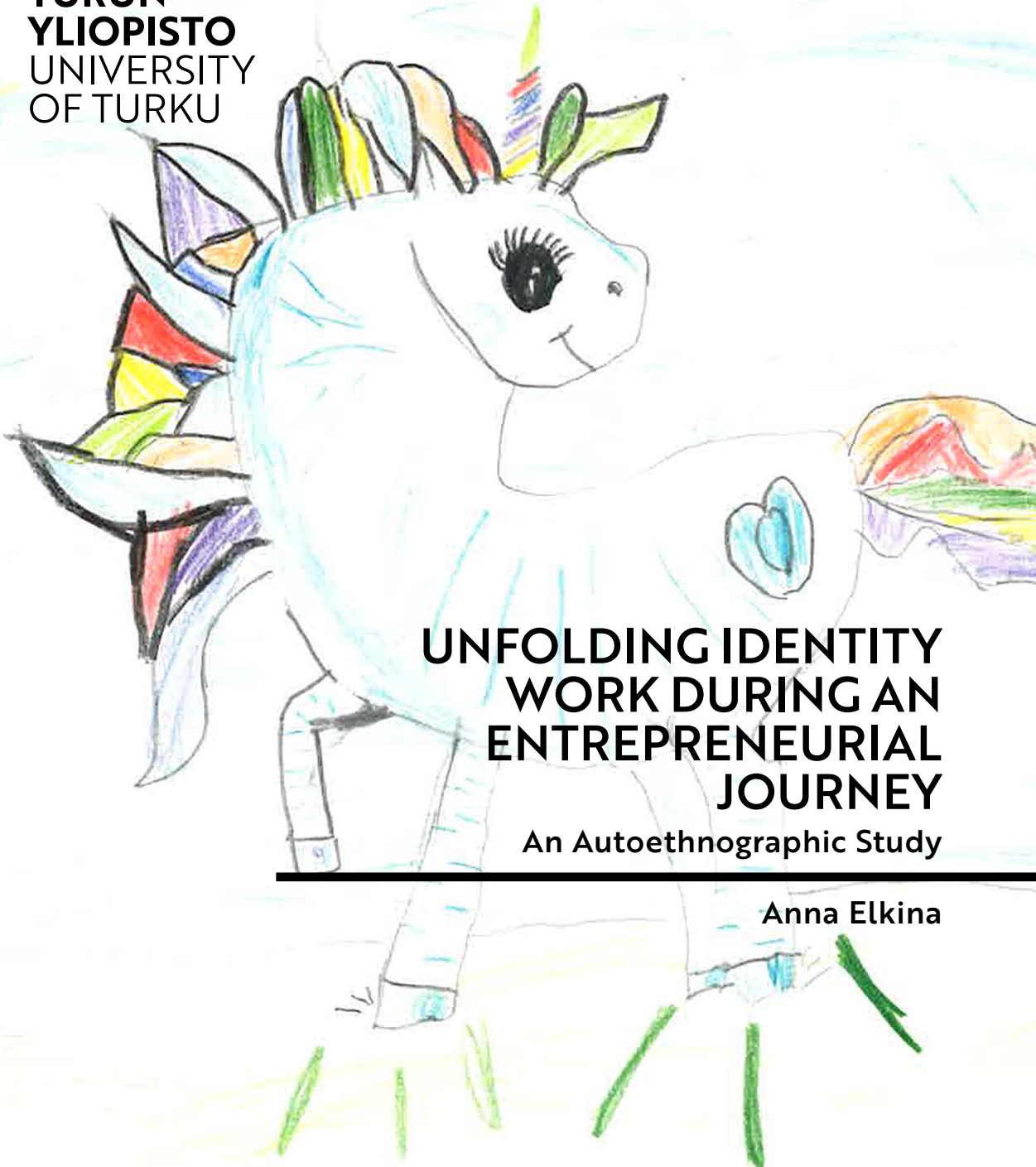TURUN
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UNFOLDING IDENTITY WORK DURING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

An Autoethnographic Study

Anna Elkina

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To my Mom.
I hear you laughing when I laugh

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is about many things: people; our relationships, needs, and desires; becoming rich or poor; our successes and failures; risk-taking and uncertainty; curiosity and learning. Entrepreneurship is a key socio-economic phenomenon often considered a remedy for economic, social, and even environmental diseases; it is discussed within the context of economic growth, employment, and the overall non-stagnant development of humankind. Entrepreneurship is also about a person and their journey—about crafting the path one takes.

Although entrepreneurship is associated with action and result-driven activities, learning through reflexivity is necessary, particularly at the beginning of the journey. *What does "becoming an entrepreneur" mean for me? Why do I strive to become one? I want to become an entrepreneur as who? What restricts me from entrepreneuring and why do I resist learning about entrepreneurship?* These questions, along with an assortment of more specific others, unveil the personal identity work of one who considers becoming an entrepreneur and gets involved in entrepreneuring.

In this autoethnographic study, I observed myself during my entrepreneurial journey. The journey implied learning about, for, and through entrepreneurship, including the creative organizing of a language camp. Drawing on this authentic experience of entrepreneuring and research literature that discusses identifying the self in entrepreneurship, I reveal how identity work unfolds during an entrepreneurial journey and thereafter.

I answer the research question posed by presenting autoethnographic stories based on experiences from my entrepreneurial journey. Those stories expose vulnerable moments of hesitation, confusion, insecurity, and questioning myself as an entrepreneurial individual. In those episodes, small encounters provoke emotional responses and identity work that reveals an entrepreneuring person as a reflexive and doubtful individual.

The study shows that one's identity during one's entrepreneurial journey can unfold while experiencing one's present self-image and simultaneously visualizing an unclear image of one's future self as an entrepreneur. The unclear image partly relates to the conflict between personally relatable examples of entrepreneurs and a socially constructed image of a "real entrepreneur". Although the image of a "real entrepreneur" is presented as gender-neutral, in practice, it is performed as a

masculine hero. Therefore, the study suggests that critically revising what constitutes the image of an entrepreneur is crucial for identity work during the early stages of the entrepreneurial journey.

Moreover, the study discusses identifying the self as an immigrant during the entrepreneurial journey and recognizing a liminal position that manifests in seeking belonging. The in-betweenness a migrant experiences provokes a feeling of insecurity. Simultaneously, the need to belong encourages one to get involved in entrepreneurship because it is a way to connect oneself to society that does not require fitting in but might be a way to restore one's sense of self, which is challenged due to migration.

This dissertation's methodological contribution lies in applying elements of autoethnography and enactive research in entrepreneurship studies. This study relies on my self-observation in the process of entrepreneuring, responding to the calls of researchers who rely on feminist methodology and suggesting that entrepreneurship studies need to expose a vulnerable self to better understand entrepreneuring as creative organizing entwined with everyday life practices.

KEYWORDS: entrepreneuring, autoethnography, enactive research, identity work, liminality

TIIVISTELMÄ

Yrittäjyys on monia asioita: ihmissuhteita, tarpeita, haaveita, vaurautta tai köyhyyttä, menestystä tai epäonnistumista, riskinottoa ja epävarmuutta, uteliaisuutta ja oppimista. Yrittäjyys on keskeinen sosioekonominen ilmiö, jota pidetään ratkaisuna talouden, yhteiskunnan ja jopa ympäristön ongelmiin. Yrittäjyys liitetään talouskasvuun, työllisyyteen ja ylipäätään ihmiskunnan kehittymiseen. Lopulta yrittäjyydessä on kyse myös yksilöstä ja hänen matkastaan – yrittäjyys on oman polun luomista.

Vaikka yrittäjyyteen liitetään toiminta ja tuloshakuisuus, reflektiivinen oppiminen on oleellista yrittäjyydessä, erityisesti yrittäjyystaipaleen alussa. *Mitä minulle tarkoittaa yrittäjäksi ryhtyminen? Miksi haluan yrittäjäksi? Kenenä haluan ryhtyä yrittäjäksi? Mitkä tekijät rajoittavat yrittäjyyttäni, ja mikä omassa toiminnassani estää yrittäjyydestä oppimista?* Muun muassa nämä kysymykset ohjaavat yrittäjäksi ryhtyvän identiteettityötä.

Tässä autoetnografisessa tutkimuksessa havainnoin oman yrittäjyyteni kehittymistä. Yrittäjyystaipaleeseeni kuului yrittäjyyden oppimista ja kokemista järjestäessäni kielileirejä. Yhdistäen omia kokemuksiani yrittäjyystaipaleellani ja minäkäsitykseen keskittyvää tutkimuskirjallisuutta yrittäjyydessä tarkastelen tässä tutkimuksessa, kuinka yksilön identiteettityö muovautuu yrittäjyyden aikana.

Vastaan tutkimuskysymykseen esittämällä autoetnografisia tarinoita, jotka pohjautuvat yrittäjyystaipaleeni kokemuksiin. Tarinoissa kuvastuvat epäröinnin, hämmennyksen, epävarmuuden ja itsensä yrittäjänä kyseenalaistamisen haavoittuvat kokemukset. Näissä kertomuksissa yhdistyvät lyhyiden kohtaamisten synnyttämät tunnekokemukset ja identiteettityö, jotka yhdessä paljastavat yrittävän yksikön reflektoinnin ja epäröinnin.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että yrittäjyystaipaleella identiteettityöhön voi liittyä ristiriitoja oman tämänhetkisen minäkuvan kokemisen ja tulevan henkilökohtaisen yrittäjäkuvan välillä. Näitä ristiriitoja vahvistavat osittain samaistuttavien yrittäjäpersoonien vähyys ja sosiaalisesti tuotettu käsitys "aidosta yrittäjästä". Vaikka "aito yrittäjä" esitetään sukupuolineutraalina, se käytännössä näyttäytyy maskuliinisena sankariyrittäjänä. Tutkimus osoittaa, että yrittäjiin liittyvien piirteiden ja sosiaalisten tekijöiden kriittinen tarkastelu on keskeistä yksilön identiteettityölle oman yrittäjyyden alkuvaiheissa.

Lisäksi tämä tutkimus kuvaa maahanmuuttajaksi identifioitumista yrittäjyystaipaleella ja siten tuo esiin liminaalitilan osoituksena yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeesta.

Maahanmuuttajan välitilan kokemukset lisäävät epävarmuuden tunnetta. Samanaikaisesti yhteenkuulumisen tarve kannustaa yksilöä yrittäjyyteen, koska se on keino itsensä toteuttamiseen ja yhteiskuntaan kuulumiseen, jotka molemmat maahanmuutto on haastanut.

Autoetnografiseen ja enaktiiviseen tutkimukseen nojaava metodologia on tärkeä kontribuutio yrittäjyyden tutkimukseen. Tutkimus pohjautuu vahvasti itsehavainnointiini yrittäjyyden prosesseissa vastaten siten feministisen metodologian suosituksiin siitä, että yrittäjyyden tutkimuksen tulee keskittyä haavoittuvan minän tarkasteluun, jotta yrittäjyys voidaan paremmin ymmärtää luovana, kaikkiin elämän osa-alueisiin linkittyvänä organisoimisena.

ASIASANAT: yrittäjyys, autoetnografia, enaktiivinen tutkimus, identiteettityö, liminaliteetti

Acknowledgements

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1   Preface

Entrepreneurship is about many things: people; our relationships, needs, and desires; becoming rich or poor; our successes and failures; risk-taking and uncertainty; curiosity and learning. As a social and economic phenomenon, entrepreneurship takes centre stage in today's world. It is considered a remedy for economic, social, and even environmental diseases and is often considered a birthplace for creativity, innovation, and leadership.

Entrepreneurship is about oneself and one's journey, the path one takes, the discourses one absorbs, and the story one tells. Simultaneously, no matter how personal the story might be, the entrepreneurial journey makes no sense if it is not done with and for others. Therefore, entrepreneurship is also about identifying oneself among others, listening to others, and looking to be reflected in the eyes of others.

This dissertation focuses on the identity work experienced during an entrepreneurial journey and shortly after. I experimented with an unconventional method of self-observation to write a personal story about entrepreneuring. The approach I call "enactive autoethnography" brought me amid discourses about what entrepreneuring and identity are and how we can research the self in becoming an entrepreneur.

This dissertation begins by describing the process of formulating the research question. It shows I sought to consider multiple questions reflecting my research curiosity, the chosen methodological approach, and the theoretical encounters of the research journey. Then, I discuss the different features of autoethnography and enactive methodology that influenced my understanding of entrepreneurship as a process and the identity work experienced during the entrepreneurial journey.

Chapter 4 overviews the core concepts I rely on in this study, such as identity, identity work, and liminality. I specifically focus on how these concepts have been applied in entrepreneurship and organizational studies. Chapter 5 returns to the "*How?*" question, explains what I did during the research journey, and looks at the entrepreneurial journey as a part of the research journey.

Chapter 6 shares (auto)ethnographic stories from my entrepreneurial journey. Through those micro-stories, I sought to reveal how I perceived different events

when they occurred. The stories are presented chronologically; however, rather than being a sequence of events in the narrative, they expose different moments experienced during the entrepreneurial journey, which reflect identity work.

Chapter 7 revisits the stories and interprets them as affective experiences that reveal the self as multiplicitous. This chapter unfolds as an after-journey reflection on the experiences in which I suggest a more theoretically informed understanding of identity work. I interpret the experience through the lens of gender studies and the concept of belonging. Thus, I show how building gender awareness and recognizing myself as a migrant changed how I saw myself in the entrepreneurship process.This chapter revisits existing literature and connects the identity work revealed during the entrepreneurial journey with the concepts of liminality and gender; it considers conceptualizing entrepreneurship as a set of practices of belonging. Last, I reflect on the experience of crafting and experiencing an enactive autoethnography and reveal how being involved in entrepreneurship while researching brought me to the concept of gender and how I discovered the possibility of vulnerable feminist writing in entrepreneurship studies.

2 Questions and the Research Question

The immersion into the research work on this dissertation started with a question: *"What if I become an entrepreneur while observing myself?"* The underlying ambition was to experience, comprehend, and then generously share the acquired knowledge about becoming an entrepreneur with others so that those who consider it a potential career path (e.g. students majoring in entrepreneurship) could get "a how-to manual". As simple as that. The entrepreneurial journey I discuss in this dissertation started with beginning my doctoral studies and ended with implementing a summer language camp for adults. The journey included, among other things, experiences of participating in entrepreneurship and business courses, building a team, developing an idea for a project, abandoning it, and developing and implementing another idea for entrepreneurship. This journey has been happening along with major life changes (e.g. moving from one country to another). Therefore, this dissertation aims to show the entrepreneurial journey in the context of everyday life.

As the journey was not merely a journey of entrepreneuring but one of researching entrepreneurship, it had its own dynamics, rules, and questions. The research process poses those basic triggering questions that frame it (e.g. *"What are you researching?"* and "*Is that a proper way to research it?"*). Choosing to observe myself placed some restrictions on what I could study. The study had to be about something I considered feasible and about someone I thought I could become. Therefore, during this self-study, I have asked myself the same questions and been unsatisfied with the answers: *Am I really entrepreneuring? Is what I am doing how society understands entrepreneuring? Is what I am doing how the research literature describes entrepreneuring? Am I actually researching entrepreneurship if I am not an entrepreneur? Will the research make sense if I do not become who I planned to become?* In other words, I have been researching entrepreneurship by observing a person I doubted was behaving as an entrepreneur-in-progress.

The entanglement of the perspectives of a researcher and a researched person has required me to bring together different and sometimes contradictory standpoints within myself. I have sought to embrace the concept of entrepreneurship through

processing information from different experiences. By the beginning of the research journey, I had accumulated mundane and deeply rooted "common knowledge" about what entrepreneurship is and who entrepreneurs are. Then, during my entrepreneurial journey, I gained experience I was supposed to relate to entrepreneurship as a research phenomenon. I also learned about entrepreneurship from the literature for research and teaching. So, one of the main challenges (i.e. tasks) during this research journey was to define and remember to revise the common ground among three standpoints: *What I understand as entrepreneurship and how it is done*; *what I am actually doing and how I experience entrepreneuring*; and *what is understood under entrepreneurship as a process in the research literature*. Therefore, I sought to expose and discuss the entrepreneurial and research journeys in the dissertation and how they have been entangled.

Initially, before deciding to research myself, I had planned to shadow (Czarniawska 2007) entrepreneurially minded people (intrapreneurs) at the university and reveal specific patterns of entrepreneurial behaviour within academia. *Why some employees keep initiating different projects and what exactly they do to make their ideas become reality* interested me. Deciding to trace myself becoming an entrepreneur changed the theoretical focus of the research from behaviour to identity work because, as I saw it, behaviour is better seen from the outside than inside. Simultaneously, the main value of autoethnographic research is an opportunity to get inside one's mind and have continuous access not only to what one says and does but thinks. When I started my self-observation and saw myself as a wannabe entrepreneur, the biggest surprise was seeing how much time and energy I spent doubting instead of acting. So, the triggering question of my research was, "*Why all this resistance, hesitance, and doubt if I know the only way to do it is to 'just do it'?*" The immediate answer was that it is because this is who I am—this is my identity. So, the question that followed and confirmed the choice of the main theoretical concept was, *"What, then, is my identity?"*

Like any (doctoral) researcher, I came across many intriguing and inspiring concepts that have enriched entrepreneurship studies and related fields such as organizational studies, management, psychology, and sociology. The challenge was making theoretical choices because I realized that too many concepts and theories that interested me felt genuinely relevant to my research and reflected my entrepreneurial experience. Some of those concepts resonated with me more intensely, provoking questions at the intersection of learning about myself and entrepreneurship. For example, *How does uncertainty feel? How does being a migrant frame the practices of entrepreneuring? Why does the concept of gender matter for entrepreneurship studies if I do not see any sex-based discrimination in society*? At some stages of the research journey, I even considered abandoning "identity" as a central concept in favour of gender, uncertainty, liminality, or

belonging. Luckily, I did not drastically change the topic midway; I felt the need to integrate those concepts and questions into the dissertation as they influenced how I understood identity and identity work.

In sum, different considerations, motivations, and experiences have pushed me towards the research question. I was eager to trace and understand how ideas transform into actions. I considered becoming an entrepreneur and decided to observe myself. In the process, I noticed my hesitance to act and wished to discuss it in the dissertation. I also sought to ground the study of my experience into the literature that discussed entrepreneuring as a process. All these aspirations and questions brought me to the main research question:

How does identity work unfold in the practices of entrepreneuring?

3 Entrepreneuring, Enactive Research, and Autoethnography

This chapter emphasizes the entanglement of the chosen methodological approach and understanding of entrepreneurship. First, I focus on the concept of entrepreneuring, which guided my way from the beginning of the journey and made it possible to understand the experience within the framework of entrepreneurship studies and justify the methodological approach. Then, I describe enactive research as a hands-on approach applied in entrepreneurship studies. After this, I turn towards autoethnography as a critical approach used in the social sciences.

3.1   Enactive research for studying entrepreneuring

For some time now, entrepreneurship studies have strived to focus on what entrepreneurs do instead of resolving the mystery of being one. William Gartner (1989) emphasized that "[t]he entrepreneur is not a fixed state of existence; rather, entrepreneurship is a role that individuals undertake to create organizations" (p. 64). For Gartner and many other researchers, who see the roots of entrepreneurship studies in organizational theories, the core of entrepreneurship is a new venture creation (Gartner 1985; Dimov 2020) or the creation/emergence of an organization (Katz & Gartner 1988; Gartner 1989; Hjorth, Holt & Steyaert 2015). As Hjorth, Holt, and Steyaert (2015) state, "(E)ntrepreneuring ends when desire is coded into interest, when an organization is in place the purpose of which is to capture value as much as possible, for this is when management will do a better job" (p. 604). From this perspective, a venture or functioning organization is considered an aim of entrepreneurial activity.

An understanding of "what an organization is" has been rapidly evolving. Karl Weick (1979) suggested viewing an organization not as a fixed entity but as an activity and defining it through the verb "to organize" as organizing. Organizing, then, is understood as a process of sensemaking (noting and bracketing) and implies enacting the environment. According to this dynamic understanding of an organization, organizing implies acting and interacting with the environment in its own understanding (Langenberg & Wesseling 2016).

A similar ontological revision has been appearing in entrepreneurship studies. Gartner, Bird, and Starr (1992) suggested considering entrepreneurship as a type of organizing. Chris Steyaert suggested conceptualizing "entrepreneuring" as a key concept of process theories of entrepreneurship: "(T)he ultimate idea is to uproot entrepreneurship studies and to envision it as a field of creative efforts that unfold along a rhizomatic logic" (2007, p. 456). In his theorization of entrepreneuring, Steyaert (2007) focuses on understanding entrepreneuring as a creative process rather than a rational recognition of opportunities.

Also, for Hjorth, Holt, and Steyaert (2015), entrepreneuring is "a particular form of creative activity […] often narratively performed, [an] imaginative exercise that intensifies the desire for, and investment in, a particular sense of potential by which the virtual can become actual" (p. 604). In this definition, authors focus on the creative part of entrepreneurship as a process and a more pragmatic understanding of entrepreneurship, implying that entrepreneuring means enacting ideas into deeds and artefacts. McMullen and Dimov see entrepreneurship as a journey that "explicitly transpires over time" and explain that this approach is "essential to understanding the transformative process by which desires become goals, actions, and systematic outcomes" (2013, p. 1482). Simultaneously, it is important to add that within process theories, entrepreneurship implies "making things happen". As Johannisson states, "[E]ntrepreneuring is thus about getting things done and not just imagined or stated – it is about enactment" (2018, p. 41). He states that pragmatism supports the image of entrepreneuring as believing in an idea and using that belief to guide concrete and affirmative action (Johannisson 2011).

Johannisson enriches the term "entrepreneuring" by introducing an existential perspective and unfolding the phenomenon as a fundamental human activity:

> Existentialism brings entrepreneuring beyond trivial instrumental, let alone pecuniary motivation[,] and relates it instead to man's generic need to constantly create and recreate his own identity by using his freedom to take responsible action (Johannisson 2011, p. 145).

He suggests that from the existentialist perspective, when people get involved in entrepreneuring, they act based on the intrinsic motivation of positioning themselves as creators and human beings and bear the responsibility to participate in society. He also suggests that phenomenology, rooted in existentialism, invites one to see an experience from an individual perspective, and helps to understand the "entrepreneurial vision as a tentative personal theory about reality and how that image may be enacted" (Johannisson 2011, p. 146).

Johannisson has suggested applying enactive research to study entrepreneurship (2011; 2018). The approach has roots in action research (Lewin 1946), implying that

a person gets involved in practices they research. Johannisson explains that to embrace the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, the one who initiates the process of change in a context and takes charge of the venture's "enactability" must conduct enactive research (2011).

According to Johannisson, the need for enactive research in entrepreneurship studies relates to a specific kind of knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible to researchers. He relies on the concept of phronesis discussed in Flyvbjerg (2001), who wrote:

> "In Aristotle's words, phronesis is a 'true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man'. Phronesis goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical knowledge or know-how (techne) and involves judgments and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor… (P)hronesis is commonly involved in social practice, and […] therefore attempts to reduce social science and theory either to episteme or techne, or to comprehend them in those terms, are misguided" (p. 2).

Flyvbjerg explains that an intellectual virtue phronesis relates to ethics, is pragmatic and context-dependent, includes the issues of power, and is based on practical value-rationality:

> "The person possessing practical wisdom (phronimos) has knowledge of how to behave in each particular circumstance that can never be equated to knowledge of general truths. Phronesis is a sense of the ethical practical rather than a kind of science" (p. 57).

Johannisson sees that phronesis adds to understanding reality as socially constructed and the world as situated; thus, phronesis adds to knowledge (about that world) as being local in time and space (2011, p. 138) and value-laden. Besides the primary implication that, in enactive research, a researcher initiates and takes charge of "making things happen", Johannisson also suggested other features that enable capturing the phronesis. He underlines that enactive research implies understanding that reality is structured and institutionalized yet represents a potential arena for human agency. The approach relies on a constructionist view and sees that a venture emerges interactively from intentional actions and unexpected external events. Enactive research implies the involvement of senses, feelings, intuition, spontaneity, and the capacity for thinking and action.

In a methodological book on enactive research, Johannisson (2018) exposed and analysed his experience of entrepreneuring through enactive research. As he

identifies more as an academic than an entrepreneur, he reveals the practices of entrepreneuring within an academic context (see also Johannisson, 2023). He says entrepreneuring concerns the creative organization of research, education, and/or outreach activities (2018:106). He describes and analyses his experience of entrepreneuring through two projects (SORIS and Anamorphosis). The SORIS project aimed to develop social entrepreneurship in the community, in which he initiated, orchestrated, and mentored creative collaboration between a work-integrating social enterprise, university students of the Enterprise and Business Development programme, and local social enterprises. The Anamorphosis project aimed to show the role of culture and science in regional development and stimulate cultural programmes at the university. Johannisson united artists, academics, and students to work on the project, leading to the opening of an art exhibition and seminars focused on bridging art and science. When analysing his project, Johannisson emphasizes it was an intellectual adventure and existential challenge, signalling a need to demonstrate independence against established academic institutions (2018).

