Exploring Professional Identity Transition:
A Narrative Research Study of New Entrepreneurs

A doctoral dissertation presented

by

Stephanie E. Raible

to

The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In the field of

Organizational Leadership

Margaret Gorman, Ed.D., Northeastern University, Dissertation Committee Chair
Chris Unger, Ed.D., Northeastern University, Committee Member
Karen Williams Middleton, Ph.D., Chalmers University of Technology, Committee Member

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
December 2018
Abstract

With an estimated 582 million entrepreneurs globally (Kelley, 2017) and 25 million in the United States (Kelley, Ali, Brush, Corbett, Kim, & Majbouri, 2017), there is a strong interest and perceived value of entrepreneurship as a driver of the global economy (GEM, 2018), as a mechanism for job creation (Audretsch, 2007; OECD, 2015), and as an attractive career option. Despite the significant public and media interest in entrepreneurship, little is understood about the real-life, lived experiences of new entrepreneurs. This dissertation explores the professional identity transition experienced by new entrepreneurs in their first few years of full-time entrepreneurship. This narrative research dissertation records the personal accounts of professional identity transition of 14 entrepreneurs in the United States, within their first 3.5 years, who started full-time entrepreneurial roles as founders or business owners. The framework informing this study combines social identity theory (SIT) and transition theory to understand the phenomenon of professional identity transition as experienced by the participant entrepreneurs. The themes suggest that the lived experience of being a new entrepreneur differs from the common definitions and depictions of entrepreneurs, with the participants reporting on four themes: (a) misalignments with previous employment; (b) reflection of the overall professional identity transition, with a focus on the perspective of entrepreneurship as a pathway to life authenticity or self-realization; (c) identity-related reflections, including reflecting on an entrepreneurial prototype, a prior organizational identity, and previous freelancing employment; and (d) supports and strategies. The conclusions support the need to (a) view entrepreneurship as an identity (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017), (b) approach entrepreneurial prototypes with more intentionality, (c) view entrepreneur mentors and connections as identity guides, (d) support entrepreneurs as they experience changing social connections, and (e) acknowledge that
entrepreneurial transitions are viewed relative to what preceded them. The implications for research and practice reflect these conclusions and assert the need for greater recognition of professional identity transitions within their context to provide suggestions for how educators can better support identity transition and prepare aspiring and new entrepreneurs for their new careers.

*Keywords:* Identity [professional], professional transition, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurial identity, aspiring/novice, entrepreneurship education, narrative, becoming
Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. There were many people who supported and sacrificed along the way with me. First, I want to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Margaret Gorman, Dr. Chris Unger, and Dr. Karen Williams Middleton. I have grown from your support, but thank you also for challenging me as well. I feel very lucky to have met you all, and I am looking forward to being your peer. Also, I would like to thank the participants who volunteered their time to be a part of this. Hearing your stories and being able to voice them on behalf of new entrepreneurs was meaningful. Having you share your stories with me means so much, so thank you all again for your support and time.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the professional contacts who were particularly supportive during my time writing the dissertation. To Dr. Aparna Katre and my former colleagues and students at the University of Minnesota Duluth and to my current colleagues at the University of Delaware, in particular Dr. Bahira Sherif Trask and Dr. Daniel Freeman. Thank you all for helping me shape my perspectives as an entrepreneurship educator and for affording me the patience and time to write the dissertation. I am grateful for your support and your confidence that the dissertation would one day soon pan out.

I have many family members, friends, classmates, supporters, and informal therapists to thank. Thank you to my family for having faith that the whole process, especially given that I moved between four states and two European countries during the doctoral journey alone. To my friends, thank you for sticking with me despite being “under a rock” and unavailable for years. To my classmates and academic supporters, thank you for being cheerleaders and guides during the entire process. I am grateful for your collective encouragement, as it helped me push through.
The most earned “thank you” goes to my husband, Francisco, who has been living the doctoral program experience with me. Without your love, patience, and support throughout the past 16 years, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for being my better half and for putting up with me being a graduate student for 11.5 years total. I owed it to the both of us to see it all through, and I could not have dreamt of a better companion to go through it all with. I am looking forward to living a life with more balance with you, and with all of my heart, thank you, Fran, for being by my side all these years.
# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Problem of Practice

15

### Rationale and Significance

18

### Research Question

23

### Conceptual Framework

23

- Social Identity Theory (SIT)

24

- Transition Theory

28

- Combined Conceptual Framework

32

### Definitions of Key Terminology

37

### Conclusion

40

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Entrepreneurship

43

- Entrepreneurship as a Field of Study

43

- Entrepreneurship as a Public Value

45

- Defining Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship

47

- Section Summary

53

### Identity

54

- Identity Scholarship

55

- Identity Formation

57

- Multiple Identities

58

- Possible Identities

61

- Professional Identity

63
Trustworthiness .............................................................................................................. 105
Researcher Bias and Positionality .............................................................................. 109
Limitations and Delimitations .................................................................................... 112
Limitations ................................................................................................................ 112
Delimitations ............................................................................................................ 114
Chapter Summary ................................................................................................... 116

Chapter 4: Findings .................................................................................................. 117

Participant Vignettes ............................................................................................... 117
Amanda .................................................................................................................... 118
Maggie ...................................................................................................................... 119
Michael .................................................................................................................... 120
Vicky ......................................................................................................................... 121
Rachel ...................................................................................................................... 122
Nancy ....................................................................................................................... 123
Tim ............................................................................................................................ 124
Kevin ....................................................................................................................... 125
Sarah ......................................................................................................................... 126
Cammie ................................................................................................................... 127
Jason ........................................................................................................................ 128
Dana ........................................................................................................................ 129
Faye ........................................................................................................................ 131
Lily ........................................................................................................................... 132

Descriptive Codes and Coding Process .................................................................. 133
THEME ONE: MISALIGNMENT WITH PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT .................................................. 137

THEME TWO: REFLECTION ON THEIR OVERALL PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY TRANSITION........ 147

Theme Two, Subtheme One: Entrepreneurship as Life Authenticity and Self-Realization. 153

THEME THREE: IDENTITY-RELATED REFLECTIONS .................................................................. 182

Theme Three, Subtheme One: Entrepreneurial Prototypes ................................................... 182

Theme Three, Subtheme Two: Organizational Identity Loss .................................................. 192

Theme Three, Subtheme Three: Contrasting an Entrepreneurial Identity with Previous Freelancing Experience ........................................................................................................... 201

THEME FOUR: SUPPORTS AND STRATEGIES ........................................................................ 205

Theme Four, Subtheme One: Joining Co-working Spaces and Programs ......................... 206

Theme Four, Subtheme Two: Building “Grassroots” Local Support Networks ................. 212

Theme Four, Subtheme Three: Loss of Pre-transition Social Supports .............................. 216

MAPPING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION .............................................................................. 225

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................................................... 227

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ............................................................................................. 227

CONCLUSIONS ......................................................................................................................... 228

Conclusion One: Conceptions of Entrepreneurship Need to Acknowledge Identity .... 228

Conclusion Two: Entrepreneurial Prototypes Hold Power ................................................ 230

Conclusion Three: Entrepreneur Supports Serve as Identity Guides ............................. 232

Conclusion Four: Social Needs and Supports Change from Pre-transition to Post-transition ................................................................................................................................. 233

Conclusion Five: Pre-transition Periods Influence Post-Transition Assessments ........ 234

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE ............................................................................................. 235
Approaching Entrepreneurial Prototypes Strategically .......................................................... 236

Guiding Students Through Targeted Identity Reflection ....................................................... 238

Curating and Recommending Social Supports ......................................................................... 241

Helping Entrepreneurs Recover and Prepare for Changing Relationships ......................... 243

Assessing Perceived Resources and Deficits ......................................................................... 246

Implications for Future Research ........................................................................................... 248

Reflections as a Scholar-Practitioner ..................................................................................... 252

REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................... 256

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE ........................................... 300

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL .................................................................................... 301

APPENDIX C: ELIGIBILITY CHECK FOLLOW-UP EMAIL ....................................................... 302

APPENDIX D: PRE-INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION EMAIL WITH INSTRUCTIONS AND SURVEYMOMKEY.COM LINK ........................................................................................................... 303

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM ........................................................................................... 304

APPENDIX F: SURVEYMOMKEY.COM PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ................................ 307

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND SCHEDULE .................................................... 308

APPENDIX H: MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL .......................................................................... 311

APPENDIX J: CERTIFICATE OF IRB TRAINING COMPLETION ........................................ 313
## Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table/Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Schlossberg’s 4 S model</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Model for analyzing human adaptation to transition</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Social identity model of identity change</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Combined conceptual framework</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Different ways in which entrepreneurs have been defined</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Profiles of the 14 dissertation research participants, organized by amount of time since full-time transition</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Step-by-step process of data collection and analysis process</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Utilized research codes, subthemes, and themes during data analysis</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Participants, sorted by their perceptions of their overall transition (positive to mixed) experience and their previous employment (negative to positive)</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Participants’ responses to the metaphor question, ordered from least amount of time to most-time as a full-time entrepreneur</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Participants whose metaphor question responses were not coded with “life authenticity/self-realizing experience,” ordered from least amount of time to most-time as a full-time entrepreneur</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Modified conceptual framework (adapted post-research study)</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation sought to explore the professional identity transition experienced by new entrepreneurs in their first few years of transitioning into entrepreneurship full-time. The narrative research dissertation recorded the personal accounts of professional identity transition of 14 entrepreneurs in the United States who started full-time entrepreneurial roles as founders or business owners from previous full-time employment within a company or organization during the 3.5 years prior to this study. New entrepreneurs are defined by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2018) as founding and operating their firms within less than 3.5 years ago. The study combined social identity theory (SIT) and transition theory to explore the phenomenon of professional identity transition with the participant entrepreneurs. The findings generated through this dissertation research can potentially inform educators how to better prepare aspiring and new entrepreneurs for a transition into an entrepreneurial role.

Entrepreneurial activity is accounted for in multiple ways and forms and is seen as a significant economic driver of the global economy. When looking to entrepreneurial activity broadly, there are an estimated 582 million entrepreneurs globally (Kelley, 2017). In the United States, GEM estimated that there were over 25 million working-age Americans founding firms or running new ventures (Kelley et al., 2017) In the U.S. context, there is a strong perceived value of entrepreneurship, particularly as a pathway for job creation (Audretsch, 2007; OECD, 2015). As one of the most supportive environments for entrepreneurship (GEM, 2018), American entrepreneurs and their firms thrive at greater rates than some of their international counterparts, within more favorable conditions for entrepreneurial activity, spanning the areas of policy, finance, cultural, supports, human capital, and markets (Isenberg, 2011). The U.S. Bureau of
Labor Statistics (BLS) reported the self-employed as being over 15 million individuals, or 10.1 percent of all workers (Hipple & Hammond, 2016), with rising rates of start-up activity by new firms being on the rise since 2013 (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2017) and startup job creation increasing since 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2016), respectively. In 2015, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contributed approximately 54 percent of the nearly $18,000 billion dollars of the U.S. GDP (GEM, 2018). Among surveyed North American entrepreneurs, approximately 29.5 percent reported expecting a medium- to high-level of job generation, anticipating the ability to create six or more jobs in the next five years at their firm (GEM, 2018). In the United States, 38.6 percent of entrepreneurs reported expecting their firm to create at least one job in the coming years (GEM, 2018). While compelling, figures involving SME contributions and participation of self-employment may be greater than typically represented, which would arguably fail to represent the total impact of entrepreneurship (Reynolds, 2007).

In addition to notable economic contributions and job creation, entrepreneurship in the United States also holds a strong perceived value as a possible attractive career path. North America holds the highest reported global perceptions of the existence of entrepreneurial opportunities at 61.9% (GEM, 2018). Compared to the other 26 innovation-driven economies, the Unites States also has higher reported averages of a high status afforded to successful entrepreneurs (74% in the United States, 69% in other nations), entrepreneurship being regarded as a good career choice (64% in the United States, 57% in other nations), and media attention to entrepreneurship (72% in the United States, 62 percent in other nations) (Kelley et al., 2017). The positive perception of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial opportunities shows that entrepreneurship is not only perceived as holding a strong public value as a contributor to the
national economy and job creation, but it carries significant perceived value at an individual level as a possible or aspirational career option as well.

While much is known about the economic, job creation, and perceived career path values of entrepreneurship, less is understood about the lived experiences of professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs. If nations seek to expand entrepreneurial activities within their cities and communities, entrepreneurial identity plays a role in the development and sustainability of new ventures. If seeking to promote entrepreneurial behaviors, identity plays a critical role, as identities inspire, drive, and modify behaviors (Burke, 1991b; Marcussen & Large, 2003; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007). Behaviors serve to confirm self-concepts and identities through a process of self-verification (Burke, 1991b, 2004). This suggests that, to act as an entrepreneur, individuals likely need to view themselves as being entrepreneurial. When unsatisfied, the absence of self-verification can be distressing and disorienting (Burke, 1991a, 2004). Therefore, behaviors and identities in alignment with one another serve the innate need for self-verification (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989).

Furthermore, less of an understanding exists of the stories of new entrepreneurs, including their perceptions of their professional identity transition. Because the transition period into entrepreneurship is complex, these transitions cannot be simply reduced to rational decision-making within a changing professional environment (Wåhlin, 1999). The complexity of transitions makes them interesting periods of time to research identity construction and development. For individuals who frequently transition between organizations, identity construction is an especially reflexive process (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001). The process of professional identity transition has been studied extensively in social science, particularly in
adult development and education, and in management research, but within entrepreneurship scholarship, the phenomenon continues to be underexplored.

This dissertation research explored the professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the elements of the dissertation research. To establish the context and challenges of approaching this area of inquiry in practice, the chapter begins with an orientation to the problem of practice, followed by a presentation of the rationale and significance of the dissertation research. Then, the chapter presents the primary research question, which served as the guiding element of the dissertation, shaping the selection of the conceptual framework, literature, and methodology. The final component of Chapter 1 is the conceptual framework that served as a lens for the dissertation research, notably its data collection, analysis, and reporting.

**Problem of Practice**

Central to this dissertation research is the problem of practice, which identifies a real-life or an experienced challenge (Ma, Dana, Adams, & Kennedy, 2018). As an entrepreneurship educator, ample time is spent by this researcher working with students and mentees in developing skills and orientations for a transition into entrepreneurship. While entrepreneurs benefit from being able to thrive through obstacles encountered when launching and managing new ventures, utilizing skills and resources (Shane & Khurana, 2003), identity work is less prevalent in the entrepreneurship curriculum. Students and mentees come from various points in their career, including pre-career, entry-level, mid-career, and retirees. While young entrepreneurs tend to make more headlines, the majority of new founders in the United States (85.7%) are over 40 years old (Challenger, Gray, & Christmas, Inc., 2017), which means the
majority of new entrepreneurs have already experienced professional employment prior to making a transition into entrepreneurship.

As an increasingly prevalent element within individual career paths (Bridges, 2003; Chudzikowski, 2012), professional transitions play a critical role in individuals’ lives. In a longitudinal view of the careers of Baby Boomers born between 1957 and 1964, the BLS (2015) found that individuals held an average of 11.9 jobs between age 18 and 48, with job transitions lowering in frequency with an increase in age. Despite a common understanding of what exactly constitutes a career change (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), the need persists to explore and understand professional transitions. When looking to why transitions occur so often over an individual’s career, it is not uncommon to hear individuals reporting a loss of interest in or loyalty to their employer (Reitman & Schneer, 2003). In addition to the relatively lower loyalty to employers, 40% of the American adult-age workforce experiences some form of self-employment during their lifetimes (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). This can include a variety of different types of self-employment arrangements, such as engaging independent contract work (Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002), being a part-time consultant while working full-time, or working as a full-time entrepreneur. The complexity of professional transitions and self-employment have significant implications for individuals’ professional identities. In order to have a better grasp of how professional identity transition is experienced, a need exists to better understand both identity construction (Leitch & Harrison, 2016) and how identity intersects with daily professional engagements and activities (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

Understanding the important role that professional transitions play within American lives, it is worth positioning transitions as representing an interesting point in time for identity research. Because the identity is contextually dependent (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2010), a
professional transition can represent the point between two distinct contexts, two relatively steady roles, and two organizational environments. This means that the periods leading up to and following a transition may have elicited different accounts of identity. Within professional transitions, individuals are constantly informing, revisiting, and revising their roles and identities (Ashforth, 2001). The elements within a transition, for example, familial support or concurrent stress, impact and influence how individuals form their identity at a particular point in time (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). The concepts of identity and transition are addressed further within Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

This dissertation research holds relevance for multiple audiences: aspiring entrepreneurs, new entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship educators. New and aspiring entrepreneurs are also interested in better understanding the experience of transitioning into entrepreneurship. While aspiring entrepreneurs might plan for the financial and time pressures of becoming a full-time entrepreneur, the psychological and social aspects of dedicating themselves to an entrepreneurial career can be unexpected. To this end, aspiring entrepreneurs may have questions regarding what to expect or what elements might be helpful during a transition into entrepreneurship. New entrepreneurs can also benefit from stories of the lived experiences of fellow new entrepreneurs to spark reflections of their own professional identity transition. A raised self-awareness allows entrepreneurs to have better psychological management and health outcomes (Haynie, Shepherd, & Patzelt, 2012; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). For this reason, a need exists for aspiring and new entrepreneurs to approach entrepreneurial practice with a consideration of developing their self-focused thoughts as a part of their development and preparation, because, in order “to become entrepreneurial, individuals must learn to interpret, manage, and leverage the inevitable emotions
they experience as they undertake entrepreneurial activities” (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017, p. 108).

**Rationale and Significance**

The dissertation contributes to further empirical data of how new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition since starting their entrepreneurial venture full time. The dissertation provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of new entrepreneurs transitioning from a prior professional identity to an entrepreneurial identity. Through researching entrepreneurs’ professional identity transition, this dissertation provides a greater depth of understanding entrepreneurship, particularly through developing our understanding of entrepreneurs as individuals in relation to their context and those who surround them (Bruyat & Julien, 2001; Down & Giazitzoglu, 2014). The rationale and significance present ways in which the research contributes to the scholarly discussion in this area and to the improvement of practice.

The historic and dominant orientations of entrepreneurship education scholarship and practice continue to present challenges for both scholars and practitioners. Predominately, entrepreneurship education has been understood as a means for new venture creation and startup activity (Fayolle, Gailly, & Lassas-Clerc, 2006; Peterman & Kennedy, 2003; Souitaris, Zerbinati, & Al-Laham, 2007); these in turn lead to fostering economic development and job creation (Drucker, 2001). As addressed earlier in the chapter, economic development and job creation only serve as part of the greater picture and value of entrepreneurship (Reynolds, 2007). For decades, university-based entrepreneurship education programming centered on wealth generation and small business development, with a curricular home within business school faculties (Katz, 2003). Despite the recommendation for entrepreneurship education not to be
exclusive to business schools (Shinnar, Pruett, & Toney, 2009), the persisting business orientation of entrepreneurship education has proven to be more appropriate for business students rather than for those who might aspire to technological, social, cultural, and educational entrepreneurship. Another limiting perspective has been to view entrepreneurship education as a way to develop entrepreneurial performance, activities, and outcomes (Walter & Block, 2016). While contemporary literature on entrepreneurship education has embraced a broader perspective on the value and purpose of entrepreneurship education, a gap persists in entrepreneurship education scholarship and practice centering on self-focused thoughts, which are active self-reflections involving sense-making and leading to the continuous formation and revision of an individual’s identity (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017). Whether conscious or not, self-focused thoughts are a critical element in becoming an entrepreneur; the process of becoming an entrepreneur is a transformation of identity and a change in one’s overall self-concept. These changes can entail an adoption of a new identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991), a psychological shift, or new social engagements (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kasperova & Kitching, 2014).

In practice, entrepreneurial identity development is a critical component within entrepreneurship education (Nabi, Liñán, Krueger, Fayolle, & Walmsley, 2017). Particularly with in the strength of the supports within the American entrepreneurial ecosystem (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2014), entrepreneurship education plays a critical role for students of all ages and demographics because entrepreneurs with education preparation are more prepared for entrepreneurial careers (Block, Hoogerheide, & Thurik, 2013; Reynolds, 2007). Entrepreneurship education serves as “one of the most important foundations for economic development . . . [and] a major driver of innovation and economic growth” (World Economic Forum, 2011, p. 7), yet understanding entrepreneurship education only for its outcomes on
economic development and employability is to know only a fraction of the picture. Despite the success metrics of entrepreneurship as more quantitative in nature, measuring economic contributions, number of new firms, or increased intention to start a business (e.g., Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014; Gruber, 2007; Küttim, Kallaste, Venesaar, & Kiis, 2014), the creation of new organizations and ventures are not the only tangible outcome of entrepreneurial learning (Gruber, 2007; Honig & Samuelsson, 2012). The value of entrepreneurial learning goes beyond traditional measures of employability. Because entrepreneurship training helps individuals gain more realistic senses of entrepreneurship in practice (Krueger, 2003), research on new entrepreneurs’ professional identity transition can contribute to informing the practice of entrepreneurship educators.

Entrepreneurship educators need to know what new entrepreneurs are experiencing and how they are making sense of themselves and their new professions to better facilitate the learning process. The many aspects of understanding entrepreneurship present challenges for educators and mentors regarding how to best work with aspiring and new entrepreneurs. Informed preparation is critical for better supporting new and aspiring entrepreneurs through their transition into their new career path because individuals need to learn how to be entrepreneurs (Cope, 2005; Corbett, 2005). The professional transition into entrepreneurship requires individuals to learn through the development of new attitudes, skills, knowledge, and values (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). This entails a tension between current and future identities (Kenny, 2015), and there is a need to better understand the process of identity formation (Leitch & Harrison, 2016) given that it is a critical focus area for new entrepreneurs (Farmer, Yao, & Kung-Mcintyre, 2011; Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardonssa, 2014).
Given the nature of such a process, a question naturally arises as to the suitability of entrepreneurship education. Despite traditional teaching approaches, including lectures and case studies as the common methods employed in the classroom, these approaches have some significant limitations (Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004). Entrepreneurship course curricula are not well structured to approach the psychological and socio-emotional needs of students, showing a lack of an informed sense of the psychological and socio-emotional experiences and needs of new entrepreneurs (Lackéus, 2014; Neck & Greene, 2011). A better understanding oriented toward new entrepreneurs’ professional identity formation and transition experiences may help entrepreneurship educators to better know how to serve the psychological and socio-emotional needs of new entrepreneurs and how to prepare aspiring professionals for their transitions.

On the scholarship end, the dissertation has expanded research on professional identity transition for the population of new entrepreneurs. Serving the need to research professional activities that help inform and shape identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012), this research focused on examining the new entrepreneurs’ identity reflections and perceptions of their transitions to acquire a broader understanding of how they experienced their professional identity transition. Research examining the transition into entrepreneurship can help to add to the empirical data and collective understandings of identity formation as new entrepreneurs experience a professional role transition. Interest in entrepreneurial identity in the literature has increased; however, there is still relatively limited research on entrepreneurial identity formation (Donnellon, Ollila, & Williams Middleton, 2014; Ollila, Williams Middleton, & Donnellon, 2012). The dynamics of identity formation remain a missing piece of information necessary for adequately relating identity to entrepreneurial outcomes (Watson, 2009).
The dissertation also contributes to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, and professional identity scholarship by adding a valuable perspective: transition. Transitioning into entrepreneurship entails more than adopting a new role or a new profession, it involves a transformation of an individual’s professional identity (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017). Professional identity transition has historically focused on what an individual becomes, rather than the process of how an individual experiences a transition (Yost, Strube, & Bailey, 1992). Despite the usefulness of the present studies for identifying the important facets to supporting entrepreneurs in establishing and continuing their businesses, they largely neglect to directly recognize the element of transition and what that might entail for an individual. Because “entrepreneurial transition is not an end in itself, but a key stage in the development of a professional identity” (Warren, 2004, p. 33), this research study utilizes transition theory as a new lens through which to analyze entrepreneurial identity development during new entrepreneurs’ transitions into their new careers.

Even within the research studies that center on different elements of transition (Goethner Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Cantner, 2012; Obschonka, Goethner, Silbereisen, & Cantner, 2012; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011), the use of transition theory as a way to view how new entrepreneurs describe and make sense of their professional identity transition appears to be limited or absent. When looking to the value of transition theory to understand entrepreneurial identity formation, the 4 S model, discussed in detail in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, identifies elements, such as resources, coping strategies, of influence within transition periods. The 4 S model better helps to showcase the resources entrepreneurs use as individuals to cope with the transition to entrepreneurship. Transition theory presents an opportunity through which to explore the individual lived experience of coping through the transition into entrepreneurship, rather than the
environment of resources for effective entrepreneurial activity. These areas serve as critical shifts within the process to become an entrepreneur and deserve further attention and consideration within the landscape of entrepreneurship scholarship. Transition theory and its 4 S model, detailed later within this chapter, help to identify the resources utilized by the individuals experiencing a transition, including changes within social connections and networks.

Research Question

With the purpose of understanding new entrepreneurs’ experiences with professional identity transition, the dissertation research seeks to answer the following question: How do new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition? The research question explores the intersection of the phenomenon (professional identity transition) and the context (entrepreneurship). The research question lends itself to view accounts of professional identity transition within their contexts. Due to the under-researched nature of this intersection, this study intended to be exploratory; it did not seek causation. To this end, the research question was constructed to be broad to allow for the complexity of participants’ lived experiences to surface and to be open to new areas of inquiry, guiding directions for further research. Notwithstanding, the dissertation presents a valuable contribution of empirical data to better understand the lived experience of professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs, as well as qualitative participant perspectives on conceptions of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial prototypes and personal accounts of identity alignment and conflict, identity management strategies, and the impacts of entrepreneurship on social supports.

Conceptual Framework

Theory helps to efficiently and effectively build, reconstruct, and challenge a particular area of understanding using a common language. Eisenhart (1991), as cited by Grant and
Osanloo (2014), asserted that a conceptual framework operates as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory . . . constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” (p. 205). The following section of this chapter includes a description and discussion of the conceptual framework, which combines two relevant theoretical lenses. The use of two theories was necessary to address the research question. The first lens of social identity theory (SIT) frames the dissertation’s assumptions as they relate to identity. The second theoretical lens of transition theory structures the experience of transition through its perceived elements. Each of the theories serves as a distinct but complementary lens through which the dissertation is constructed and the data is analyzed.

**Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

SIT relates to how an individual holds, or does not hold, a perceived membership within a particular social group, based on how the individual defines the social group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Because individuals want to act in line with who they consider themselves to be (Burke, 1991b; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000), social identity plays an important role in how individuals behave and thrive within a particular context, role, and social community. Within this dissertation, SIT contributes to understanding the participants’ perceptions of themselves within a relatively new professional social environment. The new entrepreneurs’ perceptions of their new professional identities and their relation to their larger social context—for example, group memberships, networks, and institutional and professional affiliations—play a significant role in their overall professional identity transition. Because the participants had already experienced a transition into entrepreneurship when interviewed, their identity reflections have been framed in hindsight, a feature of the study that is addressed further in the limitations.
Since its inception, SIT has also served an important function as a driver toward a better understanding of identity and its value. This was accomplished over time through the scholarly separation of identity self-categorization from other evaluative and psychological inquiry, for example, self-efficacy and intention, respectively (Ellemers & van Knippenberg, 1997). While areas like self-efficacy and intention have significant representation in entrepreneurship scholarship, SIT and its predecessor, identity theory, provide a different but equally valuable perspective for the audiences of the research. SIT stemmed from the field of social psychology, emphasizing “intergroup relations, group processes, and the social self (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 259). Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) noted three essential forms of identity that concurrently exist and can be activated: group, role, and person/individual. An individual’s sense of self in relation to oneself, to a role, or to a social group serves as a contextual basis through which a sense of belonging or an absence of belonging within a social group or category can be formed. SIT gained significant traction after the contributions of Tajfel (1972) who defined social identity as an “individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 292). SIT centers on the concept that social categories, such as entrepreneurs, frame a sense of belonging and, thus, help to define who an individual is “in terms of the defining characteristics of the category” (p. 256). Modern research on SIT has largely reinforced the presence of multiple identities (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Stets & Burke, 2003), positing that each social identity serves as a mechanism for self-regulation and social group alignment through a process of categorization and self-enhancement (Hogg et al., 1995).

SIT, rather than identity theory, provides a bit more transparency for the aims of the dissertation, particularly in junction with transition theory. Stets and Burke (2000) framed
identity theory and social identity theory as having only differences in emphasis, rather than in their definition:

Identity theory focuses on social structural arrangements and the link between persons; social identity theory focuses on characteristics of situations in which the identity may be activated (p. 231).

Furthermore, identity theory is not appropriate for research that focuses on generative, sociocognitive processes; it emphasizes role position and role behavior, rather than the more dynamic, cognitive process of self-categorization attributed to SIT, which is oriented on dynamic social identity processes, including relating to “norms, stereotypes, and prototypes” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 262). In this respect, SIT orients the research on the sociocognitive process of identity reflections and identity activation. SIT is more appropriate for this research given that the conceptual framework views the entrepreneurs’ stories as a professional identity transition, facilitated by concurrent processes of self-categorization as being in-group or out-group, and accentuation of perceived group dimensions, including traits, characteristics, qualities, values, beliefs (Hogg et al., 1995).

To this end, SIT works well in partnership with transition theory, as transition theory helps to unpack the elements of a transition environment, including detailing the characteristics of a situation and their social environments. For the purposes of this dissertation, the SIT lens helps to explore participants’ perceptions of social group identity and definitions as experienced during their transition into entrepreneurship, capturing reflections on perceptions of legitimacy, status, and belonging as an entrepreneur.

**Critiques of social identity theory.** One of the challenges with SIT comes from instances of multiple identities. While most conceptions of identity theory and SIT conform to an
understanding that multiple forms of identities exist at the same time (Ashford et al., 2008; Black, 2012; Burke, 1980), there can be other concurrent identity considerations beyond an in-group and outside-group affiliation. This can manifest as a part of the complex nature and interplay between multiple identities. For instance, a woman’s social identity as an entrepreneur may feel in conflict at times with her identity as a mother. Navigating two identities—entrepreneur and mom—may not reflect a difficulty with forming a social identity in-group affiliation with one or both social groups. Instead, it could signal a perceived identity conflict, where the nature of the two identities might be perceived as having two different corresponding behaviors. With respect to this critique of SIT, transition theory helps to draw out aspects of the transition to situate identity reflections in context to elements like social supports, personal resources, and perceptions of the situation. To this end, multiple identities are framed in the context of the experienced transition.

Another critique of SIT is evident in the variation of individuals’ interest and need for a social community and social identity to support their activities and behaviors. The strength of an individual’s need for structure, authority, and cultural sense-making have an impact on an individual’s willingness and tendency to adopt a group identity (Perreault & Bourhis, 1999). It is arguable that a lack of evidenced social identity would have implications on an individual’s successful practice in a certain role or effectiveness within a particular community. However, this criticism of SIT was considered in the development of this research, allowing for the possibility that a social identity for entrepreneurship may not be perceived as valuable or salient in one or more of the participants. Through the data collection and analysis, one participant did report direct reflections on a lack of importance of connecting his professional identity to an entrepreneur group membership, which is detailed further within Chapter 4.
With these critiques addressed, SIT is considered a viable theory for a variety of types of research, and it served the dissertation research components well. The aforementioned limitations informed additional considerations during the data collection and analysis phases and generated an active reflection on whether additional questioning, clarifications, or interpretations were needed. To this end, because SIT has been so broadly used, this dissertation sought to find related SIT models and applications that aligned best with focusing on times of transition. This further consideration led to utilizing a SIT model from Praharso, Tear, and Cruwys (2017), which is detailed within the forthcoming section on the conceptual framework.

**Transition Theory**

The other theory of the dissertation explores Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory. When looking at the use of Schlossberg’s transition theory and model, ample studies focus on life transitions into college (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006; Workman, 2015); the workforce after college (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998); new employment (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006); life following a divorce (Bowen & Jensen, 2017); and life in retirement (Goodman & Pappas, 2011; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Roncaglia, 2010). This dissertation presents a unique value to entrepreneurship scholarship: it is one of the first studies to utilize Schlossberg’s transition theory with an entrepreneur population. The theory has been used extensively within adult development literature. Transition theory is particularly well represented within literature on life transitions in higher education settings, for example, veteran to student civilian transitions. Part of the unique value of this dissertation is to explore the potential usefulness of this theory when juxtaposed with existing entrepreneurship research, with a particular focus on the entrepreneurial identity scholarship.
Transition theory helps to comprehensively and universally examine periods of transition throughout an individual’s lifetime. Transition theory is an adult development theory with a transition perspective that “focuses on life events entailing change” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 29). Within transition theory, the notion of a transition is framed as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). When using this lens with a new entrepreneur population, the experience of changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles is very relevant to how this transition is understood in practice.

Transition theory centers on the 4 S model (Schlossberg, 1981), which identifies four primary factors (4 S’s) that are at play when looking at the individual transition process. The four S’s include the factors of self, situation, supports, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008) encompassing the elements common among all transitions. Table 1 details each of the four factors which influence an experienced transition. For example, the factor of support looks at the social supports and communities the individual transitioning has access to before, during, and after the transition period.

Table 1

*Schlossberg’s 4 S Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Personal and demographic characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Trigger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previous experience with a similar transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concurrent stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Intimate relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Networks of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutions and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies (coping responses)</td>
<td>Those that modify the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Those that control the meaning of the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Schlossberg (1981).

**Critiques of transition theory.** Schlossberg positioned transition theory as an evolution within adult development literature, but many scholars have critiqued the theory’s lack of continuity or acknowledgement of previous scholarship within neighboring adult development communities. In particular, scholars coming from a developmental perspective (Levinson, 1978, 1986; Danish, 1981) have problematized a disconnect of transition theory from the existing adult development scholarship, as the latter which is sequential and characterized by stages. For example, with regard to norm-based developmentalist thought, Levinson (1978, 1986) characterized identity shifts as being informed by an individual’s natural age-based stage (age-range categorized as unique stages). Within this perspective, noted variation within an age group is possible, but the life stages are asserted to be underpinned by common, universal life drivers such as the desire to enter the adult world, the yearning to settle down.

Similarly, critiques also stem from the life span perspective. Life span developmentalists acknowledge the unique circumstances that pertain to an individual transition within life-span theories, considering that individuals adapt in different ways to change throughout their life course. Newer scholarship on life events (Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Roberts, Helson, & Klohnen, 2002) has purported that life events, rather than age, determine an adult’s development trajectory. For life span developmentalists, transition theory neglects to position transition within an individual’s developmental stage, with a full consideration of the life events and growth.
individuals experience over their life course. Danish (1981) noted that, to counsel individuals through transitions, behaviors must be framed within life stages.

Transition theory stands in stark contrast to a norm-based developmentalist lens, given that it does not frame change within an individual’s age group. Additionally, transition theory posits that transitions can inform an individual’s behavior more than the individual’s life stage (Anderson et al., 2012). The emphasis of the transition perspective shifts away from framing transition within an individual’s life stage to understanding and assessing transition in light of an individual’s life events (Merriam & Carrarella, 1991). Transition perspectives look at the underpinning available resources, tools, and capabilities individuals possess and have access to, which may or may not influence an individual’s age or life stage.

Despite the critiques of a transition perspective of human development, grounded rationale existed for the selection of transition theory for this dissertation. Some scholars (Pinker, 2002; Young et al., 2010) have asserted that human development theories have historically neglected an individual’s sense of agency during transitions. Within transition theory, agency is at the forefront of assessments of self. As introduced in the next chapter, the elements of transitions are situated within an individual’s perspective and context, with additional focus on the experienced impact on the individual. Through transition theory’s conceptualization of transitions, in itself, an individual’s sense of agency is present. For instance, if an individual is feeling helpless during an unanticipated transition into retirement, a transition perspective would uncover the individual’s low sense of agency within the transition to retirement.

Young et al. (2010) also claimed that human development theories do not adequately address the social nature of transition. Although this assertion was not directly in support of a transition perspective, the 4 S model looks towards support networks and resources to understand
and assess transitions. Therefore, the transition perspective arguably better contextualizes transitions within their social contexts more intentionally than stage-based human development perspectives. Furthermore, the other theory utilized in the study, SIT, also supports the focus on social elements of the transition, looking to the participants’ perceptions of how they socially identify within communities, particularly with communities of entrepreneurs.

**Combined Conceptual Framework**

Life transitions entail identity change (Praharso et al., 2017). The two theories within the dissertation, SIT and transition theory, are complementary and have significant points of connection. This section demonstrates the connection points between social identity theory and transition theory and proposes a model for understanding the dissertation’s conceptual framework. In order to accomplish this aim, the section starts with expanding transition theory further, introducing Schlossberg’s (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation to transition, which is based on the 4 S model. The section builds upon this model, adding in the Praharso et al. (2017) social identity model of identity change. It then, combines the perspectives of both of these models to present the conceptual framework that informed the dissertation.

As shown in Figure 1, transition theory utilizes a model for analyzing how individuals adapt to transition. The model, which mirrors the 4 S model and its factors, shows how individuals move through a transition, starting from a perceived event or nonevent and ending at adaption. The “characteristics of the individual” align with the 4 S model’s “self,” the “perception of the particular transition” with the “situation,” the “characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments” with “support,” and “adaption” with “strategies.” As addressed earlier, Schlossberg’s 4 S model and, thus, the model analyzing human adaptation to transition (Figure 1) aligns well with social identity theory. Overall, Schlossberg, (1981) noted
how transition centers on perceptions; along with other studies of transition (Cutrona & Russell, 1990), the model also acknowledges the impact social supports (relationships, networks, institutions) have on adapting to a transition.

![Model for analyzing human adaptation to transition](image)

*Figure 4. Model for analyzing human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5).*

When attempting to bridge transition theory and its corresponding models, in this case the 4 S model and the model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. With social identity theory models, the social identity model of identity change (Jetten, Haslam, Iyer, & Haslam, 2009; Praharso et al., 2017) presented an interesting overlap that served as the foundation of the conceptual model. Praharso et al.’s (2017) social identity model of identity change supports the perspective that life events are intertwined with social identity shifts. As seen in Figure 1, the model focuses on social identity shifts caused from a “stressor event,” which could be a variety of different life events, such as moving to a new city or experiencing a health decline. According to Praharso et al. (2017), if a stressor event leads to an identity loss, it can result in various
manifestations of an individual’s wellbeing, such as stress, satisfaction, or depression, as seen in Figure 1. When looking at identity loss as a result of a negative “stressor event,” Figure 2 shows a direct relationship with lower wellbeing, including higher incidences of stress and depression and lower life satisfaction. To this end, social identities can serve as a psychological resource for safeguarding wellbeing (Greenaway, Cruwys, Haslam, & Jetten, 2016).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. Social identity model of identity change. Adapted from Praharso et al., 2017, pp. 270-273.*

Social identities represent group affiliations, memberships, and aspirations, changing over time in their presence, relevance, and strength within an individual’s many held identities. As detailed in Chapter 2, because individuals hold multiple identities concurrently through their various social group memberships (Hogg et al., 1995), there can be tensions between present and future identities during transitions (Kenny, 2015), such as an aspirational future identity to become an entrepreneur and a present identity as an employee.
According to Praharso et al. (2017), perceived stress from an event arises from an anticipated identity shift, and a change in the corresponding social support is needed. As an individual experiences a social identity change, the identity shift can be perceived as a gain (Haslam, Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, & Chang, 2016; Tarrant et al., 2016) or a loss (Frisch, Häusser, van Dick, & Mojzisch, 2014; Haslam et al., 2008, 2016; J. M. Jones et al., 2012; Praharso et al., 2017). This corresponds to Schlossberg’s perception of the transition—viewing the role change as a gain or loss (Schlossberg, 1981). In addition, social supports also play a significant role in both models. As is evident within Schlossberg’s model, the social identity model of identity change also proposes that “one’s social networks and sources of support are usually affected by a life transition” (Praharso et al., 2017, authors’ emphasis). For example, a stressor event of losing a job can result in a loss of a particular professional identity, paired with the loss of active engagement with the social support of a prior organizational colleague network. Social support needs shift as new social identities become more relevant for an individual (Praharso et al., 2017).

When bridging transition theory with the social identity model of identity change, the basis for the proposed conceptual framework becomes more evident. The combined conceptual framework (see Figure 3) starts with a perceived event or nonevent. Even though this dissertation stipulates participant selection criteria that recruited those who anticipated their transition and entered into it willingly, participants had the freedom to indicate the transition being a nonevent if they did not feel the shift into entrepreneurial work was noteworthy. While Praharso et al. (2017) focused on stressful or negative life events, the combined conceptual framework uses Schlossberg’s perspective on events to span the positive, neutral, or negative and perceived as ranging from uneventful to life changing. Schlossberg introduced an important distinction on the
presence of perceived nonevents, which serve as equally meaningful opportunities for an experienced transition.

**Perceived Event or Nonevent**

- **Identity Challenge** (Transition)
- Sensemaking Cycles:
  - **Perceptions of the Transition**
  - **Social & Context Supports**
  - **Individual Resources & Deficits**
- **Identity Reflections**
- **Coping Strategies**
- **Reactions** (e.g., stress, satisfaction, depression)
- **Identity Change**
  (The identity achieves relative stability but is not static)

*Figure 5. Conceptual framework of the bridge between SIT and transition theory.*

Following a perceived event or nonevent, an individual experiences an identity challenge, which marks a transition, as framed by Praharso et al. (2017). The challenge to identity, rather than the perception of the event itself, starts a process of sensemaking through an examination of the perception of the nature of the transition—positive or negative, permanent or temporary; one’s social supports, including family, friends, networks, and institutions; one’s context, including location and the ability to shift; and one’s personal resources and deficits, involving values, skills, and orientations. These sense-making elements were all detailed, in one form or another, within Schlossberg’s model, but this researcher’s combined framework differs in how the elements are separated and emphasized. As individuals assess and access their perceptions of the transition, social supports, context, and personal resources and deficits, the individuals
experience identity reflections though which they consider existing, previous, future, and aspirational identities. Concurrently, individuals employ coping strategies (from Schlossberg’s 4 S model) for and reacting to the transition (from Praharso et al., 2017). The sense-making process cycles between the perceptions, reflections, coping, and reactions until an individual is able to achieve an identity change, which is when the new or revised identity reaches a state of relative stability; however, due to the malleable nature of identity, this stability is never static. To this end, the next chapter provides additional insight into the nature of identity and transition as is relevant to the dissertation and this combined conceptual framework.

