing its importance as groups attempt to establish legitimacy. They argue that legitimacy is gained through use of storytelling and narrative. Narrative and stories are used to shape the collective's attributes (who we are) and core practices (what we do). Collective identity is more likely to be legitimized if the message of the collective is cohesive and consistent, and if it is communicated through an ‘established market’ while at the same time claiming distinctive value.

In their article on teachers as educational-social entrepreneurs Chand and Misra (2009) discuss the importance of the interactions among the teachers' life histories, their classroom settings and the social context in which they work, as it supports entrepreneurial identity construction – the risks that have to be taken, the opportunities that have to be spotted and the focus on creating social value that has to be maintained in the face of all odds.

Focusing on academic scientists' intentions to commercialize research knowledge Obschonka, Goethner, Silbereisen and Cantner (2012) studied the role of social identity in shaping entrepreneurial intention. They found that scientists with low group identification based their entrepreneurial intentions not so much on social norms and attitudes but on their self-initiative and control beliefs. Among scientists with high group identification, in turn, entrepreneurial intentions were mainly a function of

social norms. This study demonstrates further the relationship between self-identity and social identity in the development of entrepreneurial intention, and probably identity.

Rigg and O'Dwyer (2012) argue that the entrepreneurial aspect of human identity is emergent and relational and it is developed through dialogue with family, customers, employees, suppliers, competitors and others. They illustrate how mentor networks in the education program can stimulate the aspiring entrepreneurs' learning of how to be, thus in part enabling acquisition of status and identity. The authors argue that individuals learn the most when acting at the 'edge of familiarity'. The boundary of the 'familiar' can be extended through the social interaction with mentor networks, including not only verbal, but non-verbal contributions as well.

Shepherd and Haynie (2009) discuss the challenge entrepreneurs face in balancing between fulfilling a need for distinctness and having a sense of belonging in order to balance their psychological health (as studies show that humans seek out both a sense of self through distinctiveness, but also have a psychological need of belonging). The authors argue that for entrepreneurs the risk is an imbalance towards distinctiveness, as part of the entrepreneurial role and because of association to the venture which must be distinct, and that this might be balanced through micro-identities. Management of multiple micro-identities, which can serve as conduits for both distinctiveness and belonging, can include processes of compartmentalization of a particular identity, and integration of aspects of identities, such that there can exist synergies. The article builds upon an integration of social identity and role identity theories and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory.

The professional identity of managers develops in the cultural context and in the social groups that they relate to professionally. Education is also part of the development of identity creating a kind of mindset in the course of a lifelong schooling process. Entrepreneurship education should equip students with the abilities needed to establish enterprises. Comparing Estonian and Finnish management students' values Aaltio (2008) argues that both the educational process itself by which identity is created is relevant, but equally relevant is its content. The use of narratives, the stimulation of tacit knowledge of the participants, collective sharing of experience and reflecting on these experiences all support identity building according to the author and therefore should be part of management education aiming to meet new economic circumstances.

#### *Storytelling as part of Entrepreneurial Identity Construction*

Steyaert (2007) puts forward that storytelling and narrative identity construction can be helpful to understand entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial subject but we need to remember that no story is ever the whole story. Storytelling is an ongoing writing of ourselves with all the coherence and contradiction this implies an embodied and embedded performance. The author raises the question whether there is such a thing as a personal narrative. The challenge with the narrative approach is to not fall for the attempt to equal the entrepreneurial event with the story and the story with the one telling the story. We should be aware of the public narratives and master-narratives that share the praise and trust in the successful entrepreneurial individual and therefore we need to find ways to re-address and explain the entrepreneurial subject of entrepreneurship without bringing the individual entrepreneur center stage.

In their article, Fletcher and Watson (2007) present negotiated narrative as a method to facilitate critical engagement with stories told and generalizations developed from them – used to draw out theoretical and practical learning that can be further applied to real world. The emphasis is on the social and relational developments of entrepreneurship and build upon a relational understanding of identity as "always an expression of relationship – to past (and future) conversations, events, experience, thoughts, idea, etc." (pg. 13). The authors propose that negotiated narrative can be delivered by juxtaposing storytelling with case examples of business start-ups. The intention is to emphasize the social and relational processes through which entrepreneurial ideas emerge. Through relationships, dialogues and interactions, identities are shaped socially – people develop a sense of 'who they are' and where they are going.