Johannisson's contribution to entrepreneurship studies also raised the question of whether only entrepreneurs get involved in entrepreneuring. For example, Kim Poldner (2020), who conducted autoethnographic research based on her experience as an entrepreneur, paid attention to the practices and processes Johannisson studied in his research. While celebrating his pioneering approach to entrepreneurship, she mentions that Johannisson "has never started a real enterprise, but always operated within the safety net of his position as a professor" (Poldner 2020, p. 108). Simultaneously, Johannisson frames entrepreneuring within the existential theory and claims this approach "plays down entrepreneuring by associating it with everyday life and not with heroic achievements, only to re-establish it as a fundamental human activity, central in man's ongoing quest for identity and meaning of life" (2011, p. 147). His approach invites us to reconsider our perspective on entrepreneurship research. Much research has aimed to understand and reveal the personal characteristics, behaviour, and practices of a specific, although hardly homogeneous, group of people known as entrepreneurs. An alternative approach could be to assume entrepreneuring is inherent to human beings as, for example, teaching, organizing others, or networking, which manifests under particular circumstances and can be learned.

3.2   Autoethnography

Before coming across enactive research, I started familiarizing myself with autoethnography as a research approach, which implies self-observation. As both methodologies were new to me, I was convinced for some time that enactive research

implies using autoethnography in entrepreneurship studies. This is partly true because both methodologies suggest that a researcher investigates their own experience. Johannisson (2018) also mentions that both types of research have an affinity with a narrative approach, while major differences exist between these approaches as they have different origins and epistemological roots.

Unfolding autoethnography as a methodological approach meant familiarizing myself with the rich literature on the methodology (e.g. Ellis et al. 2011; Jones et al. 2013; Denzin 2014; Luvaas 2019) and with studies conducted autoethnographically. Reading those pieces of autoethnography was a completely new and surprising research experience. It felt like reading fictional literature or even poetry. I had not known that this style of writing was possible in academic research. Autoethnographic studies were inviting me to live the situations with the authors. I could feel the fear of being caught when reading the paper by autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis and Holocaust survivor Jerry Rawicky (2013). I could not hold back my tears while reading Saija Katila's "The mothers in me" (2019) because it was so touching, and I could easily relate to the topic. Also, Essi Ikonen's dissertation "Life, Death and Love" (2020), dedicated to the phenomenon of authenticity, initially impressed me with the storyline's evocative nature.

Autoethnography is a methodological approach with roots in ethnography and autobiography (Ellis et al. 2011). It was applied in anthropology and gradually spread to other fields of human and social sciences. The word "autoethnography" reflects these two components and can be understood as writing about a certain group of people ("ethnography") through self ("auto"). Thus, not every personal experience presented as "my story" is autoethnography because it is assumed to reflect the cultural experience of the group and be theoretically informed. As Ellis et al. (2011) stated, "[A]utoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies". For example, in "The mothers in me", Katila (2019) relies on exposing affective experiences and reveals a multiplicity of social discourses on the topic of motherhood and brings up an issue that writing academic papers ("academia in us") shuts "affective channels" down. In some sense, this embodied experience of reading an autoethnography helps co-create the meaning with an author: *What does the author's experience mean for me*? *What does it mean for us as a society?*

The issue of objectivity/subjectivity in ethnographic research and the presence of an author who assumes the pronoun "I" in an ethnographic text has long been the centre of attention of ethnographers (see Van Maanen 2011). In autoethnographic research, one's subjective story, told from the first person, is not only an acceptable form of narration but the main aim and strength of this research approach. So, while writing about the "self" as a representative of a group, autoethnographers aim to

research particular sociocultural phenomena in context. Autoethnographers often deal with emotionally evocative topics such as society's unacceptance of homosexuality (Eichler 2012), domestic violence, rape (Abraham 2018), or personal experience of genocide (Ellis & Rawicki 2013). Therefore, a reader is invited to not only understand a problem but feel it and empathize with those who are different (Ellis 2011).

An important feature of autoethnography is that it sees activism as one purpose of autoethnography. Autoethnography is meant to be "value-centred rather than pretending to be value-free" (Ellis 2011). As Ellis and Bochner (2006) explain, "[A]utoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act" (p. 433).

Although autoethnographers emphasize that exposing subjectivity is an inherited, enriching feature of autoethnographic research, their papers are often criticized for it. Chang (2008) notes that reviewers question academic rigour and methodological validity and claim to detect subjectivity (p. 54). Campbell (2017) explains that "traditionalists view the inclusion of a subjective, personal view as a contaminant, spoiling an otherwise pure piece of research" (p. 40) and explains that bringing in personal experience cannot be a contaminant. Besides, autoethnographers understand the rigour and validity of research differently from, for example, realist ethnographers. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that for an autoethnographer, "questions of reliability refer to the narrator's credibility", "validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude", and "the focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience" (p. 10).

Enactive research and autoethnography rely on personal lived experiences. These research practices are grounded in phenomenology that seeks to understand situated activities in everyday experience. One's documented experience is not meant to prove theoretical conclusions and practical implementation. As Mariana Ortega states, "[T]he appeal to experience […] needs to be understood as a complex process encompassing disclosure, memory, interpretation, and reinterpretation of experiences rather than as simply the exposition of indubitable evidence" (2016, p. 8). In this sense, the lived experience becomes a starting point for a discussion.

Applying autoethnography in entrepreneurship studies is rare. Kim Poldner (2020) is one of the few researchers who conducted autoethnographic research in entrepreneurship. She analysed her experience of becoming a serial entrepreneur and an activist in sustainable fashion. Poldner introduces the affirmative perspective of entrepreneurship (compared to functionalist, interpretive, and critical perspectives), by which she understands "creative world-making, an ongoing movement of inventing and relating between humanity and materiality" (2020, p. 104).

3.3   I am becoming

Brent Luvaas (2019)[1] suggested a definition of autoethnography that reflects my initial research intentions (to become an entrepreneur and then write "a manual on how to become one"). In the paper dedicated to the aftereffects of doing an autoethnography, he describes it as "a research methodology that employs conscious becoming as a strategy for producing academic knowledge" (p. 245). As an ethnographer, he became a street blogger to research the community of street bloggers. This strategy of intentionally becoming one of the members of the research communities is rooted in practices of doing ethnography (see, e.g. Van Maanen [2011]). However, it is not often the case in autoethnographic research that a researcher creates the experience to be researched. Doing an autoethnography does not imply this kind of intentionality. Autoethnographers probably live their lives, write in their diaries and journals, do their (not necessarily autoethnographic) research, and then recognize their experiences as something to be researched. Saija Katila (2019) retrospectively analyses her experience of becoming a mother. She did not become a mother to research it. Kim Poldner became an entrepreneur before starting her research on entrepreneurship (2013); in her autoethnography (2020), she looks back at her 20 years of entrepreneurship experience in the sustainable fashion industry. Memories often become the "main data" in an autoethnography, as in Essi Ikonen's (2020) monograph. Alternatively, Ellis and Rawicki's (2013) autoethnography is an interesting example when the authors look at the experience retrospectively, but they simultaneously create a new experience, which becomes the article's main topic – the experience of discussing the horrific events of the past together.

Enactive research (Johannisson 2011; 2018) with roots in action research implies that when researchers get involved in entrepreneuring (become entrepreneurs), they intend to research and understand what entrepreneuring is and how it feels. So, following this idea of becoming an entrepreneur – someone I had not been before starting the research journey – was part of my initial plan of researching entrepreneurship. I have consciously entered that experience with a researcher's pen. Simultaneously, the intention to become an entrepreneur has provoked doubts in me about the outcome of these aspirations: *What if I do not become an entrepreneur? What will my dissertation be about? About failing to become?* Brent Luvaas suggests that doing an autoethnography means "to consciously become without previous awareness of the outcome of such becoming" (2019, p. 248). So, I thought that even if I did not become what I expected, I still could research the process of becoming (or failing to become). So, "becoming" unfolded to me was not just about entering the entrepreneurship field as a researcher but as a process to be researched.

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[1]   The article was first published online in 2017.

Then, I inevitably encountered research papers that relied on the process philosophy and ontology of becoming and shed light on how to research entrepreneurship as a process (e.g. Steyaert 1997; 2007; Hjorth, Holt & Steyaert 2015; Poldner 2020). Based on the explanation of differences between an arrow and an arrow in flight suggested by philosopher Henri Bergson, Hjorth, Holt, and Steyaert (2015) claimed that "to understand the arrowness of an arrow we have *to think movement*, not to reduce movement to space" and that "the arrow-as-flight is not a thing in motion, it is simply transformation" (p. 602). Besides, although researching entrepreneurship as a process can focus on the multiplicity of practices and processes, it reveals entrepreneurial self-formation (Poldner, Branzei & Steyaert 2019). Also, in the autoethnography on becoming an entrepreneur, Kim Poldner discusses entrepreneuring as a process of change and world-making and illustrates the idea with an image of herself holding a poster fashioned as a dress that says, "I am the movement" (2020, p. 119). In turn, my idea was to enter the experience, observe myself, and research identity work through becoming (an entrepreneur). So, somewhere there, at the intersection of those ideas, I started realizing that becoming (an entrepreneur) is not only a means to enter the field of study or a process to be observed from a distance. *Becoming is me. I am the arrow in flight. I am "the movement to think". I am "the becoming".*

In sum, I had different understandings of what "becoming" meant in this study at different moments of the research journey. First, I saw becoming part of the autoethnographic method (*I am a researcher who will become an entrepreneur, and then I will learn who the entrepreneur is*). Second, I considered becoming as a process to be researched (*I am working on becoming an entrepreneur and researching what happens during that process, including how I am changing*). Third, I started to see "becoming as an ontological assumption" (*I see myself as a process and a bundle of processes that intertwine with the processes outside myself, and we are constantly becoming; that is what the world is*).

4 Identity Work for Entrepreneurship Studies

This chapter discusses "identity" and "identity work" as concepts that have been extensively used to investigate the phenomenon of entrepreneurship and the idea of an entrepreneur. I focus on existing research that reveals how identity is formed and performed in front of others, what happens at the intersection of entrepreneurial identity and other identities, and the debate on whether identity is stable and fluid to outline this dissertation's theoretical framework. Besides, I touch upon what the concepts of sensemaking and liminality add to understanding identity work in entrepreneurship studies.

4.1 Entrepreneurial and other identities

In entrepreneurship studies, the concept of entrepreneurial identity has become central to understanding how entrepreneurs see themselves or construct their identities (Hytti 2003). How entrepreneurs answer "Who am I?" is "important for achieving legitimacy, belonging and standing out from others" (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2021), while "Who is an entrepreneur?" has been discussed as a wrong research question (Gartner 1989; Ramoglou et al. 2020). William Gartner suggested refocusing entrepreneurship studies from the traditional focus on the personalities of entrepreneurs and their traits (who they are) towards their behaviour (what they do). He has criticized the trait approach as it presented an entrepreneur as "a fixed state of existence" (p. 48) and suggested to consider an part of "a complex process of venture creation" (p. 57). At the same time, the concept of identity is about both who the person is and what they do. Instead of revealing the inherited and acquired traits of entrepreneurs (Baum & Locke 2004) or even discovering the genes responsible for success in entrepreneurial performance (Shane & Nicolaou 2013), the concept of identity suggests investigating how entrepreneurs see themselves in the process, how they define themselves in relation to other entrepreneurs and as a community in relation to other professional and social groups, and how their identity is revealed in their actions.

In the social sciences, identity as a concept is particularly important for understanding the connection between an individual and their social context. Through self-reflection and defining common meanings with others, one finds their place within a community. Within the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986), researchers differentiate "personal" and "social" identity to highlight different levels of constructing self-concept. Personal identity comprises "the attitudes, memories, behaviours, and emotions that define them [people] as idiosyncratic individuals, distinct from other individuals" (Hornsey 2008, p. 206). This identity is inter/subjective, meaning I can only define "who I am" in relation to "who you are" (Vershinina et al. 2022).

Social identity consists of "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he/she belongs, as well as the emotional and evaluative consequences of this group membership" (Hornsey 2008, p. 206). Social identity becomes more visible at the level of intergroup interaction. In other words, a personal identity lens allows people to see themselves as different from others, whereas through a social identity lens, people see their similarities with others within a group and their differences with people from other groups. Identities can also vary within one social or professional group. For example, within the professional group "entrepreneurs", researchers differentiate "founders", "inventors", "developers", "managers", and "investors" (Wagenschwanz 2021).

The concept of identity, especially personal identity, is related to and sometimes mixed with the concept of authenticity (Taylor 1992; Ikonen 2020). The latter is built on finding one's "true or core self" (Ikonen 2020), yet authenticity cannot be understood by isolating the self from its sociocultural context. As Essi Ikonen states, "…our authenticity becomes fabric-ated within the fabric of the world and the fabric of others" (p. 70). The identity and authenticity concepts imply the "Who am I?" and are to be understood as evolving within the context, while the concept of authenticity helps to understand one's uniqueness. In turn, identity is not only about posing the "How am I different from others?" question but "Where do I belong?"

Charles Taylor (1992) claims that people construct their identity against the things that matter to them:

> I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter…
> Only if I exist in the world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the
> needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God,
> or something else of this order matter crucially, can I define an identity for
> myself that is not trivial (p. 40).

A critical discussion on the essence of identity relates to whether identity remains stable throughout one's life. The discussion has roots in ontology (being vs.

becoming) (Alvesson et al. 2008). Within the role identity theory, identity is understood as the "position that one holds and enacts in the social structure" (Ives et al. 2019, p. 3). Alternatively, identity is understood as "a temporary, context-sensitive and evolving set of constructions" (Alvesson et al. 2008, p. 6). Eakin (2015), who thinks that either/or polarities are inadequate for investigating the complexity of identity experience, claims "identity can change over time and yet in some way remain recognizably the same" (2015, p. 16).

The discussion about the stability and fluidity of identity also concerns an understanding of an entrepreneurial identity. However, in entrepreneurship studies, the focus of the discussion slightly differs. Based on the literature review, Miruna Radu-Lefebvre, with co-authors (2021), showed that the entrepreneurial identity is considered property or a process in research papers. They found that papers conceptualizing entrepreneurial identity as property rely on "assumptions of status, over-positivity, and universalism". The entrepreneurial identity, then, is revealed as "a set of relatively stable and distinctive attributes" (p. 1560). When the entrepreneurial identity is conceptualized as a process, it unfolds as a "dynamic and fluid process of emergence" (p. 1570). Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021) show that this dichotomy restricts the understanding of entrepreneurial identity and suggests an integrative model for researching the topic. The model reveals existing gaps in research on entrepreneurial identity, including the "temporal, socio-cognitive and spatial context of entrepreneurial identity" and the processes of "losing and reconstructing of entrepreneurial identity" (Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2021, p. 1562).

One of the gaps Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021) pay attention to (that derives from the property vs. process dichotomy) is (re)constructing an entrepreneurial identity at the intersection with other identities. Investigating entrepreneurial identity in overlapping, intersecting, and negotiating with other identities can add to understanding identity as property and a process. Besides, it can show an entrepreneur's complex involvement in different aspects of life and reveal the fluidity of an entrepreneurial identity in the social context.

In the practices of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identities can intersect with other professional roles (e.g. employed restaurant chef, scientist, or student) and with other social identities one has – what Mmbaga et al. (2020) call a "within-entrepreneur social identity" (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion). In each case, the alternative identities can impact the behaviour of an entrepreneur and the practices of entrepreneuring.

Nielsen and Gartner (2016) researched identity negotiations of students who defined themselves as entrepreneurs and focused on how students made sense of their entrepreneurial identity. The study revealed that students mostly felt tension in combining the roles, talking about "fragmented selves", "identity confusion", "identity risk", and "identity concealment". Nielsen and Gartner identified four ways

students made sense of combining different identities. Some students managed to differentiate their identities and (temporarily) prioritize, for example, being a student over pursuing an entrepreneurial identity. Others silenced their students' identity to focus on the one they felt was theirs, i.e. entrepreneurship. In the third narrative, they exposed that developing an entrepreneurial identity expanded their student's identity. The fourth narrative unfolds how students just followed a supervisor's entrepreneurial ideas, meaning "being a student" paved the way to becoming an entrepreneur.

Some research has been dedicated to investigating the social identity of entrepreneurs. For example, the intersection of ethnicity with entrepreneurial identity has been discussed within migrant entrepreneurship literature (see, e.g. Barrett & Vershinina 2017; Ozasir Kacar & Essers 2019; Ozasir Kacar 2023). In turn, Gherardi (2015) shows the identity work of female entrepreneurs at the intersection of work and family duties and challenges the discourse of the work–family balance by suggesting female entrepreneuring as a life form. Alternatively, Hytti et al. (2023) focus on how fatherhood affects men's lives as entrepreneurs and reveal how men accommodate the normative ideals of entrepreneurship and fatherhood. Also, Karhunen, Olimpieva, and Hytti (2017) studied science-based entrepreneurs and focused on their presumably competing identities (a scientist and an entrepreneur). Their research revealed that the boundary between those identities tends to blur. Moreover, some participants viewed research and entrepreneurship as parts of the same process: "The ultimate goal is to provide technological solutions to market or societal needs" (p. 560).

In all studies described above, the authors juxtapose two identities: being an entrepreneur and "a student", "a scientist", "a migrant", "a woman", "a father", etc. So, the studies rely on defining an entrepreneur's role and another professional role or social identity, in other words, on understanding identity as property. Conversely, they reveal processes of (re)constructing and (re)negotiating identities, implying identity is fluid. Therefore, entrepreneurial identity is understood as a process occurring at the intersection with other identities.

Overall, combining an entrepreneur's role with other professional and social roles that do not comply with an entrepreneurial identity can cause identity conflict (Nielsen & Gartner 2016; Demetry 2017). Simultaneously, through identity negotiating and reflecting on possible negative feelings, people manage to combine those roles successfully. Moreover, combining identities can lead to blending identities and constructing "hybrid identities" (e.g. "academic entrepreneurs") (Bousfiha 2020; Kozlinska, Hytti & Stenholm 2023) or "mumpreneurs" (mothers and entrepreneurs) (Luomala 2018).

4.2 Identity work, sensemaking and liminality

A concept that emphasizes understanding identity as a process is identity work. Identity work represents an internal and external activity in which one invests in confirming, maintaining, altering, or evolving one's identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu 2010; Lewis 2015). Identity work combines inward self-reflection and outward engagement with various discursively available social identities and discourses (Gherardi 2015). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) see identity work as a fruitful approach for "emphasizing dynamic aspects and ongoing struggles around creating a sense of self and providing temporary answers to the questions "Who am I?" (or "Who are we?") and "What do I (we) stand for?" (p. 1164). According to them, "[C]onscious identity work is thus grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological–existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them" (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1165).

Sensemaking (Weick 1995) is a concept that intersects with the concept of identity work. Some research papers even use these concepts interchangeably (Vough, Caza & Maitlis 2020). According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005), "Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing and it is grounded in identity constructions". Carl Weick (1995) suggested that the trigger for sensemaking is a failure to confirm oneself. People learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences. While acting, people try to shape and react to their environment. Weick explains that the meaning of the situation depends on the identity the person enacts to deal with this situation: "How can I know who I am until I see what they do?" (Ibid p. 23). Thus, identity is revealed in action and is a choice one makes. Besides, a spectrum of identities ("they") can be revealed through sensemaking. So, identity is understood as accumulated propriety chosen and exposed in a situation. Simultaneously, the identity continues evolving (becoming) in the processes of sensemaking and enacting. In this sense, it is the stable "what is said and done" revelation in a particular moment and an ongoing (and probably never-ending) process of becoming.

Based on a literature review, Vough, Caza, and Maitlis (2020) analysed how sensemaking and identity relate. They clarify that identity implies looking for an answer to the "Who am I?/Who are we?" questions, whereas sensemaking is the "process through which individuals make meaning of novel, unexpected, or equivocal experiences" (p. 246) that looks for the answer to the "What's the story here?" question. These authors discuss that in the research papers, identity can be used to explain sensemaking (e.g. in the works of Weick, who explains sensemaking as grounded in identity construction), or sensemaking can be utilized as a concept that helps explain identity. This dissertation focuses on identity work. Therefore, I

consider sensemaking a concept that might help explain identity work as a process of revealing identity while acting.

Another concept to consider related to identity work experienced in the process of becoming is liminality. Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021) identified a gap in entrepreneurship research dedicated to identity work during the transition periods when an aspiring entrepreneur becomes a nascent entrepreneur, and a nascent entrepreneur becomes an established entrepreneur. Liminality is understood as a position of ambiguity and uncertainty: being betwixt and between different states (Turner 1970; Beech 2011). Therefore, liminality can help to understand the process of becoming.

Also, studies dedicated to liminality often involve discussion on identity. The concept was adapted to the social sciences from the research conducted by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep (1960), who focused on the rites of passage practised in small-scale societies when a person leaves one social group and moves to another. According to van Gennep, three stages characterize the passage from one state to another: separation (preliminal), liminal (transitional), and incorporation (postliminal). Later, Turner (1980) focused specifically on the liminal and theorized liminality as the state of being betwixt and between. He claimed that in rituals, the liminal phase "is quintessentially, a time and place lodged between all times and spaces defined and govern[ed] in any specific bicultural ecosystem by the rules of law, politics and religion and by economic necessity" (Turner 1980, p. 165). According to Andrews and Leopold (2013), several social movements imply a liminal state:

- the passage of changing status, e.g. marriage
- the passage of moving from one place to another, e.g. moving home
- the passage of moving from one situation to another, e.g. starting a new job, school, or joining a university
- the passage of time – typically the passage of a whole social group moving from one period to another, e.g. New Year, new government, or ruling authority

According to Beech (2011), who researches organizations, a person who experiences liminality (a liminar) is "interstructural". They are socially dead, outside the definition, and are "neither one thing nor another" (p. 286). The liminar has no rights, and their relationship with elders is one of complete obedience. A liminar reflects on their society and their cosmos. Thus, Beech (2011) defines liminality as a temporary transition through which identity is reconstructed, and/or it can be considered a more longitudinal experience of ambiguity and in-betweenness within a changeful context. Liminal practices occur at the intersection of structure and

agency and are particularly well-fitted to expanding our understanding of the mutual construction of self-identity and social identity (Beech 2011).

Beech (2011) claims that liminality "significantly disrupts one's internal sense of self or place within a social system" and can be defined as a reconstruction of identity in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community" (p. 287). Conversely, according to Turner (1979), liminality can be understood as a stage of reflection. Thus, the central identity questions for one to reflect upon at the liminal state are "Who am I?", "What is this community I seek to belong to?" and "Who am I in relation to this community?"

The concept of liminality is particularly relevant for understanding identity work during periods of being new to some experience, such as the transition to new (professional) roles. The concepts of liminality, liminal space, and liminal time have been applied in organizational studies (see Beech 2011), especially for studying the identity work employees experience when they change their jobs and for developing new concepts emphasizing the state of in-betweenness. For example, Garsten (1999) applied the notion of a liminal person to explore the behaviour of temporary employees in organizations. Budtz-Jørgensen et al. (2019) suggested the term "liminal career" to theorize the experience of employees when no clear categories, trajectories, and schemes exist for structuring career paths in organizations.

In entrepreneurship studies, liminality has been used in various ways, often for studying the transition from employee to entrepreneur. For example, Burcharth et al. (2022) use the term "liminal state" to theoretically frame the experience of participation in a support program for people who lost their jobs. The program, sponsored by an organization that had fired them, aimed to support former employees in starting their own businesses. In this context, the liminal state is associated with identity turbulence but is also understood as a relatively risk-free environment for rehearsing entrepreneurship and experimenting with different entrepreneurial identities. Also, Zundel et al. (2020) utilized the concept of liminality to reveal the entrepreneurial identity formation of a managing director of a newly formed firm who had been a sailor in the naval force. Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2020) use the term "liminal identity work" to discuss the experiences of older emergent entrepreneurs who find themselves between being ex-employees and potential entrepreneurs and reveal the tension between identity continuity and innovation.

In Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2018), authors investigate the transition from unemployment to the entrepreneurship of nascent necessity entrepreneurs and suggest the term "liminal entrepreneuring" for understanding the entrepreneurial practices and narratives of individuals in precarious conditions. So, liminality is conceptualized not only as a temporal condition that reveals the state of being between two identities but an integral part of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. Muhr et al. (2019) further connect the concepts of entrepreneurship and liminality.