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

**Aspirational Entrepreneur:** An individual who have entrepreneurial intentions but who have not acted on them yet (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Van Gelderen, Thurik, & Bosma, 2005).

**Aspirational Identity:** A possible identity held in high esteem by the individual that can vary in how realistic or possible the identity can be.

**Entrepreneur:** An individual who founds and operates of their own organization or business (Davidsson, 2007).

**Entrepreneurial Identity:** A specific professional role identity connected to, and informed by, an individual’s (a) experiences as an entrepreneur or (b) enterprising mindset or actions.

**Entrepreneurial Prototype:** Entrepreneurial prototypes embody all attributes that characterize entrepreneurs “and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 123) and help to serve in identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible entrepreneurial self.

**Entrepreneurship:** The foundation and operation of an individual’s own organization or business (Davidsson, 2007).
**Identity:** A complex, internal psychosocial construct of self-formed through social interactions and experiences, bound by a particular context, and developed throughout an individual’s lifetime.

**Multiple Identities:** Distinct identities (Markus & Wurf, 1987) that are categorized as a natural cognitive formation that demonstrates psychological well-being, as a greater complexity of selves buffers from external life stresses (Gergen, 1972; Linville, 1987).

**New Entrepreneur:** An entrepreneur who founded and operate their business or organization full-time within the previous 3.5 years.

**Possible Identity:** Reflecting “goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954), possible identities can be formed in light of aspirations for the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986), varying in how possible they are perceived to be (Quinlan, Jaccard, & Blanton, 2006) and subject to the categorization, organization, and possible-actual self-comparison process that aids in identity construction (Stets & Burke, 2000).

**Professional Identity:** Formed over time through “the dynamic and on-going interplay between individuals and their wider social and economic environment” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 81), with a focus on interactions and experiences within professional settings, which are assigned meaning through the “assimilation of the experiences into meaningful or useful structures” (Meijers, 1998, p. 200).

**Provisional Identity:** An identity in its initial stages that is undergoing a concurrent process of self-categorization (Stets & Burke, 2000) and identity matching (Ibarra, 1999) to help define and compare themselves to a prototype.
**Role Identity:** As one of three types of held identity, along with personal and social identities (Ashforth et al., 2008; Burke & Stets, 2009), role identity is an individual’s sense of self as it relates to a particular role, for example familial, relational, and professional roles.

**Self:** Either synonym to identity or self-concept or one of four factors within Schlossberg’s (1981) 4 S model that encompasses personal and demographic characteristics and the psychological resources of an individual during a transition period.

**Self-efficacy:** An individual’s judgments of their ability to perform in a variety of prospective situations (Bandura, 1982; Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998).

**Situation:** One of four factors within Schlossberg’s (1981) 4 S model that encompasses the trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessments of an individual going through a transition period.

**Social Identity Theory:** A theory that asserts that “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63).

**Strategies:** One of four factors within Schlossberg’s (1981) 4 S model that encompasses the coping responses used by an individual going through a transition period that help to modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, or aid in managing the stress in the aftermath.

**Supports:** One of four factors within Schlossberg’s (1981) 4 S model that encompasses the intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, institutions, and communities of an individual going through a transition period.

**Transition:** An “event or nonevent resulting in [a] change or assumption change of social networks resulting in growth or deterioration” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5) or “changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33).
**Transition Theory:** An adult development theory that “focuses on life events entailing change” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 29).

**Conclusion**

Through the use of SIT and Schlossberg’s transition theory as the combined conceptual framework, the chapter outlined the purpose of the dissertation: to better understand the professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs within their first 3.5 years of operating their ventures. The chapter established the research question, problem of practice, rationale, and conceptual framework for the dissertation. To better understand the personal learning, development, and understandings constructed from transitioning towards entrepreneurship full time, the next chapter builds on the conceptual lens to identify key literature streams relevant to the dissertation. The selected literature, as presented in Chapter 2, addresses the research question through three broad literature streams: (a) entrepreneurship, to inform the social context; (b) identity, to frame the complexities of self; and (c) transition, to understand the manners through which an individual copes with identity shifts. In line with the three strands, the data collected through the dissertation explores the narrative accounts of new entrepreneurs on their professional identities and their transition towards forming an entrepreneurial identity. The literature review also establishes the state of historical and current scholarship of the three areas to identify gaps in the literature and to establish a foundation for the data analysis, findings, and discussions within Chapters 4 and 5.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This dissertation explored the identity transition of professionals who have transitioned into being full-time entrepreneurs within the past 3.5 years. To better understand the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs’ professional identity transitions, several scholarship areas need to be addressed: entrepreneurship; identity; and transition. The first section on entrepreneurship addresses the social context for the dissertation research and presents the complexities of the profession from a scholarly and practitioner perspective. Through an exploration of entrepreneurship literature, this chapter helps to frame existing conceptions and understandings of entrepreneurship relevant to understanding the participants’ broad perceptions of entrepreneurship and what it means to be an entrepreneur. The second section on identity frames how identity and the elements of identity, including multiple, possible, and provisional identities, intersect with the relevant literature on professional identity and entrepreneurial identity. Identity literature helps to build on the conceptual framework by highlighting areas of identity relevant for professional identity transition, including professional identity, aspirational identities, and multiple identities. These definitions provide a foundational understanding of these areas, germane for the data analysis process and understanding the relevance of the analysis. The final section on transition is a relatively understudied area that has only, in recent years, been explored more extensively within entrepreneurship literature. This third section centers on the notion of transition, as established by Schlossberg, and focuses on the internal and external coping process, strategies, and resources an individual utilizes in order to move towards a new identity. The third stand provides further information on the elements of transition, expanding upon the brief introduction of Chapter 1. The elements of transition are closely tied to the conceptual framework and, in turn, the data analysis.
Because the intersection of three literature streams is not well established, each strand will be addressed independently, with a focus on the scholarship most relevant to the dissertation. The intersection of the three areas is underrepresented in the literature for several reasons. First, the study of entrepreneurship is still an emerging field of study. The challenges with entrepreneurship scholarship are addressed earlier within first section. Second, entrepreneurial activity can be emergent, developing out of complex and uncertain environments. This can make research on entrepreneurship challenging because it may lend itself to hindsight bias, which is addressed in Chapter 3. The three strands are interconnected and aligned closely with the research question and conceptual framework, and each of the three literature strands co-create the foundation through which those transitioning into entrepreneurial roles both make sense of their new professional (entrepreneurial) identity and use their internal and external resources to cope and thrive in their new entrepreneurial positions. To this end, identity transitions are interwoven with work transitions (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), and there is a benefit in not only looking at the participant’s professional identity transition, but also at the transition period itself.

While each of the sections correspond to distinct and robust strands of literature, the sections each aim to provide only a selection of relevant literature pertinent to the dissertation research. The material included in the literature review resulted from the keyword searches of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurship identity, role identity, professional identity, work identity, career identity, identity change, identity transition, transition, professional transition, entrepreneurial identity transition, and professional identity transition, among others. The following databases served to inform the literature review: Academy of Management Online, Dissertation Abstracts International, EBSCOhost, Elsevier ScienceDirect.
Entrepreneurship

This first section of entrepreneurship positions an understanding of the context of the dissertation research participants: entrepreneurship. While the participants had various levels of prior exposure to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity, they all had transitioned into their entrepreneurial positions full time within the 3.5 years prior to the interviews. The section frames the context of entrepreneurship by exploring the historical and current understandings of entrepreneurship. The purpose of the section is to establish the conceptualizations and perceptions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity, to unpack the foundations and orientations of entrepreneurship as a field of inquiry, and to explore entrepreneurship as a professional context. Each of the subsections builds an understanding of the larger social context of the perceptions and understandings of entrepreneurship. These understandings served as operationalized and salient perspectives for the participants.

Entrepreneurship as a Field of Study

Understanding the foundations of entrepreneurship as a field of inquiry aids in discerning and explaining how the area has been viewed over time. The foundations of entrepreneurship scholarship have been credited to the French, and the first treatise noting the concept of entrepreneurship was Richard Cantillon’s (1755) *Essay on The Nature of Commerce in General*, which has subsequently served as one of the foundational contributions in entrepreneurship scholarship. Cantillon (1755) emphasized the entrepreneur’s role as an economic agent willing to take on risk and uncertainty. The orientation of entrepreneurship as an activity of risk and uncertainty framed the earliest conceptions of entrepreneurship as a profession. Another French
successor, Jean-Baptiste Say (1803) was credited for helping to establish entrepreneurs’ role in coordinating, including the coordination of production and distribution (Landström & Benner, 2010). This addition of acknowledging entrepreneurship as skilled activity contributed an appreciation for the skills and knowledge necessary for successful entrepreneurship.

Following its establishment as an area of conceptual interest, the field of entrepreneurship was shaped by other disciplines, which can be categorized in three major stages of influence: the economics era, from 1870-1940; the social sciences era, from 1940-1970; and the management studies era, from 1970-present day (Landström & Benner, 2010). With each era, entrepreneurship literature added perspectives from other areas. The economics era shaped the foundations of understanding entrepreneurship as thriving through uncertainty as Knight outlined, disrupting equilibrium and norms coming from Schumpeter, and coordinating information and resources to exploit opportunities as expounded by Kirzner. The next era brought about social science perspectives on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial activities, including studies on culture with Geertz and Lipset, networks from Freeman, traits as established by McClelland and deviant behavior as defined by Hoselitz and Young (Landström & Benner, 2010).

The management era has involved a systematic and refined approach to building the field of entrepreneurship research. Since the 1970s, academic engagement and the proliferation of in this area have grown exponentially (Landström, 2005), due in large part to a growing presence and appreciation of the role of small business and entrepreneurship in the economy (Landström & Benner, 2010). The impetus to understand entrepreneurship flourished during the 1970s and 1980s with a focused attention on the process of creative destruction, or the creation and replacement of new innovations, and how emerging companies, technologies, products, and services had the potential to drive the economy upward (Lohrke & Landström, 2010).
As a discipline, entrepreneurship research has benefitted from the contributions of scholars from a variety of backgrounds (Landström & Benner, 2010; Landström & Persson, 2010). The multidisciplinary nature of the entrepreneurship research is evidenced by the field’s borrowed theory from more established fields, including psychology, sociology, and economics (Lohrke & Landström, 2010). The bridging of established theory into the field of entrepreneurship has served as a meaningful first step in theory generation (Zahra, 2005) and has strengthened the connections between fields (Whetten, Felin, & King, 2009). Leading up to the 1990s, a significant portion of entrepreneurship scholarship centered on identifying the common traits and characteristics of entrepreneurs (Baron, 1998; Gartner, 1989). These trait studies are criticized for their unpinning of static assumptions (Hytti, 2003) viewing entrepreneurship as an innate trait rather than something than could be learned. Despite the continued interest and published research within the areas of entrepreneurial personalities (Leavy, 2017; D. Miller, 2015; Routamaa, Brandt, & Uusi-Kakkuri, 2016; Yan, 2010), entrepreneurship scholarship has broadened well beyond this space to look beyond the notion of entrepreneurship as traits.

**Entrepreneurship as a Public Value**

The practice of entrepreneurship is an old tradition with a modern appreciation. The practice of entrepreneurship has been linked to the rise of the industrial era, but the practice dates back to the mercantile activities of the medieval period (Casson & Casson, 2014). Despite its centuries-old practice, an understanding of entrepreneurship is still unfolding. This subsection aims to briefly build upon the perspective of entrepreneurship presented at the beginning of Chapter 1: that entrepreneurship is broadly seen in many countries as being of the public value due to its ability to build and drive economic activity and to serve as a job creator. The subsection also argues that the value notion may be overgeneralized based on prior data, with the
subsequent subsection outlining the definitions of entrepreneurship. Indeed, there is a benefit to understanding the definitions of entrepreneurship in context of the broad conceptions of entrepreneurship in its historical scholarship, value, and perceptions.

Economies worldwide benefit from entrepreneurial and small business activity (de Wit & de Kok, 2014; Neumark, Wall, & Junfu, 2011). Despite the volatility of this sector, entrepreneurial activity contributes significantly to job creation (Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2014). The United States has noted the benefit of start-ups for job creation, with periods of time marking more start-up sector job creation than what resulted from the private sector otherwise (Haltiwanger, 2015). For the European Union, more than one million jobs have been attributed to micro-businesses, defined as organizations of 0-10 employees (de Wit & de Kok, 2014). Small start-ups surviving past their nascent stage are considered to result in amongst the highest rates of job creation by firms of all stages (Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2013).

Entrepreneurship is not only of interest to governments for its ability to create jobs and wealth: many argue that the modern economy depends on entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity (e.g., Audretsch & Thurik, 2000, 2001; Audretsch, Thurik, & Stam, 2011; Florida, 2002; Kirchhoff, 1994).

As briefly suggested in Chapter 1, the public perceptions of entrepreneurship can vary drastically from country to country. In the American context, the perception of entrepreneurship has improved over the past several years, with more Americans seeing entrepreneurship as a good way to take advantage of opportunities: 57% in 2016, compared to 28% in 2009 (Kelley et al., 2017). The United States has held one of the most favorable public perspectives of entrepreneurship as a viable and attractive career path (GEM, 2018). Likewise, those with entrepreneurial intentions, or those interested in becoming an entrepreneur, rose from 7% of the
American population in 2006 to at or above 12% each year reported between 2012 and 2016 (Kelley et al., 2017).

Despite the growing public interest in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial activity in the United States has been less of a proportional job creator since 2000, with less high growth firms overall (especially young firms) and more entering firms constituting self-employed, subsistence or “lifestyle” entrepreneurs (Decker et al., 2014; Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda, 2016). The challenge with this shift in entrepreneurship in the economic scale is that, despite a growing interest in entrepreneurship at an individual level, there is a growing proportion of entrepreneurs who are not seeking to grow and hire employees, which lowers the impact of entrepreneurship as a driver of job creation.

The aforementioned perceptions and trends are important components in the greater picture of entrepreneurship and professional identity, given that those who transition into entrepreneurship have been socialized in environments where their social supports reinforce these orientations. The roots of entrepreneurship scholarship and entrepreneurship as a public value are evident both in the breadth of definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The next subsection on defining entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship reviews the wide span of different perceived qualities, traits, and orientations of entrepreneurs to frame the breadth of how entrepreneurship and being an entrepreneur can be understood.

**Defining Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship**

Building upon the multidisciplinary history of scholarship of entrepreneurship, defining entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs is a challenge. Although the concept seems accessible, entrepreneurship has been criticized to be perfunctory term without much depth (e.g., Gartner, 2004; C. Jones & Spicer, 2009), particularly because of its multidisciplinary foundations and
broad scholarly interest. Scholars researching entrepreneurs are interested in uncovering why
some individuals identify and exploit opportunities and, through doing so, generate new forms of
innovation, like goods and services, and create new companies, industries, and wealth (Brush,
Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2002). When looking at how these individuals create new
value in society, Landström (1998) and Fayolle (2007, p. 31) defined four roles of entrepreneurs
in the economy in part based on previous scholarship:

- Risk-taker/risk-manager (Cantillon, Say, Knight);
- Innovator (Schumpeter);
- Alert seeker of opportunities (Hayek, Mises, Kirzner); or
- Coordinator of limited resources (Casson)

Each of these orientations connects to assumptions of entrepreneurs and their activities.
For example, an innovator orientation can inadvertently set a high standard for what constitutes
trepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities, as innovation entails newness. Many definitions
(Bruyat, 1993; Bruyat & Julien, 2001) expand this definition to clarify entrepreneurs’ focus to
provide or create a new value. The notion is that a “new value” can relate to economic or
monetary value—a job creator, tax contributor, or industry or product innovator—or a firm’s
ability to make a social, creative, cultural, or environmental contribution or impact (De Voldere
et al., 2017; Hindle, 2010; Rae, 2010). While the concept of entrepreneurship as new value
creation is broad enough to encompass the variety of ways entrepreneurs can contribute to
society, the emphasis on “newness” may exclude many who are engaging in enterprising
activities with more established products, services, or firm models.

Other definitions of entrepreneurship have picked up upon Landström’s (1998) other than
the economic roles. For instance, Landström’s (1998) “alert seeker of opportunities” connects
with Shane and Venkataraman’s (2000) definition that entrepreneurship entails “identifying, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities” (p. 218). Compared to the perspective of entrepreneurship as new value creation, this definition is focused less on outcomes and function in society, as in delivering value, and more is oriented to the performed activities of entrepreneur. This definition presents a slightly more open and inclusive framing of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity, but it lacks mention of the formal commitment to legally register as an organization or business.

Other definitions have absorbed this perspective of entrepreneurship entailing the foundation and operation of an individual’s own organization or business (Davidsson, 2007). The legal responsibility and formal commitment to the organization or business could arguably connect with Landström’s (1998) roles of “risk-taker” or “risk-manager” given that the commitment to operation one’s own organization or business places the financial risk on the owner. This definition focuses more on the role of the entrepreneur as risk-taker or business owner rather than their societal function and performed activities.

While Landström’s (1998) four roles of entrepreneurs in the economy highlighted important underpinnings of how entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship can be defined, other understandings of entrepreneurship exist, adding to the complexity and cloudiness of the concept of entrepreneurship. As shown in Table 2, entrepreneurs can also be understood by their personality, competence, and behavior.
Table 2

*Different Ways in which Entrepreneurs Have Been Defined*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis of definition</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>• Innovation, risk taking, judgment in project selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>• Founder of firm, owner-manager, partner, salaried, chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality (attitude, skills)</td>
<td>• Self-confident: both imaginative and pragmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence (skills)</td>
<td>• Good judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>• Take responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>• Success is typically measured by wealth accumulation and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes timely decisions (no procrastination)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motivates (rather than alienates) colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Success reflects the availability of opportunities, good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Looking for the hidden snag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Basic business skills (law, accountancy, IT, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taking a distinct view of the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Originally in Casson and Casson (2013, p. 6).

While Casson and Casson’s (2013) orientations contribute to how entrepreneurship can be viewed and defined as a function, role, personality, competence, behavior, or performance, the role of an entrepreneurial prototype is absent.

Entrepreneurial prototypes are underpinned by opinions, conceptions, and perceptions of who entrepreneurs are and what entrepreneurship is. Thus, the entrepreneurial prototypes held by individuals influence how they view entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Because entrepreneurial prototypes typically align with masculine qualities (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009), specific inventions, such as introducing feminine role models as counter-stereotypical models may need to be employed in order to encourage women to act on their entrepreneurial intentions (Max & Ballereau, 2011). When approaching defining who is an
entrepreneur, the importance of adding the entrepreneurial prototypes within the list becomes apparent. Bridge (2017, pp. 53-54) identified 10 common usages of the word “entrepreneur,” which highlight the breadth of how entrepreneurs are understood:

- Someone operating economically at risk
- An innovator – and creative destroyer
- An enterprising person and a self-starter
- An ingenious self-advancer
- A ‘heroic’, compulsive venturer
- A selfish near-criminal
- A business owner
- A self-employed person
- A source of jobs (and/or economic growth)
- A source of high-tech, high-growth businesses

These present a broad range of potential social identity perceptions of entrepreneurs. Each way presents a unique emphasis or orientation that could impact how an individual might perceive their in-group membership. For example, if an individual holds an operative perception that an entrepreneur is “someone operating economically at risk” but the individual is financially stable, the individual might disassociate from being an entrepreneur and associate with being outside-group. This exact case is presented within the data analysis in Chapter 4. Like the other definitions discussed previously, Bridge’s (2017) 10 ways entrepreneurs are understood and portrayed pick up on some of the orientations present in the other definitions. For example, Bridge’s (2017) “business owner” aligns with Casson and Casson’s (2013) role-based orientation and Davidsson’s (2007) definition. In contrast, a “‘heroic, compulsive venturer” (Bridge, 2017)
could arguably be a combination of several of Casson and Casson’s (2013) bases including the performance or behavior for “heroic,” the behavior for “compulsive,” and the function of a “venturer.” The prototype of entrepreneurs as heroic serves as the foundation of many understandings of entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Bridge, 2017; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Hytti, 2005; Hytti & Heinonenork, 2013; Marlow, 2002; Mitchell, 1997; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). This points to the definitions and orientations not being necessarily mutually exclusive; instead, they permit both single definition perceptions and multiple, combined definition perceptions.

As mentioned in the review of Bridge (2017), the breadth of ways to define entrepreneurs (Table 2) obfuscates a common meaning of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship and demonstrates the scope of existing assumptions of entrepreneurship. This represents a significant change within entrepreneurship literature given that different research builds upon different understandings of what it means to be an entrepreneur. For example, despite having significant overlap related to social identity orientation, research on the intersection of social identity and behavior (Alsos, Clausen, Hytti, & Solvoll, 2016) has emphasized the behavior aspects of entrepreneurs, whereas this dissertation research does not.

Because these definitions and orientations underpin both the literature on entrepreneurship and the collective and individual perceptions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial practice, this subsection helps to set a groundwork for how the participants viewed, understood, and portrayed entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, as evidenced in the data collection interviews, which are addressed in Chapter 4. In practice, the breadth of associations towards the concepts of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are particularly challenging. The perspectives individuals hold of entrepreneurship and how they define it for themselves
influences identity formation and social identity affiliation. These definitions underpin and can, either consciously and subconsciously, shape individuals’ constructions of the prototype of what it means to be an entrepreneur. Because definitions inform prototypes, which, in turn, impact identity activity, the concept of entrepreneurial prototypes is addressed later in the chapter within the identity section.

For the purposes of this study, entrepreneurship is defined as entrepreneurship involving the foundation and operation of an individual’s own organization or business (Davidsson, 2007). While a business owner orientation was intended, the recruitment script intentionally did not define entrepreneurship or what it meant to be an entrepreneur (see Appendices A, B, and C). This was an intentional choice permitting an exploration of the conceptions of entrepreneurship that the participants held naturally, rather than limiting their participation based on how the study defined entrepreneurship. With this addressed, all of the 14 participants within the study noted the formal registration and recognition of their business or organization within the United States.

**Section Summary**

The section on entrepreneurship served to define the professional context of the participants through presenting both historical and modern understandings of entrepreneurship as a field of inquiry. Many different definitions and conceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship exist, underpinning how individuals may view an entrepreneurial career. As a growing scholarly field, entrepreneurship researchers are interested in developing theory (Brush, Manolova, & Edelman, 2008; Zahra, 2005). The multidisciplinary backgrounds of entrepreneurship scholars have contributed significantly to the variety of theories used in the field. Because of the frequent theoretical and conceptual bridging from other scholarly fields and literature strands, Lohrke and Landström (2010) cautioned researchers to look at the foundations
and assumptions of the borrowed concept or theory. To extend theory from other fields, researchers must adequately contextualize the theory and the rationale for its use (Zahra, 2007). To this end, the scholarship on identity and transition, which both originate from outside entrepreneurship literature, were approached thoroughly and with great care and attention. To accomplish this, the next two sections present relevant literature from identity and transition areas, drawing on their relevance to the construction and foundation of the dissertation research.

**Identity**

Identity scholarship has been of interest for centuries, and it remains one of the most common concepts explored in social science literature (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Côté, 2006). Identity research has served many aims, and the construct of identity continues to hold many operative definitions (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). Despite the concept holding significant value throughout written history, the value of identity to a variety of literature streams has been uncovered only within the past 150 years. In many areas, such as entrepreneurship, its value has been explored much more recently.

The discussion of identity scholarship has acknowledged counter perspectives and critiques of building understandings from the base of identity literature. The breadth of definitions has caused some confusion regarding whether there can be a coherent scholarly dialogue about such a vague construct (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). To this end, the selected literature represents an intentional curing of relevant areas of identity, rather than the full span or a selection of the most authoritative scholarship.

This section frames the historical and modern understandings of identity. The subsequent subsections build upon the identity literature to explore applications of identity as it pertains to role and professional identity. The subsection on professional identity offers a broad perspective
on the construction of self-concept as it relates to the social contexts of work and employment, serving as a critical foundation to look at the more specific concept of entrepreneurial identity.

**Identity Scholarship**

The foundations of Western identity scholarship are best classified as sourced from the field of philosophy. Foundation theories of identity have historically centered on philosophical assumptions of consciousness within a physical embodiment or possession of a soul, as in the case of Locke, or ego, related to Descartes and Plato. One philosophical understanding of self is referred to as body theory, which centers identity as being linked with the presence of a mind within the same physical body over time (Polkinghorne, 1988; Sepetyi, 2017). Perceived flaws surfaced within the prevailing understanding of body theory. One of the first challengers to body theory was John Locke, who proposed a new perspective of how to understand identity called memory theory. Memory theory posits that an individual’s identity consists of personal memories at different life points that hold a chronological connection to one another. Like body theory, memory theory also has some significant critiques, including the holding of false memories or memories that were re-storied with inaccuracies. Hume (1739) argued that there was no constant self but rather an ever-changing bundle of impressions composed of one’s mind, memories, emotions, beliefs, perceptions, preferences, and body.

Parfit (1986) reconciled Hume’s position individuals have towards the abovementioned bundles of impressions by acknowledging the psychological connectedness and continuity, or Relation R. The concept of Relation R is not identity, but rather it involves the noted degree of the strength of connection between the most chronologically closest version of self with the most recent point in time, which are more connected than versions further back in time. Parfit’s (1986) Relation R also presents the notion of intermediate selves, which represent point-in-time selves
that served as the versions in between two distinct selves. The notion of how we navigate from one self to another over time has been developed in different directions, such as the concepts of multiple selves and possible selves, which will be discussed later in this section.

Modern identity scholarship outside of the field of philosophy gained in prominence throughout the 20th Century, first within the social science fields, primarily in sociology and psychology, and later in applied sciences, primarily business and management). At this stage, significant elements of modern understandings of identity started to emerge, such as the notion that identity can be experienced within individual, role, and social group environments (Asch, 1952; Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1904; Lewin, 1952; Mead, 1934; Sherif, 1936). Extending from the philosophical underpinnings of identity scholarship, other scholars; including Dewey (1890), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934) helped establish the social influence of self. In its modern understanding, the importance of social context constitutes a critical point of interaction with the development of identity.

An important starting position on identity is to position the meaning of “identity” as it relates to an understanding of “self.” Kihlstrom and Klein (1994) positioned the notion of self broadly as the “point at which cognitive, personality, and social psychology meet” (p. 194). To this end, self is “not really a single topic at all, but rather an aggregate of loosely related subtopics” (Baumeister, 1998, p. 681). When examining the breadth of potential meanings and extensions to the term, self, Leary and Price Tangney (2003) posited the usefulness of utilizing other terms as more specific to the intention of inquiry. For example, the term “self-concept” can help clarify the goal to investigate individuals “conceptualizations of or beliefs about themselves” (Leary, 2004, p. 3). Narrowing self to self-concept more accurately positions the term as being nearly synonymous to the operative understanding of identity within the context of
this research. Furthermore, self-concept connotes an understanding of selfhood in relation to a greater social context. Throughout this dissertation, the term “identity” is used to mean both “role” and “self” and is qualified by type, for example as “possible selves” or “entrepreneurial identity”, as appropriate.

Identity Formation

The formation of identity is complex given that identity development is both a construct of oneself and of the self within social contexts (Schöb, 2013). Identity can be understood as fragile and referential, housed within social contexts (Holmes, 2006). In its nature as a construct dependent on social interaction (Gecas, 1982), identity is fluid, malleable, and evolving, not always transferring from context to context (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Further reinforcing the complexity of self, a need arises to address the paradoxical nature of identity given that it both shifts and remains the same (Chandler, 2000).

To explain the complexity of identity formation, identity development should be understood as both a construct of oneself and the self within social contexts (Schöb, 2013). Identity should be seen as fluid, malleable, and evolving; it is not always transferred identically from context to context (Ecclestone et al., 2010). An identity developed in one professional context may not transfer to another. For example, a professional may leave one work environment where she feels unsupported and inadequate to then join another where she feels welcomed, capable, and successful within her new work context. In this respect, identity is fragile and referential, being housed within a particular social context (Holmes, 2006). In application, identity is neither an internal construct owned by the individual nor an external entity formed by a community, rather it is social co-construction between individual and others (Cunliffe, 2001). This dissertation is founded upon a social constructionist perspective on
identity, where identity is recognized as not only individual, but also externally influenced in its formation.

Identity development entails a process through which individuals form and assign their own perceptions, interpretations, and meanings to identities (Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007; Pratt et al., 2006). Identities are managed through a system of self-schemata informed and categorized through previous socialization (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Selves are situated and framed within an individual’s social environments (D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994), and self-schemata help to organize and allow for meaning making and reflection (Markus & Nurius, 1987). A process of self-categorization helps to sort identities based on an individual’s perceived likeness or sense of belonging within particular groups (Banaji & Prentice, 1994); this can include belonging to a particular occupation, profession, or community of practice. Individuals make sense of themselves by comparing their identities to future selves (Ibarra, 1999) and possible selves (Ibarra, 2004). Through the on-going conscious and subconscious reflexive self-categorization processes, individuals not only make evaluations of the multiple selves, but they also can create pathways for actualizing a self (Oysterman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

Multiple Identities

The concept of multiple identities aids in setting the stage for how multiple identities exist simultaneously. Multiple identities can be understood as distinct identities (Markus & Wurf, 1987) managed across contexts (Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 1986). Multiple selves are a natural cognitive formation that demonstrates psychological well-being, as a greater complexity of selves provides a buffer from external life stresses (Gergen, 1972; Linville, 1987). Multiple identities are categorized and collectively form an individual’s broader self-concept, which is a “structure of differentiated identities organized in a hierarchy of salience” (Stryker, 1989, p. 54).
Identities are combined into categories, which can be framed by emotions, memories, motivations, behaviors, cognition, and context (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Linville, 1985; Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003).

Multiple identities are managed through the cognitive process of self-categorization when “an individual sorts selves, based on a perceiver’s judgments of similarity among relevant beliefs” (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2012, p. 106). Different identities are discernable through the unique attributes, functions, significance, and features that characterize them, and they are categorized by what they share in common (Williams, 2000). In the categorization process, identities can be organized into a hierarchy, according to their significance and contextual relevance (Rosenberg & Gara, 1985; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). The identities at all levels of the hierarchy may vary in their salience, with social use of identity helping to provide better “readiness to act out an identity” (Stryker & Serpe, 1994, p.17). Identities interact at all levels—individual, role, and social—and have an impact on the clarity, strength, development, and use of one another (Ashforth, 2001, p. 295). Identities can influence one another, serving to reinforce, strengthen, or, complement; in contrast, they can challenge, weaken, or threaten. Salient identities without another conflicting identity present would likely be more accessible and easier to activate or enact; alternatively, identities that are not as clear or are in conflict with a strong, present identity present a greater challenge to enactment. For example, for a mid-career engineer wanting to make a transition into entrepreneurship, the long-held engineer identity may have more salience than a newer, entrepreneurial identity as she takes her first steps to learn about entrepreneurship. These two professional identities can be complementary or in conflict, depending on the perspective of the individual. In this respect,
looking back to the 4 S model, an individual’s resources and deficits within their self, situation, and supports can significantly help or hinder the development of the entrepreneurial identity.

Multiple identities serve an important role in this dissertation research considering that the participants, at the time the interviews were conducted, had recently experienced a professional transition from traditional employment environments into their entrepreneurial positions, meaning that they had likely formed a professional identity prior to their transitions into entrepreneurship. To this end, challenges arise regarding the management of multiple identities. Firstly, the active presence of one identity may inhibit the activation of other selves (Martindale, 1980). For instance, the active engagement of a mother identity might conflict with a professional or entrepreneurial identity, which may cause additional intentional identity work to legitimize the suppressed identity (Swail & Marlow, 2018). As another challenge to managing multiple identities, individuals can find it difficult, under certain circumstances, to actively engage with multiple cognitive schemata when developing opinions and judgments (Malt, Ross, & Murphy, 1995). Furthermore, identities can become dormant because individuals will transition in and out of various roles and engagements, re-focusing their energies and efforts throughout their lifetimes (Carroll & Mosakowski, 1987). Lastly, multiple identities can be separated off from one another through an identity boundary, which is the “physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities [identities] as separate from one another” (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 474). Identity boundaries can contribute towards an attempt at psychological well-being through the enactment of a compartmentalization identity strategy to preserve the identities as distinct (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Individuals may operationalize such a strategy when they anticipate an identity conflict.
Given the complexity introduced about multiple identities, it is important to note that the processes of categorization, comparisons, and interactions outlined are not just salient, actual identities. Possible identities operate alongside actual identities, being categorized and compared to actual identities to make an assessment on how possible they might be. This interaction plays a significant role for those transitioning into a new professional role. For all of the participants to have transitioned into an entrepreneurial role, they had to go through a self-categorization process through which they formed judgments and assessments of the feasibility and attractiveness of the possible entrepreneurial identity. Those who sought to move forward in developing the possible identity into a professional identity may have utilized their resources to move forward, so that their entrepreneurial professional identity could feel more salient.

Possible Identities

When discussing transitions, it is important to examine scholarship and conceptualizations of possible selves. Just like actual past, present, and future selves, individuals can also access and reflect upon possible selves (Cross & Markus, 1991, 1994). Distinguishable from one’s current actual self, possible selves are relevant to cognitive schemata that reflect upon and process potential future “goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). As discussed within the subsection on multiple identities, the categorization, organization, and possible-actual self-comparison process plays a significant role in identity construction (Stets & Burke, 2000), germane to researching professional identity transitions.

Possible selves can be formed in light of aspirations for the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986); to this end, the term aspirational identity refers to a possible identity of interest to an individual and is held in high esteem by the individual. Possible selves help to provide a structure for understanding an individual in relation to goals (Cropanzano, James, & Citera,
1993; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999) and an individual’s present actions and accomplishments (Lord et al., 1999). Possible selves can be aspirational or a version of self that is yet to be realized (Cross & Markus, 1994), and they can vary significantly in how probable, feasible, and tangible they seem (Quinlan et al., 2006). Individuals who associate themselves as having a close actual and possible self will perceive the realization of a transition from possible self to a new actual self as being more tangible. More closely associated possible to actual self-pairings will become meaningful and will be more likely to be woven into an individual’s self-schemata (Stets & Burke, 2003).

In professional capacities, a possible self can help individuals to safely play through potential new pathways without feeling judged or pressured. For the purposes of this dissertation, the possible self indeed served as a gateway into exploring entrepreneurship and an entrepreneurial identity prior to even engaging in any activities. Indeed, individuals who have explored a possible entrepreneurial identity are sensitive to seek out, closely observe, reflect upon, and pay attention to any behaviors in themselves and others that align with an entrepreneurial prototype (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The process of exploring a possible identity helps to develop a well-defined identity, strengthen a self-schema, and form a close, positive relationship with a potential future self (Strahan & Wilson, 2006).

Despite possible selves being plentiful, inconsequential, and short-lived, many possible selves can be internalized and become a significant contributor to an individual’s self-regulation (Higgins, 1996). Possible selves play an important identity role given that they can both motivate or prevent action (Oysterman & Markus, 1990). For example, if an individual has aspired to obtain a managerial role in their organization, the individual may maintain and access a managerial possible self that helps to keep them motivated and focused on relevant goals to
leading to the fulfillment of this identity. Alternatively, an individual who grew up with an incarcerated parent may have a well-formed understanding of an identity of what that life could look like, which can serve as a deterrent for behaviors or actions to realize that path. Possible selves also protect individuals’ well-being through disjointing self from negative perceptions that might cause setbacks. As Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2003) asserted, discrepancies between actual and possible selves cause “dejection-related emotions (e.g., disappointment, dissatisfaction, and sadness),” as well as “agitation-related emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, and worry)” (p. 53).

Professional Identity

This subsection on professional identity helps to build upon the understandings of identity, identity formation, multiple identities, and possible identities by speaking to how individuals form their professional selves. Professional identities can be viewed as serving as a facet of individual, role, or social identity (Ashforth, 2001). Professional identity, sometimes addressed as career, work, or working identity, constitutes a significant foundation for the understanding the how individuals view themselves within the context of their job, career, or profession. Professional identities play an important role in individuals’ lives because individual identities are closely linked to what people do (Ashforth, 2001).

To unpack the complexity of professional identities, it is paramount to first understand the aspects of a career that provide an individual’s rationale to work. Bridge (2010, p. 151) highlighted eight reasons why individuals work:

- To obtain resources needed for survival, live, and/or raise a family
- To feel part of a group or community
- To feel respected and influential (e.g., fame, status)
- To obtain the means for pleasure and gratification
• To make a fortune
• To contribute to society or benefit others
• To achieve success
• To create art or express oneself through art

From this list, individuals would likely be able to claim multiple reasons for working. Bridge’s (2010) list of reasons why people work showcases the breadth and complexity of personal expectations of our professional lives. As an example, the “need to feel respected and influential” can play an interesting role in how individuals choose to shape their professional sense of self. In a study of students by Winkler (2009), those students who engaged in low-skill, non-prestigious concurrent or term-break employment had a primary identity as a student rather than as an employee, compared to students who engaged in more skilled activities. The study demonstrated that the perceived level or prestige of work can significantly impact identity formation and that the way individuals perceive their work can limit the extent to which they socially identify themselves as part of a particular professional community, which in turn can limit their professional identity development (Winkler, 2009).

The socialization of a professional identity serves as a critical component of how any individual frames a professional identity. Professional identities reflect a “position in a social structure” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 4), and they undergo a process whereby there is an “assimilation of the experiences into meaningful or useful structures” (Meijers, 1998, p. 200). This reflects a process where professional identity is evaluated based on the perceptions of its social group and then categorized among other identities accordingly. Professional identities are formed through the participation of individuals in social contexts within the labor market, shaped over time
through “the dynamic and on-going interplay between individuals and their wider social and economic environment” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 81).

An individual’s work context can play a significant role in professional identity, as “changes in identity were intertwined with changes in work” (Pratt et al., 2006). To understand how meaning is constructed to form identity, Bain (2005) noted that the construction of meaning from work comes from work activities, work productions and recognition, the level of prestige of the work and its social context, and the work within the greater context of engagement and activities (Glaeser, 2000). Conceptions of professional identity can be informed by the ways in which individuals engage in their work, related to tasks and activities (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006). A professional identity can be informed by social contexts, such as organizational affiliations (Pratt et al., 2006) and “memberships in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions” (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 266).

Professional identity is also complex in that it does not necessarily connect with someone’s actual role or profession. Ashforth (2001) clarified that one or more of the following four psychological motives need to be satisfied for a role to hold relevance for identity formation and development: identity, meaning, control, and belonging motives. Identity motives relate to the need for elements of the coherence, continuity, distinctiveness, enhancement, expression, and knowledge of the self. The second motive, meaning, entails connecting to a role and finding a sense of purpose. The control motive pertains to individuals’ need for control over their environments and themselves. The fourth motive, belonging, involves connection with others through relationship and community building. To this end, professional identity, an individual’s sense of belonging in a particular profession, and active engagement in a particular professional
role are all closely linked to one another (Chreim et al., 2007). The four motives center around the need for identity, meaning, control, and belonging in professional roles.

Instances when none of the four psychological motives are satisfied might signal that the individual operating within the role and engaging in role-related activities is determining that the particular role is not self-defining (Ashforth, 2001), meaning that a professional role does not entail a corresponding professional identity. When an individual’s psychological motives for identity, meaning, control, and belonging are not satisfied within a professional role, the individual may not find holding and reflecting upon its corresponding identity to be beneficial, given the connection between a professional role and one’s need for identity. In this context, meaning, control, or belonging—or several of these elements combined—help relate the role to a relevant identity for the individual.

In addition, the complexity of professional identity can also become apparent in how a professional sense of self can be based both on tangible and less tangible facets of work. A professional identity can be informed by clear and tangible aspects of an individual’s professional life, such as organizational affiliations (Pratt et al., 2006) and “memberships in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions” (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 266). Alternatively, conceptions of professional identity can be informed by the ways in which individuals engage in their work, or by their tasks and activities (Dutton et al., 2010; Pratt et al., 2006).

**Benefits of Professional Identity.** Benefits exist in forming and managing a professional identity. Professional identity plays a significant role in employability, serving as one of the three dimensions of employability, along with personal adaptability and social and human capital (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). An identity perspective on employability should not be
overshadowed given the significant role in career development and preparedness. The notions of employability or professional identity development serve an important function in understanding the individual and collective preparedness—not through skills, but rather through maturation and development of identity and belief in oneself and one’s abilities to comfortably participate within the labor market.

Individuals feel the need to belong and have a sense of commonality within professional communities of practice (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The notion of community of practice refers to a social network or group formed through common participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A community of practice is an “emergent structure” formed by a practitioner group and based on a shared interest and experience; it serves as an important element of learning and identity development (Wenger, 1998). The ability for those entering a profession to participate within a community of practice functions as an important part of the learning process, particularly because it allows the new community members to both act and observe (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as well as to reflect “in action,” allowing them to determine when they can develop their professional understandings and strategies (Schön, 1987).

**Entrepreneurial Identity**

When an aspiring entrepreneur becomes an entrepreneur, a possible identity is actualized and sense of professional identity shifts over time. Entrepreneurship involves a significant process of identity development, with identities serving as the fuel to found and persist with running an organization (Ireland & Webb, 2007). In its most tentative form, studies have found there is a classification of aspirational identities, or “dreamers,” who have entrepreneurial intentions but who have not acted on them yet (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Van Gelderen et al., 2005). When reflecting on the process of “becoming entrepreneurial,” Williams Middleton and
Donnellon (2017) “contend[ed] that to become entrepreneurial, individuals must learn to interpret, manage, and leverage the inevitable emotions they experience as they undertake entrepreneurial activities” (p. 108). Emergent entrepreneurial identities are constructed and reconstructed through the practice of socializing experiences, motivation, intentions, reactions, and expectations (Morris, Kuratko, Schindehutte, & Spivack, 2012).

Similar to how the breadth of definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship were addressed earlier in the chapter, it is important to articulate that not one universal entrepreneurial identity exists; research has indicated the occurrence of many existing entrepreneurial identities or identity categories (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek 2009; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Powell & Baker, 2017). While researchers still only have a limited understanding of entrepreneurial identity formation (Donnellon et al., 2014, Ollila et al., 2012), some understandings of entrepreneurial identity can help situate how entrepreneurial identities function. Entrepreneurial identities can develop in conjunction with a professional identities, linked to a professional field and situated as complementary with a main professional area (Hytti, 2005; Werthes, Mauer, & Brettel, 2018); they can also develop in conflict with the primary area (Kovalainen & Österberg-Högstedt, 2013; Nadin, 2007). Regardless of how an entrepreneurial identity is positioned, whether it is complementary or in conflict, the balance of the multiple identities and the maintenance of not too few or too many identities is advantageous for entrepreneurs (Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007).