Through studying the contrasting life stories of two entrepreneurs, Johansson (2004) argued that "identities are formed partly by storytelling ... [are] constructed and can be fruitfully studied with a narrative approach"(pg. 279). He argues that storytelling is used to illustrate perceived and enacted 'windows of opportunities' involving dialogues which the entrepreneur has both with himself and with

others. Through such storytelling, entrepreneurial experience gained is demonstrated to himself and others.

Haynie and Shepherd (2011) studied soldiers and marines engaged in a career retraining program in entrepreneurship necessitated by trauma. Their data highlight that the ones transitioning well, made good progress in constructing foundations for re-conceptualizing their sense of self, such as constructing narratives of their traumatic experiences that is not focusing on blaming others but rather to try to move forward in life with these new challenges to enact upon. They conclude that managing career transition involves the enactment of behaviors focused on rebuilding career-identity foundations.

Harmeling (2011) offers a conceptualization of the entrepreneurial identity construction process as re-storying, in which “individuals undertake to develop, maintain and exhibit both personal and social identities.”(pg. 746). She goes on to explain that re-storying allows for development of self-narrative, in which the individuals build “exposure to new worlds, [and] access to the tools for operating in those worlds, action/doing.”(pg. 747). Harmeling argues that entrepreneurship education can be an ‘identity workspace’, where individuals can gain not only knowledge, but experiences including development of self-narrative, enabling entrepreneurial identity construction.

Rae (2005) presents a proposed model for entrepreneurial learning, with three main subjects to which additional subjects are connected. The three subjects are: personal & social emergence, contextual learning and negotiated enterprise. In particular, the personal and social emergence relates to learning about oneself that helps inform the formation of one’s entrepreneurial identity, especially as this is often in dynamic with existing identity/roles, such as gender roles like mother/wife or father/husband. Entrepreneurial identities are constructed through narrative and storytelling as the individual develops confidence in the entrepreneurial role. The contextual learning and negotiated enterprise continue the narrative development of identity, but this is expanded to the story of the firm, not just the entrepreneur. The individuals driving the enterprise utilize their role set to legitimize the enterprise identity through storytelling and negotiation.

Jain George and Maltarich (2009) look at role identity development of academics becoming entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial. The process is highly dependent on both the individual and social factors. Individually, it is a process of sense-making – finding ways to translate values and composite new actions onto the existing (more anchored or permanent) role/identity of ‘academic/scientist’. The social factors are the norms of the local context – how reticent they are to appreciating entrepreneurial activity impacts how easily or not the identity is adopted. The academics also use storytelling to shape and guide behavior as an entrepreneur, explaining how certain ‘entrepreneurial’ actions actually uphold the academic values. The identity work towards entrepreneur does not displace the existing identity of academic/scientist, but is added to, integrated with the existing identity – the authors call this composite. This involves decision making regarding how time will be spent and how core values can be achieved, recognizing the value of the entrepreneurial action. The process is explained as also dependent upon career aspiration and current status, again with the primary identity of academic taking preference, such that tenure was secured first, or entrepreneurial action was mainly conducted during sabbatical or other ‘free time’. Salience (Stryker and Serpe 1982) was used to manage the inherent conflict of the composite or hybrid identities.

#### *Strategic positioning as part of Entrepreneurial Identity Construction*

In a conceptual piece of work, building from existent literature, including the work of Lacan, Jones and Spicer (2005) argue that the ‘entrepreneur’ in the center of entrepreneurship may be – instead of the identity to achieve – a placeholder, a space towards which action is to be taken. They suggest that it is through the action towards the space or placeholder that the identity is formed.

Hytti (2005) argues that identity construction processes reflect exigencies of the time and place in which the process unfolds and that, by attending to where and when a person’s narrative unfolds and is told, we will detect the “new meanings of entrepreneurship” and therefore, can observe an entrepreneurial identity developing. Following others, she shows that “entrepreneurs are active agents who construct an entrepreneurial identity by applying their other identities and positions, their own past and present experiences and future perspectives as resources in the story (Linstead and Thomas, 2002; Thomas and Linstead, 2002).” (pg. 605).