These concepts follow the life story of an MBA graduate who started a business, suggesting that liminality can be seen not as a temporary phase but a permanent condition of entrepreneurial action.

5 Entrepreneurial and Research Journey: Experiencing, Documenting and Interpreting

This chapter describes how the research journey that led this dissertation as an outcome proceeded and emphasizes the entwinement of the research journey with the entrepreneurial journey and everyday life. Here, I understand the entrepreneurial journey as an experience that framed this study on identity work. Thus, I focus on "experiencing" the entrepreneurial journey, "capturing and documenting the experience", and "interpreting the experience". First, I define what I mean by "entrepreneurial journey".

5.1 Defining the entrepreneurial journey

Earlier, I explained that embracing the meaning of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon within this research project implied revealing presumptions about entrepreneurship embedded in me, learning about entrepreneurship through researching it, and experiencing entrepreneurship/entrepreneuring. I used the term "entrepreneurial journey" McMullen and Dimov suggested to emphasize this actual involvement in entrepreneurship and make sense of it. They view the entrepreneurship experience as a journey that "explicitly transpires over time" (2013, p. 1482) and claim this approach can help to see entrepreneurship as a "transformative process by which desires become goals, actions, and systematic outcomes". This dissertation does not understand the entrepreneurial process as "the series of actions that form a causal chain, with subsequent actions linked to earlier ones" (Dimov 2020). I aim not to reveal an efficient way of getting from A to B but to reveal one's experience of different situations along the way. However, I chose to frame my experience of entrepreneuring as an entrepreneurial journey because this term invites one to "re-live" and "re-trace" the entrepreneurial experience (Dimov 2020, p. 60) and tell a story about it.

A story about a journey requires a beginning and an end. However, pinpointing when an entrepreneurial journey starts and ends is difficult, if it is even possible. As Dimo Dimov (2020) states, an "entrepreneurial story takes place in the context of

life – there is life before it, concurrent with it, and after it and life is also a collection of actions" (p. 57). And when does the journey end? For example, Hanage et al. (2021) imply that a business exit can be considered an entrepreneurial journey's end. Alternatively, Dimov (2020) suggests "the end point [of the entrepreneurial process] can be seen as the organized or coordinated activities of multiple agents" (p. 61).

I cannot pinpoint when my journey started and whether it will continue. Yet, to make sense of my experience, I had to define the frames of the entrepreneurial journey. As Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) put it, "noticing and bracketing is an incipient state of sensemaking", and "once bracketing occurs, the world is simplified" (p. 412). Therefore, for this study, I considered doing an autoethnographic study in March 2018 as the beginning of the journey and the last day of the language camp in August 2020 as the end.

The outcome of the process defines how we retrospectively view the process. In a book chapter dedicated to the entrepreneurial process, Dimov (2020) introduces a case of the attempted expedition to the North Pole in a hot air balloon in 1897, which ended tragically. The expedition did not reach the North Pole, and all three participants died. So, there was an exciting journey but with an unsuccessful outcome. And it matters. Often, during the journey, especially during Covid-19, I asked myself, *How would not finding enough participants for the camp change my research? What if I write my dissertation about failing to organize the camp?* By then, I had had enough data to reflect upon. In my findings, I primarily focus on the very early stages of my journey as the most challenging and turbulent period with multiple encounters that evoked identity work. *Could I write about an unaccomplished journey? Could I write about not even trying to do it?*

Next, I focus on what I actually did as a researcher: creating, documenting, and interpreting the entrepreneurial experience.

5.2   Experiencing

Earlier, I mentioned that the initial idea of the research project was to become an entrepreneur, reflect on that experience, and trace the changes in myself. When the idea came to mind, it looked more or less straightforward: Define what you want to sell, find people, register a firm, and organize the process; you will prosper or fail. However, the experience felt messier. I have felt I do not do what I really need to and that what I do is irrelevant to the "real entrepreneurship" experience. I felt like "something" kept distracting me from "actual entrepreneuring" and "creating proper data", such as writing about developing a business plan. As I understand it now, everyday life constrained implementing "the plan". Not that I had not thought about it, but I could hardly understand in advance that the project of "becoming an

entrepreneur" could not be separated from other parts of my life and be related only to a research project.

I decided to experiment with my life shortly after moving to Finland for doctoral studies. Due to major changes during that period, I experienced strong overall turbulence in my professional life. Becoming an entrepreneur was one of many possible professional paths for me, especially under the pressure of horror stories about how difficult finding a job was after my doctoral studies. So, I participated in future career and success story events organized by the university and the student entrepreneurship community. Along with my ideas of becoming an entrepreneur and a researcher, I considered teaching Russian as a university professor. I tried different things. For example, I became a coordinator of the Russian language circle and a teacher's assistant for the Russian language course at the university.

Thus, not all my actions were oriented towards "becoming an entrepreneur". For example, during the first months after my arrival, I participated in the Finnish language circle organized by the university students. At those events, we could speak Finnish in an informal setting. This was not directly related to my entrepreneurship experience; however, it encouraged me to become a coordinator of the Russian language circle, which the following chapters discuss. In other words, I was new and curious about everything going on around me. Thus, I was getting involved in many activities, often without a clear understanding of why.

Among other things, I participated in different practical and theoretical courses and coaching sessions about, for, and through entrepreneurship (and business) organized by the university and the student entrepreneurship society. Practical courses were meant for those wanting to become entrepreneurs, enact an entrepreneurial identity, form an entrepreneurial mindset, and have some ideas about it. Even in those courses – clearly meant for enacting our entrepreneurial skills and identity – I was not always sure why I was there: to become an entrepreneur, learn how to teach entrepreneurship from my colleagues, or research entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. I even joined one entrepreneurship course held in Finnish for language learning but had to drop it. Besides, as a doctoral student, I had courses about entrepreneurship as a research subject and participated in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education conferences. In other words, I was trying to participate in any kind of activity labelled "entrepreneurship" or "yrittäjyys" (in Finnish).

Besides the experience, I could directly relate to entrepreneuring, I was living my everyday life. These were my first two years after moving to Finland with two children, 6 and 12. At that time, my husband was still working and living in Russia. I was learning how to open a bank account, get registered in a tax system, make doctor's appointments, or (find the courage) enrol my child on the hockey team in

Finland. All were part of the experience I intentionally and unintentionally created and upon which I reflected in my diaries.

5.3   Capturing and documenting the experience

Since deciding to do the research by observing myself, I have kept a diary. In an autoethnographic study, the one conducting research is the same person being researched. If writing fieldnotes and diaries is an integral part of researchers' and, particularly, ethnographers' work (see Van Maanen 2011; Davies 2008; Jarzabkowski, Bednarek & Lê et al. 2014), a person writing a diary who is also being observed is an uncommon method of collecting data, especially in entrepreneurship studies (van Burg & Karlsson 2020). Writing a diary in an enactive autoethnographic study implies combining two perspectives. On the one hand, there is a researcher, who writes their observations and personal reflections; on the other hand, there is a person who "just" writes about her experience. For me, writing a diary implied balancing between doing it properly (with the underlying intention of becoming a "proper researcher") and doing it more naturally, meaning sometimes I got tired, bored, and became hesitant to write. Moreover, I had three diaries at the very beginning. The first was about "issues related to research"; the second, the "issues related to entrepreneuring"; and the third, the teaching experience. However, they gradually merged into one diary, partly because of my uninformed fear of personality splitting and partly because of my supervisors' initial recommendation not to predetermine the research process by emphasizing three professional role identities (researcher, entrepreneur, and teacher). Writing about myself involved some deep "self-digging" and sometimes triggered sensitive issues unrelated to the research. So, I started a "by-product" diary in which I made reflections, which I was sure I would not include in the dissertation.

The manner of writing of a diary has been evolving. Initially, most of the notes were written in the past tense about something that had already happened; for instance, "*I visited this event, and it was so uplifting…*". Sometimes, I was making sense of what had happened and experienced strong emotions while writing; for example, "*It has been five days since I wrote those five emails to different places, and I still got no response from anyone. I feel upset and unwilling to do anything…*" At some point, most likely under the impression of reading autoethnographic articles and books, I started describing some events using the present tense: "*I enter the classroom and see many unfamiliar faces…*", "*The coach has more questions to ask…*", "*I feel my hands tremble and cannot understand where this anxiety comes from*". This kind of writing attempted to capture the feeling of being there so I could translate it for the reader. In those stories, I sought to avoid interpretations and focus on presenting the experience.

Many stories included in Chapter 5 (although not all) grew from those notes. Using the typology of ethnographic writings that Van Maanen (2011) suggested, when writing my diaries at the later stage of the stories for Chapter 5, I avoided "realist tales" and focused on "impressions" and "confessions". According to Van Maanen, "confessional writings concern how the fieldworker's life was lived upriver among the natives". So, in ethnographic research, confessional writing unfolds an ethnographer's personality. Conversely, the "form of an impressionist tale is dramatic recall" (p. 103), as Van Maanen states:

> "(i)mpressionist tales, because they can stand alone and need not masquerade as anything other than stories, allow fieldworkers who are characters in them to exaggerate to make a point to omit tedious documentation, to entertain, to be uncharacteristically kind (or unkind), to use crude figures of speech typically forbidden, to intensify the relived experience, and otherwise to say things that under different circumstances could not be said" (p. 108).

So, this is the moment to admit to myself (and confess to others) that in my stories, I perform myself, construct my identity (Beech & Broad 2020), and present myself so I can bear this person or, more precisely, bear the experience of exposing myself. I tried being sincere, but I also needed to protect myself and those who had been nearby. This can mean I (deliberately or just because I am blind towards myself) failed to present some features of myself I find annoying. As for others, I anonymized most of the characters in my stories except four. My teammates Marina and Saila read the stories and their interpretations and gave their permission to include them in the dissertation. G and E are my sons, whom I also showed the text and explained what I meant.

As mentioned, an important aim of autoethnographic writing is to connect a problem revealed in the story with a reader. In a critical review of Heewon Chang's (2008) book, *Autoethnography as a Method*, Ellis (2009) writes:

> I want autoethnography to stay unruly, dangerous, passionate, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative—in motion, showing struggle, passion, embodied life, and collaborative creation of sense-making. I need the researcher to be impassioned and embodied, vulnerable and intimate, and the stories to be evocative, dramatic, engaging, with concrete and layered details, and when the topic calls for it, even heart-breaking. I want the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, to try to figure out how to live from the story, and then to do something (p. 363).

Besides the diary, a critical documented piece of data I created with my teammates is a recorded discussion from June 2019. Chronologically and from the perspective of how the process evolved, it was more or less the midpoint of the entrepreneurial journey. By then, we had already participated together in the coaching sessions organized by a student entrepreneurship society (Pre-Accelerator); however, whether we would continue working together was still unclear. A recorded discussion is an alternative type of data compared to diary notes because it doesn't exclusively represent my impressions, reflections, or interpretations. In that conversation, we collectively made sense of our experience. When having written stories, I used this recorded discussion from two perspectives. First, in the conversation with my teammates, I revealed my understanding of the experience and my worries and doubts about the entrepreneurial journey, so this recording helped me recall and write a story about participating in the coaching session organized by a student entrepreneurship society (episode g). Second, the recorded discussion revealed the experience of building togetherness, so I compressed 20 pages of the transcribed discussion into three, and the discussion became its own story (episode i) written as a conversation.

Other "deviations" from presenting experiences written in the present tense are episodes q and r because at the end of the journey, right before the camp started and during, I almost stopped keeping a diary. Especially during the last month before the camp, I found switching to the role of a researcher difficult; I just didn't have the time and resources for it. However, many things were happening then, which were documented in emails and messages on social networks. So, episode q represents correspondence with a participant of the camp and my teammate Marina. During the camp, I made several notes in the diary and included one almost as it was (episode r), except that this note was originally in Russian[2].

Writing the stories for the dissertation also implied extracting details from my memory (St. Pierre 2018) and different secondary documents, such as materials from the courses, information on the websites, and emails and messages. All these sources helped reveal the detailed picture needed for autoethnographic writing (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011).

Not all documented and undocumented stories that happened to me during that time were included in this dissertation. When choosing what story to tell, I relied on my perception of how challenging the story was and its relevance to the topic of identity work during an entrepreneurial journey. The story had to have something triggering – something that made me come back to it – some meaningful emotional experience, such as feeling sad, angry, or frustrated, maybe regret or doubt about

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[2]   An important detail to mention is that at the beginning of the research journey, I wrote my diaries in English. However, the notes I took during the language camp were in Russian as I followed the camp's main rule: "Russian language only".

something, or happiness or relief after something had been solved. However, as Ellis claims, we usually reflect (and write) more on why we experience negative emotions and tend just to enjoy, not analyse, when something nice happens. In autoethnographic writing, authors present epiphanies – "interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives" (Denzin 2014, p.52). Johannisson (2011) notices that entrepreneurs tend to tell "stories about critical moments in the venturing process; (h)owever, like any social activity, like any practice, everyday life actually is a flow of disturbances" (p. 137). So, when picking the stories, I did not specifically focus on critical moments or turning points, which defined the process and its outcome; I looked for moments of disturbance, which continued bothering me after some time passed.

Besides, some stories were chosen to build more or less a coherent story of the entrepreneurial journey. For example, the next chapter's final story was chosen to tell the "happy ending" – the positive outcome of the journey. This dissertation would include this story, which I knew early on (probably as early as while it happened).

5.4 Encountering theories and interpreting experience

Although this dissertation emphasizes that my entrepreneurial journey was entwined with the research journey, I still tend to identify two overlapping but somehow separate roads I took. The first road relates to "experiencing entrepreneuring". Although I present it as a stage of data creation in my research journey, it could have had value on its own even without being researched. Simultaneously, as I see it, the second road relates to researching identity work and heavily relies on experiencing entrepreneuring, not solely on it. Therefore, the core question is what I did with my "data" while living that experience of entrepreneuring and after it so that it served the aim of researching identity work.

The primary assumption of post-qualitative methodologies, including autoethnographic research, applied in social sciences implies that researchers are always part of the world they research (St. Pierre 2018; Gherardi 2019). It means new knowledge cannot be considered in isolation from those who constructed it. Simultaneously, analysing "data" required me to balance engaging with and distancing myself from my experience. Distancing is something people do from time to time in everyday life to make sense of an experience. This practice helps digest negative emotions related to the experience. Johannisson (2018) suggests that separation from the experience of being an entrepreneur and becoming an "observant participant" is an important phase of enactive research to be able "to present relevant outcomes of the venture" (p. 92). Distancing from my experience and interpreting it

for research purposes was aimed at connecting this experience to existing (scientific) knowledge, allowing me to see the experience as embedded into a social context (instead of considering it purely personal). As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), cited above, state, autoethnographers must use their methodological tools and research literature to use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience. So, my questions in analysing my experience were: *What in the literature is relevant to my experience? What, in my experience, might be considered reflecting a broader cultural or social phenomenon?*

The question of how I can translate research data into research findings has been one of the most challenging in my research journey. Different methodological approaches imply different ways of analysing the data, and autoethnographic research does not provide strict rules for data analysis. Moreover, long-lasting conversations have occurred on how not to let an "unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative" autoethnography be brought under the "control of reason, logic, and analysis" (Ellis & Bochner 2006, p. 433). So, while trying to find my own way to analyse my experience within "enactive autoethnography research", I have played/experimented with different data analysis methods. For example, I tend to compile tables for better visibility of ideas. Tables clarify the messiness of the knowledge and look like completed pieces of work, especially if one fills all the boxes. However, tables seem to have the agency to restrict complexity (the other side of the same coin), insist on two-dimensional thinking, and look strange in autoethnographic text because we do not experience life as a table.

I also started with thematic analysis, which I believe is uncommon for autoethnographic research. I reviewed my diaries, including those notes that had become stories, and identified some bothersome repetitive topics. These topics included, for example, the fixation on the idea that "*I am not money-oriented enough*" and "*I am not brave enough to become an entrepreneur*". I also noticed that I compare myself to existing and potential entrepreneurs and that this comparison is usually not in my favour. This preliminary analysis was helpful, and I included its outcomes in stories and interpretations. Yet, detecting/sensing the relevance of my experience in understanding broader societal phenomena required a deeper understanding of the theory.

Reading research literature that revealed the topics of identity and identity work and entrepreneurship led me to the concepts and theories I was unfamiliar with. Some, such as "organizational identity", were genuinely revealing but were not (yet) relevant to my experience of the early stage of entrepreneuring. Other concepts felt like exactly what I was looking for, such as the concept of liminality, which I initially encountered in Nic Beech's (2011) article that precisely reflected the feelings of in-betweenness I was experiencing. This (dynamic) state, when you look forward and

backwards simultaneously, reflects the complexity of emotions related to the bundle of processes I was involved in (probably even better than the concept of uncertainty).

Also, the concept of "belonging" became a valuable source of inspiration and helped me pay attention to the crucial processes related to being and becoming who I am in the practices of entrepreneuring. Despite being familiar with the concept, an understanding of belonging that Vanessa May suggested as a concept connecting personal to social and offers a "person-centred and dynamic approach that avoids reifying social structures, but rather depicts them as actively lived" (2011, p. 363), sounded particularly relevant because I was seeking a way to connect my personal experience with broader social phenomena.

The third concept I felt I could not exclude was gender. It was not one particular article related to gender in entrepreneurship studies but a complex, powerful experience of encountering it during my doctoral studies, for which I included an "After-journey epiphany" in the chapter where I interpret the episodes. So, gradually, I found myself face to face with three concepts I considered the most relevant for my experience and the topic of unfolding identity work: liminality, belonging, and gender. With those concepts at hand, I repeatedly revised my diary notes and stories, especially focusing on those stories that resonated most and could unfold identity work. Those stories revealed in the episodes became the centre of my analytical process. They absorbed and reflected the theoretical knowledge I was accumulating while trying to keep them as close as possible to their original version (i.e. a diary note).

Interpreting the stories in the texts is unusual for autoethnographic writing. For an experienced and theoretically informed researcher who reads an autoethnographic text, the story's cultural and contextual meaning is usually visible and relatable. The story contains a theoretical interpretation because writing an autoethnographic story implies re-writing that "entails new readings of the text that each time reveal[s] novel insights" (Berglund 2007, p. 82). Sometimes, autoethnographers add an "interpretation section" to their texts to open the topic up for people with diverse professional backgrounds (see, e.g. Ellis & Rawicki 2016; Poldner 2018). In this dissertation, I chose to add interpretations to the stories I provided because I did not feel they could clearly reveal the cultural and theoretical meanings I wanted them to reflect. I would claim the obvious: that it is not only the reader's experience but the writer's that matters. Norman K. Denzin's (2014) book *Interpretive Autoethnography* suggests that a basic question driving the interpretive project in human disciplines is "How do men and women give meaning to their lives and perform these meanings in their daily lives?" So, next, I reveal how I performed those meanings in my stories of entrepreneuring and then expose the (temporary) meanings (interpretations) I gave those stories.

6   The Stories of Entrepreneuring

Something throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation;
a something both animated and inhabitable.
*(*Kathleen Stewart*. Ordinary Affects)*

This chapter tells the stories picked from that journey to start the discussion on the identity work experienced during that entrepreneurial journey. It is not a sequential narrative describing how one gets from point A to point B; rather, it reveals the moments and periods of the journey that involved affective experiences and provoked identity work. Through these stories, I seek to unfold discrepancies, collisions, or conflicting meanings, as well as the feelings, desires, and worries experienced during the period I frame as my entrepreneurial journey. The stories, as I see them, unfold as mundane but meaningful for my experience. They reveal the emotions (and emotional work) and put the identity work to the fore. The selected episodes do not focus on what worked well and felt pleasant and satisfying during the journey but more on the disturbing experiences that required reflective sensemaking. The following chapter connects these seemingly unrelated stories by emphasizing the central themes during and after the journey.

episode a.   Real entrepreneur

11.4.2018

I enter the room and see many people talking to each other. The founder story event organized by the Student Entrepreneurship Society is about to begin. In a couple of minutes, the coordinator of the event introduces Kareem. He looks like one of the students he has just been talking to. Kareem is here to tell his success story; he emphasizes, though, that he does not like the word "success". He starts by sharing that since he was 11 years old, he had been helping his mother and brother run a small café and a snack shop to make a living and cover tuition fees at school. "*It was a privilege to experience entrepreneurship so early*", he says. He

moved to Finland almost ten years ago to get a degree in IT. His first business was in the dining industry. By then, Kareem had experience working as a waiter, a kitchen helper, and a manager. "*Basically, I did everything one has to do to run a restaurant business*", he adds. He started his business when he was heavily indebted and had to figure out something to extend his residence permit for staying in the country. "*I had nothing to lose and, at the same time, had too much to lose, so I had started to sell lunches from my own kitchen as a face-to-face business*". Kareem solely owns and co-owns several companies that provide services related to cloud and internet technologies.

When the time for questions comes, I ask Kareem what motivates him. He says that he wants to make a million euros.

"*Why?*" I ask.

"*Because this is my aim*", he replies, "*and also because I want to donate money to an educational foundation in the country where I come from*".

At the end, the coordinator of the event invites Kareem to give a piece of advice for nascent entrepreneurs: "*Never take loans*", he answers, smiling.

episode b.   Why can't I just do it?

I am scrolling through new posts of my friends on Instagram. A photo of a cute teddy bear attracts my attention. The picture is so good that I can almost feel the softness and tenderness of the bear. Natalia, a former colleague of mine, creates these bears. Some time ago, in our previous lives, we taught macroeconomics together and explained the basics of monetary policy to students. Now, she sews bears, tells stories about sewing processes on Instagram, participates in exhibitions, and sells the teddy bears internationally to teddy bear collectors through social media channels. In another picture, I see exquisitely decorated cakes and meringues. Sasha, my university classmate, creates these. At the university, she was a straight-A student majoring in economics; she was later an enthusiastic employee in a bank. Now, she sells her homemade confectionery. Strictly speaking, neither Natalia's nor Sasha's entrepreneurial efforts look like real businesses; they are more like hobbies. I frankly doubt they earn much money on what they are doing. However, there is something annoying about those pictures.

They appear as if telling me, "*You see, the girls were courageous enough to start doing something different – something of their own*". *Why can't you be one of them? Why can't you just start doing it?*

episode c.   What is wrong with me?

17.9.2018

Today is our second meeting with the Russian language circle. I reserved a table for ten people in a bar because there were 12 people at the first meeting, at which the university language circles' coordinator introduced me as a Russian language coordinator to students. It is 6 pm; I hope I will be at home by 8 to spend some time with the kids before they fall asleep. I enter the bar and look around. There are not many people, and I don't recognize anyone. It takes me some time to go to the bartender. I hesitate, as usual, because I cannot decide whether I should try to speak Finnish or just get relaxed and speak English. Besides, *is it the right moment to disturb a person at work?* Finally, I am saying in English that I reserved a table for ten people. The bartender points to the table at the corner of the room. I see young people sitting there, but I do not know them. I come closer and see the notice "Reserved for the Russian language circle". The students at the table tell me they are leaving soon. I tell them they can stay longer because nobody from our group has arrived yet. I sit down at the nearest table and start waiting. Nobody comes for 5 minutes, 8 minutes, 11 minutes… The students leave "our table". I move there and continue waiting. Still no one. I feel silly and even ashamed because I am sitting at the huge table alone. *I am occupying too much space.*

At some point, I see a guy talking to the bartender. The bartender points at me. He comes to me and asks whether it is the Russian language circle. "*Yes, but I am the only one present today*", I answer apologetically. We introduce ourselves. His name is Marko. He worked in Russia a couple of years ago and speaks extraordinarily good Russian. It is easy and interesting to talk with him. I feel grateful to him for having come. *What if I had kept sitting here alone?* However, I am still upset and communicate as if not being fully present. *Why do I invest my energy into talking to someone who will probably not come next time?*

After talking to Marko for an hour and a half, I head home. *Finally!* I am going back to my kids, who were left alone. They definitely need me more than others. *But why? Why did no one from the first meeting come? Did they see the invitation on Facebook? How can I organize the meetings every week*

if nobody comes? What was it? What have I done wrong? Was the first meeting boring? It seems I failed to continue running the club, which my predecessors have regularly run every semester. What's wrong with me?

    episode d.   I have nothing to lose

<div align="right">9-26.10.2018</div>

Today is the first day of a business course for researchers. I feel thrilled about it. I hope the course will make me feel like I am ready to set up my own business. I just need some practical advice on what to do with my ideas. There are several speakers presenting one by one. They do sound inspiring. We are given an assignment to formulate what entrepreneurship means to us. *What actually motivates me?* I write about:

- Being independent and self-motivated

- Commercializing my expertise

- Employing other people

The plan seems worthwhile.