Entrepreneurial identity forms through individuals “both interacting with new value creation and being affected with regard to their entrepreneurial role expectations by their immediate team environment” (Lundqvist, Williams Middleton, & Nowell, 2015, p. 341). This explanation highlights that entrepreneurs create value for their customers, clients, and
stakeholders, and it also notes how entrepreneurial identity development results from interacting with one’s social environment. As entrepreneurs engage with their social environment, their socially constructed identity is revised and revisited, based on social interactions.

There is significant value for individuals to see themselves as entrepreneurial (Down & Warren, 2008; Hytti, 2005). Interest in entrepreneurial identities prevail because of the positive implications for having a strong entrepreneurial identity. Many studies have connected self-concept and the prediction of entrepreneurial outcomes (Farmer et al., 2011; Hoang & Gimeno, 2010; Krueger, 2007; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009; van Dellen & Hoyle, 2008). Individuals who engage in self-entrepreneurial role identity comparisons and who claim greater similarity and congruence between themselves and their perceptions of an entrepreneur prototype will have a stronger likelihood to aspire for an entrepreneurial identity (Farmer et al., 2011). This means that the correlation between perceptions of entrepreneurial identities and the strength of an entrepreneurial possible self is significant. With this in mind, entrepreneurial prototypes provide another lens through which to understand the foundations of entrepreneurial identity formation.

**Entrepreneurial Prototypes**

Entrepreneurial prototypes support identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible self. The categorization, organization, and possible-actual self-comparison processes all play significant roles in identity construction (Stets & Burke, 2000). Prototypes “embody all attributes that characterize groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors,” clarifying the distinct concept of that particular group or entity (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 123). Prototypes serve as a point of comparison for establishing a perceived alignment or misalignment between oneself and the prototype. The constructed ideas
of the prototype and an individual’s self-conception can shift over time as an individual gains further information or exposure (Hogg et al., 1995).

Significant variance characterizes how individuals view entrepreneurial roles (Krueger, 2003), and research on entrepreneurial identity supports the need for individuals to connect their sense of self with entrepreneurship (Down & Warren, 2008; Hytti, 2005). When individuals are considering a career, they may hold an aspirational identity or a possible identity. During the development of the initial stages of identity, or of provisional identities, the concurrent processes of self-categorization (Stets & Burke, 2000) and identity matching (Ibarra, 1999) help individuals to define and compare themselves, respectively, to the entrepreneurs they perceive to be successful. As individuals reflect on the extent to which they could become someone who can be and act like their entrepreneur exemplars, the potential entrepreneur through this process shapes and reinforces meaningful psychological constructs: a distinct picture of a possible self emerges (Ibarra, 1999).

Possible selves can vary in how “possible” they are perceived to be (Quinlan et al., 2006). Gecas’ (1982) findings inferred, with regard to professional identity formation, that the extent to which an individual reports identity congruence with the characteristics, traits, and behaviors of entrepreneurs plays a critical role in whether the individual will expend the effort to build an entrepreneurial identity. Therefore, perceived distance between an individual’s actual self and possible self plays a significant role in how far an identity is realized. In addition, the process involved in forming a closely associated and developed possible self helps to build a positive perception of that possible self (Strahan & Wilson, 2006).

Entrepreneurial prototypes play a significant role in the foundational development of an entrepreneurial identity, particularly related to how individuals define a possible self (Hoyle &
A stereotypical image of entrepreneurs as being heroic and masculine, however, prevails (Ahl, 2002; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Bridge, 2017; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Hytti, 2005; Hytti & Heinonenork, 2013; Lewis, 2006; Marlow, 2002; Mitchell, 1997; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). The heroic entrepreneur is associated with being aggressive, dominant, high achieving, independent, and risk taking (Ahl, 2002; Mitchell, 1997; Ogbor, 2000). The notion of a heroic entrepreneurial identity may not match the lived reality experienced by many entrepreneurs, which may limit full exploration of entrepreneurial identities; these can be multifaceted (Dodd, 2002; Morgan, 2006) and not necessarily mutually exclusive, considering that individuals can experience multiple entrepreneurial identities over time (Mathias & Williams, 2017). If an individual does not affiliate themselves with the existing prototypes, such as being a “heroic” entrepreneur, it can be challenging for them to see themselves as entrepreneurs and to connect with an entrepreneurial identity (Mallon, 1998).

**Section Summary**

This section established the scholarly foundations and modern understandings and applications of identity research. This reflect a critical framework through which the study was developed given that identity is one of three central phenomena explored. To establish an understanding of identity, the section unpacked the scholarly foundation and contemporary understandings of identity, with subsequent subsections framing the neighboring applications of identity research, including the themes of professional identity and entrepreneurial identity.

This section highlighted elements of identity that facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon and the decision-making processes inherent to the design of the study. First, identity was presented as a complex and evolving area of scholarship with historical foundations in philosophy, more modern development within social psychology and a growing relevance to
many disciplines within the social sciences, more broadly. Second, identity was narrowed to relate to self-concept and was positioned as being socially constructed and dependent on one’s social context and environment. Next, the section introduced the concepts of relational and multiple selves, which framed the social referential nature of identity and the concurrent, simultaneous existence and retrieval of multiple identities, respectively. Finally, the section discussed the distinction of actual versus possible selves and the potential challenges from perceived discrepancies between them. Because of the ever-changing nature of identity, the process through which an individual experiences a shift from one identity to another plays a significant role in how an individual makes sense and copes with the change. The following section on transition provides an overview of the scholarship of transition as it applies to how individuals experience an identity shift.

**Transition**

This third section reviews the concept of transition as it relates to life and professional transitions. This section supports one of this dissertation’s founding assumptions that professional identity and entrepreneurial identity can be developed, learned, and socialized, rather than stemming from traits established by birth or in childhood. This perspective notes that, even those aspiring to hold a professional entrepreneurial identity, may never transition into an entrepreneurial role; likewise, those not considering an entrepreneurial identity from a young age may at some point in their lives develop that entrepreneurial identity. While an entrepreneurial identity does not need to entail a role shift, for example to entrepreneurship, the dissertation engaged participants who had experienced a professional transition from traditional employment into an entrepreneurial role within the 3.5 years prior to the time of the interviews. To better frame the dissertation research, this section presents several subsections that help to: define
transition, present the types of transition, discuss the ways that transitions can be evaluated, incorporate the 4 S model and its relevance in the dissertation, and address the specific role of professional transitions.

**Defining Transitions**

A transition can be understood as an “event or nonevent resulting in [a] change or assumption change of social networks [and] resulting in growth or deterioration” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5), with the transition categorizable in one of three event types: anticipated events, unanticipated events, and nonevents. Anticipated events involve happenings that were planned, foreseen, or predictable. Typically, anticipated events are not a surprise to the individual experiencing the event. While anticipating an event can allow the participant to begin processing the transition earlier than an unanticipated event, anticipated events can still be challenging to adapt to should other elements of the transition present challenges—for example, if the individual has a personal deficit or the transition was perceived negatively. Unanticipated events, on the other hand, can present unique challenges because they are often surprising, sudden, hurried, and unforeseen. Individuals experiencing unanticipated events can feel rushed and forced into hasty decisions; even in the case of positively perceived events, if they are unanticipated, the event can be perceived as underappreciated because the individual might not have had the ability to appreciate the value in the moment. Nonevents present themselves when an anticipated event does not happen.

Transitions are psychological or physical changes that entail a role shift, exiting one role and beginning to engage with a new one. As a change in role, transitions can entail identity reflection, revision, challenges, reinforcement, adoption, rejection, and questioning. Building from the previous section on identity, several natural connections between identity and transition
Like identity construction, the transition process happens over time and involves a constant exchange between the individual and the social environment and context (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The construction of a new identity can evolve from within a transition, igniting a process through which an individual can author their new identity and new life (Wong, 2002).

The concept of transition has been studied broadly across disciplines. At its core, transitions can be understood as an “abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individual to cope with the new altered life space” (Parkes, 1971, p. 103). Transitions represent the periods of time between stable identity states (Levinson, 1986). Because transitions periods involve a process of navigating new social and environmental contexts, transitions can bring about new opportunities, transformation, and growth (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), as well as a reflection of one’s strengths and life purpose (E. D. Miller & Harvey, 2001).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the concept of transition has been approached from different lenses. Kenny (2015) detailed some of the orientations of transition literature over the past few decades:

The concept of transition has been related to a variety of topics including individual lifespan development (Erikson, 1963); occupational planning (Hopson & Adams, 1977); educational processes (Newman et al., 2000); social support (Cutrona & Russell, 1990); and the processes of ageing, retirement, and dying (Cummings and Henry, 1961) (p. 178). The selected lens of transition used within the dissertation is centered on Schlossberg (1981) who framed transition as an “event or nonevent resulting in [a] change or assumption change of social networks [and] resulting in growth or deterioration” (p. 5). As introduced in the first chapter, Schlossberg’s approach to periods of transition has provided a guideline for understanding
individual lived experiences of transition. In looking to aforementioned elements, the following subsections discussing transition frame the elements of transition, the role of perspective in transition, and the 4 S model.

**Approaching and Experiencing Transitions: Revisiting the 4 S Model**

Individuals hold potential resources for approaching transitions which are represented across the four 4 S categories: situation, self, supports, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). Individuals use real, perceived, and created resources during transitions (Sussman, 1972). Within the theoretical groundwork of transition theory, Schlossberg (1981) identified four primary factors, or the 4 S’s, at play during the individual transition process: self, situation, supports, and strategies. A cursory review of these factors (see Table 1) has led to established literature streams within entrepreneurship scholarship. However, the 4 S’s allow individuals to reflect upon, acknowledge, and approach the various elements within each factor.

Anderson et al. (2012) asserted that the 4 S Model was not meant to assess mental health and wellbeing. However, it can be useful in taking stock of an individual’s available and utilized resources and deficits. The 4 S model contributes a consistent structure for understanding, identifying, and tracking transitions. The 4 S model is not about monitoring those needing help or helping those who are “confused” within a transition because transitions can be positive or negative, and transformative or mundane, and everything in between. Rather, the 4 S model purports be applicable to all life transitions given that the four “S” categories of self, situation, supports, and strategies can be assessed in a broad variety of transitions (Schlossberg, 2008). The model also aims to highlight four overarching, meaningful, and impactful elements of transitions to provide an understanding of the individual’s lived experience throughout a transition period. These include (Schlossberg, 2011):
• The type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or nonevents);
• The degree to which one's life has been altered (changes in roles, relationships, routines, assumptions);
• Where one is in the transition process (considering a change, beginning the change, years after the change); and
• The resources one can apply to making it a success (p. 161)

The four elements of transitions from Schlossberg (2011) present overarching considerations regarding reflection about a transition. Because these elements were not utilized in a mentoring or counseling capacity, some areas were slightly modified to fit the study. For example, #2 was simplified into positive, mixed, or negative perception, and #4 was addressed as participants chose, given that it was not a direct question. The first of the two overarching elements are discussed further within the next subsection.

**Evaluating Transitions**

This subsection approaches how individuals make sense of and evaluate a transition. First, the different types of transition are addressed with examples of how they might manifest in an individual’s life or career. To evaluate transitions, Anderson et al. (2012) presented three elements within change—perspective, context, and impact—that can help structure reflection of the experienced transition process. Like the different types of transition discussed previously, the three elements within change can also involve any gradation of positive, negative, or neutral. To view how change is experienced by individuals, the elements of perspective, context, and impact each allow scholars and practitioners to dissect transition into its parts to reconstruct the lived experience.
Types of transition. Anderson et al. (2012) identified three different types of transition: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent transitions. The first two represent tangible events that occurred in an individual’s life; in contrast, the third type, nonevent transitions, involves shifts caused by a lack of an event. These might include a promotion that never materialized or a cancelled wedding, for example. All three types of change occur all throughout an individual’s life course, and identity shifts can result from any of the three.

Anticipated transitions. Anticipated transitions are predictable additions, losses, or role shifts that unfold throughout an individual’s life cycle (Pearlin & Lieberman, 1979). A graduation, marriage, the birth of a child, the start of a new job, and planned retirement are all events that individuals can typically anticipate happening, depending on their cultural and family contexts. Anticipated transitions are unique because individuals can plan towards the transition. Anticipated changes are self-initiated, and they allow for time to prepare, to role rehearse, and to consider all available options. Nevertheless, even positive, planned changes can include an underpinning of loss (Gignoux, 2002).

Unanticipated transitions. Unanticipated transitions are unpredictable, unexpected, or not scheduled occurrences and events; examples of unanticipated transitions can include layoffs, firings, promotions, changing companies, illness, death, loss, divorce, and separation (Pearlin, 1980). Unanticipated transitions can also include lower probability or lower likelihood occurrences such as natural disasters, robberies, and crime (Brim & Ryff, 1980). One of the key implications of unanticipated life changes is that individuals are making decisions under “less than ideal” circumstances (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Because of the unexpected nature of the transition, an individual may lack the resources within self, situation, supports, or strategies to successfully make the transition with ease.
Nonevent transitions. Contrasting with the first two types of transitions, nonevent transitions represent occurrences when a change event was anticipated but did not happen; they include four different types of nonevents: personal, ripple, resultant, and delayed (Anderson et al., 2012). Examples of typical nonevents that can occur throughout the life cycle include not getting married, not having children, a miscarriage, not getting a promotion, and delaying retirement. Although the presented examples of nonevents can be perceived as negative, nonevents can also be positive or negative. To demonstrate how nonevents can be positive in nature, an example used by Anderson et al. (2012) is a patient being told that they are “cancer free” after previous cancer diagnosis. A neutral example would be that an individual who never held an interest in getting married might consider the nonevent of never marrying as neutral because of a lack of a need, want, or expectation of a marriage in the first place.

Perspective. Building from the last section, the example of someone never wanting to get married highlights the importance of an individual’s perspective. As the first of three elements of transition, perspective plays a key role in how a transition is understood by an individual. The way in which an individual perceives the event or nonevent is more important than reality because transition can only be defined as such if the person experiencing it does so. To this end, transitions are not so much about change as they are about the perception of change (Anderson et al., 2012). For example, the loss of a job might be perceived as a horrible occurrence with only negative consequences or as a welcomed opportunity to pursue new career pathways. How the transition is viewed can validate whether a change was perceived as a noticeable shift. For some individuals, marriage represents a distinctly new period of life, whereas those accustomed to living with their partner for years might not note the act of marriage as causing an identity shift. Regardless of the magnitude of an event, if an individual deems a transition to be uneventful and
not noteworthy, it would put into question whether an identity transition actually took place. This is an important element of transitions, as the researcher must be mindful not to assign meaning to a transition that might not hold significance for the individual who experienced it.

**Context.** The second element, context, pertains to a multitude of factors that might influence a transition. These include, but are not limited to, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographic location (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Fouad & Bynner, 2008). The historical context can influence transitions because there have been various role expectations throughout history.

**Impact.** The third element, impact, represents the degree to which someone’s life is impacted by the event or nonevent. The impact of a transition can be best understood by considering how an event or nonevent impacted an individual’s daily life and perceptions. When looking towards impact, reflections on the resulting or perceived resulting physical and psychological consequences of an event or nonevent are critical.

**Professional Transitions**

A significant need exists to research professional transitions given that scholarship on professional transitions is arguably “still in its infancy” (Ibarra, 2004, p. 174). As framed in Chapter 1, professional transitions have become increasingly more common within our professional lives (Bridges, 2003; Chudzikowski, 2012). Particularly with 40% percent of U.S. workers experiencing self-employment in their lifetimes (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006), more needs to be understood about new entrepreneurs’ transition experiences as they take their initial steps into their entrepreneurial positions. This dissertation research provides additional empirical data to help to fill this gap.
Individuals experience reality in a manner that is “richly complex, nonlinear, and serendipitous” (Bright & Pryor, 2005, p. 302); in this context, perceptions of a professional transition can be shaped over time. However, due to the strength of influence of lived experiences, it can take significant time to both let go of old connections, roles, habits, and understandings and form new ones (Schlossberg, 2011). For instance, in a study of retirees, embracing a new professional identity took one participant two years to vocalize in alignment with the new professional role (Schlossberg, 2004). Individuals going through transition each utilize a unique portfolio through which they support their transitions, for example, building relationships or having meaningful experiences Anderson et al., 2012).

Bridged with professional transitions, the 4 S model provides assistance with understanding and coping with a transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Individuals are understood to first engage with a primary appraisal, which is an initial reaction to the perceived event or nonevent. The initial reaction can be positive (e.g., happiness, hope), neutral, or negative (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression). Following the individuals’ initial reaction, they then can use the transition model for their secondary appraisal, using the 4 Ss. The appraisal plays a strong role in the transition process given that it determines how individuals perceive the impact of the experience—for example, exciting, traumatic, or confusing.

Because transitions into entrepreneurship are framed by life circumstances, reflecting on the 4 S factors and their corresponding themes can serve as a tool to dissect the transition experience. For example, transitions into entrepreneurship can be a result of feeling ostracized or marginalized in a previous position (Nadin, 2007). When individuals feel misaligned with their existing professional position or their career overall, a transition into entrepreneurship may be particularly appealing; this emerged as a noticeable pattern within the data collection, as
addressed in Chapter 4. Particularly in the case of anticipated transitions, individuals can assess their readiness to make a transition into entrepreneurship through evaluating life circumstances, including timing, resources, and social supports, and by and building capacity in each of the areas of the 4 S model. The attractiveness of electing to make a professional transition is determined through evaluating the 4 S factors and their corresponding themes.

Section Summary

The dissertation research situates new entrepreneurs in their experiences of professional identity transition in the context of entrepreneurship. The section on transition helps to provide an understanding of transition as a unique element of life. There is truth to the quote attributed to Heraclitus, “Change is the only constant.” Likewise, even seemingly casual, routine instances can be perceived as holding significance in someone’s life course. An ability to reflect, cope, and thrive both throughout and through transitions plays a significant role in the individual’s lives.

Transitions are the stories that frame lives. Transitions can elicit a broad range of very personal reactions, and individuals have different ways of interpreting and judging transitions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, the intersection of an individual’s experience and their actions, attitudes, and reflections during a transition provides an interesting point of inquiry. An experienced professional transition can elicit a response where an individual seeks to reflect and make sense of the four elements of transition: situation, self, support, and strategies.

Chapter Summary

Based on the conclusions discussed within each of the three literature strands, the intersection of entrepreneurship, identity, and transition presents an interesting juxtaposition for further inquiry. In drawing together the three strands, entrepreneurship was framed as being a relatively nascent field of research with broad foundations, which in turn, makes it a challenge to
define. Bridging between the entrepreneurship and identity sections, the breadth of definitions and conceptions of entrepreneurship are manifested in entrepreneurial prototypes, which are evident in American media and pop culture. The entrepreneurial prototypes color the profession both at the social and individual levels, which means they hold influence over how an individual may view entrepreneurship, as well as how different social groups may regard entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. While Americans view an entrepreneurial career favorably (GEM, 2018), an entrepreneurial prototype can influence how individuals define a possible self (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006), meaning a perceived identity conflict or misalignment with an entrepreneurial prototype could hinder someone from pursuing an entrepreneurial identity. Transitions are especially interesting periods of time to look at identity because transitions result in changes in role, social networks, routines, and/or assumptions (Goodman et al., 2006); they concurrently involve ongoing, continuous assessments of resources, deficits, and possible strategies for coping through the transition.

Serving to expand the understandings presented in Chapter 1, the three strands outlined have examined literature relevant to the research question and the conceptual framework. This second chapter provided a foundation for understanding each of the fields and some of their existing points of intersection, for example, entrepreneurial identity. Down and Warren (2008) purported that entrepreneurial narratives play a significant role in the development of entrepreneurial identity. There are as many lived experiences of the transition into entrepreneurship as there are entrepreneurs, with each journey providing an account of experiences and attempts to cope and thrive throughout the challenges. This has aimed to bring lived stories of transitioning into full-time entrepreneurship to the forefront to understand the professional identity transitions of new entrepreneurs. The following chapters, Chapters 3 and 4,
build upon the presented scholarship to capture and re-story the experience of new entrepreneurs within their first years of full-time entrepreneurship, with the stories serving to build an understanding of entrepreneurial identity and transition.
Chapter 3: Methodology

With the aim to exploring the professional identity transition of new full-time entrepreneurs, Chapter 3 builds upon the previous two chapters to show alignment of the dissertation’s methodology. The first section of the chapter reintroduces the research question, the rationale for both the use of a qualitative research paradigm and narrative research method, and how the research question is approached through the selected research tradition. The second section centers on the research procedures, including participant recruitment, interview methods, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness criteria, data storage, ethics and human studies protection procedures, and researcher positionality. The final section concludes with a brief summary of the chapter.

Methodology Overview

Research Question

To set the groundwork for the dissertation, the first subsection presents the research question and the assumptions that underpin it. The research question is: How do new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition? The research question connects the themes of entrepreneurship, identity, and transition, as covered in the last chapter. In this subsection, the phenomenon, conceptual framework, method, and context are explored in their connection to the research question. First, the research question served to identify the phenomenon of inquiry or the research study’s central topic of interest (Agee, 2009). The phenomenon of professional identity transition played a central role in the direction of the research question. The phenomenon served as the primary thread of the interview protocol, apparent in the final interview questions (see Appendix G). Second, the alignment between the conceptual framework and the research question is critical to both the study’s clarity and its
credibility. The alignment of the research question and the conceptual framework was organic and iterative (Ravitch & Riggan, 2011), with each element being adjusted following any changes made to these of other elements of the study, including the research design and the data analysis plan. The connection of the conceptual framework to the research question situates itself on looking at the intersection of identity and transition. Third, the research question considered the method of narrative research in selection of the verb, “describe,” as it centers the focus on allowing the participants to guide and explore their professional identity transition through detailed descriptions. Finally, because the context provides a distinct environment through which to explore the selected phenomenon, critically, the study examines entrepreneurs’ professional identity transitions related to the research question.

**Rationale for the Qualitative Research Design**

The research design documents participant accounts of transitioning into entrepreneurship; this is the mainstay of data collection and analysis which facilitates the unpacking of lived perceptions and understandings of experiences. A qualitative approach best served this study because it seeks to explore how lived experiences and perceptions form meaning; in short, how participants’ experiences are valued through their own expressions and sense-making (Creswell, 2012). This aims to discover how individuals make sense of, and assign meaning to, their lived experiences (Chase, 2011; Merriam, 2009); thus, a qualitative approach was determined as appropriate. In this sense, the design elements have been revisited as needed throughout the entire development and progression of the study (Maxwell, 2005). In line with qualitative research standards, the dissertation employs an emic approach, through which the researcher attempts to immerse herself within the participants’ perceptions, interpretations, and positions (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013).
Rationale for the Narrative Research Tradition

The dissertation employed a narrative research tradition to center on the participants’ stories of their lived experiences of professional identity transition. This subsection serves to detail the rationale and breadth of considerations for selecting the narrative research tradition. Narrative research comes from a broad range of scholarly underpinnings, including culture, history, and discourse theories; these include critical discourse theory, and conversation analysis (Daiute, 2014). Narrative research can incorporate other traditions, for example, ethnography or discourse analysis (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). It can also be used for an in-depth quantitative study (Elliott, 2005).

This dissertation uses narrative research as its stand-alone tradition and follows a qualitative research design, which, like the majority of narrative research studies, aligns with the aim to build understandings rather than to predict outcomes (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Furthermore, the dissertation selected the narrative research tradition over that of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry uses a constructivist-interpretivist perspective and an inductive process, which serve research that approaches less-established phenomena. In contrast, this dissertation centers on a well-documented phenomenon, professional identity transition. Although the dissertation used an inductive process to collect the stories of professional identity transition, the deductive process has played a critical role in data collection and analysis; this is led by the framework established through a combination of SIT and transition theory.

At its foundation, narrative research depends on the retelling past events (Labov, 1972) to account for “lived time” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). Narrative research is “the study of experience as story,” which is “first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). It involves the recounting of stories as a natural human activity (Lieblich, Tuval-
Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), through which people construct stories to make sense of the world and of themselves (Bozatzis & Dragonas, 2014; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Storytelling develops an understanding of and assigns meaning to lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Memories and narratives of life events represent participants’ sense of self (Ross, 1989) and help to make sense of continuity and rationality in their lives (Conway & Holmes, 2004; McAdams, 2006; McAdams et al., 2006). Individuals’ memories of their life stories, and their understandings of their coherence, show uniquely personal meaning and understandings (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004). Human understanding forms through a sense making of life patterns (Sikes & Gale, 2006). The participants’ ability to find meaningful patterns throughout their lives facilitates the researchers’ ability to form a more complete understanding of their sense making (Díaz, 2013).

Although narrative research is frequently framed as storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a distinct difference exists between narrative research and storytelling. Stories can be understood as only character and plot, whereas narrative research also includes the sequencing and perceived explanations and causes of life events and the moments in between (Paley & Eva, 2005). It can be seen as navigation of self, as uncovered through participants’ spontaneous narratives of “smaller stories (of events, happenings, projects), each of which achieved its significance by virtue of being part of a larger scale ‘life’” (Bruner, 1991, p. 120).

The roles of temporality, sociality, and place. Identity transitions must be situated within their context, particularly in how the individual interpreted and adapted to the event and its social environment (Clausen, 1998). In the context of this dissertation research, the sharing of new entrepreneurs’ stories had facilitated voicing, hearing, and remembering these experiences of professional identity transition within greater social contexts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007;
Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This can be deconstructed into three pillars: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The first pillar of temporality pertains to transitions of the past, present, and future. The element of temporality, especially the sequence of the experiences, is a central element of narrative research (Cortazzi, 1993). Because narrative interviewing aims to accurately understand, capture, and present lived experiences and stories, understanding the sequence of events provides a basis for the contextualizing of the stories. Experiences are heavily situated in the time, culture, and context in which they occur (Riley & Hawe, 2005). In line with recommendations of Paley and Eva (2005), the dissertation interview protocol asked participants to reflect on the sequencing and timing of life events, and nonevents, surrounding their professional identity transition. The pillar of temporality particularly aligned with and supported the transition theory part of the conceptual framework; it provided a structure from which to understand the participants’ experiences prior to and during the transition period, as noted in the Schlossberg 4 S model’s Situation-Timing (see Table 1).

The second pillar of sociality positions stories as representative of both personal and social conditions (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). To approach this, the dissertation interview protocol centered on the personal conditions of the participants, including their “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The pillar of sociality aligns both with SIT and transition theory. SIT is heavily dependent on social environments, as defined within the previous chapters. The Schlossberg 4 S model’s support factor looks at the social relationships, networks, institutions, and communities the participants had access to and utilized during the transition.
A later addition by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), inspired by the work of Basso (1996) and of Marmon Silko (1996), this third pillar of place connects to the “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). For the purpose of the dissertation, place holds relevance in the participants’ physical, geographic, and organizational environments as these pertain to their professional identity transition. Facets of place have a role in both the 4S model’s situation and supports factors; place also plays a role in both how the transition played out and who was involved.

The three pillars of the narrative research tradition of temporality, sociality, and place have framed this study, allowing the researcher to explore how participants have come to understand their professional identity transition. The issue of temporality has allowed participants to position their transition to entrepreneurship within an experienced, temporal context. The pillar of sociality has allowed participants to frame their experiences—feelings, feelings, reactions, and expectations—within their lived personal and social contexts. The third dimension of place has contextualized the entrepreneurial resources and ecosystem accessible to, and utilized by, the entrepreneurs, which may include selection of the Isenberg’s (2010) 13 critical factors for the launch and operation of ventures: “leadership, government policy, culture, success stories, human capital, financial capital, entrepreneurial organizations, education, infrastructure, economic clusters, networks, support services, and main customers” (In Boutillier, Carré, & Levratto, 2016, p. 50). Narrative research permits researchers “authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience” (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 544). This orientation of narrative research aligns well with the research question given that this dissertation explored the authentic stories of
professional identity transition experienced by new entrepreneurs and the context through which the transition occurred. This section provided a rationale for the selection of the narrative research tradition. The next section outlines the step-by-step procedures that were employed during the dissertation research.

Participants

Recruitment resulted in 14 participants from all areas of the United States, including the New England, Mid Atlantic, South, Midwest, West Coast, and Southwest regions. The participants’ professional industries spanned a variety of fields, including education, technology, engineering, beauty, marketing, accounting, and finance. Demographic information was not collected; however, the researcher was able to ascertain from the conversations that there were 10 female and four male participants interviewed. Based on their descriptions of their work, some participants purchased existing contacts or businesses, some were doing independent contracting or consulting, and some created their own product or service. As addressed in Chapter 2, for the purposes of this study, a broad interpretation of entrepreneurship was used. Participants were asked to self-identify as full-time entrepreneurs, as evident in the recruitment materials.

At the time of the interview, the participants’ transition time frame fell within the 3.5-year definition of being an early-stage venture; they transitioned into entrepreneurship ranging from seven months to three years since their full-time start (see Table 3). At the time of the interview, all entrepreneurs were still active full-time with their venture, with one notable exception. One participant, Cammie, was planning a transition into another form of work, possibly short-term consulting work. Another participant, Sarah, was considering returning to traditional, full-time employment, having had active interviews with potential employers at the time of the interview.
Table 3

Profiles of the 14 Dissertation Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Entry into entrepreneurship</th>
<th>Type of transition</th>
<th>Prior entrepreneurial experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>7 years as a sole proprietorship with no employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Business/Accounting</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>None reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>7 months (+1 year PT)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>None reported; did start venture part-time before making full-time transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Freelancing, consulting, and some entrepreneurial projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Previous project leadership and intrapreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Business/Marketing</td>
<td>1.5 years (+1 year PT)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>7 years of founding/ operating a nonprofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Freelancing and consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Technology services</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Intrapreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Educational services</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>None reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cammie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cosmetics/Beauty</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Business/Finance</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>None reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Freelancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Business/Marketing</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Previous project leadership and freelancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Educational services</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>None reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. Organized by amount of time since full-time transition.

When reviewing participant data, there was often a mixed perception of some elements of the transition anticipated. Other elements may be classified as unanticipated or as a nonevent. While all of the participant’s transitions were events by nature, nonevents did aid in leading into several participants’ transition experiences. Many of the cases included elements of multiple categories. In this context, Maggie’s story illustrates both an unanticipated event and a nonevent, for example. However, most of the participants’ transitions into entrepreneurship could be classified overall as being either anticipated (10 of 14 participants: Michael, Tim, Amanda, Kevin, Dana, Faye, Rachel, Nancy, and Lily) or unanticipated (4 of 14 participants: Sarah, Maggie, Vicky, Cammie).

Research Procedures

This section provides an overview of the research procedures employed. Multiple subsections describe the participant recruitment, interview methods, data collection and analysis, human participants and ethics precautions, trustworthiness, research bias, and positionality.

Participant Recruitment

Narrative research involved gathering detailed stories of the participants’ lived experiences. The focal point was to obtain a depth of understanding and inquiry of a small number of individuals’ lives, rather than more superficial accounts from a larger sample size. This research tradition was determined to be best suited for studies with smaller numbers of participants (Butin, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The final sample size ended up being a total of 14 participants.

Selection criteria. Eligible participants were full-time entrepreneurs operating in the United States for a minimum of six months and no more than 3.5 years; thus, the transition into full-time entrepreneurship was current. The threshold of 3.5 years was established based on
criteria from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor that distinguishes the average state of when a firm can be classified as an established business, compared to an early-stage business (GEM, 2018).

Methodological research criteria determined that the participants’ transition into entrepreneurship was voluntary and intentional given that unanticipated, involuntary transitions had the potential to influence identity (Brewington, Nassar-McMillan, Flowers, & Furr, 2004) and the experienced transition into entrepreneurship (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prossner, 2004). All participants had to be owners and founders of existing, active, and legally registered entities. All participants were full-time entrepreneurs without other current employment affiliations or contracts. The selection criteria were framed to elicit conversations from new entrepreneurs who willingly chose to enter an entrepreneurial career at the time of transition and who, at the time they were interviewed, were able to have an informed perspective of a professional identity before and after their transition into entrepreneurship. Because the study utilized a narrative research tradition, the study participants do not represent entrepreneurs in the United States broadly. Beyond the stated parameters, no additional restrictions on geographic region, gender, age, years of experience, family background, industry, or size of their company were imposed.

**Sampling strategy.** Several approaches to sampling strategies were possible given the qualitative research design. However, when selecting a sampling strategy, it is important to consider the goals of the study. Therefore, this study employed a non-representative, purposeful sampling, the primary sampling method within qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling ranges in a variety of techniques to approach a variety of aims that are well suited to qualitative studies (Seidman, 2006). Purposeful sampling (criterion sampling) was employed to
focus on participants’ lived experience and the transition theory. Because participants were selected based on their ability to recognize and respond to the research question, a criterion sampling approach was employed in order to limit the population to those who shared common characteristics (Creswell, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). This sampling strategy served the study’s aim to target participants within their first 3.5 years of entrepreneurial activity. Criterion sampling is “used to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities” (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In the selection of this mixed sampling strategy, there are a few considerations worth noting. First, studies using non-representative, purposeful sampling techniques cannot lay claims that the findings are representative of a larger population. This is not a significant problem, particularly because the aim of the dissertation is to explore the lived experiences of professional identity transition for a few new entrepreneurs and not to draw conclusions about how such developments would occur for entrepreneurs more broadly. In addition, participants commit significant time and energy to their participation in narrative studies. Therefore, participants need to feel comfortable with the researcher to both tell their stories and to delve into their interpretations, understandings, and reflections within the story telling process. The researcher did not have a previous relationship with any of the participants prior to the recruitment stage. This allowed for researcher objectivity, but it simultaneously required additional time and attention to rapport building prior to, and during, the first interviews.

**Interview Method**

The study involved 14 entrepreneurs within their first 3.5 years of full-time entrepreneurship to approximate the professional identity transition entrepreneurs experience during their early stage activities (GEM, 2018). The small number of participants was an
intentional choice to fully explore the individual and their context in depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An interview schedule (see Appendix G) was created with semi-structured, open-ended questions, as recommended for a qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The interview questions were constructed in alignment with the conceptual framework; the researcher secured the details of the participants’ lived experiences, including arranging the order, making sense of the stories, and framing the meaning of the events (Seidman, 2006). The interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational manner (Patton, 1990) to create a sense of openness and freedom to respond authentically. The participants were asked to reflect upon their professional identity transition in context of past and present experiences surrounding the transition.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the study’s data collection followed a four-step process, as shown in Table 4. The first stage focused on preparatory work to test interview scripts and surveys through a brief pilot study. The second phase involved preparations to support participant recruitment, selection, and interview scheduling. The third stage covered audio recording and transcribing of interviews. The fourth stage focused on the data analysis and coding. The process undertaken during these stages is outlined in the subsequent two subsections on data storage and data analysis.
Table 4

*Step-by-step Process of Data Collection and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase I: Pilot interviews                  | • Conducted a pilot study with two individuals over the phone  
  • Finalized the interview protocol (Appendix E)                                                                                                                                                    |
| Phase II: Participant recruitment and selection | • Identified relevant professional contacts, networks, and associations for posting recruitment scripts  
  • Sent recruitment emails (Appendix B) and social media and professional network posts (Appendix A).  
  • Once emailed by an interested participant, they were sent a follow-up email checking eligibility (Appendix C).  
  • Reviewed potential participants based on study eligibility, availability, and demographic and professional information provided.  
  • Once eligibility was confirmed by the participant, another follow-up email (Appendix D) was sent with next-steps and a consent form (Appendix E) and a SurveyMonkey.com link with questions (Appendix F) to complete after returning a signed consent form.  
  • Established a date and time for the phone interview.                                                                                     |
| Phase III: Data interviews                 | • Reviewed and confirmed demographic and professional information collected from each participant (Appendix F).  
  • Conducted one semi-structured interview per participant, using the interview protocol and schedule (Appendix G).  
  • Recorded interviews though the Rev.com app and Audacity.  
  • Transcribed interviews through Rev.com.  
  • Established validity and accuracy of accounts through member checking (Appendix H)                                                                                                            |
| Phase IV: Data analysis                    | • Stored data in a password-protected, Northeastern University Google Drive account.  
  • Reviewed data and conducted initial inductive analysis, assigning initial codes  
  • Developed participant profiles for re-storying their accounts in vignettes.  
  • Reviewed data again and assigned primary and secondary codes, based on conducted interviews  
  • Developed a data matrix to identify themes within and between participant interviews (see Chapter Four’s section on Coding and Themes)  
  • Reviewed data and matrix for conceptual relevance and congruence.                                                                         |
Phase one: Pilot interviews. The pilot interviews served to enhance the interview question phrasing and researcher’s interviewing techniques in preparation for the interviewing process. The pilot study included two volunteers from the researcher’s network: one female who had transitioned into entrepreneurship full time three prior from the technology industry and another female who had come to entrepreneurship one year prior after working many years in the sales, marketing, and development industries. To achieve consistency with the study interviews, all pilot interviews were conducted over the phone.

The pilot study aided in the interview protocol refinement process. The pilot interviews allowed the researcher to practice interviewing techniques, clarify ambiguous questions, test recording equipment, and time the interviews. At the conclusion of the pilot interviews, volunteers were asked to provide a general reaction to the interview’s flow and the types and wording of the questions. To better approach the task, volunteers were each provided with typed copies of the interview questions. The volunteers were instructed to circle incidences of confusing term usage and unclear wording and to write next to each question, in their own words, what they thought the question was asking. Based on their responses, the researcher adjusted the interview questions accordingly. Once the pilot interviews were completed, the interview questions were finalized.

Phase two: Participant recruitment and selection. Once the IRB application was approved, the recruitment phase of the study went into effect. The researcher approached full-time entrepreneurs who were the founders of a micro or small business with the recruitment script, which introduced the aims of the study and the parameters of participation. Participants were recruited via LinkedIn and through personal contacts and networks. All contacted participants were asked to confirm their eligibility for the research study over email (see
Appendix C). Eligible volunteer participants were contacted to confirm their interest in participation and, if available and willing, to schedule a 60-minute telephone interview (see Appendix D). Because participants were not affiliated with a common organization or business, access to potential participants was not restricted.

All recruitment scripts were included within the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application reviewed by Northeastern University (see Appendix A). The first step of phase two of the data collection process centered on participant recruitment, which started with personal connections, along with local advisory bodies and professional associations that were working closely with new and established entrepreneurs; these served as the first points of contact for recruitment. The individuals and organizations were contacted via email, social media, entrepreneurship network boards, and entrepreneurship co-working spaces with the participant recruitment prompt (see Appendices A and B). After the initial recruitment postings, 19 responses were received, and all respondents were sent a follow up contact to determine eligibility. Of the 19 initial respondents, 18 were eligible under the study participant specifications, and 14 agreed to move forward with their participation. Inclusion in the study was a result of a willingness to participate, and potential participants were further narrowed down with an interest to achieve diversity in geographic location, industry, gender, and professional background.

**Phase three: Interviews and data collection.** All 14 participants were sent informed consent forms (Appendix E) and were asked to suggest a time for the first interview. After receiving a signed informed consent form, participants were asked to answer pre-interview questions via SurveyMonkey.com (Appendix F). This first part of the interviewing and data collection phase also confirmed the participant eligibility and provided basic professional
background information. The process was completed through a common SurveyMonkey.com link. No names were used in the data collected through SurveyMonkey.com, and all collected responses were only accessible to the researcher through a secure password.

The study utilized an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix G) to allow participants to speak freely and openly and to minimize instances of leading questioning or restriction of participant responses (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The semi-structured interviews were constructed with an effort to build questions that yielded “open and expansive” responses (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 59). The semi-structured nature of the interviews entailed not sticking to the exact wording and question sequence (Merriam, 2009). The researcher was responsible for the drafting of all distributed question links and interview schedules and for the data collection process. The aforementioned distributed SurveyMonkey.com questions (see Appendix F), and the interview schedules used (see Appendix G) are included within the Appendices following Chapter 5, as noted.

The data was collected through one-on-one phone, Skype, or Zoom interviews with each of the 14 participants. Participants were informed prior to recruitment that their participation would entail up to two 60-minute interviews. Because all participants were able to respond thoroughly to all questions on the interview protocol within the initial call, follow-up calls were not needed. The interview served to establish an understanding of the participants’ self, situation, support, and strategies (4 S elements), with the situation questions helping to frame a general overview of the circumstances of participants during their first few years of being full-time entrepreneurs. Participants were asked to clarify and expand upon their responses, as necessary, to better understand any responses that might have been interpreted in various ways.
The researcher was responsible for all recording procedures. The informed consent form was re-reviewed prior to beginning the interviews and confirmed consent for recording was obtained. The calls were recorded using the Rev.com app for Android on a password-protected phone and account (primary) and Audacity for Mac (back-up recordings). Each transcription was uploaded to the professional and confidential service, Rev.com, for transcription. Typed transcriptions were used for member checking and coding purposes. Each participant was provided transcriptions after each interview in order to review the transcript for accuracy and errors (Saldaña, 2013). In line with best practices, this process was done in junction with the data collection phase (Miles et al., 2014).

A Google Docs research journal helped to document the research process, field notes, and analytic memos; all hard-copy and electronic-notes taken did not include identifying information. The process notes documented the researcher’s experience throughout the dissertation, from the proposal to completion phase, with notes on navigating the administration of the dissertation research, including documenting any IRB needs, scheduling changes, etc. The field notes consisted of reflections taken down during and immediately following the conclusion of each interview. This process allowed for the documentation of observations that were not able to be captured within the audio recording, including the researcher’s perceptions of tone, pauses, or known contexts of the interview, for example: Was the participant in a rush? Was the participant at home or at work? The analytic memos served to document the researcher’s personal introspections and intuitions during the coding process. The analytical memoing also served as a strategy towards the study’s trustworthiness, which is addressed later in this chapter.

**Phase four: Data analysis.** Phase four overlapped with phase three, as phase four began following the collection of first interview data. Following the data storage, the fourth phase
focused on reviewing, analyzing, and coding the collected data. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the data collection and analysis phase utilized both inductive and deductive processes. The inductive process served to help capture the entrepreneurs’ lived experiences of professional identity transition. A deductive process aided in aligning the participants’ responses to SIT, transition theory, and the conceptual framework.