Nadin (2007) studied female entrepreneurs with small businesses in the care-giving sector and their accounts reveal that these entrepreneurs often silenced their entrepreneurial identity and embraced their female identity, reflecting the mobilization of a number of highly gendered “selves”. “This is explained in terms of the participants’ desire for legitimacy and integrity, principally in the eyes of their employees, something which is itself prompted by the precariousness of their position as female business owners in this sector. It also demonstrates the “plurality of this positioning, and the potential contradictions (e.g. between “boss” and “friend”), is reconciled by constantly sliding between the different identities, which can be regarded as symbolic spaces through the occupation of which they seek legitimacy and acceptance.” (pg. 465)

Madsen, Neergaard and Ullhøi (2008) use female entrepreneurship as a way to discuss identity and role formation relative to both individual and social theories. Female entrepreneurship is used as an example as there is evidence of structural and institutional limitations which influence entrepreneurial behavior – i.e. that glass ceilings, access to capital, expectations of other more socialized roles, such as that of mother/wife impact and impede females from taking or succeeding in the role of entrepreneur. This challenge is also exemplified in Essers and Benschop’s (2007) analysis of Turkish and Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. In their article, they expose the plethora of social identities that the women studied must constantly juggle and negotiate in order to pursue entrepreneurial activity.

Madsen, Neergaard and Ullhøi go on to present a typology of four dominant orientations of female entrepreneurs differentiated mainly by profit orientation and family vs. work orientation. The authors argue that female entrepreneurship theory has mainly addressed female entrepreneurs as one homogenous group, and emphasized a structuralist approach which does not allow for recognition of individual influence on role/identity. The authors argue that the field would benefit from taking an interactionist approach to roles and identity, in order to recognize the potential of ‘self-definition’ and influence on symbolism regarding roles and identity. The authors state that the decisions around career, and how identities are constructed and reconstructed are not gender specific and as such women have the ability to influence their own life paths.

*Symbols: visual and oral as part of Entrepreneurial Identity Construction*

How do entrepreneurs persuade relevant stakeholders to become part of their venture despite a lack of tangible predictors of competence? In attempting to naturalize their venture and convince others of the feasibility of their entrepreneurial idea, entrepreneurs depend on their own efficacy at symbolically employing speech and visual presentation. Based upon a visual ethnographic study of three entrepreneurs Clarke (2011) demonstrates how entrepreneurs use visual symbols to: present an appropriate scene to stakeholders; create professional identity and emphasize control as well as regulate emotions. The types of visual symbols used are: *setting* such as office furniture, space and arrangements as well as external surroundings e.g. car park; *props* such as pictures/paintings, displays of prototypes, framed patents/historical documents; *dress* e.g. formal or informal, to impact on audience; *expressiveness* meaning visually conveying emotions or thoughts through body or facial movements.

In their article based on an ethnographic study Down and Warren (2008) show how entrepreneurs use clichés to secure robust, useful, and achievable sense of entrepreneurial self-identity. Clichés are a discursive means by which to explore the possibilities of incorporating new or otherwise unfamiliar experiences into the individual’s ontological narrative. The use of these discursive practices does not necessarily put the individual at too great a risk should the story that is created via use of cliché prove surplus to requirements. The prospective venturer may see a chasm between themselves and the superhuman, the heroic, the extraordinary entrepreneurial identity and feel daunted in aspiring to construct such an identity. The clichéd language including elements such as risk, ambition, growth and control, identified by the authors may evoke vivid imagery more safely.

Entrepreneurs are empowered by entrepreneurial discourse to bring about creative destruction (Anderson and Warren 2011). Anderson and Warren’s (2011) article addresses the social formation of the entrepreneurial self by exploring the identity play of a flamboyant entrepreneur (the CEO of Ryanair) as it has been played out in media. The newspaper narratives of the CEO present a rough tongued brawler who is using jesting and clowning to capture emotional attraction. The authors argue that this production and use of identity is purposeful, it is strategic and tactical. He uses the license of his entrepreneurial identity to strategically shift debate into his chosen territory, i.e. he uses

entrepreneurial identity to create competitive advantage. The CEO legitimates his opinions, views and actions by recourse to the logic and desirability of the entrepreneurial metaphor. With this identity play the authors illustrate that identity is something we do identity work to acquire and in this work discourse can be used to legitimize entrepreneurial action.

Smith (2011) discusses that identity of a (family) firm is developed through storyboards and scrapbooks, put on display in the business environment. The author argues that storyboards and scrapbooks allow for visual contribution to 'narrative' – the heuristic and semiotic can help shape/maintain identity through communicated values, traditions, business practice, and also keeping alive memories (critical incidents). These can contribute to the sense-making around being/becoming entrepreneurial.