The first day proceeded perfectly, just as I hoped it would. It feels so comforting to be a part of this group – to be among these smart but, at the same time, self-doubting doctoral students. One of the speakers asks whether we know that businesspeople see us researchers as eggheads. *Of course we do; we are brainy and probably a bit impractical at times*. At the end of the day, we have a group discussion. It seems we all share the feeling of being inspired. One participant from our group says the words that sound like citations from my own mind: "*Be brave!*", "*Act!*", or "*Just do it!*". I promise myself I will.

On the second day, professors came to tell us about profits, markets, and failures. *Are you sure you need to spoil my mood after the first day?*

It got even worse the following days. A coordinator of the course gave us an assignment to make short videos in which we needed to pitch our research as if we were selling it, which should prepare us for the final presentation of our ideas in front of the teachers and students of the course. We discussed with a peer participant, who is about to defend her dissertation in law studies, that it is quite a challenge to sell research that is being conducted in social sciences. *Should I try to pitch my idea of a language camp? Nah. It is just ridiculous. I do not want to do this pitch at all. What a stupid assignment. Still, I have to. Otherwise, I will not get credit for the course. Okay, I will do the recording, but I will just pitch some ideas related to my research. It is a more interesting topic to talk about.*

With the help of my friend, I recorded a pitch in which I explained the main ideas of my research proposal, especially focusing on research methodology. *I need to share the idea that we can create knowledge by researching ourselves!* Actually, I hate seeing myself on the video, but the assignment is completed, which is good. It is handy that I have the Academic Presentation course in parallel and managed to borrow some ideas from it. I have a hunch that my pitch is not exactly what was required. However, *I am not yet ready with my business idea. I can pretend I did not understand that the pitch had to be aimed at the commercialization of the research. Nobody will pay much attention to it.*

To my surprise and regret, someone does pay attention. The next day, I received feedback from the coordinator of the course: "**It was difficult giving feedback on your pitch because it does not contain any of the elements asked for and doesn't follow the instructions given**". It feels as if I got a slap in the face. *What a shame!*

I have approximately four hours to prepare a new pitch about a commercializable business idea. *Okay, brainy egghead, now just do it!* Surprisingly, I enjoy these hours. I am writing everything that comes to my mind about the language camp on the slides; I am inserting stupid, funny images. (It bugs me a bit that downloading images from the Internet without the author's permission is unethical, but, *frankly, I have no time to focus on that now.*) I found a free online application for creating a logo and spent probably a bit too much time choosing the colour. At the same time, I try to follow the recommendations from one of the coaches on how to prepare a good pitch. *I can do whatever I want because I have nothing to lose.* I have already lost face in front of the coordinators of the course.

The day we have to pitch ideas comes. I am pitching my "business idea" to other participants from the stage placed in the hall with a high ceiling. The slides I prepared are displayed on the huge screen behind me. I feel nervous, but I just keep talking, going slide by slide. I hear people chuckling exactly when I want them to smile. After my pitch, I get a couple of questions and answer them. When leaving the stage, I hear a peer student commenting, "*Someone has already designed a logo for her business idea*". I feel relieved. *It seems I have just done it.*

    episode e.   This is where you invest your energy

30.1.2019

I get on the bus and see Saila, a student from the Russian language class, in which Marina and I assist. Saila also attends Russian language circles from time to time. I come closer and see she has something on her lap that looks like a plate in a bag. I hesitate,

wondering whether I should sit down next to her or just say hi and pass by. Actually, I have been thinking about Saila as a person to whom I could suggest participating in the Accelerator program. She is a friendly and active student, and I would like a Finnish-speaking person to be on the team. Finally, I dare to say "Hi" and take the seat next to her without asking permission. We start talking, and I ask about the plate. Saila explains that she baked a pie for a charity event at the university. They collect money for an organization that takes care of homeless cats. *Okay, I see. This is where you invest your energy.* I tell Saila I would like to set up some kind of non-commercial organization that would focus on organizing different cultural events and probably a summer language school. Saila says it sounds interesting and mentions she has participated in a language camp in Sweden and that it's a pity there are no Russian language camps in Finland. When we reach the university bus stop, although I have 1000 things to do today, I decide to join Saila to see how the charity event is organized and eat a piece of the homemade pie with a cup of tea. *After all, it is my mom's birthday.*

episode f.   Am I annoying?

27.3.2019

I feel excited. I finalized my first Lean Canvas this morning. I did not expect that the process would be so entertaining. I have finally managed to estimate the costs of organizing the camp and calculate a minimum price for one person. Now I start to worry there will not be enough students who would like to participate in the language camp at that price. If we want to attract students, we need to provide some of them with scholarships.

   I come to the meeting with Marina and Saila in one of the university buildings and start almost immediately by talking about the language camp. I feel confident and even proud of myself. At last, it feels like I know what I am talking about; I am talking about "cost structure", "revenue streams", and even "a unique value proposition". After an hour and a half of discussing the language camp, Saila asks Marina whether she would like to tell us about her idea of a City Adventure Game. I realize I have forgotten about it. I have not found time to read the file Marina sent us yesterday. I just could not focus on anything else but *my* Lean Canvas. Saila and Marina start discussing Marina's suggestion. Marina says it can be a kind of tech product if we create an app for it.

Saila supports Marina. She believes this idea is more suitable for the Accelerator. I express my doubts by saying the Accelerator people will hardly be interested in a one-day event. The girls explain it is not a one-day event but a regular event and that its frequency depends on how often we would be able to attract groups of participants. Marina seems to get irritated. She says that instead, the language camp looks more like a once-a-year product. Actually, it is. I feel a bit lost. I did not expect our conversation to go that way. *Am I annoying*?

episode g. This place is for real businessmen, not language teachers

16.4.2019

We are entering the room with Saila; Marina said she would be a bit late. I recognize a couple of students among the people in the room. They were participants in an entrepreneurship course in which I was assisting. Their presence does not make my attendance here easier. I know they have already launched their business. Luckily, they are leaving the room; they are here for some other reason. We are now taking our seats. It seems some key figures in the business community will be coaching us today because even the head of the student community is here to listen to them.

Two men who know each other are coming in. They look self-confident and serious but friendly. The Big Man is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and the Handsome Man is dressed more formally. They introduce themselves as people who have much knowledge and enough experience in starting a business. The Big Man starts the coaching. He definitely has something to say. He speaks in very clear and simple language – no fillers, no hesitation. *I wish I could teach that way.* His PowerPoint presentation slides are black with yellow capital letters on them. *Why have I never applied those recommendations from the Academic Presentation course?* The messages on the slides are as clear as his language: YET ANOTHER SOLUTION LOOKING FOR A PROBLEM. I have previously seen, heard, and admired this idea, which was formulated differently and written in capital letters: LOVE THE PROBLEM, NOT THE SOLUTION. *Is there any problem we would like to solve, or are our ideas just our fantasies?*

The Big Man keeps on talking. Slide after slide contains only one question each. There is no time to discuss – just time to stay focused: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM YOU ARE SOLVING? WHO

HAS THE PROBLEM? WHY IS IT A PROBLEM? HAVE YOU PROVEN THE PROBLEM? HOW? WHAT SOLVES THE PROBLEM? HAVE YOU PROOF OF THE SOLUTION? WHAT IS YOUR WAY TO EXECUTE THE SOLUTION? *Oh, I am so slow. It is probably because I am too old for this student community. People here are fast and easy-going, just like my 13-year-old son.*

The Big Man asks us to formulate our business ideas into one sentence. *Oh no, now it starts. Now they will tell us our ideas suck because all first ideas suck.* I have heard this before in another course. Saila and I discuss and formulate the sentence. I like it. It looks much better than all our previous attempts to clarify what we are planning to do. I am pushing Saila to present it. I feel shy and hesitant to present it myself. I feel I know what will follow. She confidently announces, "City adventure game: learning Russian through history and mystery". The Big Man nods and says, "Okay, thank you". I exhale with relief: *The ideas do not suck this time.* When I feel I have calmed down my anxiety, I hear the leader of another team passionately and protectively explaining that people are ready to buy hemp dildos instead of plastic ones because they are more environmentally friendly. *Why are we not so passionate about what we do?*

The coaching continues. Now, it is the Handsome Man's turn to talk. He seems to be a little nervous at the beginning but gets more confident and enthusiastic whilst he gets more involved in talking about the validation steps. Step 0, step 1, step 2 … *Am I the only one still stuck on step 0 in which he explained what validation means?* Step 2. MAP OUT YOUR ASSUMPTIONS, PRIORITISE THE MOST CRITICAL ONES, AND CONVERT THEM INTO A HYPOTHESIS READY TO BE TESTED.

Okay, what are our assumptions?

This is not quite clear to us. We do not have much time to discuss them. Again, I am cowardly encouraging Saila to talk for us. She explains there are not enough fun and informal activities to satisfy all purposes of language learning. The Handsome Man does not look convinced. Saila is getting confused; she is blushing, looking to me for help, but I do not know how to help. I am just smiling blankly, trying to be one with the sofa I am sitting on, hoping to become invisible. She starts explaining our ideas further in an open-minded and sincere manner. She says we would like to set up

an organization to promote Russian language learning and friendship between the Finnish and the Russian people.

I hold my breath. *Oh no, not this. Talk only about real business things. Focus on the product. Do not reveal our unclear dreams*. And yes, the Handsome Man says it: THAT'S BULLSHIT.

How could we have come here with vague, overlapping ideas without assumptions about our customers? This place is for real businessmen, not language teachers. At least I can celebrate being correct in my expectations that our idea sucks (however, this time, these were the bullshit assumptions about what a customer wishes for).

The coaching process continues, and we have an assignment to discuss our ideas and assumptions with participants from the other teams. Marina, who arrived a bit later than us, and Saila go to talk to a team sitting on another sofa. I keep pretending I am inseparable from *my* sofa. Other people go, talk, and discuss. I just participate absentmindedly in discussions of ideas with other groups. A guy sitting next to me asks, "Would you be interested in buying a hemp dildo?"

I answer, "Not a dildo, but a hemp toothbrush sounds attractive".

The guy loses interest in my opinions and starts to comment on our idea: "If you set up your own company, which would focus on Russian–Finnish relationships, do not hang a portrait of Putin on the wall". *I promise I will not. Wow! What kind of face am I having if someone is assuming I would hang a portrait of a president on the wall in my office?* It sounds even a bit insulting.

At some point, the Handsome Man gives an example of a meaningful globally scalable product – a spoon that balances the tremor of people suffering with Alzheimer's disease. It sounds like a genuinely meaningful product. "I am an idealist, as you are", he adds a bit out of context.

The coaching day is about to end. The Handsome Man is finishing his speech with supposedly inspiring lines. However, some of them sound rather frightening: "A START-UP IS ABOUT WORKING HARD". *I don't really mind.* "FORGET ABOUT YOUR FREE TIME AND ENTERTAINMENT". *Okay.* "REAL START-UPPERS DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN BARBEQUE PARTIES ORGANISED BY STUDENT SOCIETIES BECAUSE THEY WORK", adds the Big Man. *Okay, I will survive it as well.*

"YOU WILL EVEN HAVE TO SACRIFICE YOUR FAMILIES", continues the Handsome Man. *Oh, no. That was too much. What could be so important and beautiful that I would forget about my sons?* The Big Man does not seem to agree about forgetting about his family either. However, the Handsome Man has more to say: "IF YOU ARE NOT COMMITTED ENOUGH, YOU ARE GOING TO FEEL MISERABLE IN ONE YEAR". *Wow, nice attempt to inspire. I have already started feeling that way.* He starts advertising his consultancy by ending with a joke: "DON'T WASTE ONE YEAR OF YOUR TIME; FAIL WITH US IN THREE MONTHS".

We are leaving the building and approaching our bicycles. "*He is handsome*", I tell the girls.

"Which one? The bullshit guy?" They do not seem to share my admiration. "Yeah, but there is such a pain in his eyes", says Saila. Marina is nodding.

I am surprised to hear that. *What would have happened to me if I had not been able to see the pain?*

episode h.   I do love dogs, but can we go now?

10.5.2019

It is a lovely sunny day. We agreed with Marina and Saila to go the whole route of the City Adventure game. We have already developed it on the map. The list of places in the city includes an Orthodox church, statues, old buildings, and the riverside. All those places connect Finland and Russia – culturally and historically. Now, we are moving from one spot to another, taking photos, discussing practicalities, and combining these spots into one route. Actually going out and visiting these places one by one was a good idea. New ideas for puzzles and riddles naturally emerge. The City Adventure game feels somehow real now; *it is doable.* While we are walking through a park, I see two small funny dogs approaching us with their owner. I feel like I know what will happen next, considering I am here with two passionate animal lovers. Indeed, we are stuck for at least ten minutes. I check my smartphone and then stay still, observing how my teammates pet, play, laugh, and talk to the fluffy cuties and their owners about the breeds, the names of dogs, and the relationships between them. I like dogs, but *we kind of need to go, don't we?*

During the walk, we share stories about coming to the city for the first time (all three of us are not from here), discuss the topics of our research projects at the university, talk about "reading dogs" and practices of temporal

adoption of cats in Finland, about human rights, and the #MeToo movement. I ask how they feel about our experience participating in the Pre-accelerator program and why we have not applied for the Accelerator itself. While Saila and Marina share their thoughts, I catch myself thinking they are even less money-oriented than I am. Actually, it makes sense. Of the three of us, it is I who works and studies in a business school and has a degree in economics. Marina asks me again whether I feel passionate enough about developing the City Adventure game. I reply that I do feel passionate about it and suggest that even if we do not commercialize this idea, we can still create the game for the students in our language classes at the university or for the participants of the Russian language circle. However, I still have my doubts. *Am I really as interested as I am trying to convince the girls? Will I have the energy to implement the ideas without the Accelerator program? Come on, the City Adventure game is just a project and not a huge one. And we have already done a lot for it. "Don't give up on it",* I beg myself, *"just do not give up!"*

     episode i.   Why didn't we fit in?

12.6.2019

This discussion between Marina and Saila takes place in my rented apartment. We are sitting on the carpet in the living room, having tea, fruit, and sweets.

A: We have already been discussing it with you. I am interested in why we didn't apply for participation in the Business Accelerator program. What is your brightest memory about the Pre-Accelerator? What did you like or didn't like about it?

S: I liked that we had different people to work with – people from different fields who were coaching us. Also, participants. That we could hear about their products and what they were developing. I think that the best session was with the two guys. With the bullshit guy and the food guy. I enjoyed being there. I think we had fun, and the value session was good. When we were behaving as if we were realists, then critics and dreamers, although there was one guy who just started pushing people, which, I think, was not the point. I think everyone couldn't really say what they wanted to say. He was like, "Can you find something to criticize?" He was more like for himself. He made it a competition. It was pretty aggressive.

A: Marina, what is your brightest memory from the Pre-Accelerator?

M: (Laughing) Bullshit!

A: Okay, that's nice.

S: Yeah, the validation task.

M: Yeah, I didn't understand his task. I don't remember it anymore. I just remember the coach was pushy. I didn't understand what he wanted, and I don't think he understood what he wanted.

(Laughing together)

A: And what did you like at the Pre-Accelerator? I mean, I don't know. Maybe you liked the bullshit thing.

M: I don't know. I didn't like it, but I didn't dislike it. It was just weird. But what did I like? Maybe when we had this workshop about values and something else; it really made me think about my values and how I don't really know what they are.

S: I also liked the session about values. It was personal, but it was surprising that everyone chose love to be the core value. I expected something different.

M: Love? Actually, I went home that day, and I understood it was bullshit.

A: Love is bullshit!?

M: I am talking for myself, but these are values that are in my head – what I want my values to be. Like love and compassion and all. But when I try to narrow it down to business, for example, I think the better question to ask is, "Okay, now you are in this situation. Would you choose your business, or what would you choose?" Then, you can know what your values are. For example, you have to work till 3 pm and don't have time for your family. You can only see your values when they are clashing with something else, I think.

S: I remember the yoga instructor mentioned growth and some other values. She had more business-minded thinking, and what others said was more personal. Of course, these values affect your work, but then…

A: (Interrupting) For me, it was confusing with the dildo team. Their values are also about love and sustainable development. They want to produce hemp dildos to save the environment.

M: That is not true. It is not to save the environment. You do not save the environment by producing things. I don't know.

S: I think it is an alternative to something, which is plastic. But, yeah…

A: Could you join their team?

M: I don't know. I would really need to be strongly into something to be able to work with a person like this because she is like, yes, this is the best thing in the world. And I am like… mmmm. (Laughing.)

A: But do you think she believes in what they are doing?

M: Yeah, I think she does.

A: At some point, it just came to my mind that I would join their team for the purpose of being in the business accelerator program. Then, I wouldn't have

to take something personal to this program. Coming to the program with something like a dildo – it's more like a joke. Like when Saila said we want Russian and Finnish people to have friendship, we want to promote the Russian language and culture, etc. And then somebody says it is bullshit. It feels like nobody needs it.

S: Yeah, yeah.

A: It's not something you want to be open about. I think I told you that this semester, I assisted in the social value creation course, and my students – their business ideas –were like protecting women who survived violence or helping homeless people, etc. They are sincere about it. I cannot imagine myself telling them it's bullshit.

M: But that's not a business idea. I think we need to define business.

A: That's true.

S: Yeah. I think the other ones had a product in mind. Like a dildo. Okay. It's kind of a physical thing, and then you can include the values. Maybe with us, it is more like… We had something abstract but we didn't have a concrete product or service yet.

M: I think we didn't really have an idea, or we were still deciding.

A: (Interrupting) Yeah, we were still deciding which we preferred.

M: They didn't really know what to do with us. It's not that they wanted to get rid of us, but they didn't know what to do with us more because we didn't have a clear idea, and they wanted it to be like… you will do this like this.

S: And I thought, I don't know – that every idea is welcomed, but then they kind of… okay, it should be scalable. I felt like they were trying to compress us into something. We were not quite sure if we wanted them to.

M: I believe we would have to do it their way, and it would be no fun doing it their way.

S: I think that it would be nice to have those kinds of workshops where you can present your idea and receive feedback and then hear what other people are doing, but maybe more related to what we want to do – to be like non-profit or something not so fast-paced and not so much focused on profit; it's more about how you make it work and what you want to do. Money is one thing you want to consider, but then it's not like you need to do this to…

A: (Interrupting) But what's wrong with money? I mean, I don't mind money. (Laughing) Or do you think what we suggest is not possible to monetize?

S: I think it is and… to run it, we need money and… but if it is an association, then it's okay: money to make it run, money to do more projects, money to hire people, money to make things differently, and money to pay some people, but not like money for me to buy a new car. (Laughing)

A: But they were not exactly saying at the Pre-Accelerator that if you want to get money to buy yourself a car, you can participate in our program.

S: No, no, but I guess it came from a scalability kind of thinking.

A: But why? Scalability is just when you…

M: (Interrupting) Well, I can say that the coaches who were there – they are people who train other people to open their companies and make them profitable and sell them to other people. So, all these questions: "What are your values?" "Why do you want to do it?" "How does it matter if I just want to make money?" Even the values are about money. So, you can better target the people with similar values and sell to them. It's not because you do it or because you are such a nice person. You need to find out who to sell to.

A: Do you remember the coach calling us idealists?

S: Yeah. (Ironically mimicking the coach) "I am like you".

(All laughing together)

A: Didn't you believe him?

S: I don't know. I think he is a conflicting guy. I wasn't really sure what to think about what he said in general.

M: Because at the end, he also gave us this speech: Remember your values and family and everything.

A: (Laughing) Yeah, but maybe he is coaching us for free. This is the idealist part of him. We can invite him into our business – into our idealistic business.

S: The problem is that different people were talking about different things using different approaches, so maybe it was a little bit difficult to grasp what the program or next step would be.

A: I could now be participating in the program, and by the end of the summer, I would have all my data; by the end of next summer, I would have completed my doctoral studies. I am joking…

episode j.   I take one step forward and two steps back

Email to Marina and Saila

Anna Elkina
Fri 23.8.2019 15:51
Sent to**:** Marina; Saila Mattila

Hi!

I hope you had a wonderful summer. I know that you both worked hard this summer. Actually, I was the one who managed to relax properly. That's probably

why I am again ambitious about the following academic year. :)

I want to try to apply for BusinessUp. It will be more difficult for us to be accepted there compared to the Accelerator program because BusinessUp is not aimed only at university students. However, I just want to try.

This time, I would try to apply with the Language Camp Idea. I will explain why. As for the City Adventure, I do like the idea and I do believe we could develop it further and make it work. It is just the feeling that I can't lead there – as if I were not passionate enough about it. In this sense, I cannot be a driving force. It doesn't mean I suggest we give up on it. I am sure that the Spark Up journey will give us ideas on how to develop it further.

At the same time, I realize that you cannot be equally passionate about the Russian language summer camp. I will take more responsibility for it. I think you noticed I tried to impose more responsibility on Marina when we were discussing the City Adventure.

I am still at the stage, "I love my solution, not the problem". I am currently working on some conceptualization of ideas we have so far. I hoped I would be able to send it to you with this email, but I haven't finished it yet and wanted to send you something before the weekend.

I have tens of thousands of fears. I take one step forward and two steps back. I am not good at team building (I am much better at making friends). However, I would like to try again and again and again… :) I still believe we can benefit from participating in this program. I think we already benefited from the Pre-Accelerator. It was challenging, even annoying at some parts (like realizing how far we are from understanding what our business idea is), but there were also some nice moments, like working on values, etc.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, there are no clear programs of that kind for those who would like to create some kind of social venture. But, as I said, we can benefit from this as well; we will just try to stick to our values.

My question is the same one I asked you half a year ago – would you like to participate in the BusinessUp program?
I hope for honest replies and comments. :) We could meet next week and discuss it.

Kind regards,
Anna

    episode k.   Paying for caring

<div align="right">12.9.2019</div>

I am tired. It is early morning. I am walking towards the workplace, but I already feel exhausted. We were not accepted to the business training program, and my

work on articles will not proceed. I have just had another argument with G. *Teenagers!* It is getting darker each morning. Low-level hazy clouds are the worst. The song "What's Going On?" comes out of my headphones and perfectly reflects my mood, brings tears to my eyes. *Leaking body it is* (Pullen 2018). The phrase "business idea validation" buzzes in my head like an annoying fly. *How should we validate our ideas? What if I come to people and ask, "Do you want to buy some care and support? I am considering selling it at the camp together with teaching services. How much would you pay for it?"* I jump in my mind to a conversation I had a couple of days ago with my friend. She was offered 150 roubles, which is approximately two euros per hour, for giving individual support lessons to pre-schoolers in a daycare. She does need money, especially after getting divorced. She does need to restore her self-reliance. These "generous" people in a private daycare know her. They know how she works and what she can do. They know that when she enters a room, children start smiling, laughing, and hugging each other. She is a fairy; she brings light and fairy tales with her. She nurtures and takes care of the children. She cares; that is what she does. Caring is invaluable. It is priceless. (Or the price is just so low that it tends to be zero.) *How do people sell being personal – being attentive?* The business training programs encourage us to explain how we can make our product scalable, but caring is not a spoon. A spoon is scalable. Besides, people are not prone to pay for love, compassion, and connection, especially if they know where to get it for free. Okay, it's simple. *Just don't try to sell something which is not meant for sale!*

> *episode l.*   The bravest person in the world!

> 3.10.2019

At the business course for researchers, we are given a task to validate our ideas through communication with "potential customers". Everyone knows what to do. We just have to go outside and talk to people. It's as simple as that. Just go and talk. No. First, get up off the couch, put on clothes, get outside, approach a stranger, and then talk. When I participated in the Pre-Accelerator, and we were supposed to test our assumptions on people in the room, I did manage to get off the couch – other participants had come to talk to me. This time, it feels better. I did it. I got off. After all, it is not the business idea of my life to be validated; we "just" need to find out whether *people are willing to donate to an educational program developed for people trapped in poverty in Namibia.*

Our team (Marja, Tuomas, and I) go outside. We see a young man passing by. I look at his face – nice, but a bit in a hurry, isn't he? *Just let him go in*

peace. There is another person, then one more and the cyclists. After a few minutes of hesitation and silent glances at each other and after a few people passing by unapproached, I suggest we go to the bus stop. My assumption is that people have nothing to do while they are waiting for a bus. When we come to the bus stop, we see a woman standing alone there. *Perfect victim.* This is how I feel about her. We are going to intrude on her privacy. *God, we are in Finland.* It feels almost like a crime here.