Because statements may fit many categories, simultaneous coding (overlapping of two or more codes on a single data thread) and sub-coding (secondary markers on primary codes) were used on an as-needed basis. That decision was made to explore the data deeply, which aided in the secondary coding process. The data analysis was done in two parts. First, the Contact Sheet method, as modeled by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used to capture the essence of the interview for a cursory review. An illustration form without coding was used as a preparatory exercise once the interview notes were reviewed and corrected yet before a formal coding process was done. Secondly, after establishing a guiding method and reviewing its implications on data analysis, the next effort was to select appropriate first coding approaches.

Upon reviewing Miles et al. (2014), the approaches most suited for the topic were determined, including emotion, value, and evaluation coding. Emotion coding helped to capture and contextualize “participants’ perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions” (p. 75). The second coding approach, value coding, aided to uncover and categorize participants’ “values, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 75). The third approach, valuation coding, helped to “assign judgments about the merit, worth, or significance” of the supports and strategies raised by the participants (p. 76). The topic of transitioning into entrepreneurship lends itself to emotion, values, and evaluation coding approaches, which were selected for their potential to serve as key indicators of identity. However, because identity is a unique experience that does not allow a researcher to
predict response categories, the coding remained flexible through the use of provisional coding at first, with an openness to add, edit, or delete codes as deemed relevant.

**Data Storage**

All participant information, interview data, and materials were protected through the protocols set forth by IRB Human Subjects. Identifying participant information was protected through the use of pseudonyms, with only the researcher and principal investigator privy to the real identities. Identifying participant information was not included in the interview transcriptions, as doing so might jeopardize participant confidentiality; all transcripts and notes were edited to remove identifying information prior to sharing or publication.

With regard to electronic storage of audio files, transcriptions, surveys, notes, or other written documents had all identifying information removed or edited; these were only accessible through a password-protected, cloud-based storage system that offered data security and encryption, with all passwords solely being created and known by the researcher. All physical materials were digitized, stored through a password-protected, cloud-based storage system, and destroyed once digitized to protect the confidentiality of the participants and, generally, to provide confidentiality through data security.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis phase followed a three-step operation of data condensation, data display, and conclusion-making and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The data condensation began with a process of organizing, sorting, and assessing for coding or discarding purposes, followed by data coding. Each interview was recorded through Audacity and was transcribed with the use of professional transcription services. Emergent themes from the data analysis and coding process contributed towards the construction of meaning, which is characteristic of
narrative research. The data condensation phase included reviewing the interview transcripts and notes.

Within one day of the interviews, each recording was sent out for transcription through the Rev.com app or website. Once transcribed, each interview was reviewed with the audio recording for accuracy and cursory coding purposes. Immediately following the initial review, a brief, one- to two-paragraph vignette was drafted in order to construct a descriptive case of each participant, their story, and their experience with their entrepreneurial identity. Then, the post-interview field notes were reviewed, and analytic memos were drafted as part of the reflection process. Transcripts were sent to and reviewed and approved by the interviewees once, following all of their scheduled interviews.

The data display stage permits the organization of notes and coding segments to be categorized and accessed in an organized way. As themes and codes emerged during the data condensation process, a chart was concurrently drafted to categorize, organize, analyze, and reflect upon the collected data and its interpretations. Once the data themes, categories, and codes were organized, an interview matrix was drafted in Google Docs, with abbreviated interview questions in the first column and quotes and story summaries for each participant in the subsequent columns. Each participant’s responses fed into a collective summary statement, which was then compared to the vignette crafted following the first review of the transcripts and recordings. The matrix also served to compare participant responses for each of the interview questions.

After the matrix-building process was completed for each transcript, the coding process centered on the use of the written transcripts, with analytic memos written at the same time to record reflections throughout the coding process. The coding process was supported by the use of
MAXQDA2018 qualitative data analysis software for Mac operating system. A line-by-line, color-coded coding was done, noting all meaningful phrases and words that reflected key statements. A comprehensive list of codes was maintained with a table, including the original quotes, transcript numbers, and page references. The initial codes were reduced in number, based on their conceptual similarity.

Several types of coding were used to not limit the potential themes emerging from the data, with no pre-established number of codes, as advised by Saldaña (2013). In terms of coding themes, emotion, values, and evaluation coding, as defined by Miles et al. (2014), were used in the first review of the transcribed data. To this end, the coding process focused closest on participant reported emotions, values, and evaluation statements as potential key indicators of identity and agency. In line with remaining open and flexible during the coding process, the researcher employed provisional coding and simultaneous coding. Because participants’ statements fit many assigned categories, the researcher also used sub-coding and simultaneous coding. Because identity and transitions are unique, personal experiences, the researcher aimed to remain flexible, using provisional coding on the first review of the transcription data, with a further openness to add, edit, or delete codes as relevant.

The interview recordings were reviewed to one more time, in order to conduct a final cross-case analysis, which entailed listening to each of the interview audio recordings and reviewing the individual case vignettes, field notes, matrix, and themes. Following this final audio review process, the interview matrix was overlaid with the interview questions and conceptual framework presented in Figure 3. This allowed the researcher to review relevant literature to align the coded themes with existing scholarship.
**Human Participants and Ethics Precautions**

The study complies with all ethical recommendations set forth in human subject research, including considering participant confidentiality and informed consent. All participant recruitment materials and IRB application materials are available within the Appendices. In line with advisories of Human Subjects, the researcher informed participants of the purpose, intentions, and expectations of the study at the time of recruitment through a recruitment email and at the start of the interview with an oral reading of the written consent form (see Appendices). Participants were informed of the potential risks of being involved in the dissertation research and were assured of their confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and through not linking data to any potentially identifying information (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Participants were also informed about data storage and security measures verbally and through the written consent form. The researcher consistently invited potential participants to ask questions regarding any or all aspects of the purpose, content and protocol of the dissertation research. Participants who were comfortable with the research’s scope and conditions were asked to sign the written consent form and were subsequently provided with a copy of the signed written consent form for their records.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a critical to the dissertation’s validity and credibility. Like other elements within the dissertation research, the methodological approach has an impact on how the dissertation approaches trustworthiness. Qualitative research shares common approaches to reviewing elements within trustworthiness, but there are some unique considerations for narrative research. Compared to other methods, narrative studies require “criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). In this respect,
because narrative research presents and centers around the unique stories of participants and their lenses into the phenomenon at hand, replicability, for example, would hold greater relevance for research proposing theory or generalizability of the results, whereas narrative does not lend itself to make such assertions from findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) positioned trustworthiness as comprised of four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following four subsections, each of these elements are addressed to validate the dissertation’s trustworthiness.

**Credibility.** Credibility relates to a series of methods for validating or authenticating the findings (Miles et al., 2014). Wolcott (1990) purported that credibility, within qualitative studies, should aim to build an understanding through several activities. For this study, several techniques for building credibility were utilized, including creating analytic memos, source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Despite the strategies noted for their support of the findings’ credibility, there is overlap in their usefulness for approaching other elements within trustworthiness—for example, triangulation helps with both credibility and confirmability.

**Analytic memoing.** Throughout the coding process, analytic memos served as a means to record thoughts, questions, and areas of doubt. For the convenience of access throughout the interviewing and coding processes, memos were kept on one continuous Google Drive document. Any and all hand-written memos taken were promptly typed and added into the singular memoing document. The file was accessed regularly throughout the dissertation research to record, review, and address notes throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

**Triangulation.** The first technique of triangulation attempts to produce understandings through corroborating findings. In the case of this dissertation, triangulation of sources was
appropriate for the research design; this includes speaking to participants at different points in
time and comparing narrative perspectives from different participants.

**Member checking.** As recommended by Angen (2000), member checking helps to verify
data and analyses through involving participants in the interpretation of collected data. In this
process, the participants in this case had the opportunity to challenge or confirm perceptions and
interpretations, as well as to elaborate and provide further context to the collected data. Because
the dissertation’s member checking was conducted with an understanding that perceptions are
co-created and not definitively sourced solely from the perspective of the participants
themselves, any differences or disagreements that surfaced in the interpretation of data between
the researcher and participant were addressed directly within the analysis to uphold the integrity
of the member-checking process and the overall credibility of the data collection and analysis.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing, or peer review, was utilized to make sense of
challenging interpretations within the data and was used in cases when there were different
interpretations between the researcher and participant. A peer reviewer was selected who was
able to remain objective about the study but still understood the central phenomenon and
research approach (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Under Wolcott’s (1994) recommendations, Chapter
4 also contains blocks of participant primary data to allow the reader to also serve as reviewer
and evaluator of the data analysis.

**Transferability.** Transferability relates to how the findings are applicable within other
contexts. It also relates to the external validity of the data and analysis. To approach these aims,
the dissertation employed the techniques of thick, rich descriptions and variation of participants.
Thick description is a technique first introduced within ethnographic studies by Ryle (1949) and
Geertz (1973). Thick description consists of the act of writing very detailed accounts in order to
potentially form understandings about patterns and relationships in context (Holloway, 1997). In addition, an attempt at participant diversity was made during the recruitment to provide multiple perspectives within various contexts. With this in mind and because this is a narrative study, it is understood that the transferability of data was not a main priority within this methodology, as narrative studies are meant to showcase the lived experiences of a small subset of individuals. This is supported by Miles et al. (2014), who discouraged generalizations in transferability of interpretation from one context or individual to another.

**Dependability.** Upholding the consistency and replicability of findings is the cornerstone of establishing dependability, or reliability, within the findings of qualitative research. A review was conducted with the participants to allow them to read and correct the transcripts, assessing the accuracy of the collected data. Because one researcher conducted the dissertation research, dependability considerations pertaining to maintaining researcher protocol and coding consistencies, as introduced by Miles et al. (2014), did not need to be addressed. A document trail was kept, including all original transcripts and the proposed clarifications and edits made by participants.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability connects to the relative objectivity of the researcher during the dissertation research (Miles et al., 2014). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability relates to the extent to which researcher biases and interests are removed or neutralized in order for the findings to represent the participants’ perspectives. The motivation to ascertain this integrity of the findings is a cornerstone of narrative studies, as the participant stories and their authentic representation is the central value of narrative studies. To approach this issue of confirmability, reflexive notes were maintained throughout the research process. The entries included notes connected to researcher interests, motivations, and values to keep
considerations of positionality at the forefront throughout the entire data collection process. To this end, the following section presents overarching considerations of positionality.

**Researcher Bias and Positionality**

A reflection on the role of the researcher is a critical and necessary consideration because narrative research puts forth the “yet to be voiced” stories of participants (Arnot & Reay, 2007). Through the co-construction of meaning through hearing and interpreting lived experiences and perceptions, the researcher holds the role of a closely engaged, active participant (Butin, 2009; Creswell, 2008), collecting, reviewing, reconstructing, representing, and presenting by the information (Josselson, 2004).

Positionality plays a significant role in a researcher’s interpretations because the researcher holds the ethical responsibility of reconstructing and representing participants’ stories. How the researcher is positioned, by nature, impacts the focus and interpretation of data (Alcoff, 2006). Researchers need to engage in intensive, autobiographical reflection (Cardinal, 2010, Chung, 2008), and, because the researcher’s own position remains unique, representations of participants cannot ever be fully understood or accurately represented (Alcoff, 2006, 2009; Spivak, 1998). Furthermore, researchers need to acknowledge all preconceptions because they “are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484).

To address positionality, this section serves as a reflection of my beliefs, biases, and opinions that may have influenced the structure or analysis of the research (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). Firstly, my own understandings of entrepreneurship are not as much through direct personal experience as they are as a witness of its benefits in the lives of my family members, friends, students, and mentees. Despite never being someone who launched a product or a business formally, I have engaged as an independent consultant and launched projects and
conferences. In terms of the construction of an entrepreneurial identity, I would classify myself as increasingly embracing my “inner entrepreneur” with time, as I had to be entrepreneurial and creative within my approach to work to stay financially afloat.

I had the opportunity during my twenties to spend time exploring different professional roles through a series of contract, consulting, and temporary positions. Through the experience of exploring over 20 professional settings before I turned thirty, I was able to see how professional identities corresponded to a particular context and how they shifted over time. The commitment to exploration was a rewarding and formative experience, as it allowed me to better understand my professional orientations, preferences, and aspirations while acquiring an understanding of what I wanted to do and how I fit into a workplace. Despite the benefits of the formative experience, it was also a struggle to experience intermittent unemployment, underemployment, and wrong-fit positions. Similarly, the decade-long process of finding satisfying and challenging work ultimately shaped my research and professional interests in professional identity transitions, employability, and entrepreneurship.

Over the past six years, I have formally started engaging in entrepreneurship education as a college instructor, incubator mentor, and a curriculum developer in the areas of social and cultural entrepreneurship. Within these roles, I have witnessed the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education when one of my students or mentees embraces an entrepreneurial identity, and facilitation in part its development is one of my greatest values within my work. As an educator and mentor of entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, I seek to understand the transition into full-time entrepreneurship, particularly by those who have formed a professional identity already as an employee. Central to the exploration of this topic resides the desire to
know how these entrepreneurs experience their professional identity transition and learn to “become” entrepreneurs and form an entrepreneurial identity.

The premise of the study holds a few assumptions derived from my positionality. The aforementioned experiences innately form beliefs and opinions, the first of which is that the study of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identity is a valuable endeavor. As someone with experience educating and advising entrepreneurs, I view entrepreneurship as a positive activity, and acknowledge value in having a concurrent identity that might potentially reinforce entrepreneurial actions and behaviors. I have developed an appreciation for entrepreneurship education and its perceived ability to change students' identities. This belief both fuels my energy to study the topic, while potentially presenting some challenges regarding positionality, particularly the potential influences of personal orientations on the interpretation of the collected data.

However, I am cognizant that my lens likely differs from those who also identify as entrepreneurs and that they do not feel a significant identity transition in their journey to becoming a full-time entrepreneur. As addressed by Anderson et al. (2012), it is important to look at participants’ vantage points of transition, rather than our own. Schütz (1967) (as cited in Daher, Carré, Jaramillo, Olivares, & Tomicic, 2017) noted that, because the qualitative social science researcher “start[s] out from, and take[s] for granted, the same social world in which we live from day to day,” the researcher “organizes and classifies his [or her] data into quite different contexts of meaning and works them up in quite different ways” (p. 220). The strategies outlined within this chapter have served to limit the impact of positionality, accounting further for potential biases arising from my previous personal lenses and professional experiences.
Limitations and Delimitations

The dissertation, as it has been constructed, presents both limitations and delimitations. The limitations are derived from gaps in the literature and the nature of the selected methodology, research tradition, research design, and sampling. In contrast, delimitations are a result of intentional choices made by the researcher with regard to the parameters of the dissertation and inclusion and exclusion of particular populations, theory, concepts, and literature streams. The following subsections present considerations on both ends to highlight the intentions and constraints of the dissertation research, its design, and its outcomes.

Limitations

There are four primary limitations of the dissertation. The first relates to the limited prior scholarship on professional identity transition for mid-career entrepreneurs. The second connects to the nature of re-telling stories after they were lived. The limited data collection window also presents a limitation to the research results. Finally, due to the nature of the dissertation, retrospection bias was possible. For each of the addressed limitations, challenges presented have been considered and addressed, as fully as possible.

The first limitation is that research on entrepreneurial identity transition lends itself to several vulnerabilities due to gaps in literature. First, despite the central phenomenon of professional identity transition being widely studied, the dissertation also introduces an adult development theory with an entrepreneurship context. The dissertation introduces transition theory within a relatively new context. The dissertation borrows the relevance of the theory, based on its extensive use for other vocational transitions, such as transitions into nursing or student life, and life stages, for example retirement or marriage. Second, the area of entrepreneurial identity is not broadly studied to date. Furthermore, understandings of
entrepreneurial identity are not necessarily built upon the scholarship of neighboring areas—including, for instance, career identity, work identity, professional identity, and employability identity—because each of these neighboring areas has a slightly different working orientation. Therefore, the study is not only exploring new theory within another field, it is bridging into a relatively new subarea with limited scholarship, compared to other areas of entrepreneurship literature such as entrepreneurial intention, motivation, self-efficacy, and personality.

Third, because participants were recalling life events from the past, their ability to remember and assign meaning to their experience may have represented a “restoried” version of their memories (McAdams et al., 2006) due to having selective memories when reflecting on past events and experiences (Skultans, 1998). There are additional considerations for narrative studies concerned with identity. Identity can differ between how it is lived and experienced compared to how it is retold. In this context, the following holds true:

Identities should be considered as discursive constructs. That means that the topic of identity should be studied by examining what people are doing when they make claims about their own and others’ identity (Daiute & Lightfoot 2004, p. 160). Despite these complexities and challenges, narrative traditions aim to encapsulate and represent the participants’ senses of self, as well as the dynamic selves formed by and between life events (Sparrowe, 2005). Because entrepreneurs are prone to overestimating their chances of success (Cassar, 2006), a retroactive, hindsight bias can challenge them (Cassar & Craig, 2009). In this sense, participant selection criteria and the interview script both serve important roles in accounting for the tendency for hindsight bias. Because the study explored entrepreneurs’ perceptions of their own career transitions, it was important to talk to entrepreneurs as close in to their period of transition as possible.
Another limitation relates to the timeline of the study. A study of this design could easily lend itself to a longer data collection window, through which the researcher could follow individuals through their transition over a period of months or years. While a longer data collection phase was not possible, the study contributes a first attempt of using transition theory for a new population. Follow-up studies with longer data collection time frames would help to validate the findings of this study. Such a study is possible in the future but is not currently planned.

The final limitation relates to the potential for retrospection bias. Individuals have the tendency to craft retrospective rationalizations, which can present a challenge when trying to look back on what actually happened (e.g., Cassar & Craig, 2009). Rationalizations can differ from what can be observed in real time. To minimize the effects of this, the study only included entrepreneurs who were within their first 3.5 years of full-time entrepreneurship. The focus on new entrepreneurs situated the participants in the group in the midst of changing their identity. The selection criteria, in including only new entrepreneurs, allowed participants to speak to current and recent history, rather than occurrences that happened years prior that would have naturally been re-storied and rationalized. In addition, the triangulation process helped the researcher to minimize the potential for recall bias and retrospective rationalizations.

**Delimitations**

Framed delimitations are the chosen boundaries established for the study. In this respect, the intentional selections of the study elements, including literature, methodology, procedures, and populations each have a rationale established by the researcher. In addition to sourcing delimitations from the analytical memos, this researcher received feedback from five entrepreneurship scholars to better inform the areas to address.
The first delimitation relates to the strong public and academic interests in raising entrepreneurial intention. Through its established parameters, the study does not look at entrepreneurial intention, apart from understanding intention as part of the 4 S model, particularly the components of situation and self. The intentional omission of entrepreneurial intention aligns with the research question and population. The population sample was selected to understand the transition to entrepreneurship, rather than why someone does or does not transition into entrepreneurship. A strong academic interest exists to understand the transition into entrepreneurship, and this study presented further data to the lived experience of entrepreneurial identity transitions.

Second, the study did not aim to directly address a comparative demographic element such as comparing male versus female entrepreneurs or American-born versus immigrant entrepreneurs. Although this addition would add to an interest and high-need gap area in the scholarship, there is still too little understood about entrepreneurial identity transition in itself; therefore, even without the addition of a comparative component to the study, significant value in the research outcomes of this study exist as established. Furthermore, the use of a new theory for entrepreneurship literature contributes to bridging scholarship between adult development and entrepreneurship scholarship.

Another delimitation comes from the scholarly need to establish and improve upon theory. The study design supports a depth of understanding, rather than primarily looking for patterns. Due to the limitation of not having numerous publications bridging these three areas of entrepreneurship, identity, and transition, it is important that the study expand to include additional data before leaping towards theory development. To this end, significant potential exists for follow-up studies in this area to work towards theory development. The study has a
strong potential to help future studies to raise questions that can inform theory and practice through its contribution of data and its understanding of a noteworthy problem of practice.

**Chapter Summary**

This third chapter provided an overview of the selected methodology and related study frameworks as shaped through a consideration of the methodology. The chapter set a foundation from which to contextualize the collected data and its analysis, including considerations of participant selection and recruitment, strategies to ascertain trustworthiness, and reflections of positionality. The subsequent chapter builds upon the foundation set by the past chapters to present the findings of the dissertation.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the themes from the data collection and analysis process. The themes represent a review of the lived experience of transition into entrepreneurship, as told by the participants and coded by the researcher. The presented data was categorized through the coding process detailed in the previous chapter. Chapter 4 centers on the told perspectives of the participants. As part of the member checking process, participants were asked to review and ascertain the accuracy of the transcriptions. As introduced in the previous chapter, the data was analyzed in through a blended approach of both an inductive and deductive process. The inductive process provided the opportunity to take in the entrepreneurs’ experiences with professional identity transition, whereas the deductive process helped to connect the data to the conceptual framework.

The dissertation study responded to the research question: How do new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition? The research question explored the intersection of the phenomenon, professional identity transition, and the context of entrepreneurship. When approaching the cross-section of the phenomenon and context, the complexity of professional identity transitions can be better identified, demonstrated, and appreciated. The structure of the chapter seeks to present the themes in an organized, thematic manner, to set up the discussion in Chapter 5 of implications for research and practice. The chapter starts with brief vignettes of the participants. Following the detailed participants profiles, a table of codes and themes is presented, followed by detailed accounts organized by theme and subthemes.

**Participant Vignettes**

The following 14 vignettes help to provide a brief glance into the participants’ backgrounds and experiences with their transition into entrepreneurship. Their stories continue in
segments and are relevant to different thematic areas that arose from the data analysis process. To present a snapshot of further information about each participant, the participants have been presented by their length of time as full-time entrepreneurs, starting with the least amount of time at seven months to the most time at approximately three years. The vignettes are presented in the same order as initially detailed in Table 3. This ordering serves as the default order for all participant data tables for consistency; the length of time is a recommended data collection point within transition theory and in the use of its corresponding 4 S model (Schlossberg, 2011).

**Amanda**

Amanda had been working in a start-up for six years under a young CEO who taught her both lessons of good and not-so-great management practices. During her time there, she was given a promotion which brought new responsibilities but no increase in her compensation. She was especially upset because she knew her predecessor had been paid more, and as a woman, she felt this was particularly unsettling. Because of feeling undervalued, Amanda considered leaving the company altogether, but when her CEO wanted to make a transition into a new industry, she and a partner decided to buy out the company to continue working on their present contract and have majority ownership over, and a leadership role within, the company.

I think my options when we were evaluating the purchase option versus what were we going to do if we didn't buy out the company, if we didn't go through that I was going to end up being unemployed, and I was going to have to go through a job search, which could take at least this long. Of course, the job market is pretty good now, so it probably wouldn't have taken that long. There was going to be some loss of income, regardless of which path I went. The question was, for me, personally, and for our family, was what
would be the better option. I think we negotiated that into the sale of ensuring that option was better for us long-term than me going to find a new job here…

Amanda remembered not feeling particularly interested in starting her own venture as she led up to her transition into entrepreneurship. Because she was feeling undervalued in her organization, had the opportunity not arose to buy out the company, she stated that she was considering finding a new position with another employer instead. Her orientation towards not wanting to start her own business, at the time, was shaped through a difficult experience she had starting her own real estate business 15 years prior. Even though her prior entrepreneurial experience had been challenging and included painful lessons learned, she decided to try again.

Maggie

Maggie, an accounting professional, started her own business after experiencing two challenging work situations in a row: a layoff from a position at a company she loved and a position at a stressful, non-family-friendly work environment. At the first position, Maggie loved her work and colleagues. She explained:

I was happy where I was. I was making good connections at my job. I loved it. I actually felt a part of the team. It was one of the few jobs that I had actually learned a lot and grew a lot from. So, I literally saw myself there for a long period of time.

When she was seeing delays in her work flow, she feared a forthcoming layoff. Despite addressing her concerns with her boss, Maggie was verbally promised during her review that she was actually going to be promoted. A few weeks later, she was laid off. This now former employer helped her find a new position at another firm, which ended up being a poor cultural fit for her life plans. Maggie and her soon-to-be husband were hoping to start their family soon, so
she felt like the new position did not align with the future she wanted. The pain of losing the job she loved still resonated in her mind. She explained:

   It was really just getting laid off and not really liking that control that someone has over you because I honestly was about to get married. I was getting married and that meant my boss and everyone was invited to come. This guy who actually laid me off, he was invited. Just having your whole world turned upside down because someone made a decision for you is what I really didn't like, and that was a turning factor, even though I went back to work.

A recruiter helped her think about starting her own firm, and with the guidance of a former co-worker, Maggie started her own business.

**Michael**

   Michael, a mid-career engineer, had transitioned into full-time entrepreneurship eight months prior to the interview from a steady, full-time engineering position. He had not considered being an entrepreneur prior to that point in his life, and his entrepreneurial path had first started two years prior part-time. He began the experimental venture because he had to complete a master’s degree capstone project. He observed:

   This was the first time I had thought about it. Yeah, there hasn't been any other time in my past that running my own business was something that I was interested in, so yeah, this was new.

   Michael first started working on his business part time, and, from his successes during that time, he decided that it might be possible to leave his employer to work on the venture full time. Michael found himself at a crossroads: he did not want to continue to move up the organizational ladder, and he was not finding anything in his current role that felt rewarding. When thinking
about his primary rationale for wanting to more towards an entrepreneurial profession, Michael noted that he wanted to have a better quality of life and more time with his family, a wish ignited by looking to his family members and to his older neighbors who were encountering health issues. Furthermore, because he was working for an international company, he was working early mornings and late evenings. That experience led him to crave a new path with a better overall work-life balance. He continued to work on his own business on the side but felt he was not getting enough time to handle the work.

Vicky

Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, Vicky had always been driven in her career. When she was younger, she was happy in her work, but she also had an entrepreneurial interest. Nevertheless, every time a friend would approach her to start a business, Vicky worried about her ability to stay afloat financially. She explained:

I just didn't have the guts to quit my day job without a guaranteed income. So, I think I've always wanted to do something for myself and work for myself and have my own organization, but I've always been too trepidatious for financial reasons. I simply didn't have the background or the backing or the savings when I was younger to do something that's this risky.

It was not clear whether or not Vicky framed her understanding of entrepreneurs as being risk-takers (Bridge, 2017) from her experience of growing up around entrepreneurship, but the sentiment was raised on multiple occasions as a perceived deterrent for her to transition into entrepreneurship without the financial support of her husband’s more dependable and consistent salary.
Prior to starting her own business, Vicky had been working for years at an educational organization where she was feeling settled in her work until there were key changes at the senior leadership level of the organization. There were layoffs and staff departures around her, and she struggled with the shifts in culture and management. She stated:

For me, it was a personal decision to go back into [and] to revive my consulting business because of a situation at work where I ended up reporting to someone who I did not feel I should be reporting to. His experience and his background were not comparable to mine, and he was making decisions about my department that I did not feel that he should be making. And so, how about this? The vision of the company or the vision of the . . . organization, the vision of the organization changed, and I no longer identified with where they wanted to go and what they were doing.

Vicky had done some consulting work in the past, and she had a spouse who had a position they could depend on financially. When she left her previous organization, she did know what exactly would come next, but a friend got in touch and asked her if she might be willing to start a business together. Vicky partnered with her friend, and the two started on the backend preparations needed to launch their company’s products and services months later.

Rachel

Rachel, a young professional, transitioned to being an entrepreneur of her own service-based company following years in the corporate sector. Upon graduation, she said she felt like she was doing the “right” or “responsible” thing by filing into a traditional corporate career path. She worked for a large corporation and rose through the ranks. However, she said felt confined in her role, with a limited ability to learn and grow within the position.
In her last few years working within the corporate sector, Rachel’s professional and personal lives were both very different to where she was when interviewed. Within the span of a couple years, Rachel got a divorce, moved into the city, left her stable corporate position, moved in with her boyfriend, and started her own company. She expressed pride in taking control of her life and prioritizing her happiness more than she ever had before:

Sometimes, I just have to look back and be like, “Wow, I can't believe how much I've accomplished in the last few months, in the last year, in the last two years, in the last three years.” It really is amazing, once you start thinking and moving ahead, how fast you can really go and change things for the better when you really want to.

Doing the final preparations before her public launch, Rachel said she was feeling at peace embracing her new role.

Nancy

The daughter of an entrepreneur father, Nancy held many different positions over the years because she felt lost in her early career. When she took her last position, she did not really want to do the job, but she had enjoyed volunteering for the organization and thought it might be good to give a paid affiliation a try. That position helped her find other volunteer positions of influence on local boards. After years of being in that role, Nancy found herself holding too many volunteer and leadership positions on top of her full-time work. At the same time, she was enrolled in a graduate program and was shopping around for an investment property.

Then, suddenly, she confronted a significant health issue, which had her reflecting on her life. When her employer presented her with the opportunity to do her work independently, she thought she should take the opportunity. She explained:
And I'm very spiritual and religious. I was like, "God wouldn't put this opportunity in front of me the way he has. He wouldn't have designed it the way he has if it wasn't meant for me. And life isn't on my time, it's really on his time. So, let me just trust him, and move forward, and try it."

Having her employer’s support and an additional contract in hand at the time, Nancy felt like she would make it the right time to make the transition, even if it was earlier than she had intended to undertake that major change.

**Tim**

Tim, a young technology services entrepreneur, started his own business a year and a half before the interview after holding a full-time position with an employer for nearly two years. He reported being an avid traveler with a strong creative and independent streak. Because of his need for autonomy and flexibility, Tim had worked periodically as a freelancer, but he had never started his own business full time. The venture in which he was involved when interviewed allowed him to make full time entrepreneurship his priority.

When centering around the time period when he was considering leaving his former employer, he said the transition to start his own business was born from an environmental shift at his work. Tim found that the leadership within the business had become increasingly challenging for him to work with; the job thus became something he did not have the desire or patience to face long term. The company had also transitioned from a small start-up organization, when Tim was one of the business’s first hires, to employing over 100 people. Tim said he felt some of the resulting cultural shifts encouraged him to make the decision to leave when he did:

And I found that some of the cultural changes that were happening in the company, focusing on getting money and getting productivity and working harder. And it's just like,
"You know, we actually want to have a work-life balance and make a great company at the same time as being great people."

Because lifestyle, flexibility, and a welcoming work environment were all important elements for Tim, he made the decision to leave his employer without a specific plan in mind but with a sense of confidence that his skills would help him create a business that filled a needed gap in the market within his industry.

Upon leaving, Tim had taken some time to figure out what he wanted to do next; he was clear that he wanted to start his own business but did not know a great deal more at the time. After reflecting, Tim moved forward with the idea. It did not take long for the idea to receive external validation: he secured his first client who offered him a $20,000 per month contract. His new salary as an entrepreneur started at a higher level than where he had been an employee, so the shift into entrepreneurship validated Tim from an early stage in the transition process.

Kevin

Kevin was a senior administrator in the education field who had transitioned into entrepreneurship to start his own venture a year and a half before the interview. Kevin had been feeling removed from his ability to make an impact in his work, even as he climbed the career ladder. He narrated:

I was pretty much at the top of the stack in traditional work environment, but I also found that I had stepped away from the thing that was important to me, which was helping people succeed in their educational goals. It was kind of a funny thing to witness. To move up in the organization was to move away from the constituency, and that was an oddity for me.
What further challenged his satisfaction with his work was a transition within the management of his organization. While Kevin enjoyed the company of his co-workers, he said he was feeling like his expertise was not being acknowledged by those with decision-making power in the organization. Moreover, he perceived a shift in the values of the organization that no longer aligned with his own. He explained:

I reported directly to the president. I acted as the [organization’s leader] in her absence. That's sort of a pinnacle kind of event or appointment, but it was not rewarding. I felt like, at that point, this is the only way. I guess, I could move laterally to another organization, but, really, I felt like . . . And in professional conferences, I would kind of witness the same ... I don't know what it was, but sort of this detachment, this lack of passion, kind of going through the motions, and “five more years and I retire” kind of mentality. That just wasn't . . . I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to end my career and, then, start enjoying life.

Wanting greater more fulfillment in his career, Kevin was seriously considering an entrepreneurial path. Kevin had an idea for a product in the back of his mind for a while. During his last four or five years working for employers, he began to realize that there was still nothing like his product idea out on the market, so when the organizational shift happened, Kevin decided he would be up to the challenge of creating it.

**Sarah**

Sarah, an educational technology entrepreneur, transitioned into full-time entrepreneurship two years before the interview for this study; she had held a rewarding position with supportive colleagues. A series of life changes prompted her transition. The decision to switch from her prior role into an entrepreneurial one was catalyzed by getting married and moving away from
the city into a more remote area in her state with less job prospects but more affordable housing options. Because Sarah had been content in her previous work, she did not consider working independently until constraints caused by the purchase of her new home led her to consider other options. She described:

Really, it was when we decided to buy the house that we bought, and I knew that I couldn't drive to my job anymore. So, I started thinking about how else can I make a living, how else can I contribute to my field, how can I do it from home? Those are really the questions I was asking.

After buying their new home, she knew finding work in her field would be a challenge, so she established her own business as a result in part of an opportunity to work on a contract from home. During the interview for this study, she spoke about the impact that unanticipated, initial contract had on helping her to decide to establish her own business:

I had an opportunity fall out of the sky, where a former colleague offered to hire me for very large-scale projects, and it was something I could do at home. It happened right about the same time as this move, so it was kind of a convergence of situations that really made me feel like I could do this and I could be successful and I could support—I could contribute to our household.

Cammie

Cammie, an environmentally-conscious cosmetic entrepreneur, transitioned from a prestigious corporate position into entrepreneurship three years before the interview for this study was conducted. She had spent years working six days a week for her employer, with some responsibility to travel. Her life was hectic and stressful; consequently, Cammie left her position without another one in hand. She took the opportunity to do an international backpacking trip,
thinking that she would come back to the United States and look for another job. However, she was inspired by the extended trip.

After returning to the United States to look for work, Cammie brought her eco-consciousness back into her lifestyle. She started to value the importance of natural products and started making her own cosmetic and beauty products for her own use. Slowly, she started to produce enough products for family and friends to try and buy, and because of their positive responses, she decided to start her own business.

Cammie spent two years trying to scale her business, but she was continuously hitting roadblocks due to the natural ingredients she needed to source and the limited shelf life of the end product. At the time of the interview, Cammie was facing another transition point in her entrepreneurial path. She was just starting to scale back from working on her company full time to part time to find a new opportunity to use her new enterprising spirit. While still interested in continuing her company, Cammie became open to where her business and forthcoming travels were taking her.

**Jason**

Jason, a mid-career professional, said he felt as though he was going from one senior role to another, but he was not necessarily feeling satisfied in his work. He had entrepreneurs throughout his family, including his dad and siblings. As a dad of young children, he was looking for more flexibility in his schedule. With his wife in a steady corporate position, he said he felt as though he had the ability to try to start his own firm.

The opportunity to start his own business came about when there was a management change at work. Jason got along well with his first boss, but with the management change, he ended up getting a new one, with whom he did not get along.
The last year before I left was stressful. Quite stressful. There were some management changes. The person who had hired me into that role was let go. I didn't particularly care for the person who succeeded him, which I felt the *pressure* to a degree. I guess in my mind, when they let my boss go, my view was, okay by the time they find his replacement it will be six months. By the time that person gets advanced that will be another six months. So, I may or may not be here in a year. So, I had that mentality for about a year.

During that year, his wife was applying for MBA programs. Jason went with her visiting schools, and once she started, he found himself reading her textbooks and going to her program’s networking events. He felt the energy of her classmates was infectious, and it was part of the reason why he felt inspired to start his own business. He explained:

> It was exciting to me. Right? Because these people are *dreaming*. These people are doing things, they're creating things. They're trying to be new, fresh. And undoubtedly, when you go on these visits, you meet other people, and you ask them about their story. And now, you almost start *dreaming* yourself.

When his employer offered him a different job, he felt the offer was a sign about his future at the company. He was bitter, but he put that energy into taking an entrepreneurship class at a nearby university and started his own business shortly thereafter.

**Dana**

Dana, a mom, wife, and educator, transitioned into her entrepreneurial path with her husband two years prior to being interviewed. Dana was close to her own family, as well as her husband’s family, and she often referenced within the discussion about how important her family had been in her both making the decision to, and being able to transition into, joint ownership
and operation her own school with her husband. Leading up to having their own school, the couple had been working in a city for years as teachers and educational administrators in the private education sector. Dana noted that an entrepreneurial path had been a dream for her since her early years as a teacher, and each year the desire to start her own school grew stronger.

Dana’s entrepreneurial aspirations had been reinforced by thriving in her work as an educator and administrator. Dana rose to a leadership role quickly at her previous employer, an urban private school; seeing her career responsibilities and titles rise in an ever-changing environment helped her realize that she had the aptitude to handle the challenges of school leadership. While the thought crossed her mind many times over the years, it was her husband and extended family’s support that helped her be open to the possibility of moving forward with purchasing their own school.

Dana described that she and her husband had always found their work as educators rewarding, but their life had started to feel especially stressful when they chose to move outside the city to expand their family. In the time leading up to their entrepreneurial transition, their commute time, including child care drop-offs, totaled four to five hours a day. Their once simple commute made them feeling the strains of their private school jobs. Every instance of an unappreciative work environment weighed on them more, as they were already feeling the imbalance in their lives: they were less able to spend time with their children and each other and spent more time going into jobs that did not feel as rewarding as they once were. The thought of starting their own entrepreneurial venture did not seem viable until an initial opportunity came about to buy an existing school. Dana described her family’s life leading up to the transition:

There was definitely a lot going on. I would definitely say it was busy, crazy, exhausting. To some extent scary. We also weren't sure if the deal would go through, since we had
lost the first deal when we tried to buy a school. That was anxiety producing in a certain way. But we were hopeful. We were excited. There was a whole array of emotions going on, but I think that about covers it.

Dana and her husband sought the guidance of their families on whether the idea was one they should consider. While the initial opportunity fell through, it was a turning point in their aspirations: they both came to the realization that their current lives were not tenable for much longer. With considerable support from their families, the two found their opportunity to leave their private school jobs to become the new owners of a school.

Faye

Faye, a former corporate marking leader, decided to start her own firm over two years prior to being interviewed. She had grown up surrounded by family members who worked for large, established corporations, and she had started her career in that same way. While working for a large corporation in a traveling position 16 years prior to her involvement in this study, Faye had met her husband who introduced her to a whole different social circle of entrepreneurs and business owners. Faye’s exposure to her husband and his entrepreneurial network lit a spark of curiosity in her that she would explore years later following a layoff she experienced while at her corporate position, when she decided to try working for a small start-up company. Shortly thereafter, she realized that she wanted to go back to working in a large corporate environment and did so for eight years before starting her own business.

Faye planned and reflected on the decision to start her own marketing company for 10 years, during which time she built her networks, finances, and experience in the field. While leading up to starting her own firm, Faye reported that she did a lot of networking, freelancing, and work on professional boards. She also made sure that she would have enough savings to be
able to continue to live comfortably for two years during the initial stages of her company’s development.

When she made the decision to leave her position in the corporate world, Faye was prepared to leave largely because she did not have any connection to her new manager. The management change had her reflecting on her own career and her relationship with the business. She stated:

I got to a point where I was like, “You know what? I had a change in management. I didn't have any alliances or allegiances to the current manager coming in.” I just thought, “At this point, I'm at the right age. I kind of topped out with a high level of executive Management level. If I'm going to do this, I want to go out when it's right for me and what I choose to [do], versus somebody pushing me out.” So, I left.

Faye had been fortunate in her career, and she was content with her trajectory for the most part. She never really felt too constrained until her budgets and staff were cut at work. She recalled:

I felt like, throughout my entire career, the world was my oyster. I just was advancing. I had opportunities. I was being recruited. I was this, I was that, and I got to a certain level I the organization where I was head of brand and communications and I still realized that no matter what, there's always going to be something over me, but I didn't feel that until maybe the last three years of my career.

Faye made very calculated steps to leave, and once she felt comfortable with her financial and social preparations to leave, she established her own business.

**Lily**

Lily, a former school teacher, turned her passion side project into her full-time business following feeling undervalued at work. For years, Lily was an engaged school teacher with a
passion for her work. She started going above and beyond the scope of her normal work, to provide additional educational opportunities for her students. At first, her efforts were supported by her school with additional space, resources, and budget. Over time, the climate changed, and she said felt she was being driven out by the school taking away elements of her work that were meaningful to her:

The year leading up to [the transition], I was informed that my budget would be cut and my space would be reduced by half. This was sort of a subversive way of suggesting my work wasn't as valued. At the same time, an individual colleague was given full voice in running morning forum, . . . [and] my submissions for morning forum announcements . . . were being ignored by both the colleague and the administrator. It was very obvious that my work was being pushed to the sideline for whatever reasons . . . I was actually nauseous. I was alienated.

Lily said felt the changes were unfair, and she wanted to stay, but she felt she needed to leave for her own personal wellbeing.

After leaving her teaching position and starting her business, Lily’s said her life changed in many ways. She got married, she moved towns, and she started to immerse herself in a new social group of friends and supporters. Nevertheless, she moved away from a position she had loved for many years and in which she had planned to retire. Despite being happier in her new life, reminders of the stress of the prior work environment still weighed on her mind when she recalled them.

**Descriptive Codes and Coding Process**

As detailed in Chapter 3, the analytical approach and coding methods utilized aligned with the guidelines set forth by Miles et al. (2014). The collected data went through a multiple-stage
analysis process, with provisional descriptive coding and affective codes (emotion, values, and evaluation coding) assigned during a first-cycle review and pattern coding added in the second and subsequent reviews of the data. The first-cycle of three affective coding methods (emotion, values, and evaluation coding) allowed the researcher to identify, explore, and “tap into the more subjective experiences we encounter with our participants” (p. 75), whereas the second-cycle of pattern coding helped to identify overarching elements, such as potential themes, explanations, relationships, and connections to theory (Miles et al., 2014). The codes noted below emerged directly from the data and, within a third-cycle review, the segments were matched with the presented theories in Chapter 1 and the concepts addressed in Chapter 2.