Considering entrepreneurial identity to be a combination of individual and organizational symbolism and storytelling, including visual construction of entrepreneurs and their organizations, to be a means to produce entrepreneurial identities Boje and Smith (2010) study how two famous entrepreneurs have crafted and re-invented their identities over the years. The authors analyze visual images and textual storytelling downloaded from the entrepreneurs' company websites and discuss how these in fact has a high level of dialogism i.e. answering the commentary of other authors' texts. One of their conclusions is that the companies of the two entrepreneurs co-manufacture the identities of their entrepreneurial-leaders by inter-mingling the corporate intentionality of the images and narratives with fragments of direct discourse.

### **Discussion**

From the literature, we find some interesting elements of entrepreneurial identity construction that we argue to be of relevance for entrepreneurship education: socialization and collectivity, storytelling, strategic positioning, and the use of oral and visual symbols. We do not argue that this is list is exhaustive, but rather a starting point for discussing how to also consider the identity work part of entrepreneurship education.

The literature tells us that identity, even when specific to an individual, is a social phenomenon, and is thus constructed through interaction with others, as presented by many of the articles reviewed. Individuals are recognized as capable of maintaining multiple identities, relative to roles associated to their work and family position as well as other social contexts, as argued, for example by the work of Shepherd and Haynie and Madsen, Neergaard and Ullhøi. An entrepreneurial identity is mainly associated to a professional role, but is also influenced by social norms about the personification of the role, which sometimes leads to legitimacy challenges. In part, due to the challenge of establishing legitimacy, and integrating (or isolating) the role of the entrepreneur with other identities, construction of the entrepreneurial identity is dependent upon interaction with critical stakeholders. For example, building from the Johansson article, we would argue that the storytelling, through which entrepreneurial experience gained is claimed, illustrates how entrepreneurial identity is legitimized and reinforced. Even when focusing on a collective identity, Wry, Lounsbury and Glynn's article reinforces the importance of narrative and storytelling in identity work, and how this is carried out in interaction with others.

These findings present implications for entrepreneurship education. Literature suggests that educations interested in facilitating the process of entrepreneurial identity construction need to incorporate highly engaged mentor and stakeholder networks, with whom the entrepreneurs can shape and negotiate their identity. In addition, entrepreneurship educations can incorporate methods involving narratives and storytelling, which entrepreneurs can use to help legitimize their identities as they are being constructed.

Some options for narrative construction include the following. Students could produce visual images and texts as part of their process of creating an entrepreneurial identity. The language students' use and the way they interact (dress code, speaking, non-verbal techniques etc.) with their stakeholders could build upon clichés and symbols of entrepreneurship, helping them to legitimize an identity not only for themselves, but with others. Building student awareness of how some episodes are important not from a content or practical use perspective, but from an identity creating perspective could facilitate student ability to recognize and utilize critical incidents/events to their purpose. Students could maintain scrapbooks which would allow them to both build a biographical history of their entrepreneurial identity construction, but also to symbolize critical events or incidents which were



important moments shaping their development. These symbols can then be incorporated into the storytelling and negotiated narratives used to gain legitimacy.

### **Conclusions**

Based on study of existing literature on entrepreneurial identity construction this paper argues that the identity construction part of entrepreneurship education needs to be discussed and brought to the foreground as equally important as the content and pedagogy of the education. It is pivotal for faculty of such educations as well as for the nascent entrepreneurs/students to strategically work with identity construction. Setting aside time for reflection both individually as well as collectively to make sense of experiences in relation to entrepreneurial identity construction is one way to create the crucial narrative of oneself as entrepreneur, the narrative that is going to encourage and legitimate entrepreneurial actions beyond the educational setting.

Developing an entrepreneurial identity poses different challenges/hurdles for each individual and for classes of individuals (e.g., women, immigrants, ethnic groups, individuals in established and traditional career roles). Each person will likely confront his or her own internal dialogue about how the entrepreneurial identity fits with his or her social groups' expectations and demands. In addition, each will have to engage in negotiations about the legitimacy of the role of entrepreneur with these social groups as well as others. We propose that educational experiences that call attention to such challenges, label them predictable and manageable, and provide opportunities for aspiring and acting entrepreneurs to reflect on, prepare for, and negotiate, can increase commitment to entrepreneurship.

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**Appendix A:** List of reviewed articles regarding 'identity' and 'entrepreneurship'

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