We are approaching the woman with our notebooks and pencils. I am determined to start talking to her, but suddenly, I look at Marja and tell her it would probably be a good idea if she talks to the woman in Finnish. *Am I being a coward again?* The woman looks tense. Marja comes closer to her but still keeping a rather long distance, she starts a conversation (*The bravest person in the world!*), explaining in Finnish: "*We are not sellers or anything; we are taking a course at the university, and we would like to ask you a few questions*". And it helps. The word "university" always helps. Even though the woman is a bit afraid to miss her bus, she is glad to have a chat. They are talking in Finnish. I look at Tuomas. He is surfing on his smartphone and doesn't seem to be involved. Later on, he will explain that he was doing "the validation" in WhatsApp. I keep pretending I am writing notes in my book. However, when I read them, I realize they are just some words in Finnish, which I managed to catch from the conversation. In fact, it is Marja who is doing the job. I have an impression that the woman is leading the conversation in the direction she interprets as the right direction for our "research": "*Yes, poverty in other countries is an important issue, but we also have a huge problem of elderly people feeling lonely here in Finland*".

When the bus arrives, the woman ends the conversation. She seems to be happy about having been able to help "students". We discuss the conversation. Marja translates some core moments. I am happy I understood most of the conversation. We all admit that direct selling is not the work any of us would like to do. I am glad I was not alone and that "we" managed to start the conversation with a stranger.

episode m.   Dancing is almost like football

24.11.2019
At home

We are preparing breakfast together with G in the morning. I am thinking about the meeting I will probably have to attend today. Alex said he would write me a message instructing whether I should come to talk about our project. It will depend on how the

board meeting of the local branch of the Finland–Russia Society goes and how much time it will take. I imagine myself staying in a room full of unknown senior people sitting at the round table and observing how I try to convince them what a wonderful idea organizing a language camp is.

Suddenly, I drop an opened carton of milk on the floor. It feels irritating. *I am so clumsy; now I have to clean the floor.* I tell G I am nervous because today I will probably have to meet people to discuss our language camp project. I also explain to him that I am not sure whether I want to meet with those people tonight. On the one hand, I need this meeting for my language camp initiative; on the other hand, I will be glad if I don't have to go there because then I will be able to watch E's hockey match until the end. The potential meeting and the hockey match are overlapping in time.

"*I think I understand you*", G replies. "*Yesterday, I was at the school, and we had a first rehearsal of the Old Dances event. All the boys were staying in the corner; no one wanted to participate. Finally, I told everyone and myself that dancing is almost like football and went to the centre of the first line*". I feel astonished and deeply touched by what G says. *He reads me like a book!*

"*I understand your fears*", G continues, "*but you want to be an entrepreneur. You just have to be brave*".

"*I understand that I have to, but it does not make it easier*", I answer.

episode n. "Stealing" the keys: What will she think of me?

11.12.2019

I am occupied with applying for a grant to partially cover the costs of the language camp. We need to provide supporting documents to show we are organizing an event on behalf of a reliable organization and that there are other sources of financing. I come to the office where Laura works. I could have booked the campsite online. However, I had spent loads of time trying to understand how the system worked; I finally gave up and decided to visit the office. Laura promised to help me with the booking. I easily find her in the office. Her working space has a window to the common area, like a reception area in a hospital. She comes to me because computers for visitors are situated in the common space. It takes us a few minutes to complete the reservation; however, I realize I couldn't have done it without her. Laura is

heading back to her working space but stops halfway and comes back to ask whether I saw her keys. I haven't seen them, but I check my bag, just in case. Her keys are there; they look similar to mine because of a big blue magnetic key used in the offices. I feel ashamed. I apologize and laugh. I say I tend to take everything from the table and put it in my bag, usually pencils but not office keys. Laura smiles and goes back to her office.

We continue talking with her through the window. I explain that I need a paper, which confirms we booked a campsite for a reduced price. I assume this kind of document could prove we are supported financially by the foundation we apply to, which would make our application more reliable in the eyes of the grant committee. Laura explains that the only paper she can give me is the booking confirmation. However, she cannot add a price there because it will be revised within the next month. *I don't have a month; I need it now*. I need any kind of paper. I ask whether she could sign the booking confirmation and put a stamp on it. I am convinced this red tape formality matters for those people on the grant committee, but Laura is quite clear about what she can and cannot do. I feel I start to annoy her. She gives me a paper without a signature or a stamp with 0,00 euros stated as the price. This document does not make any sense for the grant application.

I come to the university and start thinking about what I should do next. Actually, it was a good visit. Thanks to Laura, I have finally managed to book the campsite. Suddenly, my phone rings. It is Laura: "*Have you accidentally taken my keys again?*"

"*No, I haven't… I don't know… I will check my bag. Just one second*". I feel terrified. *No way had I done it again*! I dump everything out of my bag and coat pockets, but I do not find any keys except my own. "*No*", I say into the phone, trying to pretend to be calm and ironic. "*This time, it was not me*". We say goodbye and hang up; I can feel a tremor all over my body.

What if she doesn't find those keys? What will she think of me? Will she think I am a thief? I look like a weird, unreliable foreigner who asked for help with booking, which was possible to do online, took the time of a busy manager, tried to acquire some non-existent document, and probably stole the keys from the office. Some hints of common sense are trying to break out: *Why on Earth would I or anyone else need those keys?* However, I cannot stop blaming myself. *I haven't done anything wrong… almost; why does it feel as if I did*?

      episode 0.   Have I just made a student cry?

17.02.2020

Today is our seminar on developing spoken language skills. We act as teacher assistants in the practical Russian course with Marina, but we are fully in charge of the next two sessions. I am in a good mood. These spoken language

seminars were my idea. We developed them together and successfully tested them a couple of months ago. I foresee how students will play games, participate in situation simulation practices, talk in Russian, and laugh. Marina is responsible for today's seminar, but I am ready to help and support. I sit down at the table where Hanna is sitting alone. She is always well-prepared for lessons but a bit hesitant to chat. I hope I will be able to engage her in talking today. At the last moment, Tarja enters the room, joins Hanna and me, and the seminar begins.

We participate in activities suggested by Marina. We laugh, but I notice it is sometimes difficult for Tarja and Hanna to find the correct words. For the third task, Marina asks me not to help the students. I start wandering around in the class, having nothing to do. I feel relaxed. Language classes is the place where I feel perfectly secure. Even if I do not always know how to explain some grammar rules, I can be sure I speak Russian well enough. *I am a native speaker here. No doubt I can do it*. The task is a bit tricky. Students have to guess the meaning and write definitions of words they do not know, but the roots of these words can provide a hint. I hear two students laughing. They are creating foolish meanings. Everything is going well. I join Marina, and we talk.

Suddenly, we hear Tarja and Hanna talking in Finnish. *At our Russian-only seminar!* We look at them with Marina and start making funny, disapproving sounds in a teasing manner. They do not react, and I say, pretending to be strict, "*Po-russki, po-russki*" (in Russian, in Russian). Hanna looks at me touchily and says she was just asking Tarja a word in Finnish. I see she took it seriously, as if I were blaming her for misbehaving. "*Oh, that's fine*", I say. They try to continue but are completely stuck. Marina tries to suggest other versions of the assignment, but Hanna has closed up and does not communicate with Tarja. I see her eyes are wet. I avoid looking at her, but my ears are with her. *Oh, God, I know the feeling*. I wonder if she goes to the bathroom or stays.

Hanna starts making this noise, which I know so well: the sounds of unzipping her bag and rustling a plastic package; she takes a napkin out of it, blowing her nose. Then I hear the puff of a bottle being opened and two sips of water being swallowed. She knows what she is doing. It will be fine now. The picture of myself when I resist crying in public places appears in my head. *I should do something, shouldn't I?* Marina feels the situation as well and leads the exercise to the end. We make jokes, pretending everything is fine. Out of the corner of my eye, I see that Hanna is also smiling. *Thank God*! Marina tells the rules of the next game, where we should explain words. I see

Hanna starting to pack her things. She shakes her head as if saying, "No, I can't", and leaves the classroom.

I have just made a student cry, haven't I? Marina looks at me absentmindedly. "*Are you looking at me disapprovingly*?" I ask Marina.

"I am not", she answers and goes after Hanna.

    episode p.   What just happened here?[3]

26.3.2020

It is Saturday, the 10th day of the Covid-19 quarantine. We have no clue how many more days we will be locked down. As many as 724 366 people have been infected around the world so far. I check the news every day – a few times a day actually. There are three of us stuck together: my two sons and I. Schools are closed. My husband, my partner, the caring father of G and E, is 3000 kilometres away from here, earning money to better our future. The border is closed. We are trying to obey all the rules with the boys. We wash our hands more than usual, do not meet with other people, and do not use public transportation; we only visit grocery shops, avoid being close to other people, and avoid touching anything we do not buy.

The university – my pride and joy – is also closed. I am not a part of this anthill anymore. I cannot sit at my desk in the office and distract my roommate from doing her work. I cannot be distracted by her. We will not go for lunch. At best, we will meet on Zoom for the unit meeting. One way or another, there is much work to do. I need to finalize an article by the deadline and prepare for teaching. This online teaching, especially recording videos with my face on them, drives me crazy. It also irks me that we have not started advertising the language camp. We need to have it this year. It is good that at least the campsite is already booked.

This morning, I am full of energy and determined to have a productive day. I just need to organize the kids so they do not spend the whole day on their smartphones. We have already agreed with G that he will vacuum, and then they will go for a walk while I work. I see them sitting on the sofa. G is playing Minecraft, and E is watching him play. I remind them about cleaning, and they ask for a few more minutes. I make the face; they realize they should give the phone to me. G starts vacuuming. I am doing my part: cleaning the kitchen. E is nearby helping me. I cannot wait to go back to my room to start working instead of cleaning. I feel inspired to write today. The cleaning will take half an hour – one hour maximum.

G seems slow. I ask him to hurry up. He tells me he will clean at his own speed. He is 14. He looks at himself in the mirror, dancing and singing, which annoys

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[3] This episode was previously published in Einola et al. (2021).

me. He shows me with all his body by performing in slow motion that he doesn't care. He puts his headphones on, trying to stay in his perfect mood, teasing me. It is me who is in a hurry, not him. I go to the kitchen and continue cleaning. From there, I hear the vacuum cleaner is not working. Two minutes and then five pass. I go back and nervously start vacuuming myself. G comes out of his room looking angry. He yells that I should do my work, and he will do his. I go back to the kitchen and try to calm down, but I can't. I go again to the corridor and pick up toys from the floor that lay about on my way. We continue arguing. I don't want to lose this battle. **Hier bin Ich der Boss!** *Я здесь главная! I am in control here.*

G behaves the same way I do. He is raising his creaking, breaking teenage voice. It has both the notes of a child and the notes of a grown-up man. I hear him ordering me to go clean something else because this house has a lot of mess. I lose my temper and throw something against the floor with all my anger, shouting something like, **"Do you think I don't know what a mess we have here?!"**

Suddenly, I hear E crying pitifully. He keeps saying, "*It was a new car; I just got it as a present*". I am looking at the floor and see a broken toy car. *Oh, my God, what has just happened here?* I slowly start to realize I have just thrown his toy car so hard against the floor that it broke and can hardly be repaired. I am sliding down to the floor and call E and G with a gesture for a hug. Now, we are all crying together. I apologize and promise E we will go buy a new car today. I start figuring out where we can possibly buy a toy car during the lockdown. At the same time, I can't stop thinking it could have been a productive day today. **Oh, for God's sake, you are the Mother first of all; that is where you ought to belong**.

episode q.   Dis(obedience): Am I a bad person?

20.5.2020

I decided we need to visit the campsite with Marina and Saila. Most of the restrictions related to the pandemic have been lifted. There are two months before the language camp begins (if it does). I am sure the whole idea of the camp will feel different to all of us, as it felt different to me after we had visited the campsite with Saila last autumn before I reserved it. Even though Saila and I have already been there, I do not remember much because we visited several places that day, and this site was not the first on my priority list. We could walk there, see the place and surroundings, and even do some physical exercises there (which we plan to be an important part of the camp's program) to get acquainted with the place – to get

connected to it. We agree with the girls on the day next week for this short trip, and I book a car. I look forward to it. After all, I deserve a beautiful day off.

It comes to my mind that it would be good to see the house on the campsite from the inside. I have some worries about it. On the website, it says the cottage has only one room with sleeping places for 18 people – a bit too much for living together for two weeks, even though in my mind, the camp is meant for students. *Should it be the women-only language camp?* I know there are no reservations for the campsite on the day we have chosen for our trip. I still feel a bit uncomfortable about "stealing" the keys from Laura, so I ask Saila to call Laura to ask her about how we could get in. Saila contacts Laura the same day and writes me a message that day, saying we are not allowed to go there. "*Do you mean we are not allowed to go inside the building?*"

"*I am not sure, but I understood we are not allowed to go to the campsite at all*". I don't understand. There must have been some misunderstanding. It does not make sense to me. Why would it be a problem if we enter the campsite? We have already been there with Saila in autumn without asking anyone.

I email Laura asking the same questions. She replies, "*Unfortunately, you cannot go to visit the campsite before your reservation, and the campsite is totally closed in May. Nobody can go there. You have probably already heard this from Saila because she called me, and I already told her this same thing*". I feel stupid. Why would she tell me something different from what she told Saila? Now I am 100% sure we are not allowed to go there. No room for "misinterpretation". I am very very upset. It is not just about taking another step forward for me; it is about the day off with the girls after this exhausting Covid-19 spring. Never mind. I have already booked a rental car. We can go somewhere else and have fun together.

We discuss the issue and options where we could go with Marina and Saila. Finally, we decide to travel towards the village where the campsite is situated. There is a beautiful church and seashore nearby. During the drive, I keep asking the girls whether we should still try to see the place. I would prefer one of them tell me it is fine and that we can just go there or the opposite – no, by no means, we cannot do it. However, we all have conflicting feelings about it. "*Okay, let's just get closer to it, and then we will see what happens*", I suggest. When there are only a couple hundred metres left to the campsite, I start driving very slowly as if sneaking about furtively, ready to run away any moment. We reach the gates and see they are open, and there is a car in the territory. I start making a reverse turn to drive backwards, but we notice a man approaching us. *What if we just ask him?* I quickly ask Saila whether she could talk Finnish to him. She agrees. We are getting out of the car, but Marina says she will stay in the car. We are coming closer to the man. He looks friendly. Saila starts explaining to him in Finnish that we came here to see the place because we are going to organize a language camp in August. *She is so*

good at friendly communication with people! The man looks a bit hesitant. He explains the situation about Covid-19 and social distancing and mentions there is still no certainty about whether the campsite will be open this summer. It triggers some extra anxiety in me: *That's not what I want to hear!* Finally, he allows us to see the campsite without entering the house and even suggests parking the car on the territory of the campsite. We are going back to the car with Saila and see Marina making a face as if asking whether it was a success. I give her two thumbs up: *Yes, it was!* I feel happy, and I believe girls feel the same way.

In the evening, while driving back, I feel it has been a good day. We went around the entire territory of the camp. *It is unbelievably beautiful.* There are pines and birds, a long shore with clear seawater, at least two piers, boats, a table for ping-pong, and a football field. I am convinced our participants will love it there. The girls look enthusiastic about the campsite as well. I know it will become more real for them now. However, one thought still haunts me: *What if Laura watches the videos from the cameras and sees we were here?* We/I have disobeyed. It was disrespectful to her, but I cannot help thinking we/I made the right decision.

> *episode r.*   We will do our best

28.6.2020, 15:21
From Jouni to Anna

Hi Anna,

This might be the last question…

I now have the all-clear that I'm able to keep two weeks holiday in August, so in principle, I could join.
BUT, as I once again read your advertisement about the camp, it was mentioned that the participants should be at least at skill level A2.
As mentioned, I have read through Kafe Pieter 1, which is (I just checked A1 level) and to be honest, normal discussion is very difficult for me. There might be some words in my mind, but because I have never used those in everyday life, I can't remember them. And that's the main reason I like to join some kind of language bath.

Faithfully,
-Jouni-

28.6.2020, 21:04
From Anna to Marina (originally in Russian)
Marish, what do you think about it?

29.6.2020, 8:53
From Marina to Anna (originally in Russian)

Hi!

It is difficult to say something concrete because we do not have a rigid program compelled for A2 level. It would be good, of course, to make groups of higher and lower levels of knowledge. On the other hand, we are not a traditional camp, so we can try something new. We can tell him we do not plan to study grammar as such (do we?) and that the camp is aimed at vocabulary expansion and overcoming a language barrier. Thus, much will depend on himself and his desire to try to explain what he wants today by relying on the knowledge he has. If there are students who speak better than him, it is good because this is how one learns new words and progresses.

That's how I see it. As we are still not sure how we will organize the lessons, it is hard to say. But, for example, I have travelled to France with my B1 level, and I was in the B2 group. And it has been such a solid impetus for the development of my language skills, especially for understanding the speech of the native speaker.

Marina

29.6.2020, 9:33
From Anna to Jouni

Hi Jouni,

Thank you for this question. It is true that it's easier for both teachers and students when students have the same level of language knowledge. That's why we state that it should be at the A2 level. However, there is still a gap between, for example, A2 and B2 levels. It means, in any case, we will have to adjust the program and exercises depending on the needs and capabilities of students. Moreover, there are always more talkative and less talkative students. And we have to deal with that as well.

It can also be true that some of our students will feel a bit uncomfortable in the beginning because it is a big challenge to get into a situation when you have to speak only a foreign language. Probably, in the beginning, you will listen more than talk. However, on our side, we aim to decrease this feeling of discomfort.

At the same time, it is also important that you understand that much depends on you and your ability not to compare yourself to students who came with a B1 level. Just make your own steps.

So, you are welcome with your A1 level. We will do our best.

Kind regards,
Anna

episode s.   What will it be?

10.8.2020

Second day of the camp (notes in the smartphone).

I am exhausted. I don't want anything. I have not slept properly for three days. I just can't sleep. Why did I decide it was a good idea to sleep in a tent? This "menu discussion" assignment today was too difficult for students. Liisa got annoyed about it. I am shaking from the inside. I hope no one finds me here. It is only noon now. I want to sleep so badly, but I am afraid of the night. What if I do not fall asleep again? Marina is also tired. She said she agreed to do it only because of me – because I had to write the dissertation. Why on Earth did I decide to organize this camp? I cannot deal with everything that is going on emotionally – it's too much to be responsible for. I keep thinking they will not like it here. What will it be?

episode t.   Overall, it was a good idea

19.8.2020

Eleventh day of the camp

Today is Jouni's turn to present his hobby. I am looking forward to it and feel a bit nervous. I am ready to give the cues, to intervene and stay silent,

and to be there for him. We have discussed and rehearsed his presentation about Russian iconography several times. Before the presentation itself starts, we go through a list of difficult words related to the topic with other students. Everyone is in a good mood. Mikko is joking as usual, and Leena is smiling supportively; Jouni, though, seems a bit nervous. Finally, he goes "to the stage" where we have been "performing" with Marina for the last ten days. At this time of the day, there is gentle sunlight shining through the trees. Jouni puts his own works on the table: Holy Trinity; Maria, mother of Jesus; and three different icons of Jesus. I enjoy the picture – the golden nimbuses seem to be shining on the icons. *«Я не православный»* ("I am not an Orthodox"), he starts his presentation, *«я – лютеранин, но лютеране тоже пишут иконы. История иконографии началась задолго до разделения церкви на православную и католическую…»* ("I am a Lutheran, but Lutherans also paint the icons. The history of icon painting had started before the East-West Schism…"). Jouni is talking slowly and clearly, showing paints and brushes and commenting on details on the icons. After the presentation, the other students, Marina and I ask him multiple questions – partly in Russian, partly in Finnish. The topic is difficult; therefore, we agreed to break the main rule of the camp of speaking the Russian language only. However, I am happy to hear that most of the questions are still asked in Russian. The discussion continues. Jouni is telling about joint projects between his Lutheran community and a parish in Northwest Russia. The presentation lasts longer than we expected. *He has so much to tell us!* I catch myself thinking that I was right to insist that Jouni participate in this camp when he expressed his doubts regarding the level of his Russian language skills. *And, frankly speaking, overall, this camp was a good idea.*

7   Focusing on Identity Work

This chapter revisits the episodes narrated in the previous chapter to discuss the identity work I experienced and reflected upon during my entrepreneurial and research journeys. I focus on the episodes that exposed me to being hesitant, unsettled, and uncomfortable and unravel them by seeking to understand how the identity work was related to those affective experiences. By interpreting those situations, I reveal how the identity work unfolded and how its focus has changed throughout the journey. My interpretations move from identifying the concrete situations that evoked emotions and identity work towards identifying and/or embedding my self-image in a broader socio-political discourse. First, I identify what kind of experiences triggered identity work during the entrepreneurial journey while identifying how "digging into my self" provoked emotions. Then, I look at myself as one who finds herself between "who I think I am" and "what I think being entrepreneurial means" and emphasize the sense of disorientation related to this kind of liminality. Further, I identify myself as a migrant and observe what being one adds to interpreting my affective experiences. Finally, I look at my experience as one who started recognizing her gender embeddedness.

7.1   Affective experiences and identity work

Most stories in the previous chapter have some affective experiences at their core. It could have been a disturbing feeling – a feeling of dissatisfaction with myself, a failure, or an epiphanic experience. Affect is what made those stories important to me. I felt I needed to write in my diary when something bothered me or made me feel anxious, excited, worried, scared, hesitant, annoyed, etc. I wrote because I needed to deal with those emotions – to make sense of what was happening and understand what was going on with me. Chapter 5 mentions that the emotions experienced in the entrepreneurial journey were the tools that helped my research. I learned to see them as signals and recognize there might have been some kind of (identity) conflict if a situation triggered intense feelings.

Mariana Ortega (2016) suggests that the self is "multiplicious"; the multiplicity of the self is revealed as "being-between-worlds" and "being-in-worlds" (p. 50). So, a single situation the previous chapter described opens a door to the multiple social

worlds I am "in" while being in "between". The worlds might exist in parallel, but they most probably overlap, merge, and collide within me, provoking a sense of ambiguity.

Kathleen Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects* (2007) puts affects at the fore of everyday life and suggests ordinary affects give everyday life "the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies" (p. 2). She says, "Each scene begins anew the approach to the ordinary from an angle set off by the scene's affects". Affects are not "just" reactions but constitute the "circuit" in life. A story about the self evolves around affective experiences.

While analysing the situations I picked for this dissertation, I noticed the most triggering ones were those that made me feel uncomfortable (i.e. when I compared myself with others, when I had to present myself to others, and when something did not go as expected). Therefore, I start my interpretations by focusing on these three topics.

7.1.1   Comparing the self to others

Since the beginning of the research/entrepreneurial journey, I started spotting entrepreneurs among people I knew or among public figures in the news; I also paid more attention to images of entrepreneurs in fiction books, movies, and TV series. I deliberately attended events organized by the student entrepreneurship society and the university courses, where entrepreneurs shared their instructive and entertaining stories. Kareem (episode a) presented his story at one of those events. He embodied the image of a businessman or a "real entrepreneur", as I pictured. He had an early experience of helping his mother run a business. For him, entrepreneurship has always been about livelihood; he was ready to take financial risks. He has been trying and failing and retrying. I assume the organizers of the event invited Kareem because he graduated from the same university where the participants of the event were studying, thus showing "he was one of us". However, for me, he still embodied a "heroic image" of an entrepreneur discussed in critical entrepreneurship literature (see Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson 2007; Hytti & Heinonen 2013; Katila, Laine & Parkkari 2019). By this, I do not mean how he presented himself. Instead, he was genuinely considerate and humble when talking about his success. "Being special" was something that I expected from him. I wanted to see a courageous risk-taking, individual conform to my expectations about entrepreneurs. For example, Kareem talked about his early experience of earning money for his education as an advantage. For me, who had not had to bother about how my education was paid for (the government granted it), this overall disturbing experience seemed admirable. Simultaneously, I could hardly relate to Kareem's and many similar stories of successful entrepreneurs. Although we had something in common – we were

university students from abroad – I was more focused on the qualities that made us different: "*I am not courageous enough", "I am not a risk-taker", "I avoid thinking about, mentioning, or discussing money issues", "I have never had entrepreneurial experience*", and *"my background is not from the IT sector".* I looked for the features in entrepreneurs I could not find in myself, revealing "who I am not", thus constructing an anti-identity (Stanske et al. 2020; Carroll & Levy 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003).

I had family members, friends, colleagues, and university peers who run their businesses, so I compared myself to them. Some were mothers and wives approximately my age with more or less similar backgrounds and professional experience, such as Sasha and Natalia, my former colleagues (episode b). They have not been serial entrepreneurs; I was unaware of whether their businesses were profitable and was prone to doubt it. I could hardly see them as entrepreneurs. They seemed too much like me. They have expressed their entrepreneurial selves by choosing to do something different – something of their own. Their ventures looked like hobbies (Lewis 2006), and I questioned why I could not start doing what they did. *If they managed to initiate something new in their work lives, I could, too.* When I finally found myself being involved in actual doing, I realized my way of "creative organizing" resembles how Natalia and Sasha have been doing it.