To keep the data organized, illustrative quotes have been coded under their strongest theme and subtheme; if relevant to the discussion, secondary themes and subthemes reference the point of the passage, but an effort was made to not duplicate quotes. An effort was also made to connect the presented data to the elements identified within the conceptual framework, which incorporated aspects from social identity theory (SIT) and transition theory. For example, the theme of Balancing individual resources and deficits connects to Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory 4 S model’s “strategies.” The theme of Disconnect from pre-transition social supports connects to the 4 S model’s “supports,” as well as a grounding in the identity literature, including Burke’s (1991a, 1991b, 2004) self-verification and Dumas’s (2003) and Shepherd and Haynie’s (2009) integration and compartmentalization identity strategies. The following sections of the chapter highlight participant data relevant to the theme and its connected subthemes.

The coding process entailed, first, hand coding the 14 participants’ transcripts, followed by confirming the codes through MAXQDA2018. The use of MAXQDA2018 helped to look across transcripts, run lexical searches for key words and synonyms of existing codes, and to
organize codes. The coding process resulted in the drafting of 72 codes. After the codes were confirmed, another review of the hand and MAXQDA2018 codes and field notes was performed to arrange the codes into 13 subthemes. After carefully reviewing the 13 subthemes, four emerging themes were finalized. Table 5 showcases the evolution of the coding process and arrangement of codes into subthemes and themes.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Subtheme(s)</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress, leadership, values, non-promotion/poor offer, organizational changes, culture shift, re-program/de-program, entrepreneurial start, prior experience- negative, prior experience-positive, prior experience- mixed, current experience- negative, current experience-positive, current experience- mixed, disappointed, surprised</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Misalignment with previous employment (pre-transition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control, autonomy, freedom, flexibility, forging own path</td>
<td>Control/Autonomy</td>
<td>Reflections on their overall professional identity transition (metaphor question)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible identity, provisional identity, self as business owner, self as leader, self as entrepreneur Provider (for self), Provider (for others)</td>
<td>Possible and provisional entrepreneurial identities</td>
<td>Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking, responsible, employees/other</td>
<td>Risk-taker/ Responsibility-holder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities, creation/creativity</td>
<td>Creator/Opportunity-finder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging, out of comfort zone</td>
<td>Challenging/Out of comfort zone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life authenticity/alignment/harmony, self-realizing experience</td>
<td>Life authenticity/self-realizing experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroic entrepreneur, entrepreneurial prototypes, celebrity entrepreneurs, mentors, listening to podcasts, reading entrepreneurship/business books/textbooks, celebrity entrepreneur case</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial prototypes</td>
<td>Identity-related reflections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The coding process resulted in the development of 72 subthemes, 13 subthemes, and four emerging themes: (a) misalignment with previous employment, (b) reflections on their overall professional identity transition, (c) identity-related reflections, and (d) social supports and strategies. Within the subsequent sections, each of the four themes are explored. In addition, eight subthemes were detailed, with only one of seven subthemes of theme two being addressed. These addressed subthemes include (a) feeling misaligned with their previous employment, (b) viewing entrepreneurship as a pathway to self-authenticity or self-realization, (c) grappling with entrepreneurial prototypes, (d) losing a prior organizational or industry identity, (e) contrasting entrepreneurship with prior freelancing experiences, (f) joining co-working spaces, (g) building “grassroots” social networks, and (h) losing pre-transition social supports. The next chapter
builds upon these themes through presenting conclusions and their implications for practice and future research.

**Theme One: Misalignment with Previous Employment**

The first theme relates to the participants’ misalignment with their previous employment. Before approaching this theme directly, this section first discusses the participants’ overall perceptions of the overall transition. Building from Table 3, Table 6 was drafted to observe overall patterns in perception. The table is organized first by overall perception of the transition experience and second by perceptions of their previous employers. For the overall perceptions of the transition, participants were classified with a “positive,” “positive, sometimes mixed,” or “mixed” classification. None of the participants noted feeling like transitioning into entrepreneurship was a mistake or overall negative experience. While it was difficult to classify some of the participants within these labels, this was done based on the participants’ overall reported stress, use of strategies to modify stress, and future plans. For the perceptions of their previous employment, participants were assigned with a “positive,” “mixed,” or “negative” classification, based on how they spoke about their previous employer, role and their satisfaction with the organization and role. These categorizations were a bit easier to assign based on clarity of the data collected. Table 4.2 uses these broad classifications, so the order to the table does not reflect any further gradation.
Table 6

Participants, Sorted by their Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Time in venture full-time</th>
<th>Type of transition</th>
<th>Prior entrepreneurial experience</th>
<th>Perception of previous employment</th>
<th>Overall perception of the transition</th>
<th>Future career plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, may start family as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>7 months (+1 year PT)</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>None reported; did start venture part-time before making full-time transition</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, wants to remain small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>Freelancing, consulting, and some entrepreneurial projects</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, but keep options open long term, including a possible return to traditional employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Previous project leadership and intrapreneurship</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Freelancing and consulting</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, until having financial freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Intrapreneurship</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, wants to expand industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cammie</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial projects</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Transition now into possible consulting / contract work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue, wants to expand to multiple businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Time in venture full-time</td>
<td>Type of transition</td>
<td>Prior entrepreneurial experience</td>
<td>Perception of previous employment</td>
<td>Overall perception of the transition</td>
<td>Future career plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Freelancing</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Previous project leadership and freelancing</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>1.5 years (+1 year PT)</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>7 years of founding/operating a nonprofit</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive, sometimes mixed</td>
<td>Continue, open to other independent projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>7 years as a sole proprietorship with no employees</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Positive, sometimes mixed</td>
<td>Continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Possible near transition back to traditional employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Sorted by their perceptions of their overall transition (positive to mixed) experience and their previous employment (negative to positive)

As shown in Table 6, while their perceptions and experiences varied, 13 of the 14 entrepreneurs interviewed seemed “positive” overall with their transition into entrepreneurship, with the exception of Sarah, who was classified as having “mixed” feelings (both positive and negative) towards her transition into entrepreneurship. Two additional entrepreneurs, Amanda and Lily, were classified as feeling “positive, sometimes mixed” in their overall perceptions of their transitions into entrepreneurship. Amanda noted a high level of concurrent stress (situation) because of having a toddler at home (timing); she actively attempting to use her family and nanny (supports) to balance her schedule (strategies). The second entrepreneur with this
classification was Lily, who experienced her transition into entrepreneurship due to a strong disconnect from a profession and organization that she had once valued (situation). Lily valued her work and felt well supported from her spouse (supports), and she made a significant effort to build her social networks and professional partnerships (strategies), despite feeling like she was not able to make the impact that she wants to with her work (situation). However, because Amanda and Lily indicated that they felt hopeful, connected, and fulfilled overall with their work and planned to proceed forward with their ventures, they were classified as overall “positive” rather than “mixed” in their perceptions of the overall transition experience. There was one other participant, Vicky, who was considered for a “positive, sometimes mixed” classification, but she seemed to have slightly lower stress than Sarah or Amanda (situation), not as high of expectations of her impact as Lily (self), a good business partner (supports), a good use of strategies to mitigate concurrent stress (strategies), and an overall reporting that her current work is meaningful and fulfilling (situation). Because of these assessments, Vicky was assigned a “positive” classification of her overall transition experience.

In addition, 12 of the 14 participants intended to remain on the entrepreneurial path for the time being, with the exception of Sarah, who was contemplating returning to traditional employment, and Cammie who had just started taking a break from her venture to reflect on what would come next. Because Cammie spoke highly of her entrepreneurial experience and had the potential to continue with her venture in some capacity in the future, she was also classified as having an overall positive perception of her entrepreneurial experience.

Building from the data presented in Table 6, the presentation of the themes continues with the participants’ pre-transition environments. The pre-transition environment plays a significant role within how individuals perceive their transition, as individuals make assessments
of their situation (4 S) through viewing whether the transition is considered positively or negatively as gain or loss. Within professional transitions, if an individual is coming from a negative pre-transition employment context, the transition may be perceived as neutral or a gain. In contrast, if an individual is coming from a positive pre-transition employment environment, the individual may report struggling through the transition, as their post-transition employment may feel like a loss. This could mean that the individual perceives the pre-transition to have better alignment with skills or identity (self), better conditions or more meaningful activities (situation), or better social supports (supports) compared to their new entrepreneurial role. Without strategies to mitigate stress, reframe the transition, and connect to their post-transition environment, an individual’s perceptions of the transition may cause them to be more critical of their new, post-transition professional role.

Past experience heavily influences how individuals approach and view their transition, causing positive or negative perspectives of the transition experience and the likelihood of coping through the transition period (Goodman et al., 2006). Transition can be viewed as an interplay between individuals and their environments, where individuals make appraisals of both their transition and the resources they have to handle it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Because individuals have past experiences, resources, and deficits that are uniquely their own, individuals can view, react, and approach the same type of transition in distinctly different ways. Because resources can be real or perceived, created or not, and utilized or not (Sussman, 1972), individuals’ sense of agency, perspectives, assumptions, and actions can have a significant impact on the experienced transition to entrepreneurship.

In the case of professional identity, it is important for individuals to feel in practice a sense of identity harmony or alignment. Transitions into entrepreneurship can be a result of
feeling ostracized or marginalized in a previous position (Nadin, 2007). Individuals can feel marginalized through experiencing leadership changes or shifts in organizational or social working culture or through feeling a lack of appreciation or acknowledgment of their work—receiving no praise, raises, or promotions—or feeling generally overworked. All of these reasons arose within the interviews and serve as the first finding of the dissertation.

The motivation to classify the participants’ perceptions of their previous employment came from the interview notes and the coding process, as the majority of the 14 participants (11 of 14) held overall negative perceptions of their previous employment. This is not to state that all participants felt challenged in the same way by their previous employment. For some participants, part or all of their negative orientation previously resulted from a change in leadership that caused feelings of stress, disconnect, or unappreciation. This was the case with Tim, Amanda, Kevin, Jason, Faye, and Vicky. Some of the participants reported feeling some level of a cultural mismatch with their previous employer or its leadership, as with Michael, Tim, Amanda, Kevin, Maggie, Dana, Jason, Faye, Vicky, Rachel, and Lily. Many participants also noted significant stress for a variety of reasons within their previous position, particularly Michael, Tim, Maggie, Dana, Faye, Vicky, Cammie, Lily.

Of the three who were not categorized as holding “negative” perceptions of their previous employment, two were classified as “mixed,” Amanda and Nancy, and only one, Sarah, was classified as “positive.” Amanda, in her new venture was still working alongside many of her former colleagues and was executing the same contract as with her previous employment. While she did note some differences in leadership philosophy from her former boss and said she felt underappreciated by not getting a raise, the nature of her previous role carried greater consistency and less travel, which made her new role stressful. Nancy said she had not felt
challenged within her previous role and wanted to make a transition into entrepreneurship anyway. She reported feeling connected to, and appreciative of, her colleagues at her previous employer, with whom she was able to remain a connection with the employer as a client of hers. Because Amanda and Nancy still had active links to their colleagues and previous employers in some way, they both reported having left both on good terms with, and with the blessing of, their previous employers. In contrast, Sarah was the only participant interviewed who said she felt well aligned with and positive about her previous organization, her former colleagues, and her former role within the organization. Her transition was somewhat unanticipated given that she only left her job when she bought a home too far away to commute to her work. She noted that she likely would not have otherwise left her position to transition into an entrepreneurial role.

To continue from the subsection, looking to the 11 participants who reported feeling misaligned with their previous employment during the pre-transition period, entrepreneurship can be a better fit for those needing to psychologically restore their professional identity following harm caused by a previous professional identity (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018). Although the majority of participants were classified as having a negative perception of their previous employment, two of the participants’ stories will be highlighted for how they demonstrated participants’ perceptions of their pre-transition period, particularly focusing on the stress and disconnect they felt within their pre-transition employment environments. The selected two cases of Rachel and Dana present the same types of transition (anticipated), perceptions of their previous employment (negative), and perceptions of their overall transition (positive).

For example, Rachel explained how she felt disconnected from herself while working under an employer, noting:
Yeah, I *definitely* felt constrained. I just felt like I was limited and I couldn't, no matter how hard I worked, I couldn't—I was only as good as what they said I was, or something like, as good the title, what they allowed me to work on, and the things I tried to volunteer for and add to my skill set. It was very *limiting*. I don't know how to explain it. I just feel like I didn't want to step out of bounds, or even just my peers... If I said I was the manager of this or something. You get nervous to be like, ‘Oh, and I'm really interested in learning about AI and small businesses or something.’ They'd be like, ‘Why do you care about AI and small businesses? We’re not paying you for that.’ It just defined *me*. You're not really supposed to like things that they don't want you to work on because it's not why they've hired you.

Despite being in a creative role in her previous employment, Rachel still felt the organizational culture did not allow her to embrace her creative self, who enjoyed learning and growth both within and outside her professional role.

Rachel spoke to having felt limited when working for her former employer at several points in the conversation, which is a constraint she no longer feels in her current role as an entrepreneur. When reflecting on her professional identity now, Rachel feels as though the experience has helped her better understand herself and follow her own passions.

Now, I feel like I've just grown as a person. I'm just following my own experience.

Maybe, one day, I could end up in something sort of corporate, one day, but I just feel like this has been the best year. Just growing into myself and not being defined so much.

From the quote, it seems Rachel is not against returning to work in a corporate environment should her life take her that way, but for the time being, she is enjoying her new life and the process of launching her new venture.
For Dana, before making the leap into entrepreneurship, Dana and her husband were leading a stressful life. They had just bought a house in the suburbs far out from their jobs and were trying to make their new life work with their daily commute of four hours to and from work. With two young children and a supportive husband, Dana felt the quality of her life was not where it should be. She wanted more time with her family and a more peaceful life, and her work was only adding to her stress.

Feeling undervalued at work, Dana felt especially misaligned with her previous employer. Despite feeling capable and skilled, and in a leadership role within her organization, Dana was noticing that she was being assigned more and more responsibilities without a promotion, raise, or even praise. The more years she worked for her previous employer, the more she would think of how she would do things differently. She had already risen up to a leadership role within her school, so she viewed her choices as making a lateral move to another organization or owning her own school. Once the idea to start her own school was in her mind, Dana started to reflect on her feelings about her previous employer, and she concluded that she could handle the pressures that came with running her own school:

One of the reasons [for wanting a professional change] would be, probably, feeling underappreciated by my employer and knowing that it would be nice to work under my own capacity, where I could achieve even more for the children and the way that I thought that they would benefit more than the school I was at before.

During the pre-transition period, Dana concluded that she had the right skills, preparation, and mindset for a transition (self). Particularly with the high level of concurrent stress, she also felt the timing was right (situation). She also attributed the decision to transition into entrepreneurship to having the support of her husband, children, and family to make it all work
Despite her entrepreneurial role coming with significant stress and responsibility, Dana viewed her transition into entrepreneurship as a positive gain, particularly when assessing the post-transition environment with her pre-transition one.

Rachel and Dana both noted that they worry on occasion now because they like their new identity and life. Both Rachel and Dana mentioned that things are so good now that they worry it will all come to an end. Rachel really enjoys her new life and how she is able to be creative and feel a sense of meaning in her work.

I'm very grateful [for my new life]. Sometimes, I get nervous. Will it all go away or something? Not go away, necessarily, but like, so [there are] many good things happening that I just... You know, I don't know. Hopefully, nothing bad happens.

Like Rachel, Dana expressed her gratitude and occasional disbelief in how everything seemed to come together for her and her husband in starting their entrepreneurial venture together:

Just absolutely grateful for where I am, believing, at times, that I'm living in a dream bubble. And I'm going to wake up because it's popped, and I'm not going to be living in this life anymore. Sometimes, I feel like, compared to our last life, it's almost too good to be true.

Both Rachel and Dana used the word “grateful” to describe their reactions to their new lives, professions, and selves. The two of them feel as though their lives are much better overall, and because they had both felt misaligned with their previous employment, they have a strong sense of appreciation for their careers now. Particularly because of the distinct contrast of their lives pre-transition and post-transition, they both indicated wanting to be able to continue on in the life they have now.
Theme Two: Reflection on Their Overall Professional Identity Transition

The second emerging theme is related to the participants’ perceptions of their overall professional identity transition. Despite this theme having several subthemes, the subtheme of “entrepreneurship as life authenticity/self-realization,” serves as the focal area of this section due to how prevalent the subtheme appeared in the data and the lack of representation of the subtheme within the existing conceptions of entrepreneurship. To center on the professional identity transition and how the participants viewed their entrepreneurial transition and experience, one of the questions in the interview protocol asked participants to use a metaphor or analogy to describe their lived experience of professional identity transition by comparing their pre- and post-transition professional identities. Participants were asked for an analogy or metaphor to describe their professional identity during their previous employment and their professional identity in its entrepreneurial state. Metaphors serve “not [as] a figure of speech, but [as] a model of thought” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 210), providing a way to decipher and contemplate an entrepreneurial identity (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010; Philips, Tracy, & Karra, 2014). The use of metaphors to express an entrepreneurial identity has been helpful in bridging the entrepreneurial experience with more familiar conversational framing (Dodd, 2002; Perren & Adkin, 1997). Rather than ask participants directly about their conceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship through metaphors (e.g., Dodd and de Konig, 2015; Down & Warren, 2008), others (e.g., Clarke & Holt, 2017) have used metaphors as a vehicle to understand reported entrepreneurial identities. In the context of this dissertation, the metaphor question allowed the participants to describe their own professional identity transition, with one metaphor or analogy for their professional identity before their transition into entrepreneurship and one for their professional identities at this point in time.
Within this section, responses from each entrepreneur are shared to show the trajectory of the experienced professional identity transitions and the perceived differences between the pre- and post-transition environments, as explained by the participants. The section presents the metaphor or analogy of their professional identity before their transition into entrepreneurship compared to their professional identity at the time of the interview. Table 7 presents the participants in order of their time as a full-time entrepreneur, starting from those with the least amount of time at seven months to the most amount of time at the three-year mark.

From the participants’ responses to the metaphor question, answers were coded to uncover assumptions, definitions, and perspectives of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, which were alphabetized within the table for greater ease of comparison. This coding was used only for this question, because this was the only question directed specifically towards their professional identity transition, comparing the pre-transition and post-transition identities. While the participants held many perceptions of their entrepreneurial experience, this question aimed to illustrate their primary orientations, particularly as participants had already had the opportunity to detail their pre-transition and post-transition environments.

In reviewing the final column of Table 7, 10 of the 14 participants—Maggie, Maggie, Michael, Rachel, Nancy, Tim, Kevin, Jason, Dana, Faye, and Lily—noted a shift within their entrepreneurial role that allowed them to feel a greater sense of control or autonomy, which included the codes of “control,” “autonomy,” “freedom,” “flexibility,” and “forging own path.” None of these nine participants with greater control or autonomy had response codes for the “risk-taker/responsibility-holder” subtheme. Only two participants, Amanda and Sarah, had responses coded with the “risk-taker/responsibility-holder” subtheme, and both of them also had a code of the “challenging/out of comfort zone” subtheme, along with one other participant,
Vicky. This indicates that participants who viewed their transition into entrepreneurship as allowing them to feel a greater sense of control or autonomy did not mention risk-tasking directly within their response. The three participants who noted entrepreneurship as being challenging or out of their comfort zone also indicated feeling the risk and responsibility of their entrepreneurial role on their shoulders.

Table 7

Participants’ Responses to the Metaphor Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Metaphor (pre-transition → post-transition)</th>
<th>Metaphor question response</th>
<th>Personal perspectives of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Amanda      | Rehearsing → Performing                      | [Before,] it's like I've been rehearsing, and rehearsing, and rehearsing, and now, I'm performing. Now, I'm out there, definitely way out of my comfort zone. I'm doing networking stuff. I'm definitely an introverted person by nature, but you got to get in front of CEOs with all your stuff and network with people. I have people, literally, whose livelihoods rely on my ability to perform, so it's kind of like a dancer or an actor who's been rehearsing and rehearsing at different jobs and, then finally, [is] on stage out in public performing. It's scary and exciting at the same time. | • Challenging/Out of comfort zone  
• Provider (others)  
• Risk-taker/Responsibility-holder |
| Maggie      | Not going anywhere → Having a world of possibilities | You know what, I would say I felt lost, to be honest with you. I felt lost. I felt a little trapped. Although I felt lost and I felt trapped, I felt like it wasn’t going to go anywhere because I looked around and the managers there. I didn’t really care for any of the managers there. So, when you don’t care for the people who are one level above you, it’s hard to aspire to be like them, to be that role . . . Now, oh my gosh, the possibilities are just tremendous. It's endless. There are things that come up that I can't even think of, I don't even think about, and someone just mentions it to me, and 'Yes, I could do this.' Just being in this space, I don't think certain opportunities would have presented itself [otherwise]. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Creator/Opportunist-finder  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly “lost” and “trapped;” allowed her to live her values rather than organizational values) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Metaphor (pre-transition (\rightarrow) post-transition)</th>
<th>Metaphor question response</th>
<th>Personal perspectives of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Michael    | Robot \(\rightarrow\) Artist                    | The metaphor that I would probably use for being with my previous employer would be a robot instead of an animal, just because that's very much their culture. Everything is very regimented, plenty of policies for everything. You just do things this way. Write your emails this way, and it's very regimented. Now, I don't know . . . I would say going from a robot to an artist, where it's just “being yourself,” which is really interesting to see the way that you would prefer to do things. You take off all the restrictions that someone else places on you and say, "Okay, just do this how you want to do it." “Okay, that sounds great.” I get to be “me,” figure out who I am and how I want to do things. It's been a really good feeling. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Creator/Opportunity-finder  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly not able to be creative; allowed him to live his values rather than organizational values) |
| Vicky      | Swimming the breaststroke \(\rightarrow\) Swimming the butterfly stroke | I guess before I was like doing the breaststroke, and breaststroke is very, very easy for me. I love doing the breaststroke. I can do the breaststroke for hours and hours. No, not really, but you know, at least a mile without much effort. Now, I feel like I'm doing the butterfly [stroke], which is my most difficult stroke. But I'm still in the water, and I really like being in the water. I love to swim. I'm doing the most difficult stroke, the one that's most exhausting, the one that I have the most trouble with. But I'm still swimming, and I'm still on the water. | • Challenging/Out of comfort zone |
| Rachel     | Being trapped \(\rightarrow\) Forging her own path | I was trapped. I was in this small space, and I wasn't really making all of my own choices and following someone else's path for me. And now, it's kind of broken out of that, and I gained strength and am now forging my own path. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly “trapped;” allowed her to live her values rather than organizational values) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Metaphor (pre-transition (\rightarrow) post-transition)</th>
<th>Metaphor question response</th>
<th>Personal perspectives of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nancy       | Being passive aggressive \(\rightarrow\) Being a strong “type A” | I, personally, view myself as passive-aggressive before the transition. I think I'm still somewhat passive-aggressive, but I feel like I'm definitely a strong “Type A” now. And I never wanted to be a Type A, but it's become necessary. So, that's the change and that's I think how I would describe it, from being more of an introvert to like now an extrovert where it's just like I just, I have to be Type A. And I think that was always inside of me. I think I probably was somewhat of a Type A before, but now I'm like Type A to the extreme . . . I'm creating the rules. Whereas I had to play by someone else's rules, now I'm creating the rules. And if I don't create the rules, my competition in the world will create the rules, and then I'm going to have to play by someone else's rules. And I'm not going to be successful doing that. | - Control/Autonomy  
- Creator/Opportunity-seeker |
| Tim         | Unhappy sheep \(\rightarrow\) Human | I guess, before, I've never quite been a sheep. If I have been a sheep, I've been a very unhappy one. But I feel much more like a human now than I did before because I feel like I'm actually doing what we're supposed to do, which is providing for yourself as a person. I figure out my housing, and I figure out my taxes, and I figure out my bank accounts, and I find my own food when I need it. And that's just wildly different from getting a job for someone else right out of University, and then getting another job and just feeling like you're sort of going along with the flow. | - Control/Autonomy  
- Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly a “sheep”)  
- Provider (self) |
| Kevin       | Hireling \(\rightarrow\) Foreman | So, the word that I have is hireling, and now foreman or whatever the appropriate leadership role would be in that environment . . . It goes back to this idea of, somehow, not always able to be able to share that information in a way that caused the organization to take notice. I mean, I got promoted. I'm not suggesting that I was always ignored or anything like that. In fact, I wasn't ignored; I just don't think that, often, the weight of what I was understanding or what I had produced really landed very well . . . [Now,] I'm able to look at what may be happening in one area and see how it might impact another and trying to find opportunities for our company to succeed. | - Control/Autonomy  
- Creator/Opportunity-finder |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Metaphor (pre-transition ➔ post-transition)</th>
<th>Metaphor question response</th>
<th>Personal perspectives of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sarah       | Elephant ➔ Fish                          | Things that are coming to mind are—between being very sturdy and stable and solid, versus being flexible and worried. Flexible is a good thing, but also floundering a little bit. If you think of an elephant, it’s a very strong, stable, steady animal, versus a fish that’s just a clown fish. That’s just flitting around, looking over here, looking over there, wondering what am I... what do I need to be thinking about that I don’t even know to think about? What might be out there to my success in this area that I don’t even know to be aware of, never mind how to mitigate? I might be painting it more negative than I really feel, but there is something in there about steadiness versus wariness. | ▪ Challenging/Out of comfort zone  
▪ Creator/Opportunity-finder  
▪ Risk-taker/Responsibility-holder |
| Cammie     | Ox ➔ Bird                                | I think before I would definitely describe myself as an ox. I was very determined. I was very diligent. I was always doing what I was meant to do. Maybe, because of my upbringing, but I was always doing what I was meant to do. That's the best way to put it . . . Now, I feel more like, maybe, a bird [because] I can roam around and see all different perspectives in different parts of the world and embrace, just, the difference of it versus maybe... For example, with an ox, if you put me on a farm, I'd be really comfortable. But if you put me by the beach, I will feel really out of place versus as a bird, I feel at home everywhere I go. | ▪ Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (gained broader perspective) |
| Jason      | Living ➔ Flying                          | Living. When you're living everybody can say kind of similar in perspective, is like walking. Right? I'm just walking. I was getting up, I'd get dressed, I would go. I was walking . . . Now, I feel, I'm flying. I'm looking, I'm soaring. It’s so much better from up here. Right? I got a view. A way-out view. I can see way out. And I get to choose whether I want to fly left or if I want to fly right or up? Water, I see sky, I see a lot of moving parts. Before, I was just walking a trail. Not only walking, walking a trail. That path. You see a path, like you walk through a paved path, that's what I was. I was walking on a paved path. Now, I'm flying. And I have options. | ▪ Control/Autonomy  
▪ Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (gained broader perspective) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Metaphor (pre-transition to post-transition)</th>
<th>Metaphor question response</th>
<th>Personal perspectives of entrepreneurship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dana        | Stuck in a rut ⇒ Over the moon | We were stuck not just in a bad position in life but in a place where I felt like I could no longer move forward, professionally, that is. I felt like I wasn't ever going to be valued or treated well in my job at that point . . . I guess that's why I think of stuck in a rut . . . You weren't allowed to have any kind of freedom of expression. You weren't allowed to speak . . . Just absolutely grateful for where I am. Believing, at times, that I'm living in a dream bubble, and I'm going to wake up because it's popped, and I'm not going to be living in this life anymore. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly “stuck in a rut”) |
| Faye        | Caged cougar ⇒ Free cougar | I would think I was more of a caged cougar, versus someone that... There's nothing holding me back now. I always had a lot of fierceness and a lot of energy, and I always felt like you were strapped down by resource issues or management didn't like this or this. I don't have those anymore. For me, I'm just as much of a workaholic into what I do now, but I don't have any restrictions. I'm not caged. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly “caged”) |
| Lily        | Force to be reckoned with ⇒ A provider | While I was in the classroom, I've heard the expression a force to be reckoned with and that would be around being a professional educator. . . . [Now,] I'm more of a ... I'm offering. Like somebody who offers something. Like a giver, or not really a giver. A provider. A potential provider . . . I'm not all balled up, I'm not all stressed, I'm not on an artificial bell schedule. Public schools have a lot of unhealthy, self-imposed constraints and ... I don't have to worry about those anymore. | • Control/Autonomy  
• Life authenticity/Self-realizing experience (formerly being silenced and constrained)  
• Provider (others) |

Note: Ordered from least amount of time to most-time as a full-time entrepreneur.

**Theme Two, Subtheme One: Entrepreneurship as Life Authenticity and Self-Realization**

Of significant note, nine of the 14 participants (see Table 7) received codes relating to life authenticity or a self-realizing experience, which included the codes of “self-realizing experience” and “life authenticity/alignment/harmony.” The life authenticity, alignment, and harmony code was conceptualized to capture incidences of participants feeling more aligned with their authentic self, whereas the self-realizing experience code was formed to capture participants’ responses to finding themselves through entrepreneurship. While these codes were
initially formed as two separate subthemes, it was difficult to determine from the data whether some participants meant one or the other. The two codes do carry the same essence and central premise, that entrepreneurial roles also allowed participants to feel a notable sense of satisfaction with their new professional identity, which could indicate being able to enact an aspirational identity or having a better alignment between existing identities—for example, creating identity harmony, removing an identity conflict, and feeling greater authenticity with a professional identity. For these participants, the coding indicates that the transition into entrepreneurship was not simply a professional role change but also a professional identity transition.

**Subtheme absent.** Before looking to the nine participants whose responses were connected with codes attached to the “life authenticity/self-realizing experience” subtheme, the data from the participants without that coded responses are presented first. The responses of five of the 14 participants were not assigned with the “life authenticity/self-realizing experience” subtheme. Table 8 presents a synthesis of the participants’ transition type, perceptions of their previous employment and their overall transition, as originally highlighted in Table 6, and their transition experience as framed with the transition’s 4 S’s of self, situation, supports, and strategies. An interesting pattern noted from the five whose responses were not assigned with the positive professional identity transition related code included their perceptions of their previous employers, including the three who held the most favorable categories of “positive,” Sarah, and “mixed,” Amanda and Nancy. As noted within the previous section, these participants were the only three categorized as not having a negative perception of their previous employment. In addition, as mentioned previously, three of the five participants’ responses, Amanda, Vicky, and Sarah, were the only responses of all 14 that were coded with “challenging/out of comfort zone.” The only participant not covered by some of these classifications and codes was Kevin. Kevin
noted in the interview that he was just as knowledgeable pre-transition and post-transition, but
his greatest personal grievance in his past position was that he did not feel heard and that, despite
holding a leadership role, his expertise and guidance seemed to be frequently not considered. In
addition, four of the five reported having some sort of entrepreneurial experience prior to their
full-time transition into their current entrepreneurial role, with the exception of Sarah.

Table 8

*Metaphor Question Responses not Coded with “Life Authenticity/Self-realizing Experience”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Time in venture)</th>
<th>Transition type</th>
<th>Perception of previous employment (PE) &amp; transition overall (T)</th>
<th>Transition experience: Notes of interest (Connected to the 4 S Model)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amanda</strong> <em>(7 months)</em></td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>PE: Mixed PE: Mixed</td>
<td>• Introverted; still adjusting to (but enjoying) her new role and the public speaking that accompanies it. (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsing → Performing</td>
<td></td>
<td>T: Positive, sometimes mixed</td>
<td>• Has not been able to pay herself yet, but anticipating she will soon; was anticipating up to six months but will likely be around eight months (Situation- Duration and Concurrent Stress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenging/Out of comfort zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Not ideal timing due to having a young child at home. (Situation- Timing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk-taker/Responsibility-holder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had an entrepreneurial experience before (Situation-Previous Experience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provider (others)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Secured a business partner. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Has supportive family. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Managing child care with a nanny, husband, and her mom. (Supports; Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wants to feel like she has earned her title; does not feel that way yet, but she has reflected that her ability to secure her first new client contract she will help her “own” the title/role more. (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Accepted a public speaking engagement. (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Attending industry conferences to network and sell her company’s services. (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (Time in venture)</td>
<td>Transition type</td>
<td>Perception of previous employment (PE) &amp; transition overall (T)</td>
<td>Transition experience: Notes of interest (Connected to the 4 S Model)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky (9 months)</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>PE: Negative T: Positive</td>
<td>Feels more like a small-business owner than an entrepreneur because she is not taking on enough of a risk (has income coming in through spouse’s work). (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interested in entrepreneurial activities, but did not necessarily want to be an entrepreneur due to financial risk (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left previous employer without a plan (Situation- Timing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left previous employer because she felt a significant disconnect from the job (new hires; lack of respect of her work) (Situation- Trigger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has the financial support of spouse (Situation- Control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has prior freelancing/consulting experience (Situation- Previous Experience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Invested more time and money than expected to date into the venture; thinks this is part of the nature of the work (i.e., investments are heavier up front). (Situation- Duration and Concurrent Stress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has supportive family. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approached by a friend to partner up on a business venture; has a strong rapport with business partner (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently enrolled in a graduate program, anticipated more career options following program (started before transitions) (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping options open long term, including a possible return to traditional employment (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Perceptions of Entrepreneurship
  - Swimming the breaststroke → Swimming the butterfly stroke
  - Challenging/Out of comfort zone
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Time in venture)</th>
<th>Transition type</th>
<th>Perception of previous employment (PE) &amp; transition overall (T)</th>
<th>Transition experience: Notes of interest (Connected to the 4 S Model)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nancy (1.5 years FT + 1 year PT) | Anticipated | PE: Mixed T: Positive | Sees herself as introverted and humble; her mentor encourages her to be more direct and promotional in her social introductions. (Self)  
Feels like she is a bad manager on occasion; she felt like a better manager before at her last employer, but she now feels the pressure of looking at productivity and financial bottom line (Self)  
Had experienced an expected health issue, resulting in her pushing forward her transition into entrepreneurship (Situation - Timing)  
Left on good terms with previous employer, as they offered to be her client (her work is very similar to what she was doing before, but now she is independent with employees). (Situation - Trigger)  
Has seven years of previous and concurrent experience as a founder of a nonprofit. (Situation - Previous Experience)  
Has supportive family. (Supports)  
Feels well integrated in an entrepreneurial network. (Supports)  
Enjoying flexibility of work but encountering a disconnect with her previous social group. (Supports)  
Has a mentor (Supports)  
Joined a local co-working space. (Strategies)  
Made more entrepreneur friends. (Strategies) |
| Kevin (1.5 years) | Anticipated | PE: Negative T: Positive | Felt strong confidence in perspective and industry knowledge (Self)  
Never before wanted to be an entrepreneur, as he had been happy working for and within organizations (Self)  
Left employer because of feeling a strong disconnect with previous employer (Situation - Trigger)  
Had experienced the passing of a close family member, which made him reflect on his own happiness (Situation - Timing)  
Had prior experience as an intrapreneur (Situation - Previous Experience)  
Able to secure contracts but the clients take a while to implement new product use; wants faster venture growth (Situation - Concurrent Stress)  
Able to move closer to/spend more time with family. (Supports)  
Has a solid network of fellow entrepreneurs (Supports)  
Joined a co-working space, through which he attends entrepreneurial programming and networking events (Strategies) |
### Participant (Time in venture)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Transition type</th>
<th>Perception of previous employment (PE) &amp; transition overall (T)</th>
<th>Transition experience: Notes of interest (Connected to the 4 S Model)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sarah</strong> (1.5 years)</td>
<td>Unanticipated</td>
<td>PE: Positive T: Mixed</td>
<td>Introverted; dislikes having to sell and bring in business all the time. (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elephant → Fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Had previously had a slight interest in an entrepreneurial path (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes the new nature of her work, as she is less involved in the creative side of work and more on the operational side. (Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Left previous employer due to moving away from the area (Situation- Timing &amp; Trigger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moved away from good job and friends (Situation-Concurrent Stress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Had no prior reported entrepreneurial experience. (Situation- Previous Experience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feels socially removed due to not having access to a professional social context and friends because of the nature of her work and the move. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has no consistent supports within entrepreneurial community and only remote professional partnerships. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does not use of co-working space/ institutional groups. (Supports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Currently enrolled in a graduate program; anticipates better job outcomes following her degree program. (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewing for a possible near transition back to traditional employment. (Strategies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Participants whose metaphor question responses were not coded with “life authenticity/self-realizing experience,” ordered from least amount of time to most-time as a full-time entrepreneur

**Kevin: From a hireling to a foreman.** Nearly two years into his entrepreneurial journey, Kevin said he felt a sense of purpose and impact in his work, as well as an acknowledgement of his expertise that he was missing within his previous employment. In response to coming up with an analogy for his professional identity before and after his transition into entrepreneurship, Kevin positioned his response on how he was previously unable to feel heard, despite holding a leadership role. While working with his previous employer, he used to inform the leadership team about industry trends, what people were doing, things to look out for, and what could have
had an impact on their business. This information, over time especially, was something he felt provided value to his organization and revealed his expertise. However, despite holding a high-ranking title, he felt that he was unable to have his efforts and expertise valued by the other leaders within the organization.

In contrast, in his entrepreneurial role, Kevin explained that his knowledge and expertise could be acted upon. As the decision maker in the context of the new venture, he said he felt able to capitalize on his knowledge of the industry and to build plans towards its future:

Now, I still read the same trade journals. I still get the same news feeds from the various authorities, and now, I have the ability to kind of make the connections. I'm drawing a blank on the exact description of this, but I'm able to look at what may be happening in one area and see how it might impact another and trying to find opportunities for our company to succeed.

From the interview, it appeared Kevin embraced his new title and role. He seemed to prefer his new role, having transitioned from “just information sharing” to becoming the decision maker. He also used the word “captain” to explain his new professional identity, because he was exercising his ability to gather information, to see the information from within the greater landscape, and to steer the organization accordingly.

I'm the president of my company. I don't prance around with my presidential title. That doesn't mean anything. An organization has to have a leader and an [organization] has to have a president, and that role falls on my shoulders. It's that now I have a say in the formation of a company. I still seek advice from people that are smarter than me . . . I enjoy that. It's just that I feel like I am now sort of captain, if that conveys the right
notion. I can look at what needs to be done, and I can act on it. I enjoy the role and the responsibility.

The interview data revealed that Kevin struggled in his previous position to feel his expertise was validated by his peers, so in his next position, the greater lived experience of his entrepreneurial identity stood in contrast to his prior experience, making the coding of “control/autonomy” and “creator/opportunity-finder” natural choices for someone who felt those qualities were absent in his previous position. At the time of the interview forward, Kevin expressed that he wanted to continue to lead and grow his business; he said he was hoping to help the company deliver value outside the current industry, given that some of his contracts had lengthy implementation timelines. In addition to his goal setting strategy, Kevin was also actively participating in the activities and culture of his local entrepreneur community through membership in a co-working location.

Nancy: *From being passive aggressive to being a strong “type A.”* Initially, because Nancy had founded and operated a nonprofit for seven years and counting previously, at first glance, Nancy’s case might not have been perceived by this researcher as similar to Kevin’s—that she might have enacted or reinforced an existing entrepreneurial identity previously and did not experience feeling a distinct identity transition within her new role. However, Nancy’s case may instead indicate an instance of a compartmentalization identity strategy (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009), with an identity being separated off by an identity boundary in order to keep two identities as distinct from one another (Ashforth et al., 2000). Because the two feelings conflict with one another, Nancy expressed that she actively felt she was trying to make sense of how to feel authentically herself while embracing her new job. Nancy said she considered herself to be humble, an important quality of how she viewed herself, which came across directly in the
interview. When bridging this identity with her entrepreneurial role, she noted difficulty striking a balance between the two. Also, Nancy noted that she sometimes struggled making sense of the interaction between her former employee identity and her new professional identity.

At the time of the interview, Nancy had been an entrepreneur for a year and a half, and she said she had seen herself change. When asked for an analogy or metaphor for her professional identity pre- and post-transition, Nancy noted that she felt passive-aggressive beforehand and in the new role she would describe herself as more “Type A.” She noted that she was feeling like she had to be on top of everything, and that was making her feel “Type A to the extreme” (her emphasis). She explained the distinction she felt switching from being an employee with her demeanor in her previous position versus her new role and orientations.

I think, working for someone else, you never can always just say what you want to say and do what you want to do. There are rules that you have to follow. There's a game to it. I'm a very respectful person, and I've always been taught to respect authority, no matter where I'm at. And so, I felt like an introvert [in my previous position] because there have been many times where I would have said or done things differently, but it would not have been what was expected of me. It would not have been what was ‘professional.’

And so, I kind of kept a lot of things to myself.

Nancy said that, in her entrepreneurial role, she had felt the need to be more outspoken because her name, her money, and the reputation of her company were constantly on the line. She recognized the extent to which what she said mattered in the new context it was shaping procedures, behaviors, and rules:

Now, I'm in a position where what I say, no matter how I say it, it's going to matter because, again, it's my company. And there are things I have to say, [and] I can't let [it]
slide. I'm creating the rules. Whereas I had to play by someone else's rules, now I'm creating the rules. And if I don't create the rules, my competition in the world will create the rules, and then I'm going to have to play by someone else's rules. And I'm not going to be successful doing that.

Nancy said she felt empowered to lead her company and to set these standards; however, she admitted she was still struggling to publicly embrace her new professional identity from time to time because it was still all relatively new for her.

I feel like internally it continues to be conflicting because I've been one way for so long. I think I'm still really trying to come out of this shell, and I don't feel like it's consistent.

My personality is definitely not consistent, and that sometimes bothers me too.

When interviewed, Nancy was still coming to terms with how she felt about herself within her new role. Within her business, she noted sometimes feeling like her mother, who would reprimand her and make her feel horrible after making mistakes. She said this comparison made her feel conflicted because she was indeed getting the result she wanted from her staff; however, she did not initially intend or want to be like her mother.

Nancy said she experienced reflective moments as an entrepreneur when interacting with external audiences outside her organization. Although she had pared back her volunteer and board positions since becoming an entrepreneur, she remained serving on a handful of high-profile boards. During the interview, she discussed how she viewed her role boards as compared to when she had joined them while she was still at her previous organization.

I finally felt like I joined the “old boys club,” finally. I felt like, “Yeah, I'm a boss too. I have employees of my own, and I own my own company now too.” I felt more not only empowered but confident. [In] one of my positions, I chaired [a committee] in the city and
actually was appointed to that position while I was still at my old job. When they selected me, I'm like, “Me? Why me?” And now it's like, “Yes, me. I have this.”

As an entrepreneur, Nancy said she felt more confident within some of her circles, but she was still navigating how to balance her new social identity while remaining authentic to her humble self:

So, I would say that I feel like there's a different level of confidence that comes with being able to say I have my own company because, to this day, I still hesitate. Sometimes, when people go around, and they say, “So, what do you do?” And a lot of times I say, “Oh, I'm in [field].” And some people will let it go, and then, some people, they're like, “Oh, so where do you work?” And I'm like, “Oh, I work for myself.” They're like, “Really? Tell me more about this.” So, even though there are positions where I'm at where I feel really confident, I feel like there is line between confidence and cockiness, and I'm still trying to figure out what that is. But I don't like to be a cocky person. I feel like I'm really humble, but I'm still trying to work on it.