Under the category of "humane entrepreneur", Ulla Hytti and Jarna Heinonen understand an entrepreneur who is "running a low-tech firm with modest business goals or acting as an intrapreneur in an existing organization" (2013, p. 886). The "humaneness" of entrepreneurship is constructed at the individual level. So it is closely connected to the relatability of the image of an entrepreneur to the self (Burcharth et al. 2022). So, although the examples of entrepreneuring women with the same background had similar professional and family experience, making them seem more relatable, becoming a "humane entrepreneur" meant remaining who I am – acting without "the magic of thinking big". "Remaining myself" did not seem like a good plan for becoming an entrepreneur. Besides, I have not seen "remaining myself" as something worth researching. Thus, in a sense, it was kind of an identity loop, implying I would like to become a kind of entrepreneur I cannot relate to. Yet, the idea of initiating a project I felt I could implement did not seem entrepreneurial enough.

7.1.2   Exposing self/revealing an idea in front of others

The necessity of exposing myself during the entrepreneurial/learning journey was one of the reasons for intensive identity work. In many situations, I had to talk about myself and the project I would initiate. Presenting myself to others felt different from journaling about my experiences and emotions or comparing myself to others while

observing what they said and did. I had to confront others while presenting. They could react and respond to what I said or just ignore me. These "other" people were, for example, university teachers at entrepreneurship courses or coaches at the coaching programs, colleagues I had shared ideas about the research/entrepreneurial project, and people I wanted to work with, as well as my friends.

Introducing myself to others implies answering the *Who are you*? question, which is internalized as *Who am I*? This interaction implies dialogical identity work (Beech 2008). As any socially involved person, I have answered this question my whole life. I had to answer it even more often after moving to another country and starting my doctoral studies because I met so many new people daily. During the entrepreneurial journey, how I presented myself to others depended on the context and how close I was to those I talked to. Thus, the ways could vary from a formal introduction, "*Hello, my name is Anna, I am a doctoral student, I research entrepreneurship…*" at the beginning of the *Business for Researchers* course to more personal confessions about myself, as in an email to Saila and Marina (episode j). I wrote the email during the period of intensive identity work when I had to decide whether I could initiate and lead an entrepreneurial project. I presented myself as a doubtful person with many fears regarding starting a new project. While I wrote it for myself, understanding what stopped me from 'just doing it' was important; I wrote the email with them in mind as readers, meaning I wanted to share how I saw myself so Saila and Marina could decide whether they were interested in continuing "trying it" with me. Overall, I was more or less prepared to face the "Who are you?" question.

The more difficult question to answer during the entrepreneurial journey was, "*What is your business idea*?" Initially, this question is not about the self but what one will do and their future plans. However, as I later understood, "*What is your business idea?*" has been closely connected (or even entwined) with the "*Who am I?*" question. For example, in the entrepreneurship courses, I was hesitant to present my ideas. It felt like they were not good enough, childish, or irrelevant. Later, I understood that behind this hesitance lay the fear that if I said aloud to others what my ideas were, everyone (including myself) would have seen I was naïve, lacked knowledge, and hardly understood anything about real business. Therefore, I sought to avoid discussing the language camp idea. In one of the courses, I even behaved as if I did not understand the assignment aimed at revealing and formulating business ideas (episode d). Instead, I focused on presenting my research, trying to rely on my more salient identity as a doctoral student. I was glad when we had to work with imaginary ideas in other entrepreneurship courses, and somebody else had to answer "our core question" (as in episode l). Saying "This is what I want to do" was surprisingly difficult because it inevitably implied revealing the insecure self.

Cannella et al. (2015) discuss that a firm can be considered an extension of the lone founder and a family firm as one of a family and its members. Likewise, in entrepreneurship education, an enacted idea, exposed in a pitching exercise, can be considered an extension of a student's self. Thus, in the process, when ideas are being enacted, students' selves are exposed to enact entrepreneurial identities. One main message of the entrepreneurship courses I attended was that sharing business ideas with others is crucial in any entrepreneurial journey. An entrepreneur needs to be open about their ideas to create something that will have value for others. Talking about a business idea implies that people who listen also express their opinions and attitudes. They can support, criticize, or reject the idea completely, and the reaction is not always expected. For example, when we discussed with Marina and Saila what a good idea for the Pre-Accelerator could be, I was surprised and even got a bit upset that they supported Marina's idea (episode f). Although we agreed we would suggest different ideas and discuss them together, when they actually challenged me, it was disturbing and made me challenge the idea of the language camp again.

We decided to apply for a grant from an organization that supported Russian language teaching and learning outside Russia to implement the idea of a language camp. However, a non-commercial organization had to make the grant application. As we (Marina, Saila, and me) could not apply as three individuals nor have enough time to establish our organization with a more or less reliable history, I decided to ask a regional non-commercial association – which we had already visited with Saila when we worked on the City Adventure game –whether they would be interested in applying and organising the language camp on their behalf. I was introduced to Alex, who showed genuine interest. He said I needed to meet the head of the organization and suggested I come to the board meeting. While thinking about that meeting, I pictured myself standing in front of the senior people sitting around a table and assessing me (episode m). It felt a bit overwhelming. Imagining the meeting with people who would decide whether the project suited their organization triggered the *Am I good enough?* question and then again, the question: *Do I want to do it at all?* The meeting did not happen that day. Alex phoned and said it would be better if I contacted the head of the association the following week, which I did. However, I can still see that image of me standing in front of senior people as if it were a bad dream.

In entrepreneurship education and especially in business coaching, teachers, including myself, and coaches deliberately challenge students and their ideas with an implied intention to help them build confidence about what they do and their resilience for facing the market and operating in it. How efficient this approach can be is not straightforward though. At the Pre-Accelerator program, organized by a student entrepreneurship society that we attended with Saila and Marina, coaches were intensively challenging participants (episode g). Even then, it was clear to me

that boosting the confidence of the participants through their resistance towards those "attacks" was part of the coaching process. I would even say their approach towards us and their reactions to what our team said were milder than how they challenged more mature teams. However, their approach and reactions had the opposite effect on me. During the assignments, when we had to reveal our ideas and the coaches reacted to what we were saying, I had already doubted myself, our ideas, and their relevance for the program enough to fight for those ideas. Thus, I did not feel more confident afterwards. Instead, I just found more confirmation regarding the assumption that I was simply not an entrepreneur (i.e. entrepreneurial).

7.1.3 If something goes wrong

A situation that made me challenge myself and ask what was wrong with me happened when I had just become a coordinator of the Russian language circle at the university. We had a nice first meeting where we introduced ourselves and played some ice-breaking games. I thought it went well; however, no one from the first meeting came to the second (episode c), which was upsetting. As a coordinator, I felt I was responsible for that. In that situation, my identity work was triggered not because I compared myself to others or because someone openly commented that my/our "*ideas sucked*" or that assumptions about customers were "*bullshit*". In this situation, I started doing something that was new for me, and people, as I thought then, were not interested in it (or me). This somehow resembled the feeling when, in the middle of the semester, the number of students attending the lectures starts decreasing, and you question yourself: *Am I doing something wrong, or is there some other reason for them not to come?* However, in the teaching–learning process, you often know they will come anyway because they need to pass the course and get study credits for it. However, when I volunteered to organize regular meetings with people who might be interested in talking in my native language, I felt responsible for organizing it so that people would be interested in coming without any extra benefits. However, in this situation, I felt I could not attract people to join the circle. For some time, until I found a way to make those meetings more entertaining, that experience added doubts about my "entrepreneurial plans" and provoked the question of *whether I should do it (start something new) at all*.

Another unsettling situation that triggered my self-reflection happened when a student started crying at the workshop we organized with Marina as a Russian language teacher's assistant (episode o) – the second time we organized this seminar. The idea behind those seminars was to encourage students to speak Russian as much as possible (we later enacted this idea at the language camp). We knew the group of students quite well, and I felt confident and relaxed about the seminar. However, pushing the student made her feel uncomfortable. I never considered myself as

someone who could make a person cry, especially a student. I have normally been more worried that students were too relaxed during my lectures. Moreover, this seminar was not obligatory for us to organize or for students to attend. This was our initiative with Marina. Students came to practice talking freely and willingly. *How did I not recognize that the student felt insecure? Am I not empathic enough?* It almost felt like a failure for me as a teacher and the person involved in organizing the workshop.

This experience also resembled the situation discussed above when we had to present our ideas at the Pre-Accelerator, and the coach told us it was bullshit (episode g). His idea was to push us "outside our comfort zone". Similarly, but being on the opposite side of the learning process, I pushed the student into doing something she did not feel was easy for her then. I believe once she does it, it will be easier for her to do it again. In some sense, I was following the logic of a business coach from the program organized by the Student Entrepreneurship Society. And similarly to how I behaved at the Pre-Accelerator while feeling insecure, the student had to skip the activity.

7.2   "Back and forth" of in-betweenness

At the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey, I often found myself in situations when I knew what I needed to do but hesitated to do it. It could be making a call, writing an email, or asking something from people directly when meeting with them. Initiating a meeting with people whom I did not know was especially difficult. Responding to someone's personal or public proposal or invitation, be it an open position of a language tutor or a suggestion to join a project, has been much easier. During that time, I applied for at least ten grants, including research grants, travel grants, and grants for business and social projects. In all those cases, I have not had the usual feeling that I was "*bothering others with my problems and ideas*". However, as discussed, taking the initiative, which often required exposing myself and my ideas, was more difficult.

Overall, the experience of "starting to do it" felt like moving forward and then back and then forward again, as if I could not decide whether to do it. I even shared this self-observation with Saila and Marina in an email: I acted like I took one step forward and two steps back (episode j). This sensation reminded me of the concept of "being in-between" or experiencing liminality (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1980; Beech 2011) that Chapter 3 discussed. It felt like being "neither one thing nor the other" (Beech 2011, p. 286).

Table 1 focuses on the moments that the episodes in the previous chapter described when I experienced hesitation. I see those moments as examples of being in-between or experiencing liminality. These were affective moments of

disorientation and doubt. I felt unsettled and restless and frozen, unwilling to take action. At those moments, I had to decide what to do in a particular situation. What made some moments even more intense, as I see them now, is that the choice of action (or inaction) also implied an identity question – the question of who I am, or, more precisely – *who should I be acting like.*

Table 1. Liminality and identity choices.

	Following more or less familiar scenario	**Identity choices** **Who are you (becoming)?**	*Stepping into uncertainty*
episode a **episode b**	*I can continue doing what I know how to do, like teaching.*	Am I an entrepreneur?	*I can start something up myself.* *What if I make all those efforts, invite people to join me, and we work together, only for "potential customers" not to get interested? How miserable will I feel?*
episode d	*I can present my research about entrepreneurship and look confident and knowledgeable in the eyes of others.*	Are you the one who looks naïve and lacking in knowledge or the one who is afraid of being exposed to criticism?	*I can present the idea of the language camp and take a step towards making it happen.* *What if I present it and everyone sees how naïve I am?*
episode f	*I can agree with Marina's idea and be supportive.*	Are you the one who annoys people with her ideas, or are you the one who doesn't have the confidence to defend her ideas?	*I can insist on organizing a language camp.* *What if I offend Marina and do not implement the idea of the language camp?*
episode m	*I can go to the hockey match and be a good mother.*	Are you a bad mother who does not find the time to attend her son's hockey match or a coward who looks for an excuse to avoid going to the meeting?	*I can go to the meeting and take another step towards implementation.* *What if I come to this meeting and they find the idea ridiculous? How embarrassed will I feel?*
episode q	*I can do as Laura said (and obey the rules). I will be a good (diligent) person then (as usual).*	Are you the one who behaves disrespectfully and ignores the clearly stated rules, or the one who cannot make it happen?	*I can still go to the campsite and take another step towards making it happen.* *What if Laura finds out I ignored her instructions? How embarrassed will I feel?*
episode r	*I can tell Jouni not to come to the camp because it might be too difficult for him.*	Are you the one who talks about something she is unsure about (faking, pretending to know – acting as if) or the one who plays it safe (the one who does not want to risk it)?	*I can tell Jouni to come to the language camp.* *What if it is too difficult for him, and he regrets joining the language camp?*

So here I look at the liminality in its narrow meaning as experiencing a moment (which could last for quite some time) when I was choosing between stepping back (and acting according to a more or less familiar scenario) and stepping into a situation with an unpredictable outcome. Choosing to step back meant I could rely on who I knew I was and on how I believed people saw me. I would have felt secure doing the well-known "right" thing, such as becoming a supporting person for implementing Marina's idea (episode f) or being a good mother to my son if I go to the hockey match instead of having a meeting that was important for my entrepreneurial efforts (episode m). In turn, by choosing to step into uncertainty, I would have to challenge my sense of self and get involved in the situation, which could be emotionally disturbing and embarrassing. In this case, I would have to present someone I was not sure I was.

Regarding agency, Kathleen Stewart suggests that "the move to gather a self to act is also a move to lose the self" (2007, p. 85), meaning the hesitancy related to deciding whether I should act was also about having to compromise some parts of my identity. Besides, the ordinary affects "can be seen as [...] the trajectories that forces might take if they were to go unchecked" (Stewart 2007, p.2). So, those affective moments of hesitation reflected anticipation of the outcomes that could make me feel uncomfortable. For example, when I realized Marina and Saila supported the idea of the City Adventure game (episode m), I could keep insisting on implementing my idea of the language camp or supporting Marina's idea. To some extent, this was an attempt to make a "rational choice". We needed to agree on an idea to apply to the Accelerator program. I tended to agree with Marina and Saila that the idea of a City Adventure game was more suitable for the program. However, from the perspective of identity work, it meant something else. When I did not feel confident about the idea of a language camp, I did not want to be that annoying person who kept insisting just to insist. The alternative was to support and help Marina implement her idea while giving up on (or postponing implementation of) my idea, which felt like a less bold (i.e. less entrepreneurial) choice for me.

In hindsight, I can clearly see "the right choices" among the options I describe in Table 1 that led to implementing the language camp. For example, I feared looking naïve while presenting the idea of a language camp at the business course, but by pitching the research proposal instead, I made myself look even more ridiculous. The naïve pitch made up in four hours brought me much further than days of hesitation and considering the best way to do it (episode e). I also now understand that visiting the campsite without permission was the right decision (episode q); it had not harmed anyone. However, back then, when at the moment, it felt like an impossible decision because I felt trapped between "I know I need (and I want) to do it" and "I am not allowed to do it". When in the moment, defining what the right option is hardly possible (or even relevant). For each situation, the more important question was: *Do*

you feel ready (motivated enough, secure enough) at this point to challenge your stable, reliable identity? In other words, to a lesser extent, the situation was about making rational choices but about imagining how I might feel in the "worst-case scenario".

Moreover, Kim Poldner (2013) discussed that being stuck between discourses (e.g. social vs. economic goals; creativity vs. financial viability) in entrepreneuring can lead to the impossibility of making a decision. The dichotomy disables seeing a multiplicity of discourses. This idea resonates with my experience of entrepreneurial becoming. The question I kept asking myself during my entrepreneurial journey (and even after) was, "*Are you an entrepreneur or not?*" I sought to hear the answer, "*Yes, you are,*" to start acting. However, from the perspective of identity work, the question does not make sense because identity is hardly a choice between two options; it is always in the making. As Stewart (2007) states:

> "Like a live wire, the subject channels what's going on around it in the process of its own self-composition. Formed by the coagulation of intensities, surfaces, sensations, perceptions, and expressions, it's a thing composed of encounters and the spaces and events it traverses or inhabits. Things happen. The self moves to react, often pulling itself someplace it didn't exactly intend to go" (p. 79).

As discussed, at the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey, I experienced an unsettling situation when participants of the language circle I coordinated did not attend the second meeting (episode c). I was worried it could happen again and did not want to feel miserable again. I almost immediately called this experience "rehearsing a failure". I considered having a bigger "real" project (starting a business or non-commercial organization, developing a new course and selling it to an educational organization, organizing a language camp, or something like that), always with the idea in mind that I could fail. Therefore, one of the key questions throughout the journey was: *What if I make all those efforts and invite people to join me so that we will work together, only for "potential customers" not to get interested?* This disturbing question haunted me until we met with our participants at the campsite on the first day of the language camp. This is an inevitable and important question because it requires reflection. However, especially in the beginning, it neither made much sense nor helped the process. Moreover, some "what if" questions that invite us to think twice and reflect – questions that can correct the actions and launch identity work – can rise into too big and abstract questions that make the concrete action needed for moving one step further impossible.

7.3   Migrants belonging and entrepreneuring together

7.3.1   Looking for belonging

Moving from one country to another almost inevitably creates "liminal time and space" for a migrant. I decided to do an autoethnography (and started writing diaries) two months after arriving in Finland for doctoral studies. However, in my diaries, I did not write much about moving to another country and probably ignored my feelings related to the migration. I have hardly ever felt discriminated against in Finland for being an immigrant and believed the topic was irrelevant in an autoethnography. The understanding that I had been experiencing major changes requiring a lot of emotional work came to me much later, probably only after my stress level lessened. Especially when I read the articles on experiences of migration (e.g. Wessendorf 2019; Osazir-Kacar & Essers 2019; Essers et al. 2021), I started to retrospectively revise my entrepreneurial experience and recognize that although the immigrant in me manifested in my actions, the liminal position of a newcomer added to my feelings of insecurity and hesitance to act.

For starters, our ideas for entrepreneuring have exposed us (Marina and me) as immigrants. When developing Marina's idea of the City Adventure game, we searched for the places in the city connecting Russia and Finland (episode h). It has been Marina's first and my second year since our arrival in Finland. We were still excited about the move but felt inevitably homesick. In some sense, through developing the City Adventure game, we sought to attach ourselves to our new place by finding the attractions connecting Russia and Finland.

Also, the idea of teaching Russian in Finland came to Marina and me. Only cooking national cuisine can probably be as stereotypical of migrant entrepreneurship (and employment) as teaching language. This venture was about identifying what I thought I was naturally good at – about the part of my identity I could rely on. Although I was not a professional language teacher like Marina, I was a native speaker (episode o) and a daughter of the Russian language teacher for foreign (not Russian) students. In my eyes, these qualities made me legitimate for teaching Russian and organizing a language camp.

However, relying on my knowledge of language and culture was not only about recognizing personal competitiveness in this field; it was about leaning on something bigger than me but still part of me. For me, the question was: What can I, a newcomer to Finland, suggest to the Finnish people? How can I become a valuable (i.e. appreciated) member of society? I came here for doctoral studies. Although this is often a paid position in Finland, I still felt I was a student benefitting from Finnish

society. My Russian language knowledge was one of the valuable assets I could share. Although I moved to another country, I felt attached to where I came from.

Experiencing liminality as a newcomer implied I am looking for my people to find my place in this society – to feel needed and accepted among those I meet. In some sense, looking for belonging permeated my being and doings. During my entrepreneurship journey, this search became a driver for actions (*if I show myself as an active and reliable person, I can be accepted by people*) and a restricting force (*if I do something wrong, I can be abandoned by people*).

If I return to the story when Alex invites me to present the idea of the camp before the board of directors of SVS (episode m), I can see that the doubts and hesitation related to meeting those people relate to my fear of not being accepted as a migrant. These abstract people, whom I had never met, represented the Finnish people interested in learning the Russian language and culture. In my perception, they would decide not only whether the idea of the camp was good enough but also, symbolically, whether I could be a "useful" member of Finnish society.

Two more stories illustrate my insecure sense of self as a migrant. Both relate to communication with Laura, the woman responsible for renting out the campsite for students. She worked for the city and, thus, represented the city in my eyes. The first story of when I put her keys into my bag (episode n) seems so harmless and silly – something to laugh at and forget forever. However, I can still remember how ashamed I felt when she called and asked whether I had taken her keys with me. I felt as if I were one of "those migrants" who misbehaved in this respectable and flawless Finnish society. Would I feel different had it happened in my home country, where I was not a newly arrived migrant? I don't know. I just clearly remember this feeling of guilt because she helped me with the booking and spoke English with me; however, I could be an "untrustworthy foreigner" in her eyes. I had similar feelings when Marina, Saila, and I we visited the camp despite Laura telling us it was prohibited (episode p). That time, I clearly ignored the instructions, but then, it was less about being an immigrant and more about doing what I needed to do. Besides, I shared this act of disobedience with Saila, who is Finnish.

Belonging is a central issue for migrants, especially during the liminal period of the first years of migration (Wessendorf 2019). Seeking belonging was at the core of my entrepreneurial journey. The desire to belong motivated me. I wanted to be professionally useful and accepted in society. In addition to "Who am I?", I had to question "Who are they?", "What are their expectations?", "Who should I become for them to accept me?", and "What should I do to get them interested?". I was focused on understanding who others were and what they might expect from me; I was keen on meeting those expectations. In some sense, I was defining myself by imagining how others saw me. Although I understood what others (especially customers) want is a useful skill for the entrepreneuring process, focusing too much

on belonging and the feeling of being accepted was restricting. May (2011) emphasizes that the sense of belonging plays a central part in connecting a person to society, although she claims there is always tension between the desire to conform to belong to the group and ignoring the group's expectations to present a self that feels genuine (p. 761).

7.3.2   When "I" becomes "we"

A turning point during my entrepreneurial journey was when I started answering "we" instead of "I" to the questions related to "setting up a business": *"How is it going with your business project?"* and *"Still not much clarity about it, but we are considering different ideas for participation in the Accelerator program"*.

Having a team of at least three people has been an application requirement for the Accelerator program, in which I planned to participate. So, I needed to find two people who would agree to apply with me. Getting two people interested in working with me felt challenging because I was unsure anyone would be interested in something I still could not define myself. When Marina said she did not mind participating in the program, I started feeling more confident about it. As I see it, Marina and I started building the sense of "we" while teaching the Russian language together at the university language centre. Due to a research project, the teacher overseeing a course in which Marina and I assisted suggested we substitute for her for two months. We agreed with Marina that we would be present at each lesson. Thus, we prepared for each lesson together or at least decided on who did what. In other words, we asked ourselves and each other, "What will *we* (Marina and Anna, course teachers) teach *them* (students of the Russian language) *next time*?"

I also wanted a Finnish-speaking person to join us in applying to the Accelerator program (and probably become one of the participants in whatever we decided to organize) because I realized that language knowledge could make many processes easier. Saila was a master-level student who had participated in the Russian language course, in which Marina and I assisted. I had already considered inviting Saila to join us before, but having met her on the bus (episode e) and the fact that Marina already supported the idea of participating in the Pre-Accelerator made me more courageous about asking her.

Thus, our "*we-ness*" started appearing because of our participation in the Accelerator program. First, we discussed what *our* business idea for the Accelerator could be (episode f); then, during the Pre-Accelerator, we had to introduce *ourselves as a team* or reveal the values *we* shared (episodes g and i). After participating in the Pre-Accelerator, we continued working on the idea of the City Adventure game. Inspired by our conversations and my research goals, I initiated a recorded discussion with Marina and Saila about how we experienced the Pre-Accelerator (episode i).

We discussed what was happening there, what made us feel uncomfortable, and how we differed from other program participants. Through that discussion, we revealed how each of us saw ourselves individually and as a team. For example, we talked about another team that participated in the program; Marina pondered that she hardly could have worked with the leader of one of the teams because that person was pushy and overwhelmingly passionate about their business idea. When we discussed the program, Saila said had we participated in the program, coaches would have compressed *us* into something *we* did not want to be. Gradually, this statement transformed into the question, "Why didn't *we* fit in?" (Elkina 2021). During that discussion, we did not define who we were and what we wanted to be(come); instead, we touched upon who we were not.

Discussions about the meaning of "business", revenues, and money orientation were crucial for understanding how we saw ourselves as a team and what we would like and could implement. Sharing the views with Marina and Saila was important for me because I continued thinking it was what I wanted – to become a different, revenue-oriented person; however, I could not because something was wrong with me. When talking with Marina and Saila, who had similar values and views, I felt I was becoming bigger when facing the image of "the real entrepreneur", challenging my intentions to fit into those frames of understanding business and entrepreneurship to implement something we wanted to implement.

7.3.3 Who is who?

Along with defining who we were as a team, we (Saila, Marina, and me) had to understand who each of us was within the team of three. The actual defining of the roles in the project happened when we already knew what kind of project we were to implement. However, when there was no clarity about what we were doing together, we just tried different roles by acting collectively.

In the early stage of my research journey, I had a discussion with a keynote speaker at one of the conferences who shared the idea that in entrepreneurship education, creating a team should precede developing a business idea. Before that conversation, I had been convinced that an idea was more important and that the one with an idea just needed to find people who would be interested in implementing it. When we started looking for an idea for the Accelerator program, I still had a kind of chicken-and-egg dilemma: *What comes first: an idea or the team?* I thought I needed an idea to invite people to work together. However, I did not want to insist on my leading position and wanted Saila and Marina to get more involved by suggesting their ideas. At some point, we discussed that we could set up an organization that initiated different kinds of projects. In that case, each person would be responsible for their own project. So, I was unsure whether I wanted Marina and

Saila to join me or all of us to generate ideas and, thus, share responsibility for implementing the projects.

When we started discussing ideas for participating in the Accelerator, Marina and Saila thought the idea of City Adventure that Marina suggested was more aligned with the program's concept (episode f). I agreed. I was very keen on participating in the program because I was sure it would provide many materials for the research. I easily gave up my idea of the language camp, while in addition to the rational assumption, *"This idea is good for this event"*, there was the weird fear of "*what if they do not want to participate in it with me if I do not agree?*" Moreover, when I realized we did not seem to move much with our idea, I even considered (although not very seriously) joining another team, which I mentioned in the recorded discussion (episode i). *If I do not have enough passion, could I join a passionate team?* In both cases, giving up on my initial idea meant giving up the leading position. At that moment, it felt like a relief. I could still be involved in entrepreneurial activity, but not as the one who regularly needs to push the project forward. Simultaneously, focusing on Marina's idea of City Adventure did not lead to changing roles in our team. Participating in the Accelerator was not her priority for that summer (as it was for me), which she told me from the very beginning. At least, I felt that a question was still directed at me, "*What do we do next?"*

For some time, participation in the Accelerator program was an aim for me and, to some extent, Marina and Saila. I felt we needed the guidance from the program. We wanted to find an idea that was compatible with the program's format. However, once we decided not to participate in the program, we were on our own. This situation made me rethink my attitude towards the process. I could not expect Marina or Saila to be equally engaged and motivated or take the lead and responsibility for the project, which was important for me. I wanted and needed to be involved in the entrepreneurial activities because of research. After participating in the Pre-Accelerator, we continued developing the City Adventure game (episode h); then, I felt it should be me who pushed it forward. However, after the summer break, I suggested that Marina and Saila apply to another program, like the Accelerator program, but with the idea of a language camp (episode j). In some sense, I was back to where I started with the idea of language camp when I initially presented it at the university business course for researchers (episode e). This time, however, there were Marina and Saila, with whom I went through the entertaining but challenging experience of the Pre-Accelerator, and there was an understanding on my behalf that I needed this project more than the others; thus, I had to lead it.

Another aspect of initiating and implementing the language camp with Saila and Marina relates to how my self-perception changed when they were with me. As mentioned, for Saila to be a native Finnish speaker was crucial to me. I asked Saila for help when I needed to write an email, call someone, or translate a document into

Finnish (see, e.g. episode q). However, gradually, at the Pre-Accelerator and since then, I started relying on her in situations in which one needed to take the lead in talking, such as when we went to the campsite without permission and met men there (episode q). I relied on her ability to communicate nicely with people to shield my hesitance to talk in Finnish and my insecurity about meeting new people. On the first day of the camp, I asked Saila "to entertain participants" who had just arrived while I went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Trying to avoid the situation when people do not yet know each other and do not know what to talk about, I asked Saila to be brave for (instead of) me. Also, I had a similar situation at one of the entrepreneurship courses I took after we participated in the Pre-Accelerator (episode l). With two other students, we had to go to the street to ask bystanders what kind of social problems they cared about. Although I knew we could speak English with people on the street, I pushed one of my teammates to talk for us with a stranger in Finnish.

From the first time we met at the interview for the position of teacher's assistant, I saw Marina as a more professional teacher than me. She had philological and pedagogical education and experience in language teaching. In one of the early discussions of the language camp, Marina told me something like, "*No, it does not work that way. If you gather people with different levels of language knowledge and lock them in a camp for two weeks, they will not automatically start speaking Russian. There should be common ground, materials, contents, and an approach*". Not that I had not considered it before, but there was some solid reasoning and confidence in her voice that made me believe she knew what she was talking about. Since then, I felt there was someone nearby who would not let nonsense happen. This feeling gave me more freedom to imagine and suggest some ideas, which I was unsure about. Also, when Jouni, one of the potential participants, emailed me, asking whether his language level was enough to participate in the language camp, I redirected it to Marina to get her opinion (episode q). I was no longer the sole controller. I knew Marina would tell me if she felt something would not work.

7.4 A mother, entrepreneurship, and its gender-neutrality

7.4.1 Being a mother and entrepreneuring

The questions of what women entrepreneurs do and how they experience entrepreneuring have been essential to my research since the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey. I knew I was a woman, not a man, and I felt aware that this mattered to understand the process of becoming an entrepreneur. Besides, I considered being a mother at the core of my identity. Therefore, I carefully reflected on different situations related to my interaction with 6–8-year-old E and 12–14-year-

old G during my entrepreneurial journey. I assumed those situations would contextualize the entrepreneurial journey in my research. Gradually, through reading and reflecting on what was going on with me, I started noticing that practices of mothering not only contextualize entrepreneuring but constrain, encourage, and frame, meaning entangle with the practices of entrepreneuring (Luomala 2018; Gherardi 2015).

As mentioned, being a mother has been central to my self-identification. The strongest emotions I have experienced have been related to my relationships with my children. Being a mother, ensuring they are safe, fed, hugged, healthy, and emotionally and mentally stable has been my primary duty and responsibility since their birth. Moreover, moving to another country has intensified the pressure of responsibility because those who shared the duties and responsibilities were not physically nearby anymore.

Being a mother is often considered a restriction for work and entrepreneurial actions (Luomala 2018). Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004) show that the routines of taking a child to school and picking them up can be seen as "a daily chore that sets the cadence of organizational time" (p. 416). Similarly, everything I was involved in during my entrepreneurial/research journey had to be considered from the perspective of "*What will kids do, and who will stay with E at that time?*" I had to interrupt my working day to pick up my younger son from daycare or take him to his sports training. One reason we organized the language camp in the summer was that I knew finding people to stay with my children in the summer would be easier since they would not have school.

During the spring of 2020, when the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic hit, I, like many parents around the world, experienced the restrictions of being a mother in its extreme form (see Einola et al. 2021; Yavorsky, Qian & Sargent 2021; Collins et al. 2020). Being the only caregiver in our household in Finland, I found myself trapped with my kids at home (episode p). The schools that shared the responsibility for taking care of my children with me were closed, so I started to feel that all my time belonged to my children. I was obliged and willing to do my work; however, separating my working time from the time I dedicated to my children was challenging. It was not a matter of choice; I felt *I had to be who I really was – the mother* – and suppress all other ambitions (episode p).

The lockdown in the spring of 2020 showed how much worse such a life can be compared to the one I had lived before the lockdown when I was waiting for the right moment to experience entrepreneuring. From that perspective, the lockdown motivated me and even pushed me towards organizing the language camp. I could not bear being "only" a mother; I had to show myself. When the Covid restrictions were partially lifted and the doors of the schools and the university opened in May, I felt I had all the time and resources in the world. Therefore, when one who was

responsible for the campsite told us we could not go there (episode q), I could not comprehend it; it felt like some misunderstanding – *No, you don't understand, this is the moment I feel like I can finally do it.*

Yet, in most situations, I could choose to spend time with my children or do some extra work. At the beginning of the journey, when everything was new to me and every step I took felt like stepping into uncertainty, I was sporadically dedicating time to different activities, such as attending guest lectures and meetings of student organizations, coaching sessions, participating in and organizing language circles, or volunteering in Russian language tutoring without clearly understanding why. Sometimes, those activities did not seem to lead anywhere. Or, as I described above, when participants of the language circle didn't come (episode c), it felt like I was doing something that people did not actually need. In these situations, I felt as if I were stealing time from my children.

After the unsuccessful second meeting of the language circle, I decided inviting participants to have a "Russian cuisine evening" at my apartment would be a good idea. It worked surprisingly well; many came. For participants of the language circle, the cooking-and-eating-together events seemed more attractive than sitting-and-drinking-in-the-pub or even watching-a-movie-together events. Thus, several meetings of the Russian language circle were held at my apartment because I did not know who would stay with 6-year-old E if I went to a pub. When the children were home, they even initiated board games for the circle's participants. Thus, I could enjoy communicating with people interested in Russian language learning and being with my children. Later, when developing the idea of the language camp, I considered offering G, who was keen on cooking then, the opportunity to participate in the camp as a native-speaker volunteer (helping in the kitchen). Although I rejected that idea, the experience of cooking and eating evenings at our apartment inspired some ideas for the language camp. Cooking together became an important part of language training in the camp and was crucial for creating a relaxed and homey atmosphere. Thus, for me, *being a mother during the journey was about balancing* (Gherardi 2015) or even *combining entrepreneuring with mothering*.

Moreover, in the early stages of the entrepreneurial journey, being a mother was a safe place. I took this place and the sense of belonging with my sons across the border when I moved from one country to another. When I was so upset because participants of the language circle did not come (episode c), it comforted me to know there was a place I belonged with two very important persons who needed me. Thus, although I needed to get home by a particular time to be with my children (to feed them, play, read with them before they go to bed, and accompany them at their training and competitions), it took time and energy, and I felt restricted about how much time I could spend on alternative activities. However, whenever I felt self-

doubt, disappointment, and non-belonging because something went wrong in my entrepreneuring, I knew I could go home and just be a mother.

The manoeuvring between staying in a safe place and attempting to step into uncertainty was discussed above. Table 1 presents the situation when I had to attend the meeting to present our idea to organize the language camp (episode m): *Are you a bad mother who does not find time to attend her son's hockey match or a coward who finds an excuse not to come to the meeting?* The meeting of the organization's board members was planned to be held approximately the same time E had a hockey match. Being present as a parent when your child is performing is not only crucial for a parent and their child; it is also a social expectation, which is not easy to separate from one's personal desire. For me, it has always been easy and clear: I should go to the game because that is what good mothers do.

Although there is a hockey match I want to attend and am expected to attend as a good mother, such does not require any extra effort from me. I know how to do it and what will happen. I want to do it, and I am expected to do it as a good mother. However, there is a meeting I need to attend if I want to move forward with the project. There will be many senior people who, in my eyes, also represent Finnish society, to which I want to belong. They will look at me and decide whether our project and I (a Russian newcomer) are good enough for their organization, meaning enjoying a well-known role instead of exposing myself to the uncertainties of entrepreneuring was much easier.

7.4.2   After-journey epiphany

> *It just had to happen because it was the right time and place;*
> *the topic was obvious to everyone but me. Reading articles,*
> *attending the vulnerable writing seminar, watching movies, talking*
> *to female friends and colleagues, reading more articles, having*
> *more experiences, not forgetting Covid-19, writing my own texts,*
> *and then learning about this book presented at the conference by*
> *Silvia Gherardi[4].*
> *Now, let's just iterate it:*
> *GENDER IS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED.*
> *I was not born feminine; I was born female. I was expected to*
> *become feminine – whatever that might have meant. Supportive?*
> *Caring? Submissive? I have been working hard to meet these*
> *expectations, and God knows I excelled. Okay, then. This is what*
> *all fuss is about. Entrepreneurship is not a gender-neutral concept.*
> *Entrepreneurship is constructed as a masculine phenomenon. A*

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[4] Bruni, A., Gherardi, S., & Poggio, B. (2005). *Gender and entrepreneurship. An ethnographic approach.* Routledge.

good entrepreneur is a masculine entrepreneur. He is a breadwinner, even if he is a she.
What should I do with this precious knowledge about gender now? How should I combine it with my 30-something years of life and work experience?
*What do I do with all these **"We live in a world of equal opportunity…"** "**If you work hard enough…"** "**You know not all people are equally dedicated**…" "**It is probably just not who you are…?"***
And all those stories. The warrior who wins is praised, not the caregiver who heals his wounds. I admire the warrior – the male entrepreneur – not his caring wife. That's it. The warrior I want to become, not a dull teacher organizing a language camp.
"But you know all those women who try to compete with men… A woman must remain the Woman in the first place."
"Just keep quiet for a while; I am trying to understand what I want, not what a woman must".
Is it I not allowing myself to be someone I want to be(come), or is it I not accepting myself as I am?

7.4.3   "What if gender matters" revision of experience

As described above, I was aware I was a woman throughout the journey. Simultaneously, the research experience entangled with entrepreneuring during the liminal period of being a migrant encouraged me to reconsider what being a woman meant. I have moved from one country to another, which implied changing the socio-cultural context, making new friends, and building new networks; it also meant changes in my family life. For the first five months, I lived alone. After that, my children – but not my husband – moved to Finland. During my entrepreneurial/research journey, this remained our family situation.

My tiny entrepreneurial journey in the country where, at some point, 10 out of 15 ministers were women led by a female prime minister has not given much experience connected to, for example, sexism or discrimination against women in the business and entrepreneurship field. Simultaneously, during our discussions with Marina and Saila and especially after participating in the Pre-Accelerator (episode g, episode i), we often touched upon the topics of masculinity and femininity, feminism, and male and female entrepreneurship. I felt Marina and especially Saila were more critical about what occurred during the Pre-Accelerator. They pointed to the masculine patterns of coaches' behaviour. Saila also paid attention to some sexism in how one guest coach talked when he mentioned he had just lost at the municipal elections because of "those female voters". As for me, I just had not noticed those jokes. The comment from one of the participants of the Pre-Accelerator

who said we should not place the Russian president's portrait in our office (episode g), revealing the stereotypes related to my national identity, sounded far more annoying. I was hardly interested in looking at our experience from the gender perspective. I kept recognizing the elements of "how the real entrepreneurs behave" in the behaviour of coaches and some participants.

After the Pre-Accelerator, moving forward with the language camp meant choosing "doing what we can do, though hardly entrepreneurship" over "not doing anything at all because I am not an entrepreneur". Gradually, it became obvious there was much work even in "doing hardly entrepreneurship". So, the "*Who is an entrepreneur?*" and "*Are we doing entrepreneurship or not?*" questions became irrelevant for some time. However, after the language camp ended, I returned to those questions that bothered me.

Although I had the empowering "We did it!" feeling (episode s), there were still many questions to answer. Not only research-related questions such as *What was this experience? Was it entrepreneuring? What has that to do with entrepreneurship?* triggered me, but more annoying questions, such as *How many people have you employed? What was your profit? Were you innovative enough? How about risk? What did you risk? What is next? What are your future plans? Will you expand internationally?*

Simultaneously, I could not ignore the idea, which appeared during the research/entrepreneurship journey, that entrepreneurship is socially constructed as a masculine phenomenon (Bruni et al. 2005). Although not all men are prone to breadwinning, most of them, in some cultures and/or neighbourhoods especially, are raised under the pressure (and encouragement) of that expectation. Besides, men dominate the field; thus, they define the rules of the entrepreneurship game, meaning most females, who are raised and socialized into feminine patterns of behaviour (and given that such is an integral part of their identity) are expected to reconsider those patterns when they join this male-dominated game.

When I started revising the experience through a gender lens, looking for instances of how gender is constructed or done in everyday life, different important details arose. For example, when we applied for a grant to organize a language camp, I asked Alex for permission to write his name in the application as a project manager and indicated Marina and myself as project coordinators. Alex has never asked me about it, but I believed it was the right thing to do. Although I was very grateful for his support, as he helped us meet different people, gave advice on practical issues, and made us feel our project was needed, I thought the application would seem more reliable in the eyes of the grant committee if a male vice-director of the organization was included as the person in charge of the project.

So, in my imagination, "the real entrepreneurs" have usually been males, such as "born into entrepreneurship" Kareem (episode a) or the self-confident and a bit

sexist coaches from the Pre-Accelerator (episode g). During my entrepreneurial journey, I met women entrepreneurs. For example, when looking for a campsite, I visited a lady who runs a country hotel with cabins by herself. However, I did not focus on those instances when writing about entrepreneurship. As I wrote above, I doubted Natalia and Sasha could earn a living from what they did (episode b). In conformity with a narrative about entrepreneuring mothers of small children, I saw their entrepreneurial attempts as hobbies (Lewis 2006). Another example of ignoring women as entrepreneurs relates to a coach from the Pre-Accelerator program who led a session about team building and defining team values. She had her consulting business but looked too much like me to be considered "a real entrepreneur" in my eyes. These experiences resonate with the idea of arrogant perception suggested by Marilyn Frye and discussed in an article by Maria Lugones (1987): "…women who are perceived arrogantly can perceive other women arrogantly in their turn".

In the chapter "Self-interpreting animals" of Charles Taylor's book Human Agency and Language (1985), he analyses how articulations shape feelings. He gives an example of someone who experiences a feeling of unease and a sense of unworthiness. By reflecting, the person concludes he is ashamed of his background. His further reflection leads him to understand this kind of shame is senseless, demeaning, and degrading. Gradually, the initial feeling of being ashamed of his background disappears, and he even starts feeling initial shame is something to be ashamed of. This example reflects how my self-perception changed when I embraced the idea of gender in entrepreneurship. As I see it, when trying on the image of the "real entrepreneur", I felt this discomfort and unease. Gradually, I started understanding that within the discourse of entrepreneurship, I feel ashamed of who I am. Not being a competitive, risk-taking, passionate individual while considering becoming an entrepreneur felt shameful. I started to understand I was ashamed of being a female, or, more precisely, to "do the gender" into which I had been socialized.

For me, understanding this shame meant recognizing the sense of admiration and even submissive self-positioning in relation to the dominating image of an entrepreneur, which also implied devaluing alternative images of entrepreneuring, including my entrepreneurial endeavours.

From the gender perspective, further work on identifying myself in the entrepreneurship field and in working life overall implies two presumably conflicting directions. Although I am learning not to feel inferior to the masculine image of an entrepreneur, to respect and worship the "feminine" part of myself, and to appreciate entrepreneuring as creative organizing, I keep asking myself whether I could (and should) resist the deeply internalized gender-embeddedness and focus on finding the (probably suppressed) competitive, risk-taking, creatively destructive part in myself. *What can I do with my gender-embeddedness so it does not feel like*

a trap? What can I do if I know I was not socialized into being a breadwinner but would like to become one? What does my gender have to rely on in entrepreneuring?

8 Discussion

8.1 Revision of the questions

A research question I have been looking for in my research journey and gradually came up with was: *How does identity work unfold during an entrepreneurial journey?* This question appeared to be broad enough to embrace my experience, research curiosity, and theoretical interests. By agreeing with myself on having this question, I emphasized that I see identity work as a process of becoming and recognize the multiplicity of the ways I identified myself during my entrepreneurial journey. This research question also assumes there can hardly be a single answer. The identity questions evolve, and the answers evolve with them.

In the dissertation's text, I reveal questions I have asked myself and others during my entrepreneurial and research journeys. Identity work has been unfolding through posing the questions. Following the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Essi Ikonen (2020) suggests the question occupies us long before we can see or recognize it. I agree. Identity work had been unfolding in what I did before I knew the identity question my actions were answering. Only later, after having written a question down, such as "*What's wrong with me?*" or "*Can I become an entrepreneur at all?*" in my diary or posing a question to my teammates, such as "*Do you think you could join a team which has explicitly focused on money-making?*", I could see there had been identity work going on and interpret what it was about.

The process of writing about the self is identity work. The confusing combination of the research topic (identity work) and the chosen method (self-observation), which implied the blurring of the roles of a researcher and a researched person, made the core phenomenon somehow elusive. I have always been a bit late as a researcher. I have been trying to capture the core question of identity work while my mind has been posing new identity questions born from what I had just learned and experienced. Therefore, the evolution of the identity questions also changed the meanings of the core research question and the focus of identity work depending on what was important for me at the different periods of my entrepreneurial and research journeys.

My stories of entrepreneuring that unfolded identity work started with the question, "*Why can't I just do it?*" This annoying question was particularly relevant

at the beginning of the journey. Chapter 6, which reveals my interpretations of stories while representing my after-journey identity work, ends with the question, *"What does my gender have to rely on in entrepreneuring?"* In other words, I started unfolding identity work by focusing on myself, but gradually, I learned to see my experience in a broader context; I learned to frame myself within alternative discourses that were new to me, but which I saw as relevant to my experience.

Further, I elaborate on how I see my contribution to the discussion about the self and identity work in the process of entrepreneurial becoming. First, I focus on how identity work unfolds within the theoretical frame of liminality and in-betweenness. Then, I discuss building gender awareness as an important step in a woman's entrepreneurial process of becoming. Finally, I discuss how belonging – a concept for understanding identity work – can be applied to understand entrepreneuring as a process deeply embedded in a social relationship.

8.2   On liminality and affect

One way to answer this dissertation's *"how"* research question is to claim identity work during an entrepreneurial journey unfolds through experiencing in-betweenness. Liminality, which is being in-between (Beech 2011), appears to be an appealing concept for understanding identity work in entrepreneurship studies, especially when one talks about becoming an entrepreneur. Even the word "*entre*"preneur(ship) etymologically might be interpreted as containing (and meaning) in-betweenness (see Hjorth 2003; Steyaert 2005). Simultaneously, understanding the liminality and how the concept is applied has significantly evolved. In 1909, folklorist and anthropologist Van Gennep (1960) introduced the idea of the liminal stage of a rite of passage (e.g. an initiation rite) to explain the rituals of transition from one social status to another. He described well-established rituals in which everyone knew their role, including a liminar, who has been experiencing symbolic "death" to be "reborn" into the well-articulated role of an adult. In other words, being in-between implied some certainty about the future self. Currently, "liminality" and "liminal" as concepts applied in social sciences have much broader meanings. In entrepreneurship studies, we discuss, for example, people who live in precarious conditions creating organizations as "liminal entrepreneuring" (Garcia-Lorenzo et al. 2018) or view entrepreneurship programs as risk-free "liminal spaces" (Burcharth, Smith & Frederiksen 2022).

My research adds to the literature that considers liminality as a state of in-betweenness requiring intensive identity work and one's emotional involvement (Beech 2011; Muhr 2019). I sought to apply the concept to better understand identity work experienced at the very early stages of an entrepreneurial journey. From within, during the journey, the in-betweenness manifested through the moments of

hesitation and doubt. These moments of staying still could lead to making a tiny step towards what I saw as being entrepreneurial or not making that step but postponing it or denying it outright. In-betweenness implies entering the unknown, which feels insecure and requires reliance on an established identity.

Liminality implies the time and space in which one might feel a wide spectrum of emotions – from exhilaration to frustration; simultaneously, it is a space of anti-structure containing a possibility (Muhr 2019). Liminality can challenge identity and reconstruct it (Beech 2011).

This dissertation suggests looking at identity work from within a (self-defined) liminar – one who finds themselves betwixt and between. Based on the literature, I noticed and focused on different ways of experiencing (and understanding) liminality and in-betweenness during the entrepreneurial journey.

Liminality as a stage. First, especially in organizational studies, liminality is often understood as a stage of the process of becoming that implies that a newcomer becomes an experienced employee or manager (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006; Weatherall & Ahuja 2021; Callagher et al. 2021). From the perspective of becoming, identity work implies constructing a provisional identity to bridge the gap between self-concepts and a yet-to-be-elaborated professional identity (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann 2006; Weatherall & Ahuja 2021). So, in a professionally liminal position, a person gets involved in intensive identity work. Ibarra (1999) suggested that during the transitional period, an employee's identity work has three consequent stages: "observing role models to identify potential identities", "experimenting with provisional selves", and "evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback". So, in organizational studies, there is an underlying assumption that "new" will become "expert" over time as "part of progress and development towards a more established identity" (Weatherall & Ahuja 2021, p. 407), implying a person has understanding about what an expert or professional in some particular field means for them. However, in entrepreneurship, the role model can be more blurred or even illusionary. As Burcharth, Smith, and Frederiksen (2022) state, "[E]xperimenting with different "provisional selves" is difficult when the provisional selves are unclear" (p. 1673).

In this context, I exposed being in-between as manoeuvring between a present (accumulated) self and an imagined (future) entrepreneurial self. The present self reflects a self-image based on the accumulated experience and knowledge about the self; the imagined entrepreneurial self reflects the image of an entrepreneur based on accumulated experience and knowledge about entrepreneurship and can be perceived as the "non-me" (Muhr et al. 2019). In my case, the gap between my present self and the image of the "real entrepreneur" was quite substantial; I could hardly find the common ground. Therefore, the imagined future entrepreneurial self was quite

unclear. This discrepancy or identity gap at the early stages fuelled the desire to escape because "*I am just not an entrepreneur*", especially when something was going wrong or I had to take another step forward.