Nancy noted that one of her entrepreneur mentors was actively coaching her to be more confident with her introduction and pitch, but because of the consistency in her hesitation within certain social groups, for example her friend group, she reflected that having an entrepreneurial identity might conflict somewhat with an existing identity of her being humble. When interviewed, she was still trying to find an authentic balance that represented her a bit better, showing both her personal identity humility combined with her new professional identity as a business owner and entrepreneur.

**Vicky: From swimming the breaststroke to the butterfly stroke.** In contrast, two of the participants (Vicky, Amanda) noted some conditions regarding their conceptions of being an
“entrepreneur.” Vicky had held several consulting and freelancing positions throughout her career, and later in the context of the interview, she mentioned that she considered herself to be more of a “business owner” than an “entrepreneur” because she was not operating at significant risk. Therefore, despite “business owner” being one of the possible interpretations of entrepreneurship, she viewed them as being slightly distinct from one another. In this case, Vicky might not have been experiencing a transition to an entrepreneurial identity, but rather more to what she associated with being a business owner.

As an entrepreneur for under a year at the time of the interview, Vicky said she was feeling like the entrepreneurial role was stretching her professional muscles in ways that were not required while working with her last employer. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial path was filled with ups and downs. Overall, things had calmed since the hectic initial months, but, at the time of contact, she stated that she still felt that “there aren't enough hours in the day to accomplish everything.” She was still trying to strike a balance between her work and life, but she reported that this aspect was improving. Vicky said she expected the entrepreneurial path to build her venture would take a lot of work, but in her new role, she found herself navigating new tasks, with which she was less familiar. There have been struggles to get paid contracts lined up as well, as so much time was earmarked to build their product and business. In turn, Vicky has enjoyed the flexibility of her new role and how meaningful and valuable the work has been to date.

Connecting her transition experience back to her professional identity as an entrepreneur, Vicky said she was unsure about her feelings about the process. She said she had always associated entrepreneurship with greater risk, particularly financially; she indicated that conflicted had arisen within the identity formation because she enjoyed financial security
through her husband, his work, and insurance coverage. It wasn’t until coming across the
recruitment post for this dissertation research study that began reflecting on whether she was an
entrepreneur.

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

Despite feeling very challenged in her new role, Vicky was trying to take things day by day. She
was able to tap the resource of having experienced significant professional identity shifts
previously when transitioning from one industry to another and when moving from traditional
employment to freelance consulting roles. Vicky stated that she felt that thriving through a new
stage is related to mindset:

I think that a lot of it has to do with life perspective and being able to tell myself, “You're
on a different path and that's okay.” I have different chapters . . . I think that's an
important mindset just to be able to get through.

Despite expressing that she felt content in her new work, Vicky also said she missed feeling
more connected to her former industries, particularly because her previous professional identities
had been very closely linked to her field and organizational affiliations. To this end, one of
Vicky’s coping strategies (see Table 8) was to feel as though she was keeping her options open,
seeing where both her venture and her life were taking her. She mentioned that she was still
entertaining the possibility of eventually transitioning back into her former industry, though in
another capacity.
Amanda: From rehearsing to performing. At the time of the interview, Amanda had only been an entrepreneur for seven months. During that time, Amanda experienced some significant shifts in her lifestyle. In her new entrepreneurial role, she acquired more responsibility, increased her travel, and became involved in more extensive direct client interaction than she had in her previous role. In her personal life, maintaining her new travel schedule and balancing family obligations, including balancing child care, her husband’s travel schedule, her children’s schedules, and meal preparations, had proven challenging.

Amanda’s entrepreneurial journey had been characterized by some highs and lows. On one end, she said it had been an exciting process as well: she said she felt that the entrepreneurial path had been filled with new opportunities to grow, to learn, and to challenge herself. On the other hand, and as for the negative aspects, she said she was dealing with exhaustion and stress as an entrepreneur. Even though she anticipated that it would take a while before she could pay herself, she expressed during the interview that not having cut herself a first paycheck since the transition had endured much longer than expected. She described a great deal of pressure in her new role, including livelihoods that were on the line in her new capacity. She explained:

It’s terrifying to think, “I got to make sure that I can keep the lights on.” But it's exciting because there's tons of new opportunities, and I think we can be wildly successful if we can execute and get in front of the right people. But it's a lot like a performance, you don't want to forget your lines and you don't want to screw up in front of a presentation, and turn off the right buyers, miss opportunities to expand your business. At the same time, there are lots of opportunities, and we could do really well.

This helps to illustrate her more salient experience with entrepreneurship as being a “risk-taker/responsibility holder” and a “provider” for others. As evident from the quote, Amanda did
not necessarily view the pressure to do well as a negative thing; rather, she appeared to perceive it as possibly a great opportunity for her and her team to grow and thrive both individually and as a business. All in all, Amanda stood by her decision to buy the contract from her former employer. Indeed, she said it may have taken her just as long to find a new position.

Being only at month seven of owning and operating her venture, Amanda, when interviewed, was still likely coming to terms with her new role and the impacts it was having on her life. When addressing how her transition into entrepreneurship had shaped her identity so far, she explained that she felt her owning her title as CEO would be imminent:

I have deliberately not given myself the title of CEO. I'm not comfortable with it yet. Maybe, as we expand, I'll get more comfortable with it. Seeing myself first as the Chief Operating Officer and getting comfortable in that role, it's a new perspective for me. And being in charge is a new perspective to me. I'm acclimating to it. I'm not there yet.

When asked if and how she might be able to better embrace her new professional identity, Amanda explained that she felt like she has continued business as usual thus far in her venture, and that she wanted to feel like she had earned the title before embracing it.

I think we started this company buying an existing book of business. I think once we get to a point where we are generating our own new business that is kind of like the next benchmark [that] I have for myself. I think that will encourage me that we're really legit.

Interestingly, the very act of noting that she did not feel like she could “own” her title until she was able to bring in new clients or contracts herself, might indicate that her ability to embrace an entrepreneurial ability was, at the time, also conditional on her ability to successfully perform as one through the act of bringing in new business—perhaps by adding in the code “creator/opportunity-finder” to her experience. When reviewing the interview data, Amanda
explained that she was employing several positive strategies (see Table 8) to be able to acclimate to her new role, including attending conferences and accepting a public speaking engagement, despite wanting to minimize travel and public speaking for her personal comfort. She spoke to how the entrepreneurial role had presented some new opportunities for her: she fully intended to be open to new experiences to thrive and to galvanize her business.

*Sarah: From a steady-and-stable elephant to a flexible-but-foundering fish.* Sarah had formerly perceived entrepreneurship as interesting but not feasible. Sarah had seen colleagues with similar skill sets transitioning into careers working for themselves. When reflecting on her entrepreneurial aspirations, Sarah indicated that she thought about the possibility for a while, especially as others within her network had made the transition; however, she did not foresee herself being able to do so until getting that first opportunity:

[Entrepreneurship] was on my radar in the sense that I saw other people doing it, and I was jealous because I thought that would be really fun to be able to work from wherever and set my schedule and choose my clients. But it wasn't until this opportunity of my former colleague calling me that I felt like it was feasible and that I would be able to get clients of my own. So, it finally felt like the right time.

While this was Sarah’s first entrepreneurial venture, she expressed that she had the ability to reflect upon an aspirational identity leading up to her transition into entrepreneurship. While this was an aspirational identity reflection, Sarah had perceived that it would not be likely that she would have the ability to become an entrepreneur. As her life circumstances shifted with a marriage, a move to a locale where she would have less job opportunities without a long commute, and an opportunity to get her first contract, Sarah revisited this possible identity and
repositioned it as a provisional identity, which catalyzed the initial stages of her professional identity transition.

For Sarah, because she noted that she was actively struggling with whether to remain an entrepreneur or to return to traditional employment, it is possible she did not express a response coded with “life authenticity/self-realizing experience” because she was actively struggling to employ strategies that aided her in coping through the transition into entrepreneurship. The two noted strategies within her 4 S notes (being enrolled in an academic program and interviewing for other jobs) may have been helping her professionally, but they did not aid her current entrepreneurial venture. Sarah also had significant deficits, including her lack of social supports, particularly fellow entrepreneurs who could serve as mentors or a community of practice. Sarah struggled in her role, as some of her learning curves and motivation issues (self) have led her to question her ability to sustain an entrepreneurial career:

When I hit this wall, it was entrepreneurship, like, “Oh, here's this next thing I don't know.” I don't know salesmanship. I don't know marketing and communications. I don't know financial strategy. Surely, I will pick those up really fast like I have other stuff, but I haven't. And it turns out, I've got this mental block against them where, really, they're just things I don't want to learn. They're just things I don't feel that interested in or motivated by. So that's been hard for me because I have this impression of myself as being very adaptable and a really fast learner and I'll really take to a challenge and dive in headfirst. I've really learned in the last two years, if my motivation's not there it's not happening.

In her second year of her entrepreneurial role, Sarah expressed feeling instability and inconsistency in the role. Sarah had experienced a challenging-but-rewarding entrepreneurial
path, lined with both doubt and satisfaction. Sarah has always felt a strong sense of confidence in her ability to handle the work and tasks at hand, but some of the aspects of her entrepreneurial role, which are much more expansive, were not challenging. Concurrent with her transition into entrepreneurship, Sarah’s social networks switched from vibrant, in-person networks to working independently and interacting with her clients and contracted teams remotely. Sarah also was grappling with her feelings towards how meaningful and impactful efforts she perceived her work to be contributing. Within her previous position, she not only felt socially well-connected to her peers, but she also felt a strong sense of purpose in her work.

Sarah expressed mixed feelings towards her transition into entrepreneurship from many angles. Sarah noted that she felt confident and prepared for her new work in terms of her personality, skills, experiences, network experiences, and field knowledge, but she knew finding a steady pipeline of work would be a struggle. From her perspective, she was accustomed to feeling a strong sense of self-efficacy in her work, but being an entrepreneur and feeling lower self-efficacy in many of her new tasks led her to feel disconnected from the identity. With some of the challenging facets of the new role, her feeling socially isolated, her having to handle all levels of work, and having to keep a steady flow of work coming in, Sarah was left with mixed feelings and perspectives on her experience as an entrepreneur. Her reflections centered around whether to stay on the entrepreneurial journey or to return to more traditional employment.

When asked to describe her professional identity transition, Sarah highlighted the feeling of comfort and stability in her previous position in contrast to the flexibility and uncertainty of her entrepreneurial role. Sarah mentioned that professional identity was something at the forefront of her mind, noting that the dissertation research interview came during a time of reflection for her. During the interview, she stated, “This is a well-timed conversation because I
do think I’m in the middle of an identity crisis.” Sarah noted her participation in the study as helpful to her professional reflection on whether she should remain on an entrepreneurial career path or not:

I think your questions have been helpful for me just to even shed some light on my own thought processes, and they gave me some new ways of thinking about [the] interview tomorrow, and even to just explain to myself in my internal monologue of like, “why am I doing this,” and “do I want to give up on the entrepreneurial adventure altogether, or put it on hold for a little while, or...?” I don't know. So, it's been helpful to have to answer some of these questions, so I appreciate it.

Summary. The five participants whose responses were not coded with the identity transition-related code, “life authenticity/self-realizing experience” present an interesting discussion of how those with new entrepreneurial roles might have activated an entrepreneurial identity through previous professional work or engagements. In addition, personally-held definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, as exemplified in the cases of Vicky and Amanda, can influence if an entrepreneur is willing to fully embrace an entrepreneurial identity. The limitations of operative conceptions of entrepreneurship is expanded upon further within the next section, which addresses entrepreneurial prototypes. Furthermore, the 4 S’s (self, situation, support, strategies) provide critical context to the resources and deficits of the experienced transition, as was particularly helpful within the analysis of the final participant story of the subsection, in the case of Sarah, as she was currently contemplating another professional transition back to traditional employment.

Code present. For those who felt their new entrepreneurial role helped them to transition into a new professional identity characterized as having greater “life authenticity” or as allowing
them to see entrepreneurship as a “self-realizing experience,” the transition into entrepreneurship particularly held a valuable meaning allowing them to feel as though they have better identity harmony or alignment. They were able to enact an aspirational identity, or are able to act authentically in line with an existing identity. This subsection explores a few different cases that point to different identity strategies or structures.

The feeling that an identity is authentic plays an important role in behaviors. As mentioned within Nancy’s case, she struggled in with her entrepreneurial introduction and manager roles because she was experiencing an identity conflict with her humble self and her professional identity she formed with her previous employment (e.g., being a good manager). Nancy’s case speaks to how authenticity is an important aspect of fully embracing and enacting an identity.

O’Neil and Ucbasaran (2010) found that prior professional identity misalignments with authenticity can even cause transitions into entrepreneurship. For many of the participants, not being able to embrace their identity within their previous employment context was the direct reason for their departure and why they chose to start their ventures. This was the case with Lily. For others, identity exploration was ignited by the transition into entrepreneurship, as in the case of Michael. This subsection highlights select cases where participants noted an element of recovery in order to embrace identity authenticity or realize a new identity.

**Tim: From an unhappy sheep to a human.** Like many of the other participants, Tim noted having come from a formerly stressful work environment within his interview. Tim had always had entrepreneurial aspirations, but he had spent his earlier career wavering between having traditional employment and consulting contracts. When describing the transition prior to leaving his previous employer, Tim noted that the nature of his work was changing with the
hiring of many new employees across the entire organization. In large part, the stress centered around the drastic organizational changes Tim experienced while working with his previous employer given that he was one of the first employees of the startup organization and, by the time he left, the company employed around 100 people.

I was stressed. I was stressed a lot. I had a lot of work to do, and I wasn't really sure if I'd hired myself out of my position. Someone else came in and did a lot of the stuff that I wanted to do, and I wasn't given a lot of free reign at that company. It was a pretty toxic culture, I feel.

Tim noted that he was feeling more restricted at work and felt the newer managers did not understand his role. Even more disappointing to Tim was that, as stated in the previous quote, the work he wanted to grow into was assigned to a newer hire.

When asked for an analogy for his professional identity transition, Tim spoke about being an “unhappy sheep” while at his previous organization, versus his present state of being a “human.” While he had never felt like a compliant, complacent “sheep” while working with his previous employer, he reported that the organizational constraints and environments were confining him to be one, so he was an “unhappy” sheep because those constraints never suited who he views himself to be:

I guess, before, I've never quite been a sheep. If I have been a sheep, I've been a very unhappy one. But I feel much more like a human now than I did before because I feel like I'm actually doing what we're supposed to do, which is providing for yourself as a person. I figure out my housing, and I figure out my taxes, and I figure out my bank accounts, and I find my own food when I need it. And that's just wildly different from getting a job.
for someone else right out of University, and then getting another job and just feeling like you're sort of going along with the flow.

Even though his business is the right fit for his life and needs at the moment, Tim describes that the exact venture is more of a utility, rather than passion, project. To this end, Tim dreams of being able to pare down his work and the number of hours he is dedicating to his work and to explore other pathways of his creativity in other fields.

I'd prefer to be independent income. And working less and out of the tech industry. I'd prefer to have other people working for me, and less stuff on my own plate, and a lot more freedom for me to pursue my own artistic and adventuring endeavors. So, I don't see myself in the same place in five years. I see myself somewhere else.

In his explanation of how he hopes to see his career shift over the next five years, he indicates that he would like to secure even further freedom from the day-to-day tasks of working. He would prefer to hire employees who will be able to manage the work and daily business operations, in order to be able to have more time to travel and reconnect with his creative side. Nevertheless, the transition into entrepreneurship served as a step in the right direction for Tim, as he felt, overall, that he is able to live more authentically and more in line with himself.

*Maggie: From not going anywhere to having a world of possibilities.* Maggie felt that her life has been transformed within the past year. After thinking she was going to get a promotion to being laid off to starting and ending a position at a bad-fit organization, her life immediately before establishing her business was not where she expected it to be. She was feeling demoralized and reported gaining weight from the stress. She viewed the chance to start her own venture as a way to build forward rather than start over in her career.
Since leaving her previous employer, she feels like she has the ability to be creative in her work. She joined a co-working space. She has been networking to build her potential client base. She is delivering training and meeting interesting people. Maggie also notes that, since the transition, she has learned to be stricter with her time. She now plans her schedule carefully and surrounds herself with inspiring people when she can. She also has been trying to strike a better work-life balance as she can, taking time to spend with her family. Maggie also explained that she is more aware of her energy level and what energizes her and what drains her. Because she drives her business, she has seen her time and energy as being valuable.

I have to spend time with people and spend time with things that feed my soul and not take away stuff from me. I can't be drained.

When thinking back to her sense of professional identity before and after she made her transition into entrepreneurship, Maggie spoke to how she felt within each time period. With her previous identity when working for her former employer, Maggie saw a life and a future that she did not want to be a part of.

You know what, I would say I felt lost, to be honest with you. I felt lost. I felt a little trapped. Although I felt lost and I felt trapped, I felt like it wasn’t going to go anywhere because I looked around and the managers there. I didn’t really care for any of the managers there. So, when you don’t care for the people who are one level above you, it’s hard to aspire to be like them, to be that role.

She knew that she did not want to remain in a work environment where she did not see herself staying in over the long term. She also did not want to be hurt again like she had when working for the employer that she loved. She wanted more freedom and autonomy to be in charge of what her working future looked like.
In contrast, when reflecting on her professional identity now, Maggie had a sense of excitement in her voice.

Now, oh my gosh, the possibilities are just tremendous. It's endless. There are things that come up that I can't even think of, I don't even think about, and someone just mentions it to me, and ‘Yes, I could do this.’ Just being in this space, I don't think certain opportunities would have presented itself [otherwise].

Maggie noted that she enjoyed the adventure she is experiencing as an entrepreneur. She has gotten back into reading, and she felt like she has met some interesting people along the way.

Maggie noted that she loved telling people what she does now, explaining:

So, being in this space [as a new entrepreneur] and telling people what I'm doing, it's like the universe is putting good people in my space, I would say.

**Lily: From a force to be reckoned with to a provider.** Lily used to be able to live her passions and values when working for her previous employer; however, when her organization’s leadership started limiting her resources and colleagues turned unsupportive of the aspects of her work that she connected with the most, it hit Lily hard. She had the choice to adjust her activities to be more in line with the expectations of her organization’s leadership and her colleagues; however, Lily felt her intrapreneurial activities she developed while working there were authentically linked to who she was and what she believed.

Once deciding to leave, Lily knew that recovering would not just entail just starting her venture. When leaving her previous position and closing off that chapter in her life, Lily was grateful to move on, but she was realizing that she needed to heal from all that had unfolding in her leave. She stated: It was like relieving a great burden, but then all of a sudden, being away from the environment, and I realized how heavy that burden had been.” Because of the toxicity
of previous work environment, Lily has needed significant time to adjust and recover since leaving her previous position, even deciding to use a counseling to separate out her former professional environment from her new life. Even three years later at the time of the interview, the memories of the toxic environment she transitioned from are still easily retrieved. Lily expressed that she felt her ability to start new and remove herself from her previous life allowed her to reflect and reinvent herself. She was thankful that so much else was going on in her life at the same time, as it allowed her to start fresh in a new city with new personal and professional contacts. She said: “It was a new, supportive relationship. A new opportunity to reinvent myself. I was doing some reading, listening to people who had done similar things to, sort of, gain strength from it.”

During the interview, Lily noted how she had to navigate her social identity. Despite having worked on a similar venture while serving as a teacher, she expressed that she felt as though she was initially socially perceived as a retired teacher, rather than an entrepreneur.

It's a series of building blocks where you have to make the community aware of you and the work that you do. So, in the first year, that was really rough, because who cares about a retired school teacher in an office in [location] trying to push out [topic/mission]? By the way, what is [topic/mission]?

Lily said that she not only felt she had to sell her new venture, but she also had to simultaneously balance prioritizing her recovery and establishing her social credibility and legitimacy and expertise.

Like most of the other participants, Lily noted that her entrepreneurial path was full of both highlights and challenges since starting her own venture three years before the interview. Overall, when speaking to what she was doing in her entrepreneurial venture, Lily described her
work as making her feel “whole,” reaffirming her metaphor response as being coded with “life authenticity/self-realizing experience.” She also stated that she felt a strong sense of efficacy about what she was doing (her emphasis). However, when asked to provide analogies of how she would describe her professional identities both pre-transition and post-transition, Lily struggled a bit more to figure out exactly how to describe how she perceived herself when queried about her current entrepreneurial role. She said: “I'm more of a ... I'm offering. Like somebody who offers something. Like a giver, or not really a giver. A provider. A potential provider.”

More than what or how, Lily seemed to want to find an opportunity to make a significant impact on the education field, showing signs of holding a missionary social identity orientation, identifiable through her orientation to be part of the change she wants to see in the world (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011).

Like I said, for now, [the venture is] an experiment to see how much change I can affect in local and state and national curriculum. That's a big piece of cake, right? Especially, when you have so many naysayers and continue to work within their own self-imposed constraints. Again, if I can just push out a few more success stories and say, ‘Look, you can do this. You can really do this.’ Maybe then, with the people who I'm working with who are working at state level curriculum, maybe, we can actually make a difference over the next few years, but it's a long shot.

Although she was enacting an authentic professional identity, it became evident that her missionary social identity prompted her to evaluate her success of living the identity through her ability to have the scope of impact she wanted to have in her work. To this end, Lily became open to exploring how her passion and vision for education could have a broader impact, and her
venture continued to serve as a vehicle for the change she wanted to see occurring in the educational structure.

Because of her orientation towards impact, when thinking to the future of her business, Lily was not sure of what the future held or how much longer she would continue on with her venture. During the interview, Lily thought aloud about pathways she had discerned might have the impact that she wanted to have in her field.

Yeah, for me, right now [my venture is] an experiment. I'm going to take it a couple more years and see how it works and see if it sticks. I'd also like to do, you know… Maybe, I should just write a book. Maybe, I should just write a curriculum manual. They're already out there, but I have a specific perspective and set of experiences. Maybe, that will be what it is.

Particularly due to feeling a significant identity conflict within her previous position, Lily was not entertaining a return to back to traditional employment in the public school system due to the rigidity of the environment can be for teachers.

*Michael: From a robot to an artist.* Like Lily, Michael also noted an element of recovery during his transition into entrepreneurship. Since he transitioned full-time transition into entrepreneurship, Michael has been feeling happier and more satisfied in his life. Nevertheless, he admitted that there was a significant adjustment period of recovery from years within a stressful and demanding work environment. During the interview, Michael discussed how his life had evolved since his full-time transition into entrepreneurship eight months prior:

Since then, it was very interesting because I actually had to, we'll say, ‘de-program’ myself from the corporate attitudes that I had had, realizing there was a lot of undue stress with things that didn't exist anymore. [I had to] really re-associate myself with
myself as a person and a professional [and] the things that really drive me, so that's been very positive.

When asked to define the metaphor describing himself professionally before and after the transition, Michael reinforced the need to de-program and re-center on himself on his needs and wants. With his previous employer, he expressed feeling like a “robot,” continuing to describe that time period as “regimented.” The implication of this orientation signals a consistent sentiment of feeling disconnected from himself during that time.

Having lived his entrepreneurial career full time for eight months, Michael described his new professional identity of an artist as “it's just being yourself.” During the interview, he unpacked his strategies for realigning and uncovering his authentic identities to feel more like himself:

I would say one of the biggest things was just thinking a lot about who I am, what a lot of my core values are, what drives my decision-making process, and why I want to do things.

The process of reflection helped him to realize greater identity harmony and rediscover his authentic self. The changes he described in his current state change were noticeable, at least to Michael himself. He spent more fun time with his family and within social settings since going through his “re-programming” period. He stated:

As I've transitioned away from this very regimented daily existence, I've found that I have a little more time to do things that make me happy. I've remembered that I'm a little more artistic than I used to get to be. I've gotten to create corporate logos and things like that. It's something I never would have gotten to do before and do all my own internal branding for my business. I'm a bit looser . . . You know, just loosening up and being a
real individual again. That's definitely had a lot of good impact on my personal life. I know that—I feel like my wife and I get to have a lot more fun nowadays, just because I don't feel so uptight, which has really been great. You know, personally, getting to reconnect with yourself is really satisfying, to remember, "Hey. I like to do that." Maybe, it's not something that I've done in years at my previous job, but it's something that I like to do, and it makes me feel good.

From the discussion, Michael positioned his new entrepreneurial career as being part of a rewarding new lifestyle. Because he had found so much peace in the work already, he mentioned that he wanted to continue as an independent entrepreneur without employees; he wanted to balance the client load with his ability to live a good life. For him, the ability to achieve work-life balance was a welcomed change from his time working as an engineer within larger organizations, and it served an important aspect of what brought him a sense of authenticity and alignment of his identities.

This section showcased how the participants described and made sense of their professional identity transitions. Each interview included significant reflection on their perceptions of their transitions and their experience with professional identity transition. To determine how the participants were perceiving the transition, they were asked about their perceptions of the role change and their feelings about change, including the degree of stress they experienced, as well as their perceptions of the transitions’ sources, timing, durations, and overall impacts. The presented data provides a snapshot of the total collective data, exemplifying the complexity of the participants’ professional identity transitions and how the participants reflected upon their existing, previous, future, and aspirational identities.
**Theme Three: Identity-Related Reflections**

The third theme of identity-related reflections centered on the reflections that participants had related to their professional identities, excluding their perspective of the metaphor question, which asked about their professional identity transitions. In addition to reflecting on their professional identity transition, the participants also reflected on other areas of their professional identities. Their professional identity reflections served as a pathway to how they defined their entrepreneurial experience. The section highlights three subthemes of identity reflection, as it pertains to (a) entrepreneurial prototypes, (b) a prior organizational or industry identity, and (c) a previous freelancing role. The professional identity reflections show how participants managed and reconceptualized multiple identities, as well as navigated and revised an entrepreneurial identity.

**Theme Three, Subtheme One: Entrepreneurial Prototypes**

The first subtheme outlines reflections participants had related to entrepreneurial prototypes, as held personally or by their supports. As introduced within Chapter 2, entrepreneurial prototypes can help individuals make identity comparisons between an actual self and a possible entrepreneurial self, serving as a critical part of the identity construction process (Stets & Burke, 2000). Entrepreneurial prototypes characterize distinguishing values, orientations, and behaviors of entrepreneurs as a group (Hogg & Terry, 2000) to build a starting point of identity reflection and formation that can develop and transform over time with further group exposure (Hogg, et al., 1995). Individuals can access, form, and adjust entrepreneurial prototypes based on a variety of different prior exposures and experiences. To this end, supports can be a significant resource in adjusting an inaccurate or misaligned entrepreneurial prototype into a form that might have better identity harmony for the individual. Because entrepreneurial
prototypes function as a comparative point of reference for determining a perceived alignment (in-group membership) or misalignment (out-group membership) between oneself and the entrepreneurial prototype, within this section, three cases (Michael, Rachel, Vicky) are showcased as examples of how new entrepreneurs make sense of their new professional identities through drawing comparisons between themselves and the working conceptions of entrepreneurs that they hold.

The notion of a “heroic” entrepreneurial identity, as addressed in Chapter 2, often does not align with the lived reality and experiences of many entrepreneurs. The prevailing “heroic” entrepreneurial prototype causes challenges for individuals to feel connected with an entrepreneurial identity (Mallon, 1998) and to adequately explore an entrepreneurial identity, which, in itself, can transform and change over time (Mathias & Williams, 2017). Looking to the value of the 4 S model, strategies may need to be employed to utilize resources of the self, situation, and supports to navigate through a perceived identity conflict or misalignment with an entrepreneurial prototype.

Michael and Rachel both mentioned that they utilized entrepreneurship podcasts and TV shows as resources to make sense of and cope during their own entrepreneurial transitions. While these are not social supports, the podcasts served a function for Michael and Rachel that helped to supplement a social network. After making the transition into entrepreneurship, Michael and Rachel each had a different reaction to their media consumption of entrepreneurship stories and guidance. Michael admitted to not having entrepreneurs within his immediate network of family and friends, so for him, listening to a favorite entrepreneurship podcast helped him reflect on his own identity, orientations, and practices. In contrast, despite loving them before her transition, Rachel noted that she had to stop listening to entrepreneurship podcasts and watching
entrepreneurship-related TV shows because she noticed it would fill her mind with unrealistic images of who entrepreneurs are and everything they need to do in order to be successful.

**Michael: Sorting through entrepreneurial prototypes.** As one of his coping mechanisms, Michael would listen to an entrepreneurship podcast. He developed an orientation that people go through the motions with their work without asking why they do what they do and how they might reflect to do their work better. He explained:

I feel like a lot of people have an attitude of, “I show up to work at the same place every day. I do the things that I'm supposed to do. Then, I go home, and my employer tells me how I should be doing that.’ When you look at, ‘Okay, this is a task I need to do. How do I want to do that? What's the best way for me and take all the boundaries off?’ You realize that you've got a lot of preconceived notions about how that is and how that should be.

Because he lacked supports in his immediate network who were entrepreneurs, Michael noted how a favorite podcast he listened to provided him with good advice on how to re-center and reflect on himself, his values, and his new entrepreneurial work. Michael discussed that process:

I have a podcast I listen to. It's called *Free Agents.* It's a couple of guys that talk to people about going out and working for themselves and being entrepreneurs. One of the things that came up recently for them, which I took to heart, was one of the guys takes a quarterly day off just to reevaluate his business and how he wants to do things and the values that are important to him and the work that he's doing, reflecting that. That's just a difference of why am I doing this every day? It gets you to be “you” doing what you want to do in your workplace.
Michael saw this ability to reflect on the why and how of entrepreneurial work to be invaluable, so he could re-center on the value and reason of why he did this work.

When asked about entrepreneurial social supports in his life, Michael noted that, while his wife has been a strong advocate of his new entrepreneurial path, even encouraging him to leave his previous employment to try the venture full time, he did not have many people who understand what he was doing. He said:

You know, usually when I've told people, either I've told them that I was going to do my own thing or that I am doing my own thing, I just usually get this reaction of, ‘Oh, my gosh. I can't believe that. I can't believe that you could do that. It seems so risky.’ I don't know. I haven't ever felt that it's any more risky than having a job that you could get fired from. And, usually, if you're doing things and being creative, you should be pushing some boundaries. If you're working in a place that seems like they don't encourage that, then whenever you're doing, that it just seems so foreign to them.

When engaging with his existing social supports, they projected an entrepreneurial prototype of entrepreneurship as risk-taking, which aligned with a quality of the notion of the “heroic” entrepreneur. Michael did not seem to vocalize being impacted too much by this, crediting his wife for being such an important part of his support network.

**Rachel: Dismissing the “cool” entrepreneurial prototype.** In contrast, while Rachel enjoyed consuming entrepreneurship-related podcasts and TV shows, she noted having to be more careful with her consumption of entrepreneurship resources in the initial months of her transition. She found that the projection of the “heroic” entrepreneur would cause her to doubt her efforts and progress. Rachel spoke about how listening to entrepreneurship podcasts and TV shows initially created a source of stress for her:
Yeah, you know what's funny about *Shark Tank*? I actually used to love that show, and I still do. But I, literally, didn't even want to watch it for two months because I was like, “Ugh, I can't.” And I even love the podcast *How I Built This*, like absolutely love it, know every episode, but I even stopped listening to that for a month or two because I just wanted the pressures of what everyone else says you should be off of me for a bit. And now, I love it and will listen to it and love all that stuff because I've kind of given a little bit of peace to just do my own thing. Don't feel like you have to follow everyone else's magic formula necessarily.

Despite really liking the podcasts and shows, Rachel needed a break from their content in the earlier stages of developing her venture because she did not want to feel pressured to shape it into something that was not authentic to her, especially as she was attempting to find her own voice and confidence in her new work and progress. The act of not engaging with stories of more advanced entrepreneurs was an effective strategy for Rachel to manage her stress and the intimidation that she felt when listening and watching this type of content.

Rachel did make one clarification about what types of podcasts she gravitated towards, mentioning that she particularly enjoyed the stories of when the entrepreneurs were not well resourced to start and those who admitted that they still struggled because she wanted to hear something that resonated more closely to her lived experience as a new entrepreneur. Rachel stated:

If you listen to *How I Built This*, my favorite part of it is, “We started off with nothing.” You know? Or the people who are super genuine and honest and will be like, “Yeah, it's still tough.” Or whatever. Or the ones afterwards, where it, you know it's like a new launch entrepreneur, where they kind of talk about their really scrappy story, and how
they're still figuring it out. Like those make me feel good. I think just for a while I was just like, ‘I can't stop.’ I do want to look up to someone as an entrepreneur, but I can't limit myself to just the people I see that are way up there already. And I think that's why I was looking for a women's group or something. I really wanted something that was closer and more relatable to me at that time. And I couldn't find it really.

Rachel’s disappointment with the variety of publicly expressed experiences with entrepreneurship had her seek out relationships and a community to help her validate her own experiences, give her comfort in her own process, and provide hope for the future prospects for her own entrepreneurial career. The notion that she was seeking and unable to locate many stories of more realistic, smaller-scale entrepreneurship in podcast and television media presented an interesting perspective, which is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Despite her ability to stop consuming entrepreneurship media for a period of time, as was also reinforced in Michael’s case, Rachel also felt the “heroic” entrepreneur notion would come up in her social interactions with her friends and family, including a few who were in entrepreneurial roles themselves. She was notably feeling pressure from her entrepreneurship supports to go beyond the pace she was ready for at the time. She noted an interaction with one of her entrepreneurial supports who was providing her with overwhelming guidance on what she should be doing. She explained the conversation, stating:

[The peer said,] “You need to be blogging every day, and you should be doing this, and this and this and that.” And who knows, maybe I will have to be a great public speaker and be in all these places, but it was so much pressure. Like, “You need a great social media presence, blog more, get a professional cartoon of yourself.”’
Specifically, Rachel also noted that part of the entrepreneurial prototype that she has been fighting was the idea of the “cool entrepreneur.”

There are all these pressures to be the ideal “cool entrepreneur,” to be like this person you have to go to all these parties, you have to blog in this way, you have to be on Instagram, you have to have all these followers, all these things . . . But it hit me, and I was like, “Wait, let me just focus on having a great business before I try to make myself this person.” It's really not about me; it's about having a great product. That's what I really want. So, it may not be the right way, or maybe other people found success in that way, but I think I'm just trying to learn as much as I can from other people. But not necessarily follow this exact path of, “Do all these things and be an entrepreneur superstar.” I don't know if I need to do it that way.

Rachel employed a strategy to help diffuse the power of the “heroic” entrepreneurial prototype: joining a co-working space and a mentorship program. The strategy helped her to feel more settled in her new professional identity which related to her ability to present a more public declaration of her entrepreneurial role to new audiences. Rachel spoke enthusiastically about the opportunity to introduce herself in her new role; it helped to validate her new role and make her work towards starting her own venture real and valid. She explained:

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

Vicky: **Adopting the “bootstrapping” entrepreneurial prototype.** In contrast, Vicky’s transition was not planned with as much notice. In fact, she left her former position without anything else lined up, but was approached by a friend to start their own company. Because Vicky had left a toxic work environment, she was thankful to have the opportunity to keep working in an area of interest to her and to be working with a good partner. Nevertheless, despite her long hours in the first months prior to launching her business, Vicky felt the transition was almost too easy in certain respects. She felt as though transitions into entrepreneurship should be riskier and more “high stakes” than what she encountered being married to someone who could keep their family financially afloat as she explored entrepreneurship:

I do think that part of this is I am privileged that I have a husband who can help . . . Some of the advantages that we have by, “Hey, I can start a new company because my husband can pay the bills, and we have health insurance?”

Vicky’s business partner is also a married mom with a husband who can help provide her with health insurance and steady income to pay the monthly expenses. Because of this, Vicky said she felt she was having an entrepreneurial experience through the long-hours and having a business partner, but she, personally, was challenged to refer to her activities as “entrepreneurship” because of how comfortable her life was otherwise. She said:

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

Vicky used the word “fraud” when she thought about herself as an entrepreneur. She was more comfortable embracing the identity of being a (female) business owner, explaining:

We are female business owners. I mean, we own the business. We're partners. We've had a 70/30 split. That does feel good, to say, “Okay, I'm a woman, and I own a business.”

So, that part feels good, but yeah, I definitely feel like if we . . . a true entrepreneur should be risking probably more than we are.

Vicky mentioned her role as a woman on several occasions both to show her perceived privileges and her challenges. Vicky perceived that she was fortunate as a married woman with a husband who could financially support the family. She also felt that same dynamic of being a married woman conflicted with being able to prioritize her initial career goals. She also felt that being a woman in her field was too easy. Overall, Vicky’s framing of her privilege reinforced an orientation that entrepreneurs should be risk-takers in some sort of fashion.

When asked to expand upon her working conception of entrepreneurship as risk-taking further, Vicky mentioned that she did not feel her professional identity aligned with the risk-oriented entrepreneurial prototype that she imagined when thinking of well-known stories of entrepreneurship:
It's like the Bill Gates story. He was a kid in his parents' garage. He wasn't doing a lot of risk, so he got to be creative and he got to take a bunch of the risks without really risking too, too much. And he did very, very, very well. But he's not like TOMS Shoes, where he's selling stuff and taking out loans on his credit cards and selling his shoes himself and hawking them because he has this vision of what he wants to do.

She then connected the entrepreneurial prototype with one of her prior experiences working for a company 18 years ago. She explained:

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

At the time of the interview, Vicky was investing thousands of dollars of her own funds, but she stated that because her family had her husband’s salary coming in, it did not feel risky enough.

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

For Vicky, the prototype of a “bootstrapping,” risk-taking entrepreneur was what defined entrepreneurship, making her feel more comfortable describing her new professional identity as being a business owner, rather than an entrepreneur.

Summary. Within this subsection, three participants described how they interfaced with entrepreneurial prototypes. Michael listened to an entrepreneurial podcast (strategy) to hear guidance from entrepreneurs and reflect on his own practice (self). While the podcast seemed helpful for his own reflection and development of perspective and practice, he did not indicate if
this podcast influenced his perspective of entrepreneurs. Michael did note that some of his contacts (supports) were concerned about his new career (situation), framing it as “risky.” On the other hand, Rachel did note an active need to disconnect from entrepreneurship podcasts and TV shows for several months (strategy) to be influenced from a more “heroic” entrepreneurial prototype (self). Around her personal network (supports), she was often exposed to a “cool” entrepreneurial prototype, which she said she found overwhelming and superficial. In contrast, Vicky highly regarded a strong risk-taker, “bootstrapping” entrepreneurial prototype (self), so she associated herself as more of a business owner than an entrepreneur. She contrasted well-known entrepreneurs and their stories to illustrate how one was more of an entrepreneur because of his clear passion and bootstrapping approach. These examples reveal how new entrepreneurs hold—and engage with—entrepreneurial prototypes. Michael and Rachel employed strategies to manage the impact of an entrepreneurial prototype, whereas Vicky chose to maintain a professional identity as a business owner instead.

**Theme Three, Subtheme Two: Organizational Identity Loss**

The second subtheme relates to incidences when participants discussed a previous organizational or industry identity. Individuals can have strong organizational ties, which can result in a professional identity that is closely linked to their organizational affiliation (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Holding too strong of a professional identity tied to an organization can result in a loss of a sense of individual self (Elsbach, 1999; Michel & Jehn, 2003). The perceptions of a previous professional identity linked to a former organizational or industry affiliation was evident within four of the participants’ stories (Faye, Sarah, Cammie, Sarah). Faye and Cammie spoke about how their work as entrepreneurs led them to notice a distinct difference in how they were regarded by their social networks. Vicky spoke to the meaningful connection she still held
for another industry and the high-profile organizations that she used to be a part of. Sarah spoke about her prior organizational affiliation as a gateway for high-profile and meaningful work. For many, it is not just the brand recognition of a prestigious organizational affiliation, but the kind of work prestigious organizations bring in, the scope and impact of that work, and how individuals feel because they are associated with organizations of that caliber.

**Faye.** Faye’s story presented several interesting aspects that related to her perceptions of the transition. Faye had experienced a more stressful work environment than she had immediately prior to making the decision to start her own marketing firm. Her employer was not letting her fill key vacancies in her department, and the work performed by those staff members started falling on her. While she was getting backlogged in additional work, calls, and emails, her operating budgets also were greatly reduced. The final piece was a new boss who she felt did not know marketing well, which made her work challenging; there seemed to be no indication that she would ever be able to get the staff and resources she needed to be productive. She described:

> I felt I was on the edge of deteriorating. I felt, because of what the corporate situation had dealt me, that I was going to be impacted negatively. I was going to spiral down in my career because of the current situation, and I did not want to do that because I had worked so hard for so many years to be on top of everything. I felt that the situation that was presented to me, [and] that it was going to take me down a notch. I chose, at that time, I was like, “Well, I want to go out when I'm feeling good about myself. I'm not going to go out beaten up and feeling like I wasn't successful.” I wanted to go out when I was feeling really good. I made the decision then because I felt like the current situation . . . it was not going to be to my benefit.
Faye had carefully planned her transition out of her corporate position. Nevertheless, despite her careful planning towards her transition, Faye initially had trepidations about leaving the stability of a corporate position. She said:

You're like, “Oh, crap.” You're like, “Am I cut out for this? Can I do this? Is it too late?” I even panicked, and I interviewed for other jobs. I was like, “Oh, my God. I just screwed up. Maybe, I should go back.”

Faye also struggled with her role change. Because Faye had been used to working with large, recognizable corporations, she was used to feeling pride in her organizational affiliation. When she left her corporate role to start her own venture, she said she knew she might have to shift her professional identity, but the transition was much more significant than expected:

I think the identity thing, too, is a big issue. When I would tell people [that] I worked for [company] or I worked for [company] or I worked for whatever, that gave me a certain clout. People were like, “Oh. Wow. Really?” Everybody still, to this day, will say, “Oh, are you still at [company]?” That's what they tag me with because, to them, that's prestigious. I kind of struggled with it a little bit. And I kind of expected it, but not to the extent. Now, I'm nobody. I'm a business owner of a small marketing firm, and I'm not associated with a major brand, if you will. It's a big shift in your psyche, in your identity. You're going from these big corporations and holding these top-level jobs. I was being interviewed by the media left and right. Until you leave that and you become an owner of a marketing firm, which maybe has a couple clients and hardly any budget, it's a big shift. It's a big shift.

Faye explained that the social perception of the role change from her network was particularly surprising:
I wasn't *expecting* that. I was really *shocked*. At first, people are always looking at your LinkedIn. They're not going to reach out. People are not natural networkers, I don't believe. It was kind of hurtful a little bit. They were always willing to reach out to you when they knew you were in a position of power in a major organization, but when you go off into your own business, all of a sudden you have probably not a lot to offer them, they abandon you.

Despite the challenging and surprising reactions from her network, Faye was working through the struggle to be acknowledged for her work and talent, rather than her affiliations and connections. She attributed her success in working through this aspect of the transition to having a portfolio. She had been building a portfolio of her proudest work throughout the years, and she noted that it came in handy for many reasons. It helped her bridge her previous identity with her new one through being able to remind herself of her past talent and accomplishments. Moreover, she was also able to reveal the work she had done within the prestigious organizations over the years to her prospective clients, which was allowing her to use the organizational clout as individual professional capital.

Since becoming an entrepreneur nearly three years before the interview for this study, Faye said she consistently felt she had been on a professional identity journey. From working at several prestigious corporations, she did not realize how much of her professional identity, including how she was perceived by her social networks, was wrapped up in her company affiliations. As an entrepreneur, she had to center herself on the value of the work she produced rather than on where she was working. She explained:

Just because I'm an owner in a marketing firm on my own today, doesn't mean that I'm going to produce anything less. I think that that's one way to help you transition and carry
forward being associated with some major brands is that, just because you're no longer with them, you're still you and you still produce that amount of work.

To remind herself of who and what she could do, Faye, looked to her portfolio. Having that portfolio that she had kept over the years helped her remind herself of her abilities and strengths, and it showed her clients the quality of her work productions. Faye related:

It definitely helps. I often go back through and have to remind myself, “Oh, I did do that! Whoa, I did that.” You know? It kind of helps you remember your confidence level and that you were able to produce this level of work, as you move into your own business because you question yourself a lot as you move out of Corporate America. Instead of everybody else questioning you when you're in Corporate America, you end up questioning yourself a lot when you leave it.

She noted that self-doubt is something entrepreneurs likely face with frequency when leaving a large, structured corporate environment. Faye noted the importance of having a way to stay on track and be reminded of where you have come from and what you can do. She explained:

I think that's important because it's important for the psyche of yourself. When you want to go off on your own, you want to feel like you were really successful. You want people that are in the industry, in your network, to know that it wasn't a forced decision. This was something that you chose to do. I just think that that's important from a psychological perspective.

Furthermore, Faye said it was important to be ahead of the messaging of her new business which proved best for both her psyche and reputation.

Cammie. Similar to Faye’s experience with working for a well-known corporation within a prestigious role, Cammie also experienced a drastic shift when starting her entrepreneurial
career. Having worked within a stressful and demanding role previously, Cammie was relieved to start working on her passion: her new venture. Cammie unexpectedly started this venture as a side hobby for her own use and some product to spare for friends and family; she was still looking for work while initiating the venture and moving into entrepreneurship.

Despite feeling that her transition was very positive and full of opportunities to learn and grown both personally and professionally, Cammie definitely noticed a difference in how much time people seemed to give her when she discussed her work. After working for a well-known, well-regarded organization, she noticed that many people no longer seemed to want to hear her out. She stated:

It was really hard because, at least in the States, a lot of the times, our identity is defined by our careers. To go from such a prominent position and such a well-regarded company to starting something from scratch… Sometimes, I would tell people about it, and they wouldn't give me the time of day. It's really hard. I think it's also a ‘blessing in disguise’ in a sense that it was really hard to give up that pride of what I did.

Cammie explained how, in her role change, she went from having pride in what she did at her previous employment to having pride in why she did what she was doing in her entrepreneurial venture. Nevertheless, she noted that it can be demoralizing at time to have so much passion for your work but to have no one seem to care. Staying focused and talking with other entrepreneurs who had experienced similar reactions helped Cammie to remain positive.

**Vicky.** Vicky had experienced switching industries before moving into her venture given that she was previously working within a field that was geographically limiting. Her last organization was within her second industry, with more job possibilities across the country. Despite the transition, Vicky said she still holds a strong affinity for her original industry and
several of the prominent organizations within that field. The valued professional identity, she explained, was something she frequently would think about when reflecting on her career:

I still feel a bit of a twinge that I'm not in that world anymore because I did identify so strongly with [industry]. It was important to me. I worked for very large international companies and that was important to me too, and I don't know if I've imposed this on myself or I've forced a change inside of myself. I've always been pretty confident and I've always had a pretty decent self-esteem when it came to work and learning, and the shift over the last seven years of my life has been more I've had to reinvent myself a little bit because of my location

The implications of leaving an industry she loved and organizations she was proud to work for still weighed on her when the interview was conducted. She described: “I've had to rethink my career completely, and because of that, I just had to start thinking about myself differently. Otherwise, I would be extremely depressed.”

As someone who stated that she valued her professional identity and that she still felt closely linked to her original industry, Vicky needed to reconceptualize herself to avoid negative consequences—for example, identity misalignment or identity conflicts. It was not clear during the interview whether or not Vicky’s preferred professional identity affiliated with another industry was holding her back professionally; however, it was evident that she had deeply reflected on her new identity and her new role, including thinking about whether or not it should be considered entrepreneurship as highlighted within the Entrepreneurial Prototypes section within this chapter.

Sarah. In contrast, Sarah noted that she had mixed feelings regarding her transition, even early on in the progress. In part, Sarah noted that giving up the affiliation with her previous
employer meant her losing the impact she felt she was able to have by doing work within a high-profile, prestigious organization. Sarah also knew her transition away from her previous employer and colleagues would be a challenge. She enjoyed a strong affinity to the organization, particularly its culture, prestige, and visibility. She also noted that her previous organization was doing projects of consequence which she said she was missing considerably within her current role as an entrepreneur:

One thing that's kind of nagged at me all along this path so far, is in my last job I felt like I was part of a team at an institution that was answering important questions and tackling important challenges that had impact on the world. There were questions and challenges of significance. Now, I'm really just completing projects, and a lot of the conversations I have are about font color. It's a lot more task-based than idea-based, if that makes sense, and that's . . . I can make a paycheck this way, but I don't feel like I'm making an impact on anything important at the end of the day . . . I want to be tackling important challenges again, and I want to be working through important questions with people again. That's really the thing I miss the most.

Having identified her loss of immersing herself in personally and professionally meaningful work prior, Sarah also noted that the scope of her work as an entrepreneur was indeed broader than her specialized role at a large organization. She explained how her role change into entrepreneurship also brought a change in the nature of her professional relationships and in the perceived “level” of the work she did:

The nature of the work has been different than I anticipated in the sense that the work itself is lower level than what I had been doing. I was at a higher level. I was able to be a part of important conversations, asking big questions and tackling big challenges,
because I had climbed the ladder to be at that point in the full-time workplace. On my own, the point at which I'm brought in to do projects for my clients is a much lower level than that. Those conversations have already happened, those decisions have already been made, and now they just need someone to get the work done and they hire me to do it.

Furthermore, Sarah expressed that she felt especially connected to the previous employer because she had also experienced so many professional “ups and downs” in her career prior to that last position:

After very rollercoaster-y ‘ups-and-downs’ in my career, I had finally established myself in a position that I loved, at an institution that I loved, [with] people under me, next to me and above me that I loved working with and working for. I had so many jobs [that I would have] happily [left] to go do something like this. It kind of *killed me* that the one I was willingly leaving—*voluntarily leaving*—was my favorite one of all. I really had no reason, other than the commute. I had no reason to leave that job. I loved it.

According to Sarah, having such a wonderful position, organization, and social context immediately prior to starting her own venture made her the transition more challenging than if she had attempted to build her venture after one of her other less-rewarding roles. She noted that her reflections on and interpretations of her recent professional experience as an entrepreneur seemed to depend on the day she was asked:

It really varies day to day. I think there have been a few moments of meltdown where I thought, “Gosh, I really made a horrible mistake,” and “if I ever go back into the full-time workplace, I have shot myself in the foot in terms of growth paths that I was on.” I left a great position at really the greatest [organization] ever, and I won't ever find anything like that, and where do I go from here? I've had a lot of moments of buyer's
remorse and regret, and like I described, a lot of anxiety. But then there's also those moments of, these confidence-boosting moments where you realize, I left the full-time workforce, and yet have not really missed a month of paying my bills. I've pulled it off for two years, and I didn't ever think I could do that. It's really a mixed bag.

Sarah’s positive experience with her previous employer and disappointment with some aspects of her current work shape how she perceived transition.

Theme Three, Subtheme Three: Contrasting an Entrepreneurial Identity with Previous Freelancing Experience

The third subtheme that arose was participant reflections on defining themselves as entrepreneurs relative to other flexible employment pathways, such as freelancing or consulting work. Before making the transition into full-time entrepreneurship, Tim had self-identified as having engaged as a full-time freelancer in the past. During the interview, Tim self-initiated reflections on his previous work as a freelancer to define the evolution of his entrepreneurial prototype as distinct from the work of freelancers and consultants. As a former freelance consultant, Tim discussed how he makes sense of the distinction of his time as freelancer earlier in his career with his current work now in building his venture. Tim started off this reflection by noting the growth of the company in getting clients and hiring contractors and an assistant, stating: “I started getting clients. And I've hired some contractors, and now, I have a part-time assistant. It's a bit more than just a freelancer [position] right now.”

Tim noted that it was not just having clients and employees that had him feeling like he was building a business, it was also the company’s vision to provide a particular and unique service and his ability as the entrepreneurial founder and leader to make decisions on contracts and hiring.
It's like a service I provide through my company that makes me feel a bit more like an entrepreneur because I can fire my clients and the like, and it's not quite freelancing because I'm not really selling. I have individual contracts with all of my clients.

As he was distinguishing his current role and comparing it to his previous role as a freelancer, Tim noted that, while some of the description he was providing seemed similar, starting a business felt distinctly different, in part because it was more about a central vision of the business, rather just about his skills as a “tech person.”

I guess it'd be hard for us to define whether it isn't freelancing. It just doesn't feel like it. I feel like I have a business. I run my business, and I do what's best for it. I go to conferences for it and the like. So, it's more about the business than about me just being a tech person. It's about, “This is what we offer.”” And I really like that feeling. And it's been great.

This active reflection process appears to have helped Tim outline what makes him an entrepreneur and what defines his entrepreneurial prototype, based on his experiences and exposures. He explained how he discerned that is distinctly different from his previous roles and how it might be similar, and how he connects with that role and title, stating:

But as freelancing stuff goes, freelancing was a pretty good stop-gap measure, you know, to gain skills. And I still do some freelance contracts, kind of, but right now, the majority of my money comes through my business. Which, I have a lawyer, and I have contracts. We have clients who pay on retainer basis, and I'm interested in staying relevant in the ecosystem. And it's much more business than freelancing, and it works well.

In this segment, Tim outlined more facets of his current work that help to distinguish his role now as an entrepreneur compared to his previous occasions working as a freelancer—for
example, having a lawyer. It became evident in the interview that Tim viewed his work freelancing as good preparation (a resource) for building skills for his own professional development.

Tim’s overall self-reflection on this topic reveals his active sensemaking of what he considered formed his activities and engagements that of an entrepreneur and, in turn, how he came to define entrepreneurship and himself as an entrepreneur. It is worth noting that while Tim referred to his work as being entrepreneurship, Tim did mention that he does not like the label of entrepreneurship per se. He said the label failed to provide any distinguishing aid for his identity reflections; indeed, he described how it has the potential to erase the unique distinctions of the individual and their orientations:

I'm not a big fan of late-stage capitalism and the way that we're put into boxes in general. So, I like being able to say I'm my own person, I make my own money, and I do it through my own business. And no one else can tell me any different, and that's just how it is. I like that a lot . . . I mean, entrepreneur is kind of a really stupid term, I think. Because it sort of covers everything. It’s kind of like saying that someone who works is a worker. Someone who starts is a starter. I like the fact that I don't have to fit into a really clear box where I do “x” . . . So, it's fun to have a different perspective on things where my work doesn't define my identity; I define my identity.

Tim said he preferred to define the label, rather than to let it define him. He explained that he tended to view work as a vehicle for living, and, in some instances, as an outlet for creativity. He expressed strong preferences for his work environment and conditions, and he said he sought to have work conditions align with his values and preferences. Entrepreneurship, he said, fit more
adequately with those wants; therefore, he said he felt he was shaping the definition more than it defining him.

Tim had embraced entrepreneurship for a year and a half at the time of the interview, and he noted that he found himself being happier and feeling freer. He described the experience transitioning into entrepreneurship as “orienting” as opposed to disorienting. In the passage below, Tim describes how the entrepreneurial path has felt for him overall:

So, risk-prone. It was tumultuous. It was a lot of uncertainty but also better dividends. So, it was happier, less stressful, more time for me, more time in the day. More opportunity to grow, very freeing . . . I didn't mind the uncertainty. I didn't mind the tumultuousness.

It was just a very freeing experience. It was like unburdening yourself. It was embarking.

It is important to emphasize Tim’s description of being unburdened and moving into embarking; it belies the noted professional identity transition Tim made connected with control/autonomy, life authenticity/self-realizing experience, and being the main provider for himself. While Tim described entrepreneurship as being risk-prone and full of uncertainty, these were likely areas developed within a pre-existing entrepreneurial identity. Tim was someone who identified as having a strong entrepreneurial orientation from a young age. His professional transition into full-time entrepreneurship allowed him to experience and fill in areas that he was not able to have in his previous employment, such as control and/or autonomy, and to feel like he was able to enact and supplement the gaps of the entrepreneurial identity held from the freelance positions, including feeling self-realized, for example.

One of the strategies Tim used to feel more control in his life as an entrepreneur is framed within his use of the word, “human,” which he used at several points in the discussion. Just as he had done in describing his post-transition identity, Tim would frequently situate being human or
movements towards becoming human as being more peaceful and aligned with his ideal state of being. It served as a simple technique to distance himself from the stress he experiences.

I use that term[human] to try to put some distance between me and pressures—pressures coming from myself, pressures coming from society, pressures coming from work—because it helps me remind myself that there's always an escape somewhere else. There's always another career I could do. And odds are, I'm not going die tomorrow. So, relax a little bit, and enjoy life.

The goal of being “human” helps him stay centered on his values and priorities and what he finds to be a purposeful life. The use of “human” was similar to a linguistic mindfulness exercise, which will be picked up further in Chapter 5.

**Theme Four: Supports and Strategies**

The fourth theme connects to the reflections the participants had that connected with their social supports and the strategies used, which connect to two of Schlossberg’s (1981) 4 S’s. The participant entrepreneurs noted many coping strategies to resolve some of the challenges experienced during their transitions into entrepreneurs. Because acceptance within an entrepreneurial community is a key indicator of effective socialization (Starr & Fondas, 1992), many of the participants spoke to how they built their support networks within their new profession. Within the overarching theme of coping strategies, three subthemes correspond to Evans et al. (2010) strategies within this category, which include strategies that (a) modify the situation, (b) control the meaning of the problem, or (c) aid in managing the stress in the aftermath. Regarding the first coping strategy, strategies that modify the situation, participants employed a variety of options that enabled them to drive forward with the change they wanted to see in their lives and careers. The second coping strategy of controlling the meaning of the
problem looks at participant approaches to help shape the meaning of their work; while similar to the last subsection, these represent attempts by the individuals to shape how they viewed their transitions, which in this instance, would be their new work as an entrepreneur. The final category of strategies that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath help to mitigate stress during the transition period.

**Theme Four, Subtheme One: Joining Co-working Spaces and Programs**

The first subtheme within supports and strategies related to participants’ decisions to join a co-working, accelerator, or incubator space. While the location of the entrepreneurs’ offices was not an explicit question asked during the interviews, many of the entrepreneurs noted the influence of their physical environments as having an influence on their perceptions of their social resources as new entrepreneurs. When discussing their transition stories, the participants noted a few different locations and their relevance within their transition stories. Of the 14 participants, six of them noted either using a co-working space currently or at one point during their entrepreneurial journey (Kevin, Maggie, Jason, Faye, Rachel, Nancy). This subsection provides data from four of those participants (Rachel, Jason, Faye, Kevin) noting their interpretations of their social supports that came along with working from within a co-working environment.

**Rachel.** Rachel perceived a need for additional social supports, and in order to resolve this deficit, she joined a co-working space and mentorship program, in order to broaden her network of entrepreneurs and potential mentors. She was seeking someone social supports to help her feel more comfortable with her decisions with and to have someone to look up to:

Then, it got to the point, too, where I was making big decisions, and I was like, “I really wish I had a bigger entrepreneur network to help me.” And then, I remembered this [co-
working program], so I looked into it and did it. It sounded really good. They talked about having mentors. I really wish I had more, just like someone who's doing exactly what I'm doing that I could look up to more.

Rachel wanted to find a mentor circle that focused on helping women, as she felt as though other women might understand some of her orientations and would help her feel heard and supported:

I love working with men and women and talking with different people, but I felt like, as an entrepreneur, there was something with just kind of confidence that I felt like I would get more working with other women because I felt like all the men I was working with, or a lot of the men, just have a different confidence about them. And I just wanted to be around women that would, I think, maybe be easier to talk to about some things. I just was drawn to do a women's entrepreneurship program. I just felt like, maybe, I wouldn't fall to the bottom.

Rachel expressed that she wanted to feel inspired and welcomed within a community of entrepreneurs in order to have more people in her life who understand some of the benefits and challenges she faced on a daily basis.

**Jason.** Jason also intentionally sought out to build more entrepreneurial networks as he was making his own transition. He felt informing himself on the entrepreneurial mindset and learning from their stories would help him in his own journey.

And now, since I've started this though, I'm around many more entrepreneurs. And I understand, because I talk to them, I read about it, the entrepreneurial mindset.

Jason initially found the co-working environment through helping a start-up company he came across while taking an entrepreneurship class. He recalled this class and how he became familiar with the co-working space environments:
And while I was there, I was asked to help a startup from a financial perspective because I have a finance background. So, I did that, and I found they were located in [co-working space] . . . I was in one [co-working space], then I got into another. [Then,] there was another opportunity I had [at a third co-working space]. And I just said, you know, I want to do this, and I started to get serious around building strategy around what the firm should be. What's it going to look like, first plan, business plan, [and] so on and so forth.

While he was helping other start-ups, Jason decided to set up his own business in a co-working space because he found that being surrounded by other entrepreneurs helped him get into the mindset of his new professional identity. He related: “I set up my office at [the co-working space] because I wanted to throw myself into this space. It changed my mentality.” Because of the uniqueness of the role, responsibilities, and mindset, he expressed feels surrounding yourself around other entrepreneurs helps to learn the new mindset and adapt to a new way of thing and being. He said: It's like you have to re-program yourself to be an entrepreneur. And that doesn't happen overnight. You've got to be around it, so you can feel it. And it becomes a part of you.” Jason had been “re-programming” himself by shaping his mindset through reading about, interacting with, and surrounding himself with entrepreneurs.

Faye. Similarly, Faye also wanted to join a co-working space, at least for her first year. She acknowledged that she was leaving two decades of working for, mostly, corporate employers, so she was anticipating that she would need a social context in order to go forward with her plans to start her own venture:

That was the environment I was moving from into nothing. I knew it was going to be important for me to have somewhere to go, somewhere to socialize with other
professionals, because I had been doing it for 20 something years. I just didn't want to sit at home initially, and try to make something work.

Faye knew having social connections and a physical space to go into to socialize was a critical part of feeling at ease with the transition between working for an employer and being her own boss. Upon careful reflection, Faye knew transitioning from a busy, social office into a home office would be a hard transition, so she joined a co-working space for her first year, so she could be around others who were in a similar situation and have a social environment for her work:

She viewed the physical environment of her initial stage of her transition as being a critical piece to her personal and professional needs:

Another key thing that I did was, because I was so used to a routine, going into the office. I had people around me. I ended up negotiating a barter agreement with a business connection, where I could have an office space and a shared work environment to help me through the transition.

She continued speaking to how valuable she saw that decision in her earliest months of being an entrepreneur. She knew how important routine and physical space were to her former professional self. Those elements were strong aspects of her former routine, and she knew she would need some time to break those patterns:

[Joining the co-working space] was the best thing I could've ever done because I didn't want to sit at home. I had taken some time off to visit people and my family and so forth [after leaving my job], but I needed to still get up in the morning, get dressed, go somewhere to do work. That transition and that physical and that mind-set, you have to transition out of it.
After that first year, Faye felt like she was in a better spot socially and emotionally to start working from home. She had structured her venture and its connections during her time in the co-working space, but once her bartered contract was up, she felt she was in a much better place to be less dependent on a physical context.

The first year, I didn't have a business partner. We didn't have staff. I was just starting to—
I had one client. Now, we have multiple ones. Now, I do work from home, but I still have the socialization. I have enough people in the business where I'm socially connected. I'm visiting my clients, or I'm business developing, or I have meetings, scheduled meetings all week long now and status meetings and client meetings and measure meetings. That first year, you're building all of that. You don't have it. For me, that first year of actually going to a co-work space, it keeps you, kind of, in the mix it keeps you going until you get enough structure in your business, where you don't feel like you're isolated.

From the conversation, it seemed that she did not seem to miss the social environment of the co-working space at this stage in her business; she was able to meet up with her team and clients both electronically and in person as needed.

**Kevin.** Kevin also joined a co-working space. He noted that he felt the transition away from a physical work space after leaving his previous position:

I miss the social . . . coming to the office and somebody brought donuts, and, hey, here's some new coffee from Starbucks or something like that. I miss that kind of thing, or I found this great place for dinner, or this movie was great, or whatever. That part is a little bit harder to reproduce outside of a corporate structure or business environment.

Once he completed his move, he also prioritized joined a co-working environment because he wanted the opportunity to build his local network and to learn from other entrepreneurs:
When I moved to [new city], I didn't know anyone, and [joining a co-working space] seemed to be the fastest way to connect to people who had similar [experiences within] completely different sectors.

Kevin set up a home office as well, but he expressed that he felt as though there was an advantage to having a distantly different physical environment for working on his new venture:

Then, the other part of it is just being able to set aside office time from home time. I spent quite a bit of time earlier in our conversation discussing the beauty of being able to set my own schedule and establish the hours that I want to work. I still believe that, and I still do that. The thing where [a co-working space] can help is, in the case of this one, they're open 24/7, and I have a badge that allows me access to an office space when I need to work and to kind of pull away from ... I mean, I have a home office. I like having a home office. But if I really have to concentrate on something and I don't need to hear the doorbell or phone ring or any kind of thing like that, then pulling away to [a co-working space] is really a great thing.

**Summary.** This subsection details the strategies and rationale employed by four of the six participants (Rachel, Jason, Faye, Kevin) who joined a co-working space. Rachel decided to join a women’s mentorship program at a co-working space (strategy), in order to build her entrepreneur network (support) and establish a more realistic entrepreneurial prototype of entrepreneurship through further exposure to local women entrepreneurs, as having a more heroic entrepreneurial prototype made her feel intimidated and caused her to doubt and question her approach too much (self). Jason joined a co-working space to do his daily work (strategy), in order to be surrounded by fellow entrepreneurs (supports) and to readjust his skills and mindset for his new entrepreneurial career (self). Faye decided to join a co-working space
through bartering her skills (strategy) to help her build her network (supports) and use the setting to separate her work and home lives (supports). Kevin decided to join a co-working space (strategy) because he was new in town (situation) and wanted to build his skills (self) and networks (supports).

**Theme Four, Subtheme Two: Building “Grassroots” Local Support Networks**

The second subtheme contrasts the first subtheme of the supports and strategies theme in that these individuals approached their supports and strategies in a more organic way, outside a designated space for entrepreneurs. Like several other participants Kevin, Sarah, Dana and Lily also moved to new towns or cities concurrent to their transition into entrepreneurship. Moving can be a stressful situation, especially if moving to an area without social supports, which was the case for Dana and Lily. However, Dana and Lily both had supportive spouses. Dana and her spouse moved together to start their new venture together. Lily moved cities to accompany her new husband who had a local social and professional network in her new city. The two cases contrast the previous section of those who joined co-working spaces in that Dana and Lily used more grassroots approaches to building their social support networks.

**Dana.** In moving to a new town and taking over an established school, Dana knew it would be important to build her professional supports fast in order to reaffirm the partnerships that had been long-standing in community through the former owner. Furthermore, Dana knew having personal supports would be important for her family to feel integrated well into the community. She made it a priority to make those connections early, and she used a more grassroots approach to building her network of fellow business owners and community members.

Despite not having the ability to express her professional voice and networking skills within her last position, Dana had the ability to use them as a resource after transitioning into
entrepreneurship. With her move and transition into entrepreneurship, her network of personal and professional contacts has grown through her ability to develop a strategy and mobilize a personal resource (self). Having moved into a well-connected, family-oriented town, she and her husband were able to benefit from an active community and joined professional associations and local clubs and groups and attended local community meetings. They both also made direct efforts to connect with other local business owners and to have a visible presence in the community at local events.

Since transitioning into entrepreneurship, the resource of being a good relationship builder and networker have served Dana, her family, and her business well. As a result of their strategic efforts to build their local social supports, Dana expressed that she felt as though she, her family, and her business were well integrated and well regarded in her community. Their efforts have helped them feel supported not only by their immediate family members and close friends, but by the whole town. She said she valued her new community relationships for many reasons, including their impact on the current and future sustainability of their school and helping her and her family feel welcomed and supported within the community.

Furthermore, her relationship building and experience helped her connect and retain her employees. Dana felt her time as an employee made her better understand how to manage her own staff and work with teachers. When discussing her current role, she talked about how she values not only delivering a high-quality experience for her students at the school, but she also wanted to create a pleasant work environment.

[I am not] someone who comes into a principal job who has never taught in a classroom before, which was important to me, to not only have the experience [but] to see both sides of it. One thing I value is that having been a teacher and having worked under an
employer before. I can, thereby, treat my employees in a better way that I would have appreciated working under somebody. I can see both sides, both worlds, to make it a pleasant environment not just for the children but also for the staff.

She noted this was a perceived distinction from her previous role as a director, as she would try to create a positive work culture but felt like she had less control over the environment than as a school owner.

**Lily.** Like Dana, Lily also moved to a new city when launching her new venture and was coming from a negative pre-transition previous employer where she felt she had no professional voice. She was fortunate to be able to bridge into and feel connected to the community in part through her husband’s network and friends. However, when moving to her new city, Lily knew building her own networks and supports would be critical for her to secure contracts and clients, so she took time to embrace her new lifestyle as an entrepreneur and to find people who were of like mind and interests.

My outreach to community members and institutions, even though some of them tend to have “blocking” tendencies, it's just been more fun. I'm happier. I'm not as stressed. I'm not bottled up all the time. My clock is more natural. I'm not on this artificial bell schedule anymore. Conversations with people tend to be more authentic and interesting. And I'm meeting more interesting people.

In order to strategically engage with prospective clients and partners, Lily developed an introductory presentation of her venture, skills, and successes from her work to build interest and credibility.

I probably had, in the first two years, 30 meet and greets in my office. These are with PowerPoint presentations describing my process, backed up with pedagogical skills,
demonstrated through student artifacts and work and examples. So, that was a lot of meet and greets. I'm still doing those.

Lily was proactive making contacts with certain stakeholders and adjusting her strategy when she noticed her audience was not receptive or did not follow through.

So those [introductory presentations], over time, change as well because you hear that you maybe didn't say the right thing or you were saying it to a [different] audience. You know you have to sort of tweak that each and every single time. So, there's some level of disappointment when you don't get a callback, but then you get really happy when a project is accepted and brings up more people. So, I go with the flow there, pretty easily.

Regarding her efforts to build her supports, network, and business, Lily noted that she also felt she was able to develop her skills. She felt she had to hone her listening skills in order to better respond to her clients.

So, you really have to learn. It's a real learning curve about how to listen to people's responses. You know, listen to understand, not listen to have an answer right away.

There's distinction there.

In reflecting on Lily’s strategy to build her social supports, she bridged into the community making friends with her husband’s network. While she wants to keep her number of projects low, she did indeed lament not being able to have an even greater impact. This may not be an indication of a further need of strategy, as Lily has a clear missionary perspective and sets her standards for the impact of her work at a societal level, as mentioned previously within the Life Authenticity/Self-Realizing Experience section.

**Summary.** This subsection showed how two of the participants (Dana, Lily) navigated their transition into entrepreneurship through developing and employing strategies to build their
networks (supports) through managing their resources (e.g., skills) and balancing their deficits (e.g., moving to a new area). Dana felt her ability to mobilize a strategy to utilize her prior experience (situation) and people skills (self) helped her and her family break into a new community and to connect the community to them and their business (supports). Lily employed a more grassroots approach (strategy) to building her local network (supports) through hosting “meet and greets” where she would engage potential clients and partners through telling them more about her venture and what she would be able to contribute (self).

**Theme Four, Subtheme Three: Loss of Pre-transition Social Supports**

The third subtheme of supports and strategies highlights stories of the participants’ experiences with feeling a sense of loss or disconnect with their pre-transition social supports. An interesting, unexpected element that arose during the data analysis was a thread of participants’ perceptions of their personal and professional social connections before and after their transition into entrepreneurship. Particularly, the common thread of navigating pre-transition supports after the transition came up within several of the stories of early stage entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial career can be fulfilling in that an individual can satisfy the human need to feel unique and distinct; however, paired with that comes a potential for entrepreneurs to report a missing sense of belonging (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009), which can lead to feeling isolated (Brewer, 1991) at the expense of an individual’s psychological and physical health (Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001). Entrepreneurs do not only take financial and professional risks, but, due to the nature of their work, entrepreneurs put their personal relationships in jeopardy as well (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Ufuk & Ozgen, 2001). In turn, the entrepreneurial experiences can bring on feelings of loneliness (Akande, 1994; Shepherd & Kuratko, 2009),
isolation (Hannafey, 2003), and chronic stress (Akande, 1994; Harris, Saltstone, & Fraboni, 1999; Shepherd & Kuratko, 2009).

Within this section, stories of disconnects with pre-transition personal and professional contacts (supports) are showcased, as many of the participants discussed the changes they had experienced with their former networks of friends and family. While this was not a direct question within the interview schedule, participants kept bringing up stories of interacting with personal and professional contacts who had difficulty understanding their new careers and the impact it had on the participants’ lifestyles and identity. To illustrate how the entrepreneurs felt a misalignment with some of their pre-transition contacts, six participants’ stories (Nancy, Michael, Lily, Jason, Rachel, Cammie, and Faye) serve to demonstrate the breadth of experiences and reactions the participants had with this experience. It is worth noting some entrepreneurs experienced only minor disconnects, whereas others were experiencing a disconnect in a more impactful way.

**Nancy.** As the first example of an experienced disconnect from their pre-transition personal and professional support, Nancy noted that her network was very supportive, perhaps in part because they had seen her moving towards an entrepreneurial path for a while beforehand. In fact, she reported that she was fortunate to have only received positive feedback from her social supports. Nevertheless, Nancy explained that their positivity and support did not necessarily mean they understood, “I felt like a lot of people, even though they were very supportive, they didn't understand the new challenges that I faced.” Nancy noted that she had a very close-knit group of friends, but since making the transition into entrepreneurship, she had felt somewhat isolated from them because of the nature of her new work and life:
And so, I kind of became siloed. My friends were super supportive. They still are. They're still there for me, but to this day, I still feel siloed in a way, and so, I feel exempt from those conversations. Those type of conversations that I solely have with them are really all personal conversations, like, ‘How's your family doing? How is your love life?’ And it sucks because all of us went to college; a lot of us went to the same college. And then, our careers are extremely important to us, and now it's like one of the things that are extremely important to the people that are closest to me, I no longer feel connected with them. And I no longer feel like I can fully support them in that.

To build her own social supports, Nancy spoke to her efforts to expand her network to add more entrepreneurs to have social supports who would understand her new life and challenges as a new entrepreneur. Thankfully, she got closer to a couple friends in her existing personal network who hold entrepreneurial roles, and she found comfort in spending additional time with them during the transition period.

**Michael.** Even though Michael noted that his personal connections did not change a great deal with his transition into entrepreneurship, he did not have anyone in his immediate network of family and friends who was an entrepreneur. Based on the tone of his response, it seemed that he had not reflected on this extensively. While he did not reference their reactions as an issue or deterrent, Michael did note that the reactions of his personal and professional contacts were typically of disbelief and concern:

You know, usually when I've told people, either I've told them that I was going to do my own thing or that I am doing my own thing, I just usually get this reaction of, “Oh my gosh. I can't believe that. I can't believe that you could do that. It seems so risky.” I don't
know. I haven't ever felt that it's any more risky than having a job that you could get fired from.

Michael also noted that people from his personal and professional contacts also might not fully grasp the nature of more creative endeavors because traditional employment did not always support those ways of thinking and acting:

And, usually, if you're doing things and being creative, you should be pushing some boundaries. If you're working in a place that seems like they don't encourage that, then whenever you're doing, that it just seems so foreign to them.

Despite getting some confused and concerned responses from his friends, family, and professional networks, Michael was making good connections with other entrepreneurs and business owners since starting his business. He also had the strong support of his wife, whose opinion and reactions he valued over others.

**Lily.** Like Michael, Lily had supportive friends and former colleagues, but she also had experienced several instances where she felt misunderstood by her social networks. She said she felt as though many were “quizzical” and “curious” about her new role. Many people in her network did not “take it very seriously until they had seen some of the products” and her work firsthand. She felt that some of her friends and former colleagues were “resentful” and perceived her as being “entitled.” Lily detailed a contentious interaction with a close friend that resulted from her starting her venture:

I’ve actually lost a close friend when I made this transition. She literally said, excuse my French, “You’re never going to fucking make a thing out of it.” She said, “When I retire, I’m not carrying my skills into the community.”
Lily had to come to terms with the changing nature of some of her former friendships. Her husband helped to remind her that her journey might have made others think about their own, which could have been raising sentiments of insecurity. She explained:

So, there's some level of envy, I think, support, admiration, resentment. Some people think it's a folly, “[Lily’s] folly.” But yeah, and you know, the distance between some friends has become greater, and [my husband] just sort of says, “Well, you've changed your life, and they haven't. They're where they are, and they're where you were. They don't want to be reminded of that.”

Lily persevered through the challenges she experienced in how she was perceived and received by her former social networks and to support her new professional identity. In addition to building her professional networks in her new town after making her transition, Lily ended up making new friends who were more open and supportive of her ability to embrace her new self.

**Jason.** Jason also spoke about one instance that stood out clearly in his mind of an interaction with a close friend who did not quite understand his decision to transition into entrepreneurship and his corresponding new identity and lifestyle. The friend approached him cautiously but candidly, attempting to see if he could help Jason secure an interview. Jason stated:

I got a really close friend that was like, “Hey, you okay? You know what you're doing?”

He wasn't seeing me going for any jobs. And he was concerned. Because he knows my family, and he was, “Are you guys okay? Can I get you an interview in some way? Can I help you in any way?” I'm like, “I'm good.”

Jason’s friend did not initially understand that Jason intended to continue full force with his venture, thinking perhaps that he left his position and was doing independent work while seeking
to find another full-time position in his field. Jason explained that this friend had experienced a transition 14 years prior when he took time off between jobs. Interestingly, one week before the interview conversation, this same friend now was seeking his advice on possibly starting his own venture. Jason narrated:

It's interesting because he once took a year off, when he wasn't' happy where he was. And he went through a similar thing, took a year off and eventually landed at a job. He wasn't trying to be an entrepreneur or anything; he just kind of found his next thing. And when he found it, he became their number one [position]. Wildly successful. And he just quit that one 14 years later a week ago because he wasn't happy. Right? So now he's . . . he hasn't been happy for almost a year. Right? But he's a person, who when I started was like, “Hey, what are you doing?” And now he's like, “Hey, how do I get on with that?”

Rachel, in particular, also expressed that her new professional identity had not easily translated into an affiliation with social groups she had from before the transition. While Rachel said that most of her network supported her new path, she explained that her adjustments to an entrepreneurial path were not necessarily helped by some of her friends. In fact, she expressed that she felt as though her some of her friends did not really understand her problems and her new life, as well as they had been able to do when she was working for an employer. She stated:

And also explaining it to my friends. I think they were just sort of confused on what I was doing . . . This time last year, my friends found me more relatable. It was like the same schedules and stuff. And so, it was easier for them to be just like, “Hey, how's work?” Like, “Ugh, my boss is so…” You know, just the usual stuff. And I think a lot of people liked that, just sort of simple stuff.
Rachel. Because of how unrelatable her entrepreneurial identity has been to many people in her network, Rachel said she felt apprehensive about putting her entrepreneurial self out there on social media, at least at her current stage:

My Instagram and Facebook posts from three years ago were like, “just finished my kitchen remodel” and this and that. It was the acceptable, nice things that people talk about. And they're like, “Oh great, good for you.” You know, normal stuff that sort of felt, like, everyone was okay hearing. And now, the things I'm doing, I just feel like, I don't know, people don't necessarily want to hear about it.

When reflecting on why she felt this was happening, Rachel expressed that she was somewhat tentative to be sharing about her new life. This had impacted how and who she would engage with and how she could talk about her life:

I just don't like sharing as much as people because I don't want people to... I have felt that through all my changes, some people are maybe not as thrilled to see me moving forward fast or something. So, I think I'm just . . . I don't know. I, maybe, just have stopped sharing as much, or I just sort of stick to different channels. I think I've just shifted the way I care to present myself to people.

Cammie. Similarly, Cammie noted that her transition into entrepreneurship highly impacted her friendships. She explained that the process helped her sort out the friendships that were united by shared circumstances and those with greater compatibility:

I think when you take a big unconventional shift, doing very different things [than what most] people are doing, you really see who your true friends are because there are times where friends get together because it's just very easy. It's really fun, but then, when you have nothing to talk about or don't have a lot in common, you see them less and less.
Despite this new test on her existing friendships, Cammie looked at the positive outcomes of the experience. She said:

However, I feel like the relationships that I truly cherish now—we'll consider them my friends for life—are people that will be there for you. Even though we are talking about different things, they're still willing to listen and see from your perspective of how your life is. I think that's made me also value relationships differently to understand which ones are the . . . I look at friendships or relationships like an onion now. There's that core part, where people that you can call at 3:00 in the morning if you are in trouble. As the layers go out, they might just be friends, and you see at gatherings or stuff like that.

In addition to the strong entrepreneur contacts Cammie developed as an early stage entrepreneur, her transition experience inadvertently helped her determine and solidify her closest friendships.

**Faye.** In addition, Faye experienced challenging social interactions after her transition experience. She had experienced both professional and personal connections who did not know what to make of her transition. Some of her contacts’ reactions surprised and shocked her. In reflection, Faye did not know how she could have avoided this because becoming an entrepreneur makes people reflect on their own path and happiness, which can bring forth some hurtful comments and reactions. She said:

I don't know what you could do to deal with that, but feel sorry for them because they're still stuck where they are and you have wide-open plains in front of you to go make. There are people out there that would downright say, “hope you fail.” That stays in my head every day. Like, “What do you mean you hope I fail? What does that mean?” . . . At first, it's disheartening because you're like, “Oh, my God. Somebody's wishing evil on
me.” But at the same time, I'd just never wish that on somebody ever, and [especially] people that go off on their own.

Faye noted that those negative reactions were alarming but telling. They had also helped her reinforce her own practices and better recognize her own values and orientations. She stated:

I would never not connect with them. I purposely connect . . . I purposely go out and answer every email I get. Just like when [business contact] reached out, and [I] said, “I'd like to help. How can I help?” That's just me. When you don't reach out to me and you don't do this, that's just not me. I would never wish anybody evil or to fail. I just think, “God, I'm glad I'm not you.”

Faye also recognized the value in her contacts showing their true colors; that helped to see their characters and to value her accomplishments, both person and professional, and to be someone who was able to be supportive of others.

Of course, I don't want anybody to feel that way about me. But on the second hand, wow. [It] doesn't sound like they are a very decent, grounded person, and I would never want to be like that. Yeah. It kind of gives you a bad feeling at first, but in the end, you're like, “Wow.” You've got to think about where that person's coming from, and you don't want to be that person.

Summary. This subsection helped to unpack some of the experiences the participants reported that related to the entrepreneurs’ perceptions of their social supports during their transition into entrepreneurship. Within the first portion, four participants’ observations of their pre- and post-transition environments were revealed. In the second section, six participants’ stories of feeling misaligned with some of their pre-transition personal and professional contacts
were outlined. The next subsection explores participants’ perceptions of the context during the transition period.

**Mapping to the Research Question**

The chapter presented an overview of the lived experiences of professional identity transition, as experienced by the 14 participants interviewed for this dissertation study. Having presented the themes that emerged from the data analysis, as well as the essence of each of the individual stories both in vignettes and in a more in-depth through reflection on their professional identity transitions, it is important to revisit the research question. The research question asked, “How do new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition?” It was aligned with the conceptual framework (social identity theory and transition theory), the central phenomenon of professional identity transition, and the context of entrepreneurship.

Revisiting to the research question, the presented data suggested that new entrepreneurs experience their professional identity transition in an interwoven fashion with the element of the transition. While each participant told a unique story of the timing, circumstances, and experiences of the transition into entrepreneurship, there were several themes shared by the new entrepreneurs. Although the themes presented are not necessarily representative of or generalizable to the experiences of all new entrepreneurs, the shared understandings and perspectives of their experiences provide guidance regarding how educators might improve their practice of preparing aspiring entrepreneurs and mentoring new ones.

Chapter 4 presented the collected data by categorizing segments of the participants’ stories into common themes, as relevant to the research question and conceptual framework. The next chapter, Chapter 5, utilizes the emergent themes of Chapter 4 and presents several emergent conclusions. In addition, the next chapter discusses the relevance of the conclusions for both
scholarship and practice and highlights potential implications for entrepreneurship education and mentorship.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This dissertation research aimed to contribute to the collective understanding of experienced professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs within the first 3.5 years of their ventures. The study bridged theory on social identity and transition to make sense of professional transition from traditional, full-time employment settings to entrepreneurial roles. The narrative research method focused on the stories of professional identity transition, and through the collection of 14 stories of lived experiences of individuals transitioning into entrepreneurial roles, there were notable themes that connected with the selected theories of social identity theory (SIT) and transition theory. The final chapter builds upon the themes presented in Chapter 4 to uncover their value to the presented conceptual framework and literature; it also explains implications for practice. This final chapter serves to provide a summary of the research, overarching interpretations of and conclusions from the collected data, and discussions of the implications of the research for theory, future research, and practice.