In-between the worlds. Simultaneously, if we look at identity work from the perspective of Latino feminist writers, we see that "in-between" is not a temporal state or space but a definition of the self. Relying on Latin feminist and Heideggerian existential phenomenology, Mariana Ortega suggests the self is multiplicitous. It implies "being-between-worlds and "being-in-worlds" (p. 50). The self is present in and moves between different social worlds. Maria Lugones introduced the notion of "world-travelling" and explained it via the example of Latina women living in the US:

> "Being stereotypically Latin and being simply Latin are different simultaneous constructions of persons that are part of different "worlds". One animates one or the other or both at the same time without necessarily confusing them, though simultaneous enactment can be confusing if one is not on one's guard [...] Those of us who are "world"-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different "worlds" and of having the capacity to remember other "worlds". [...] The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call "travel" (1987, p. 11).

My study revealed the process of seeking my entrepreneurial identity in the context of other identities: the identity of a mother/woman, a researcher, and an immigrant. For example, I showed that the idea of becoming an entrepreneur might feel like challenging oneself as a mother. At the beginning of the journey, it felt as if I had an important, respected identity, but through entrepreneuring, I was trying to go beyond this identity – to neglect it or even become a child myself and "play entrepreneurship". Another way to look at the multiplicity of identities is to recognize, following the ideas of Maria Lugones, that in the entrepreneuring process, I travelled between different social worlds. That kind of travelling is more than just being torn between home and work. It means travelling between different worlds that construct an idea of what one involved in entrepreneuring looks like. The worlds often conflict, and staying attuned to many worlds might confuse a person, leading to conflicting emotions. Therefore, moving forward requires identity work.

Simultaneously, Burcharth, Smith, and Frederiksen suggested that a hesitant entrepreneur in a liminal position without a clear prototype of an entrepreneur can "give in to the well-known and comfortable prior work-related identities" (2022, p. 1673). According to Lugones (1987), we feel more at ease in some worlds than others. In my experience, the identity of a mother was not only a restriction for

entrepreneuring (Luomala 2018; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004) but part of a world in which I could feel at ease. When something was going wrong with my attempts at entrepreneuring, and I felt *"I am just not an entrepreneur"*, I could travel back to the safe identity of being a mother, where I knew what to do and how to do it. I could rely on my experience and "professionalism" in this part of my life.

In-between the countries. Another way of discussing in-betweenness I find inspiring relates to the experience of moving from one country to another. Cross-border migration is a challenging moment for the multiplicious self. It implies a physical world and travelling between countries. Therefore, the experience of in-betweenness is sharper and more violent (Ortega 2016). A person loses the sense of being at ease in most parts of their life. The intensity of experience reflects the need to restore the sense of self. Thus, what one chooses to do during those periods, including entrepreneuring, is substantially defined by this need to restore, find, or create the worlds in which they feel at ease.

The in-betweenness migrants' experience is discussed in the migration studies literature (see, e.g. Kirk, Bal & Janssen 2017), but the concept of liminality is rarely applied in the literature investigating migrant entrepreneurship. In my research, I revealed that being between two places – physically in the country where I arrived but mentally where I came from – can impact the choices made while entrepreneuring. For starters, in my entrepreneurial endeavours, I focused on teaching in my mother tongue. Liminality related to migration is experienced as turbulence and a sense of insecurity – a temporal experience that is particularly intense in the first years after moving from one country to another. The part of the self connected to where one comes from is particularly challenged. This desire to remain connected to where one comes from might partly explain why migrants rely on attributes of national identity (language, culture, cuisine, etc.) while entrepreneuring shortly after arriving in the host country.

8.3   Entrepreneurship, gender, and identity work

Another way to answer this dissertation's research question is to claim that during an entrepreneurial journey, identity work can unfold through revising what one sees as entrepreneurship. It can concern reconsidering the role models, the scope of business, or even the value of one's entrepreneurial actions. My autoethnographic research in the entrepreneurship field has inevitably brought me to the critical literature revealing entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon (Bruni et al. 2004; 2005; Lewis 2006; Ahl & Marlow 2012; 2021; Berglund et al. 2017, and others). In my research of identity work, which I sought to unfold as a negotiation between self and the idea of entrepreneurship, the encounter with this literature has encouraged me to shift the focus of identity work from the self towards an image of an entrepreneur (and the overall idea of entrepreneurship).

So, this dissertation's findings draw on insights from literature that rethinks and reconstructs the role of gender in entrepreneurship practices. Previous studies have illuminated that entrepreneurship is not a gender-neutral phenomenon but socially constructed and normalized as masculine (Lewis 2006). Doing gender and doing entrepreneurship are entwined practices; although entrepreneurship is equated as masculine, alternative (non-masculine) forms exist (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio 2004; 2005). Besides, the previous research showed that not only do men not consider gender an issue, but some women entrepreneurs remain gender-blind and committed to masculine norms of entrepreneurship (Lewis 2006). In my research journey, I learned to embrace the idea that gender matters. Therefore, as I see it, the contribution of this thesis lies in revealing the experience of building gender awareness as part of identity work during an entrepreneurial journey.

At the beginning of the journey, the image of an entrepreneur was mostly taken for granted. It remained untouched and empowered by encounters, such as those at the Pre-Accelerator program, where my assumptions about what "real entrepreneurship" looks like were confirmed. To become an entrepreneur, I just had to change my self or let it go because "entrepreneurship is not for everyone". So, identity work was focused on myself, my traits, and my identity (*What kind of identity restricts one from becoming an entrepreneur? Being a mother? Being a teacher? How does my self reveal in practice?*). When I "discovered" for myself that entrepreneurship was a concept that is deeply embedded in the idea of masculinity, I started revising what I saw as entrepreneurship and who I saw as entrepreneurs. And it turned out that my ideal (illusionary) role model of an entrepreneur was male, masculine, and hardly relatable.

In this dissertation, I autoethnographically described some key moments of identity work related to recognizing entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon. In the stories, I revealed the resistance to accepting gender as a relevant issue for entrepreneurship, thus exposing myself as gender-blind (Lewis 2006).

Simultaneously, I kept emphasizing I am not an entrepreneur, echoing how women talked about themselves as "dis-entrepreneurs" in Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004). Further, in an after-journey epiphany, I described recognizing that gender matters in entrepreneurship as an emotional and disorienting experience. It can be described as the experience of regaining agency but being unsure what to do with it: Embrace "femininity" and proudly rely on it in entrepreneuring or dig deeper into the self to find suppressed "masculinity" and try to overcome this imposed and internalized gender-embeddedness.

Overall, learning about gender as a structure revealed that identity work related to becoming entrepreneur(ial) is not only about *my* self and *my* inherited personal traits and mindsets but about gendered socialization and internalized social expectations (Jones 2014). Gender is one of the structures that can restrict agency. It is not only an external set of formal rules that defines what women are allowed and not allowed to do in a particular context. Gender as a structure can be deeply internalized in how one sees oneself and others (Calas & Smircich 2006), and it manifests in practices – in how it is done (West & Zimmerman 1987; Bruni et al. 2004; 2005). Accepting and internalizing the idea that a structure exists – in my case, that entrepreneurship is not a gender-neutral phenomenon, that both sexes are hardly equally treated when they do entrepreneurship, and that in entrepreneurship, gender neutrality might imply masculinity – is eye-opening. It is like starting to understand another language. Revealing and accepting knowledge about a restricting structure allows one to face it and possibly act on it.

Becoming an entrepreneur is often discussed as a liberating process that empowers women (Rindova et al. 2009; Alkhaled & Berglund 2018). However, for a woman who has been socialized into norms of femininity, trying to fit into the masculine norms of entrepreneurship can hardly be liberating and empowering. However, recognizing gender restrictions in entrepreneurship, becoming "gender mindful" (Calas & Smircich 2006), and discovering that a masculinized "norm" is not a universal entrepreneurship norm (Lewis 2006) but a social construct subject to change can make a difference.

Here, I need to return to the issue that my experience of entrepreneuring entwined with mine of researching entrepreneurship. Although findings from gender studies have been actively spreading in social sciences since the 1980s, understanding gender is not commonplace in entrepreneurship practices (Mustafa & Treanor 2022). My encounter with research articles that explain why gender matters in entrepreneurship is not something each wannabe entrepreneur encounters. However, there are definitely other ways that people with a "traditional" understanding of gender roles or those who can be described as "gender-blind" experience gender awareness. Gender sensitivity can be enacted due to changes in one's social environment, such as making new friends, changing a place of residence, starting

studies, or all of it together. Therefore, in further studies, it could be interesting to further investigate whether (and especially how) raising gender awareness changes their attitudes towards entrepreneurship or even behaviour in practices of entrepreneuring.

8.4   Entrepreneuring and belonging

Sometimes, it seems like the whole entrepreneurial journey was about building belonging. I recognize it in what I was doing while entrepreneuring and how I was entrepreneuring. Yes, I saw making a living from entrepreneurial activities as an option and reflected on it in the diaries. The potential threat of not finding a job as a migrant (Bizri 2017) after my studies has been one of my worries; however, earning a living through entrepreneurship has never felt like my story. My story is revealed as one of looking for and building belonging. It was about becoming a liminar – one who finds herself between two countries, two worlds, two lives. It was a story of suddenly becoming free from restrictions that constituted belonging in my previous life, feeling enthusiastic, and becoming open to new ideas but feeling deprived of a sense of professional and social belonging.

Non-belonging is freeing and overwhelming. Although it is full of opportunities, it might provide the sense of being completely lost. Therefore, those two years of my entrepreneurial journey were the time and space to reconnect my self with society and seek belonging. Entrepreneuring was one possible way to find what I was looking for. It was about searching for like-minded people overall, finding teammates with whom we were creating something together, and building a sense of "we". It was about connecting to society through receiving support from an organization that became interested in our project. It was about being trusted by locals ("our customers") who joined us and spent two weeks with us in the language learning camp. Ortega (2016) suggests the concept of "becoming-with" as a possibility of transformation as we engage with others with whom we may or may not share identity markers.

Through entrepreneuring and teaching my native language, I could put my national identity to the fore and rely on it (not hide it), which was empowering. I dare to assume that people who start their national cuisine businesses, among other things, are also striving to see that the locals of the country they moved to appreciate some part of their culture that is a constituent part of their identity.

Looking at entrepreneuring through the concept of belonging might be particularly relevant for migrant entrepreneurship, *but what if it is not only about migrants? What if we consider entrepreneuring as a binding process, bridging the self with others, and building belonging?* The concept of belonging intersects with the concept of legitimacy. For example, De Clercq and Voronov (2009) focused their

study on early-stage entrepreneurs entering the field and seeking to gain legitimacy. The authors consider gaining entrepreneurial legitimacy to be one of the stages of an entrepreneurial process and emphasize that "to be legitimized as entrepreneurs", they should learn to "fit in" and to "stand out" in the field. Vanessa May (2011; 2016) theorizes belonging similarly. She defines belonging as a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings (2011, p. 368) and states it is a complex and multi-dimensional experience encompassing our relationships with people, cultures, and the material world. May (2016) claims that belonging "hinges on receiving recognition" (p. 751), not just being accepted, but being seen. It is not about being included (as a passive object) in the system but about recognizing the agency of a subject. In other words, standing out and being seen provides an opportunity for "being with" (May 2016).

In entrepreneurship studies, the concept of belonging has been applied to understand how migrant or women entrepreneurs experience belonging or non-belonging to the community of entrepreneurs, which implies "being accepted into business" (see Lewis 2012; Stead 2017; Essers et al. 2021). For example, Stead utilizes belonging as an "explanatory and mediatory concept through which to gain [an] in-depth understanding of the relationship between gender, women entrepreneurs and their efforts to belong" (2017, p. 73). Essers et al. (2021) investigated the experiences of female entrepreneurs representing an ethnic minority in the Netherlands to theorize the concept of "entrepreneurial belonging". They also discuss legitimacy but focus on belonging and emphasize the importance of the historical and cultural dimensions of this concept. Moreover, a sense of belonging towards a place is considered a driver for community development (Redhead & Bika 2022). Overall, belonging appears to be a concept that emphasizes the embeddedness of entrepreneurship into different aspects of social (and family) life.

Looking from that perspective, I dare to suggest the concept of belonging can be considered one of those concepts that add some existential questioning (why we do what we do) to a mostly instrumental (how to create a venture) understanding of entrepreneurship as a field of study. Based on my experience, building belonging can be an important driver for entrepreneuring during the liminal periods when one reconsiders their previous experience while seeking to belong in a way that implies not just fitting in but being seen.

9 Reflections on Enactive Autoethnography

9.1 Crafting enactive autoethnography

Researching by observing myself in the process of becoming an entrepreneur brought me to two rather different – if not conflicting – methodologies of enactive research and autoethnography. Both seemed relevant for researching identity work in the process of becoming and learning through self-observation. I picked and combined elements of those methodological approaches by crafting my own way of researching my entrepreneurial experience. Autoethnography and enactive research directed me not only in how to research but what issues my dissertation should focus on.

Enactive research encouraged me to get involved in actual hands-on doing, to do my best so that a project was initiated and implemented, and to be reflexive but not to get lost in overthinking (Johannisson 2018). I wished to become an entrepreneur to better understand entrepreneurship as a process, experience practising it, and feel more legitimate when conducting research within the field of entrepreneurship studies and teaching it. The process of becoming has not exactly brought me where I had planned. I have not become an entrepreneur but have definitely experienced entrepreneuring, understood as creative organizing. Initially, I thought that through enactive research, I could gain practical knowledge (promised by Johannisson 2011) and communicate it. However, this dissertation focused on identity work, which has unfolded through moments of hesitance and insecurity. Therefore, I have not found a place to share practical wisdom (Flyvberg 2001; Johannisson 2011), which I understand as answering the question of "how to do creative organizing" in this dissertation.

Enactive research is specifically aimed at understanding "entrepreneuring". I was happy to re-discover that entrepreneuring is not necessarily defined by money-making, although one should keep financial sustainability in mind. Entrepreneuring is more about agency, co-creation, and "getting things done". I kept returning to Johannisson's suggestion that entrepreneuring means "creative organizing", which is revealed in everyday practices; thus, we can even expect to find similarities in the practices of businesspeople and busy housewives (Johannisson 2011; 2018; 2023).

As for autoethnography, it has been an appealing and simultaneously difficult methodological approach to comprehend. While reading autoethnographic papers, I could easily feel ethnography's evocative nature, even its artistry, and have been willing to learn to create knowledge and present it in writing the same way. However, more importantly, autoethnography invited me to talk about society, its pitfalls, and probably its beauty by being attentive to myself. At times, applying autoethnography felt like walking in the darkness, wondering if there is an issue (a spot) that would resonate in me – that I could recognize as relevant for understanding entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon. Besides, autoethnography is often used in feminist studies, which I understand as having an activist and critical position towards societal injustice revealed in research and everyday life. So, the autoethnographic approach pushed me towards being critical towards the fundamentals of society.

My crafting of an enactive autoethnography was based on reading about enactive research that Bengt Johannisson suggested (aimed primarily at researching entrepreneurship) and about autoethnography as a post-qualitative research inquiry. Thus, as I see it, enactive autoethnography as a methodological approach implies getting personally involved in creative organizing, living and observing this experience, and critically connecting it to existing knowledge about entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon.

9.2   Experiencing enactive autoethnography

Being brave or inexperienced? During my research journey, I was told a couple of times that autoethnography is (1) a brave choice of methodology and (2) is meant for experienced researchers. Neither statement was helpful; however, they made me think, doubt, and return to what being brave and experienced might mean regarding applying unconventional methodology. At this stage, when reflecting on the chosen methodology, I would agree that doing autoethnography adds challenges to the research process at the doctoral level. (One must admit, though, that any methodology has its own challenges).

A lack of experience can make us braver and more ambitious. At least, as we know from entrepreneurship studies that (entrepreneurial) action can be considered an outcome of less perceived uncertainty (McMullen & Shepherd 2006). However, when I came closer to the reality of doing research based on self-observation, especially when I had to expose my personal experience and theorize from it, it started to feel rather disturbing. At that point, I wished I had been more experienced, especially from a methodological perspective. Prior experience of being an ethnographer would have helped, as well as having deeper theoretical knowledge in sociology (*and psychology and gender studies and definitely philosophy and…*).

Learning reflexivity. Simultaneously, the learning experience from self-observation is enormous, especially if one considers reflexivity a feature of quality research. Reflexivity is known as an integral part of research work, particularly when it implies using ethnography (see Geertz 2000; Davies 2008) and when one applies qualitative methods overall (see Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016; Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018). Barbara Czarniawska even suggested "to exchange rigour for a flexible, forever changing, dialogical reflection over the way research is done and what research is done" (2016, p. 618). The idea of reflexivity is to be attentive to the choice of methods one uses to investigate a phenomenon (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018) and to make the researcher's standpoint visible to the reader. Reflexivity is also about being (becoming more) conscious about the self as a researcher in the research process. Enactive autoethnography has been a great experience of consciously juggling the roles of a researcher and a researched person. I sought to separate one from the other "to face each of them" and hear who says what in the knowledge creation process, which turned out to be tricky, even impossible. So, enactive autoethnography was an opportunity to experience the dynamics of subjectivity; to embrace that, I, as a researcher, am of this world, and my values, perceptions, interactions, and experiences inevitably influence the outcomes of research, as well as the methods I choose to conduct research with (St. Pierre 2018). I have been learning to embrace this idea.

Experimenting with writing differently. Unfolding autoethnography that encouraged me to focus on gender issues has been happening along with discovering "different" (feminist and queer) writing in organizational studies (Pullen & Rhodes 2008; Steyaert 2015; Pullen 2018; Kiriakos & Tienari 2018; Helin 2019). Through reading those examples of "different writing" and experimenting with writing differently (Ahonen et al. 2020, Einola et al. 2021), I got to experience academic feminism, which is revealed not only through the topic we research but in the ways of knowing (Bell et al. 2020). Unlike mainstream writing, this way of writing has been unfolding as vulnerable (Helin 2019; 2020) or dirty (Pullen & Rhodes 2008; Pullen 2018). Academic feminism could have involved using the "F" word in academic texts (Katila 2019; Poldner 2020; Einola et al. 2020). I learned and could feel that using the "F" word was a way to emphasize the strong emotions an author experienced instead of remaining calm and detached in academic writing. Different writing can seem messy and disorganized. It seeks to reflect the complexity of processes and ways of becoming. It challenges the representation of the male order in academia (Pullen & Rhodes 2008), which reveals itself as particularly relevant for management and organization studies (Bell et al. 2020) and entrepreneurship studies.

Conversely, the more "traditional writing" Chris Steyaert describes as "the usual frame/form/style of writing which follows the masculine form of linearity and abstraction, and of coming quickly to the point" (2015, p. 164) had already been

embedded in my understanding and practice of academic writing. I needed both. I have been experimenting with this new, unruly way of expressing myself that felt new but genuine, was a bit rebellious and was, therefore, appealing. Yet, I needed to feel the foundation of what I saw as traditional writing with its linearity and even distance from the researched object (i.e. myself). Overall, this manoeuvring between different methodological approaches and writing styles reflected the process of negotiating my identity as a researcher and profoundly impacted how I chose to write.

"What" I research or "how"? Throughout this autoethnographic research process, recognizing and separating the research method from the researched phenomenon I have been focusing on has not always been easy. The method and the phenomenon have been moving and changing places. I had experienced identity work even before my entrepreneurial and research journeys. Such is how I make sense of this world and find my place in it. Simultaneously, when I focused on *my self* for research purposes, I discovered and started paying attention to identity work as a phenomenon to be researched. However, in the research process, identity work regularly slipped away from my focus as a researched phenomenon and appeared as a method of inquiry. Enactive autoethnography requires intentional and more or less conscious identity work, preferably documented in diaries. In other words, I have been researching identity work by getting involved in intentional identity work.

Another example of entanglement of the method and the research phenomenon from my study relates to the experience of vulnerability. Vulnerable writing initially interested me as a sincere and engaging way of writing about oneself. Gradually, it opened up to me as a performative feminist practice that unveils gender inequality. Some of my texts started exposing the vulnerabilities related to gender biases in entrepreneurship before I could recognize that it is a topic widely discussed in the literature. I was just writing as I felt. When, for some time, gender embeddedness became the central topic of my study, I moved forward with an understanding of the methodology and embraced the idea that the knowledge academia produces is also inevitably gendered. Thus, I returned to vulnerable writing to see it as part of an alternative (feminist) methodology of producing knowledge that challenges ways of understanding and making sense of the social world (Katila, Meriläinen & Bell 2023). In some sense, the chosen method of self-observation directed me towards the topics to research; I also noticed the messy entanglement of the "how" and "what" questions of feminist studies. Is vulnerability a feature that characterizes the identity work of a woman in a predominantly masculine domain (i.e. relates to the researched phenomenon) or the writing style that helps one connect to a reader (i.e. relates to the method)?

Also, I saw my emotions and feelings as detectors or sensors that allow me as a researcher to recognize that something meaningful was happening since I tend to see

myself as a high-sensitivity device. However, the autoethnographic process required me to continuously check those sensors when they rang the bells too loud. *Why this emotion? Why it is so intense at the moment? What is wrong with the sensor? Why does it not allow me to work "normally"?* Gradually, my feelings and emotions have been opening up as part of the identity work I need to focus on.

So, the autoethnographic process revealed that the research choices I should make are not always up to me. Sometimes, it is more a question of the intensity of the experience at a particular moment of the research journey. My task, then, is to stay still and accept what is happening… to me.

Vulnerability and the shame of telling a story about the self. One important issue related to experiencing autoethnography concerns exposing the self in the research process, which might leave the researcher vulnerable. The vulnerable writing, which, for me, implied exposing myself as imperfect, doubtful, and often indecisive, has been at the core of the writing process in this dissertation. This was how I saw myself and was how I wanted to present "an average person" in the entrepreneuring process: no heroic stories, no breakthrough innovations, and no strategic geniuses – just routines, emotions, and processes. However, this is exactly where my vulnerability as a researcher takes its roots. In some sense, the vulnerability of writing about my entrepreneurial experience hides behind the question*, If you are not a model entrepreneur, why does your story matter at all?*

Academia has hardly ever welcomed a researcher's vulnerability being exposed. Strictly speaking, it has not been welcomed in public life overall. Why would emotional openness be important if researchers should distance themselves from produced knowledge? Also, in a broader context, vulnerability unfolds as a weakness, and there is the implication that vulnerable people need help. There are times and places for exposing vulnerability, and exposing it relates to private life. However, the understanding and attitude towards the concept of vulnerability have been changing (Johansson & Wickström 2023). Vulnerability has become an important topic in organization and management studies (see, e.g. Satama 2015; Corlett et al. 2021; Johansson & Wickström 2023). Vulnerability also concerns understanding how research can be done (Helin 2019; Bell et al. 2020; Meriläinen et al. 2021). Moreover, the change in attitude towards vulnerability might occur in everyday life. For example, Brene Brown, a researcher of vulnerability, significantly contributed to popularizing the concept of vulnerability not as a weakness but as a way to connect (also in the leadership field) (Brown 2012; 2018). Her speech "The power of vulnerability" has remained among the most frequently viewed speeches on the TedTalk platform for over ten years[5].

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[5] Brene Brown's TedTalk on the power of vulnerability at: https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

Susan Meriläinen, Tarja Salmela, and Anu Valtonen (2021) explore relational vulnerable knowing by looking at vulnerability through the lens of the bodily experience of being naked. Nakedness implies the state of a body when it is open for connection; simultaneously, it is at its least protected and most assailable. Similarly, practising vulnerability in academic writing promises a connection with a reader but contains a foreboding of being misunderstood or, even worse, ridiculed. Therefore, in my experience, vulnerability is one reason to feel shame while writing about myself.

Ruth Behar's essay "The Vulnerable Observer" discusses vulnerability as an ethnographer's virtue. She emphasizes the need for an ethnographer's humility and emotional involvement. She also discusses exposing the vulnerable self from the perspective of possible failure to produce interesting results:

> "The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self-revelation, one that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing; it is humiliating" (1996, p. 13).

While working on this dissertation, I inevitably had to face my vulnerabilities. Exposing vulnerability has made the process of researching myself rather complicated and uncertain. In vulnerable writing, I sought a connection but often found myself drowning in the fear of rejection and in feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. That is probably why more experienced researchers told me at the beginning of my research journey that autoethnography was a brave choice of methodology, as it required previous experience. Now that I have some experience, I suggest that a researcher's vulnerability is probably one of the few things that makes self-observation a worthwhile choice of methodology. We just need to keep looking for careful and ethical ways to rely on vulnerability (Etherington 2007; Armstrong-Gibbs 2019; Pullen, McEwen & Rhodes 2023) in our research.

Epilogue

i am begging you. tell me
what is there behind that line?
the deadline i mean, of course.
they say new beginnings happen there.
i do not think so.
all beginnings have already begun, i think.
why to end the story then?

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