Overview of the Research

The purpose of this research was to better understand the lived professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs. In Chapter 2, three strands of literature aimed to establish a foundation for the existing knowledge and perspectives of identity, transition, and entrepreneurship. The findings demonstrated the value of bringing together the three literature strands, as each area played an important role in the participants’ conceptions of their transition experiences. As noted in the limitations section in Chapter 3, the research findings do not purport to be representative or generalizable to a broader population; however, the emergence of these conclusions can serve as a starting point for future inquiry, research, and theory building. The Implications for Practice and the Implications for Future Research sections of the chapter discuss
potential implications and recommendations based on the findings, whereas the next section centers on introducing the interpretations and conclusions of the research, as derived from the data collection and analysis process.

**Conclusions**

Following an analysis and discussion of the dissertation research findings, five conclusions emerged. The first conclusion asserts the need for conceptions of entrepreneurship to include identity given that it constitutes a notable part of the transition into entrepreneurship. The second conclusion positions entrepreneurial prototypes as having significant power on new entrepreneurs as they make sense of their own professional identities. The third purports that the role of social supports for new entrepreneurs is also important in framing how new entrepreneurs understand their professional identities. The fourth relates to how entrepreneurs experience changes in their social networks after a transition into entrepreneurship. Finally, the fifth conclusion describes the influence of pre-transition periods on how new entrepreneurs view their new professional identities.

**Conclusion One: Conceptions of Entrepreneurship Need to Acknowledge Identity**

Despite attempting to encompass the breadth of ways entrepreneurs are defined and viewed, the definitions presented by Landström (1998), Casson and Casson (2013), and Bridge (2017) among others, failed to capture some of the lived identity experiences of entrepreneurs. Definitions of entrepreneurship cover entrepreneurship roles at various levels, but they ultimately neglect the important perspective of entrepreneurial identity. Casson and Casson (2013) mentioned the different ways entrepreneurs can be understood (see Table 2), including functional conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as “risk-takers” or “innovators”), role conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as “founder” or “business owner”), personality conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as...
“extroverted” or “creative”), competence conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as “skilled at business”), behavioral conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as “motivating” or “taking responsibility”), and performance conceptions (e.g., entrepreneurs as “wealthy” or “reputable”). These conceptions reflect the various definitions and perceptions that are held about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but they also contribute to how individuals construct entrepreneurial prototypes that can potentially limit identity reflection, which may have both behavioral and identity implications.

When looking to the breadth of ways entrepreneurs have been defined and understood, as demonstrated by Casson and Casson (2013), there should be an additional category for identity conceptions. Within this dissertation research, nine of the 14 participants described their professional identity transition in such a way that indicated either (a) feelings of “life authenticity” through entrepreneurship (reaffirming or aligning existing or entrepreneurial prototype) or (b) entrepreneurship being a “self-realizing experience” (exploration of a new identity that is in alignment with existing self-conceptions.) Thus, for many, the lived experience of being an entrepreneur means that they may conceptualize entrepreneurs as “being self-realized,” having transitioned into entrepreneurship for greater identity alignment and harmony.

For example, as shown in Table 7, Michael noted that his new professional identity metaphor as being an “artist” meant that “it's just ‘being yourself.” Tim spoke to his current professional identity as being “human.” Many of the participants referenced a sense of no longer feeling “trapped” (Maggie, Rachel), “caged” (Faye), or “stuck” (Dana). The perspectives of the lived experience of transitioning into entrepreneurs provide powerful illustrations that suggest other conceptions of entrepreneurship: entrepreneurship as “self-realization,” “identity alignment,” or “authenticity.”
Conclusion Two: Entrepreneurial Prototypes Hold Power

Connected to the discussion of better representing identity experiences within definitions and conceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, these definitions serve to inform how entrepreneurs are viewed and portrayed, forming entrepreneurial prototypes. Within the data, conceptions of entrepreneurship—what it is and isn’t, and who it is and isn’t—provided a source of reflection for many of the participants as they made their transitions into entrepreneurship. Individuals have a need to view themselves positively as being competent and capable (Baumeister, 1998; Goodman & Hoppin, 1990) and as being socially accepted and valued (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). While individuals can be acting in entrepreneurial positions, if they perceive that certain elements of their transition, social supports, or individual characteristics do not align with their conceptions or expectations, this may hinder their ability to form an associated identity. To reconcile the self with a future identity, entrepreneurial prototypes serve to characterize a possible self for the individual (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006). The findings highlighted a few participants (e.g., Vicky, Rachel, Nancy) who felt a misalignment with an operative conception of an entrepreneurial prototype.

In the case of this research, it was only women who reported instances of being impacted by feeling a disconnection between their perceptions of themselves or their circumstances with their perceptions of an entrepreneurial prototype. While Tim framed the idea of an entrepreneurial identity to be potentially confining, he indicated that he did not find need to reflect on entrepreneurship conceptually in order to know he was one. Michael noted that he could disregard conceptions of entrepreneurship held by others that he felt were irrelevant or not helpful to him (e.g., pre-transition supports noted entrepreneurship as “risky”). In contrast, several of the female participants (Amanda, Vicky, Rachel, Nancy) reported that an
entrepreneurial title felt like it was not something they could fully own at the time of the interview; this might be limited to personal contacts, due to feeling an identity conflict (e.g., both Rachel and Nancy valued being humble and positioned being an entrepreneur as feeling like a conflict between a personal and professional identity). Amanda said she felt she had not yet earned her title and role until she was able to bring in new business clients (performance conception). In contrast, Vicky stated that she felt she was more of a business owner than an entrepreneur because she was not taking a great enough risk (function conception).

Conflicting or oppositional social identities may indicate that, when one identity is switched on, the conflicting identity will be deactivated (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2004). For entrepreneurs, identity conflict may present itself more often in women given that entrepreneurship is frequently associated with masculine traits (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2005) and masculine media stories and depictions (Bird & Brush, 2002). For women to be able to balance their other social identities, they may need to first modify their conceptions of the corresponding prototypes. For example, remaining “humble” as an entrepreneur was an active challenge mentioned by both Rachel and Nancy, presumably because entrepreneurial archetypes tend to be linked to traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness, directness, or confidence (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Bridge, 2017; Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007; Gupta et al., 2005; Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). If two identities are highly valued, an individual’s self-worth may struggle when both identities cannot be activated and approached to the extent the individual would want, thus increasing stress and the perceived conflict (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Both Rachel and Nancy showed signs of trying to protect both identities by employing a compartmentalization identity strategy, showing one identity within personal networks (humility) and one within professional networks (being entrepreneurial). In Rachel’s case, there was data
indicating a possible entrepreneurial identity compartmentalization, through which she maintained and acknowledged distinct social identities, without efforts to reconcile the perceived conflict (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). She noted her comfort in introducing herself as an entrepreneur within her entrepreneurial networks, but she said she simultaneously felt that she did not feel ready to be as vocal with her social identity within her broader social networks, particularly over social media. Such a case might be reconciled over time or through greater positive socialization of the new entrepreneurial identity within broader social networks.

However, if an individual is unable to reconcile a conflicting or oppositional identity (i.e., “wanting to being humble”) with the ideal entrepreneurial archetype, it may be stressful or challenging to connect with an entrepreneurial identity (Mallon, 1998).

**Conclusion Three: Entrepreneur Supports Serve as Identity Guides**

To feel supported moving from organizational environments into entrepreneurship, social supports play a particularly important role as new entrepreneurs try to navigate and build new careers. Within organizational settings, access to mentors can come more easily given that bosses and colleagues can help to introduce a new employee to their organization. Within many other professions (teachers, doctors, chefs), those entering the field frequently shadow experienced experts, engaging as members of a community of practice as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, because entrepreneurs pursue ventures from all fields, at all stages of life and with a variety of different preparations, transitioning into entrepreneurship can be particularly challenging. Nevertheless, social validation and support is important for new entrepreneurs as they reflect on their professional identities, and access to social supports can help new entrepreneurs understand their new professional identities.
Social supports play an important role in the coping strategies of new entrepreneurs. During transitions, individuals have psychological needs for identity, purposeful engagement, and meaningful relationships (Goodman et al., 2006). If the transition environment lacks any of these three needs, individuals can struggle to move through the transition well. To cope effectively through transition, individuals need to be able to access social supports and contexts that can aid in their bridge to the next role. Within the data, six of the individuals interviewed chose to use a co-working space at some point during their transition into entrepreneurship. The co-working spaces helped the new entrepreneurs to expand their networks and to learn about entrepreneurship. Some of the participants (e.g., Rachel) mentioned securing a mentor through her co-working space. Other participants (Dana, Lily) used more grassroots strategies to build post-transition social supports. One participant (Jason) decided to take an entrepreneurship course at a local academic institution to build his skills and to network. Mentorship programs, co-working networks, incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurship education and training programs can all help aid new entrepreneurs in their development by providing access to solid social supports. Regardless of the strategy to build them, having solid social supports can yield greater self-efficacy and optimism (Hobfoll, 2002), which are particularly meaningful within a new profession.

**Conclusion Four: Social Needs and Supports Change from Pre-transition to Post-transition**

Transitions can alter perceived needs for social intimacy and belonging (Goodman et al., 2006). For new entrepreneurs, relationships that hold meaning within a pre-transition environment may not feel as valuable following a transition. In turn, due to the significant changes new entrepreneurs encounter in their new work (e.g., Nancy mentioned her working hours, Amanda mentioned her need to network and travel more), pre-transition social supports
(e.g., friends, former colleagues) may not understand an entrepreneur’s new life, work, or professional identity. The lack of understanding of the social support system and lack of perceived support for the entrepreneur may cause tensions within relationships. For those who have limited exposure to or information about entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial prototypes may serve as the only understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneur. This was supported within the research. Several of the participants (e.g., Faye, Kevin, Jason, Rachel, Nancy, Cammie) noted the transition into entrepreneurship shifted their social support needs to incorporating more fellow entrepreneurs into their networks.

In addition, the section on losing pre-transition social supports in Chapter 4 demonstrated the breadth of experiences the participants encountered with their pre-transition networks, ranging from experiencing some minor misunderstandings (e.g., Jason, Michael) to losing personal and professional contacts (e.g., Lily, Faye). Others maintained friendships (e.g., Nancy, Cammie), but the value of the friendships increased or decreased based on the ability of the social supports to understand the change and support the entrepreneur. Participants did notice that they were able to find new value in old friendships, especially if the friend was also an entrepreneur.

**Conclusion Five: Pre-transition Periods Influence Post-Transition Assessments**

As is evident in other transition theory research, an individual’s interpretations of the individual elements of the transition—along with the perceptions of its context, social supports, resources, and deficits—influence perceptions of their overarching transition (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981). The participant interviews suggested that how an individual perceives the pre-transition and post-transition has influence: those coming from positive pre-transition work environments relative to their perception of their post-transition time may struggle more if
they regard the post-transition environment as less satisfying. When this transition represents a change in a profession (e.g., engineering to entrepreneurship), the perceptions of the transition may shape how the individual makes sense of that new profession, for example, prompting reflection regarding whether or not entrepreneurship is truly the right career path and how closely the pursuit aligns with one’s life.

Within the data, there were limited cases of participants having positive (Sarah) or mixed (Amanda, Nancy) orientations regarding their previous employment. Despite not having too many examples of these cases, this corresponds to Schlossberg’s (1981) notion of the perception of the transition regarding viewing the role change as a gain or loss, meaning that perceptions are made relative to the pre-transition environment. This supports the need to understand an entrepreneurial identity in context; how it is shaped will depend on the experiences and exposures of the transition period as well as on the nature of the time before.

**Implications for Practice**

The motivation for this dissertation research centered on better understanding how new entrepreneurs describe their professional identity transition to consider how they might be better supported by those in educator and mentor roles. Because entrepreneurship can be learned and developed through entrepreneurship education (Gorman, Hanlon, & King, 1997; Kuratko, 2005), integrating research and practice helps to inform how entrepreneurship education can best serve its students and mentees (Kassean, Vanevenhoven, Liguori, & Winkel, 2015). Even students with prior experience in entrepreneurship can benefit from entrepreneurship education (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003; Ramayah, Ahmad, & Fei, 2012).

Even though the participants of the study were older than the age of a traditional university undergraduate, many of them mentioned the influence of a university on some aspect
of their transition experience. Two of the participants (Sarah, Vicky) were, at the time of the interviews, enrolled in graduate programs to advance their careers as entrepreneurs or otherwise. Two other participants (Jason, Lily) used a local university for network building or for taking a course during the early months of their transition. One participant (Michael) stated that his pre-transition graduate program influenced his decision to try entrepreneurship in the first place, and another participant (Nancy) initially attempted to plan her transition after her graduate program so she would be well positioned to start her venture with an additional credential in hand. Outside of the university environment, six of the participants (Kevin, Maggie, Jason, Faye, Rachel, Nancy) mentioned utilizing co-working spaces at some point in the development of their ventures, including making use of their available training, mentorship, and networking programs. Several participants (e.g., Tim, Faye, Amanda) discussed the role that conferences, local get-togethers, and industry training events had on their professional development and networking.

The findings resulted in several notable implications for those teaching, training, mentoring, preparing, and supporting aspiring and new entrepreneurs. The findings supported being intentional with the entrepreneurs selected as speakers, networking guests, and mentors and supporting students in their identity reflections, curation of social supports, transitions, and assessments of their resources and deficits. Within this section, the conclusions are reviewed for their potential implications for practice, and recommendations are suggested in each area.

**Approaching Entrepreneurial Prototypes Strategically**

Based on the first two conclusions presented within the last section, the first implication for practice is a need to directly discuss the breadth of definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship and to engage in identity reflections related to them. Because students are coming in with a variety of different conceptions and definitions of entrepreneurs and
entrepreneurship, it is important for entrepreneurship educators to spend adequate time with students reflecting on who entrepreneurs are and what entrepreneurship is. Having the ability to discuss entrepreneurial prototypes, particularly in comparison to oneself, generates rich discussions in the classroom. For educators, bringing these conceptions to the forefront of conversation can help identify existing biases and assumptions that exist among students, given that comparing oneself to an entrepreneurial prototype can indicate comfort levels with certain elements of being an entrepreneur and can point to areas where new entrepreneurs are feeling a conflict with another existing identity.

Entrepreneurs can help energize the classroom with stories of real-life experience. Having entrepreneurs visit the classroom can engage students in forming real-life exposure to entrepreneurs and their work. However, it is critical to be mindful of presently a broad diversity of entrepreneurs (race, gender, age, personality, background, field, experience-level, etc.). This is because having students perceive patterns in the speakers may inadvertently aid in reinforcing entrepreneurial prototypes (e.g., masculine, heroic, risk-taking). As noted in Chapter 4, when Rachel discussed her preferences for her consumption of and reactions to her exposure to the stories of fellow entrepreneurs (via podcast, TV show, or in person), she spoke of the need that many individuals have to hear stories of entrepreneurs outside of simply the “heroic” prototype. Rachel was seeking stories of more realistic, smaller-scale entrepreneurship, but she felt as though she was not able to find that within a podcast or TV show. Her reactions reflect the importance of diversifying speaker lists and of presenting students with entrepreneurs that challenge their existing entrepreneurial prototypes.

In addition to offering students a diverse range of entrepreneurs to profile and expose their classes to, entrepreneurship educators can also offer students the opportunity to continue a
connection with diverse entrepreneurs through building mentorship connections. Mentorship, co-working, and accelerator programs offer students an opportunity to explore entrepreneurship (Brush, Corbett, & Strimaitis, 2015). Mentorship programs expose students to life-real entrepreneurship, rather than the idealized stories of the entrepreneurs who start high-profile, large-scale ventures. Returning to Rachel’s case, she opted to join a women’s mentorship program at her co-working location to reorient her perspective of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship to something that she could connect to more readily. Initially, Rachel felt the pressure to fall into an entrepreneurial prototype; however, she had the sense of awareness that following others’ expectations and stories would be detrimental to her own success.

**Guiding Students Through Targeted Identity Reflection**

As a response to Conclusions One, Two, and Three, when looking at the literature on entrepreneurship education, there is a need to consider the potential implications entrepreneurship can have on individuals’ professional identities and how the factors of their transition (4 S’s) might affect how they make sense of themselves as professionals. The transition into entrepreneurship can present an opportunity to develop, reinforce, shift, or challenge professional identity.

The data indicated that socializing their new identities proved a helpful activity for the new entrepreneurs interviewed for this study. When looking to practice for activities that foster identity reflection, exploration, and socialization, pitches and networking events can help aspiring and new entrepreneurs get comfortable with their new professional identities. The act of practicing elevator pitches is helpful for honing selling, storytelling, and developing public speaking skills. Indeed, crafting and delivering a pitch can be helpful for aspiring and new entrepreneurs, based on several of the participants’ stories. For example, Amanda noted that
doing a local speaking engagement was a scary but rewarding experience; it helped her feel like she was more public with her new role. Activities that have students practicing their introductions as entrepreneurs can also provide helpful opportunities to socialize a new identity. Rachel, for example, loved simply being able to introduce herself in front of new people within her co-working networking and mentorship programs. These experiences of socializing a new entrepreneurial identity in front of a community of practice serve as invaluable opportunities to socialize a new identity and to feel like a legitimate participant within the entrepreneurial community.

Furthermore, hearing students voice their pitches and introductions can help educators better understand the types of targeted discussions they might need to have with students. For example, Nancy mentioned a conversation she had with her mentor following a networking event where the mentor witnessed Nancy coming across as too timid when introducing herself, as well as being too humble when speaking about her business. This conversation helped Nancy to reflect on her identity, recognizing that she sometimes felt in conflict with herself when having to introduce herself as an entrepreneur. In Nancy’s case, it was not an issue of self-efficacy, but rather she wanted to also feel in sync with another identity—being humble. Being able to have targeted discussions on how students can reconceptualize themselves as entrepreneurs can help them strategize how to become comfortable with both their new professional identity and their existing self-concept.

Reflection is an essential component within entrepreneurship education (Neck & Greene, 2011). Entrepreneurship educators could assign reflective writing exercises to help students engage in the metacognitive process of thinking about their thinking, which can lead them to achieve a deeper appreciation of their experiences and learning (Martinez, 2006). Brush, Neck,
and Green (2015, pp. 46-47) offer guidelines for entrepreneurship educators for six distinct types of reflection students can engage in to aid in their sense making process:

- **Narrative reflection**: Student describes what happened in a class, exercise, or event.
- **Emotional reflection**: Student focuses on what they were feeling, why, and how the emotions were managed during a class, exercise, or event.
- **Percipient reflection**: Student must identify and consider the perceptions (theirs and others) and how it affected the class, exercise, or experience.
- **Analytical reflection**: Student explains the processes or important elements of the class, exercise, or experience, and how they are connected or related.
- **Evaluative reflection**: Student assesses the class, exercise, or experience and identifies the criteria used for the evaluation.
- **Critical reflection**: Student identifies alternatives or contradictions in the class, exercise, or experience while also reflecting on what was learned about student, his or herself, in the process.

While these categories provide a helpful direction for engaging in guided reflections, identity reflections provide valuable information for both the student and teacher for how the student is feeling connected or disconnected from entrepreneurship. Writing exercises that reflect on a professional identity transition can permit students to see their identity development; to evaluate their resources and deficits for self, situation, and supports; and to strategize on their needs during the transition. To attain the greatest results from reflective writing assignments, entrepreneurship educators will need to explicitly teach students how to reflectively write about
their experiences given that the students may be unprepared to articulate their thoughts beyond cursory, descriptive reflections (Yeoh, 2017).

**Curating and Recommending Social Supports**

Fostering networking and mentorship links is helpful for students, as building social capital is as important as raising finances and employing the right people for the venture (Jones, 2010). While increasing venture sustainability serves as an essential component of entrepreneurship education, the act of building social capital also serves to foster social connectivity as an important facet of joining a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Due to their vast networks, entrepreneurship educators are well positioned to help aspiring and new entrepreneurs to build curated social supports and contexts and to foster entrepreneurship communities of practice. Based on the data collected, new entrepreneurs commonly find meaning in forming connections with entrepreneur social supports during their transition; however, each participant noted different needs and preferences.

However, mentorship alone cannot provide all of the social supports necessary to create pipelines into entrepreneurship. Due to the nature of entrepreneurship, which involves high risk and specific skill sets, mentorship, in itself, would likely not be able to foster entrepreneurial intentions (Eesley & Wang, 2017). Furthermore, mentorship programs typically tend to be associated with those in the early stages of their careers, with those over 40 years old likely offering to be mentors rather than seeking mentorship (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Levinson, 1978). This is changing particularly for older individuals who also tend to have fewer social ties (Kohli, Hank, & Künemund, 2009). This means that entrepreneurship educators should be mindful of the diversity of needs and orientations to implement programming that allows the students to build up their entrepreneurial networks. As previously observed, while some of the participants noted
having mentoring relationships (e.g., Cammie), others found class attendance at educational institutions (e.g., Jason) or training, programming, or networking opportunities at a local co-working space (e.g., Rachel, Nancy, Kevin) to be meaningful ways to connect with others and to embrace their new careers and professional identities. Having a breadth of available options to develop entrepreneurial social supports can be helpful for entrepreneurs of all ages and backgrounds, providing them with more opportunities to access resources that can support the exploration and reinforcement of an aspirational, possible, or provisional identity.

A need exists for entrepreneurship educators to develop a variety of different social support options for entrepreneurs; these could be provided through their institutions or organizations or be offered through a local partner organization. Overall, entrepreneurship educators have the opportunity to help build communities of practice. Preparing for integration into a community of practice may also be a meaningful opportunity for entrepreneurship educators to help aspiring and new entrepreneurs to engage in identity work and prepare for difference and diversity within their professional communities. For example, generational difference can cause identity disconnects within a common professional community of practice, as noted through the research of Down and Reveley (2004).

Experiential learning also provides a valuable opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs to learn through observation of real-life practice and social conventions, and this can help aspiring entrepreneurs internalize the observations to build their own professional practices and perspectives (Moon, 1999). The ability to engage in a new profession enables an individual to learn through their experiences, which commonly center on the principles of continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938). Continuity refers to the need to take in existing knowledge from others within the professional community and give back to the community once established,
whereas the principle of interaction notes how past experiences inform the present. The two principles frame the importance of informed actions and reflective practice, both of which are served well by the experienced social network that makes up a community of practice.

**Helping Entrepreneurs Recover and Prepare for Changing Relationships**

While they are not the same as counselors, entrepreneurship educators can serve on the front lines of interaction for aspiring entrepreneurs seeking to prepare for a transition into entrepreneurship and for new entrepreneurs who are actively navigating through a transition period. To this end, these recommendations source from Conclusions Four and Five. While the implications are two-fold, the recommendations to approach the issues are the same.

The data made evident that many entrepreneurs transition away from challenging, stressful, or toxic pre-transition environments. The conditions experienced in the pre-transition period for the participants in this study were incredibly challenging. Particularly due to the self-driven, self-powered nature of entrepreneurship, new entrepreneurs may need to allow time for recovery from a challenging pre-transition environment. In fact, some of the participants noted needing to take time off to travel (Faye, Cammie, Lily) or to take classes (Jason) following their transition. The level of stress and disorientation resulting from their previous employment caused one participant to note a consistent need for professional counseling and two participants (Michael, Jason) expressed that they needed to “de-program” or “re-program” themselves, respectively. Considering this, it is important for entrepreneurship educators to understand that even well-planned, anticipated transitions can carry residual stress and can require support and a coping process.

Likewise, another significant cause of stress for the participants in this study came from changes in personal and professional relationships. Transitions can entail changes in
relationships for a variety of reasons. When looking to the data, seven of the participants (Nancy, Michael, Lily, Jason, Rachel, Cammie, Faye) noted various levels of challenging interactions with their personal and professional connections, including a few that resulted in significant changes in their some of their relationships and behaviors. Based on the data, it seemed that the participants were surprised at the changes they experienced in this area. This was also an unanticipated data point, as it was one of the most widely found codes between transcripts. Furthermore, participants coming from high-level positions within prestigious organizational contexts (Faye, Cammie) also struggled in an additional way compared to those who did not come from such organizations; indeed, some of the professional contacts for the former were found to be predicated on their names being closely affiliated with high-profile organizations.

The participants’ interviews revealed relationship changes that included people not understanding or approving of the transition. Or, in some cases, the entrepreneur did not find the existing relationship as meaningful as it had previously felt. Changes can be particularly challenging when they involve close friends and family. Because aspiring and new entrepreneurs enter a professional community where they are required to be ready to network and sell their idea, product, or service, educators and mentors can represent a safe space for new entrepreneurs to openly express their hopes and concerns. For matters needing continued support, educators and mentors can provide guidance for seeking professional assistance. For professional network shifts, pre-transition social supports may need to be reassessed for their present and potential future value. Guided reflections with an educator or mentor could potentially help new entrepreneurs to take stock of their existing network and future needs for it. Also, it is important for aspiring and new entrepreneurs to surround themselves with encouragement and support. In this context, educators and mentors can help recommend connections and networking
opportunities that are unique to the psychosocial needs of the entrepreneur, rather than just sticking to recommendations that only help their businesses flourish.

Entrepreneurship educators can play a role in helping aspiring and new entrepreneurs to anticipate, react, and recover from issues raised as a result of their pre-transition and transition experiences. In practice, educators and mentors often help their students build their networks and to concurrently build community and improve their students’ potential business connections and clients. However, educators and mentors often initiate conversations about how to manage and maintain existing relationships, and educators are often unaware of the trauma or stress their students might be experiencing. Entrepreneurship can be a lonely path. Educators and mentors have the opportunity to help to better prepare aspiring and new entrepreneurs to navigate a landscape of changing personal and professional relationships. Teaching students about possible relationship changes may help them to feel better prepared and to feel as though they have a shared sense of community by knowing that relationship changes are common and may require additional reflection, effort, or attention following a transition into entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship education and training programs bring an opportunity to provide aspiring and new entrepreneur students and mentees with guided reflections using the 4 S’s to determine needs for a hypothetical, forthcoming, or current transition. The exercise aids in an assessment of resources and deficits, allowing educators and mentors to help students construct strategies for navigating a transition into entrepreneurship where they can start off on the best footing possible. Career focused programs, like part-time or executive-format MBA programs, encourage students to conduct resource and network mapping. The 4 S model format offers a more holistic, individual-focused approach oriented towards helping an individual coping through transition rather than focusing primarily on building a business. For those starting an
entrepreneurial career within less-than-ideal circumstances, reframing the transition can help create an alternative interpretation of a situation (Hackney & Cormier, 2005).

Stress management and reframing exercises can also help students to manage stress and thrive past perceived challenges. Reframing exercises help to take a held belief or situation and to think about how else it might be perceived, in order to resolve the issue at hand. Within the interview, Tim mentioned using certain language (“human”) to distance himself from the stress of his work. Tim’s exercise in preserving himself while reframing the lived experience into something more positive and productive could be considered an exercise in mindfulness and reframing. Reframing exercises can help move past perceived obstacles and hang-ups by focusing on what can be controlled or changed, thus facilitating the repositioning of the transition in a more positive and productive direction (Burnett & Evans, 2016).

For trauma and stress beyond self-management, entrepreneurship educators should recommend professional support and make their students’ wellness a priority. One participant who spoke directly about counseling support noted that the experience helped them to make sense of experienced pre-transition trauma and to gear towards recovery. Entrepreneurs’ struggles with depression and suicide risk are now starting to have more media attention (e.g., Bruder, 2013; Gourguechon, 2018; Kerr, 2015); however, it can feel like a stigma to admit challenges and struggles within such a public and competitive career. Entrepreneurs need to know they have a listening ear, particularly considering they commonly experience high levels of stress and shifts in their existing social relationships.

**Assessing Perceived Resources and Deficits**

The robust literature utilizing transition theory supports that those experiencing a transition move through the transition by utilizing their available resources and managing their
liabilities. Goodman et al. (2006) suggested that the 4 S model can help individuals reflect on the balance of their resources and deficits; in this context, a pessimistic view of the transition may signal an imbalance in the resources and deficits that can be addressed by the individual.

The data collected and analyzed for this study revealed that the participants attempted to establish the best possible scenario for the initiation of their entrepreneurial careers. Faye and Tim both considered their respective savings accounts and ages as assets they could commit to their periods of transition. Maggie, meanwhile, wanted to start a family sooner rather than later; however, she noted that not having young children would be a resource within her first years of establishing her venture. For Dana and Jason, their awareness that they were good networkers and relationship builders helped them resourcefully build up their community support and potential customer and client bases. Michael, Maggie, and Kevin each viewed their good health as a sign indicating they should move forward with their ideas and aspirations to transition into an entrepreneurial career. Rachel and Tim both looked to their no- and lower-balance student loans, respectively, as an asset for making their career transitions.

Individuals considering, anticipating, or navigating a transition into entrepreneurship have existing resources and deficits that can impact their perceptions of the transition and their identity. Because resources and deficits can be real or perceived, being able to have the objective voice of a concerned individual engage with in a reflective discussion can help aspiring and new entrepreneurs anticipate blind spots, approach needs, and balance deficits. Some deficits may be unavoidable, but having the ability to acknowledge, map out, and strategize around existing and anticipated deficits can help students feel more prepared when approaching or moving through their transition.
The entrepreneurs interviewed for this study discussed their professional identity transition stories, and through their stories, they were able to identity perceived advantages and challenges experienced during their transitions. Transition theory and its surrounding literature can provide many interesting lenses for entrepreneurship educators to utilize. For instance, the 4 S model can help differentiate and detail resources and deficits for each area delineated: situation, self, support, and strategies. Students can be paired with a teacher, mentor, or peer to assess each of the four factors. Being able to proactively identify and build solutions to balance actual resources and deficits might be beneficial, but because resources and deficits can also be perceived, reframing exercises, as discussed within the first subsection, might also help entrepreneurs to think about their resources and deficits in a way that would be more helpful for their transition experience and business. The pairing could discuss the extent to which the resources and deficits are perceived rather than real. The “self” factor of the 4 S model could be expanded to include a number of identity reflections. These could prove especially valuable because resource, deficit, and strategy mapping centers around a model created for coping and thriving through transitions.

Implications for Future Research

This section reflects upon the fit and usefulness of the conceptual framework, which bridged social identity theory (SIT) and transition theory. The conceptual framework served as a lens through which to understand the phenomenon of professional identity transition. The section first reflects on the fit of the conceptual framework as originally presented and questions how it might be adjusted or expanded. Then, the section closes with general recommendations for future research based on the dissertation’s data analysis and limitations.
First, when looking to the data and the usefulness of the presented conceptual framework (see Figure 3), a few areas within the visual that would be more representative of the lived experience of transitioning into entrepreneurship if they were differently positioned (Figure 4).

*Figure 4. Modified conceptual framework (adapted post-research study)*

Because identity reflections are constantly occurring throughout the transition experience and are ignited by the occurrence of new events and nonevents, experiences, exposures, and social interactions, the revised model better demonstrates the interactive nature between the 4 S model factors and other concurrent elements, including assessments of the transition, new events/nonevents, new exposures, new experiences, reactions, and identity reflections. Despite the need to better draw the relationship between the elements of the Praharso et al. (2017) social identity model of identity change (see Figure 2) and Schlossberg’s (1981) model for analyzing
human adaptation to transition (see Figure 1), the conceptual framework presents an interesting perspective for future research on professional identity transition. The main adjustments would better illustrate the participants’ self-reflection that constituted of a continuous formation and revision of an identity (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017).

Transition theory provided the lens for identifying and understanding the different elements of a transition—the 4 S’s—situation, self, support, and strategies). It provided a useful perspective through which to look at the phenomenon of professional identity transition and the context of early stage entrepreneurship. It also helped frame the interview schedule and provided areas of interest to reflect upon when analyzing the data. For the purposes of looking at professional identity transition, transition theory’s notion of self looks to personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Schlossberg, 1981) rather than identity.

Likewise, social identity theory provides a lens to look at participants’ perceived memberships within a particular social group, in this case entrepreneurs, based on how the participants define that social group (Hogg et al., 1995). SIT aided in developing the interview protocol, and as a result, the data collection also looks to conceptions of social identity, perceived memberships, and disconnects from entrepreneurs as a social group. However, SIT, in itself, falls short exploring how individuals are identifying, or not identifying, with new social memberships or how other elements interplay with social identity and membership. Even the use of Praharso et al.’s (2017) social identity model of identity change, which acknowledges reactions to identity loss, does not approach the elements of transition and how people attempt to cope through transition.
This intersection is not well established within the entrepreneurship literature. Mixed methods and additional qualitative data collection and analysis would all help to better establish this intersection to determine the potential value of looking at the professional identity transition of entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial identity formation from a transition theory perspective. The combination of the two theories served to offer a fuller picture and perspective of professional identity transition; hopefully, it can contribute towards future research and theory development. Warren (2004) noted that an “entrepreneurial transition is not an end in itself, but a key stage in the development of a professional identity” (p. 33). Just as transition literature needs further consideration of identity throughout the transition experience, professional identity and entrepreneurial identity literature needs enhanced consideration of the role of transition.

When looking to how scholars can build upon, complement, and supplement the findings of this research, several areas of interest for future inquiry emerge. Further studies on professional identity transitions into entrepreneurship, as well the complementary areas of entrepreneurial identity formation that focus on the transitions into entrepreneurship, could contribute additional data through which to further understand the connection between identity and transition within the context of entrepreneurship. To this end, further use of orienting entrepreneurship as an identity rather than a role can help to grow the discussion of how aspiring entrepreneurs can prepare for an entrepreneurial identity along with an entrepreneurial role (Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2017).

Studies on social support or network loss during early stage entrepreneurship transition could help better understand if and how new entrepreneurs are experiencing loss of social supports during their transition into entrepreneurship. Aspiring and new entrepreneurs, as well as entrepreneurship researchers, educators, and mentors, would benefit from better understanding
the transition period and its effects. These areas serve as critical elements within the process of becoming an entrepreneur and deserve further attention and consideration within the landscape of entrepreneurship scholarship.

Furthermore, a stated delimitation of the dissertation research was an intentional approach to not focus on comparing demographic elements between participants. New conceptions of entrepreneurship support the inclusion and emphasis of the more feminine qualities of entrepreneurship within educational programs, including relationship building and collaboration (Rae, 2010). Despite these evolving perspectives of entrepreneurship, further research on gender, identity, and entrepreneurship education can help to better inform educators on the unique needs of women during a professional identities transition. While this dissertation featured the stories of only 14 new entrepreneurs, there were areas of interest within the data that would serve as potential areas for further research. Amanda noted that she felt as though she still needed to earn her title. Vicky noted that she felt privileged as a wife to be able to engage in an entrepreneurial career to begin with. Rachel wanted to seek out a female entrepreneur mentor because she felt as though women might understand her identity struggles in entrepreneurship. Understanding the unique lived experience of new female entrepreneurs may serve as an important piece to supporting and preparing female students for a professional identity transition.

**Reflections as a Scholar-Practitioner**

As someone who teaches and mentors aspiring and new entrepreneurs, as well as many other students who are just exploring the idea of entrepreneurship, the dissertation research provides an understanding for the need to prepare aspiring entrepreneurs and support new entrepreneurs beyond focusing on subject-area instruction and skill development. The lens of transition theory and the elements of transition can serve as a tool for structuring our practice and
research in entrepreneurship education and related fields on how early stage entrepreneurs experience their new careers as transitions. Based on the stories collected through this research, educational institutions and co-working spaces can help support identity development throughout the pre- and post-transition environments.

There is value in reorienting the conversation of our practices as entrepreneurship educators to acknowledge the role of professional identity transition in context. Our students, mentees, and entrepreneur community partners experience challenges that can relate to their identity during a transition into entrepreneurship, particularly for new entrepreneurs who are attempting to categorize and situate their previous selves while navigating the construction and legitimization of their entrepreneurial identity. As a practitioner, I have had some very thankful students and entrepreneur mentors and partners who appreciate having an educator not “gloss over” the lived experience of becoming an entrepreneur, particularly because they experience daily pressures to be the expected “heroic” entrepreneurial prototype for their families, communities, advocates, employees and investors. It is a challenging hat to wear every day, and it is important for entrepreneurship educators to prepare those who want to learn about an entrepreneurial path of strategizing and coping through a professional identity transition.

As an example, best practices in teaching and mentoring support entrepreneurship educators to encourage the building of entrepreneurial networks. The behavior to seek out networks is often framed in light of developing networks for business development and growth. The recommendation to seek out fellow entrepreneurs is not frequently framed as a coping mechanism that can help mitigate stress and support an entrepreneurial identity. There is value in having a directed conversation about the ups-and-downs of the new entrepreneurial experience because this allows a more realistic conversation about the benefits and challenges of an
entrepreneurial career to take place. An orientation that acknowledges the need to employ coping strategies might also open the conversation to authentic dialogue about such experiences.

From my work with entrepreneurs of all stages, I have had numerous, candid conversations with new and established entrepreneurs about their real-life, lived experiences transitioning into entrepreneurship. Their authentic stories of the entrepreneurial experience often did not match the stories that they are pressured to tell publicly to their stakeholders and even their own families and friends. The weight and pressure entrepreneurs feel to succeed, I have found, often shapes how they feel they can speak to their experiences. There is a pressure for aspiring and new entrepreneurs to present themselves and their ventures as strong and without a sense of vulnerability.

Nevertheless, as those who are teaching and advising, we are presented with a unique opportunity to prepare these individuals for the challenging world of entrepreneurship. Our conversations with them should open a pathway to discuss the vulnerability, uncertainty, and stress associated with a professional identity transition. By opening this conversation, we can better prepare aspiring and new entrepreneurs for how they might experience their own professional identity transition. We can also guide them in discovering how can cope through any challenges experienced during the process and strategize to better their situation, reframe their orientations, and manage the stress they are feeling.

We are often concerned about an individual’s resources and supports to launch a venture, looking to their access to an entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, as the educators, mentors, and advocates for aspiring and early stage entrepreneurs, we need to promote more extensive dialogue on the individual experience of a transition into entrepreneurship and encourage further reflection on the entire individual’s pre- and post-transition environments and experiences.
Starting into an entrepreneurial path may feel like “the road less traveled” for many of our students and mentees. As they face their transitions, we can help to raise awareness about the journey into entrepreneurship as just that—a transition—teaching and providing support to these individuals about how to best prepare for and thrive through the transition. This must involve helping them to balancing their resources and deficits, to build meaningful connections with social supports and contexts, and to frame and reframe their perceptions of the transition as they cope through it.
References

doi:10.1080/09518390902736512


*Journal of Business Venturing, 24*(2), 149-164.


*Publications of the American Economic Association, 3*(5), 426-431


Appendix A: Recruitment Script for Social Media Use

New entrepreneurs wanted to participate in the study, “Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs,” which aims to explore the professional identity transitions of new entrepreneurs who have recently transitioned into their entrepreneurial roles within the past 3.5 years through capturing their stories. My name is Stephanie Raible, and I am doing this research for my Ed.D. Degree at Northeastern University. I am inviting you to participate in this study completing pre-interview questions (less than 10 minutes) and two 45-60 minute phone or Skype interviews. The purpose of the interview is to hear more about how entrepreneurs experience transition from traditional employment into their new career. The information learned from this study may help educators and mentors increase their understanding of what entrepreneurs experience when transitioning from traditional employment into entrepreneurial roles. If you would like to volunteer, please email me at raible.s@husky.neu.edu. Messages to me in LinkedIn or in Messenger on Facebook must be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.

IRB# CPS18-07-15
Approved: 8/27/18
Expiration Date: 8/26/19
Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear [Entrepreneur],

My name is Stephanie Raible, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Gorman. I am preparing to conduct research for my dissertation and would like to invite you to take part in my study. Specifically, I am looking to interview entrepreneurs who have transitioned into their new career as an entrepreneur full time within the past 3.5 years.

The title of my study is “Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs.” As the title suggests, the purpose of this study is to explore the professional identity transitions of new entrepreneurs who have recently transitioned into entrepreneurial roles through capturing their stories. The purpose of the interview is to hear more about how entrepreneurs experience transition from traditional employment into their new career. The information learned from this study may help educators and mentors increase their understanding of what entrepreneurs experience when transitioning from traditional employment into entrepreneurial roles.

In order to collect the necessary data, I am inviting you to participate in this study, which entails responding to a few written pre-interview questions (less than 10 minutes), two one-on-one interviews, and two follow-up communications that ask for your review of transcripts. Each interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Prior to written questions and our first interview, you will be given a consent form that will explain the process of taking part in the research. The interview will consist of general, non-identifiable information along with questions pertaining to your experiences as a new full-time entrepreneur.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the research at any time. Additionally, for the purpose of the research, you will be identified as an Entrepreneur followed by a number, such as Entrepreneur 1. The only individuals privy to the recordings (audio/video) of this interview will be myself (the doctoral candidate) and Dr. Margaret Gorman (the doctoral advisor). After the audio of the interview has been transcribed by Rev.com it will be destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

If you are comfortable with the purpose of this study and are still willing to participate, please let me know by emailing me at the email address below. If you have any questions, please contact me at 609-975-9211 or via e-mail at raible.s@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you,

Stephanie Raible  
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University  
College of Professional Studies
Appendix C: Eligibility Check Follow-up Email

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study, “Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs.” This study aims to explore the professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs through capturing the authentic, lived stories. To determine your eligibility, please confirm that all of the following apply to you:

   a. You a current, full-time entrepreneur who started your entrepreneurial career/venture within the past 3.5 years.
   b. You have previous years of work experience under an employer prior to transitioning into your current entrepreneurial role.
   c. You currently live and operate your business, organization, initiative, or project in the United States.

If all of the above apply to you and you are interested in participating in this research study of professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs, please email to the student researcher, Stephanie Raible, Raible.s@husky.neu.edu, with your name, telephone number, and email. Messages through Facebook Messenger or LinkedIn will be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.
Appendix D: Pre-Interview Confirmation Email with Instructions and SurveyMonkey.com Link

Dear [Entrepreneur],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study, “Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs.”

I have included with this email a consent form, which needs to be reviewed and signed by you prior to your participation in the study. Once a signed consent form is emailed back to me at Raible.s@husky.neu.edu, please complete the following SurveyMonkey.com questions (www.surveymonkey.com/xxxxxxx), which will help me get to know you and your background more prior to our scheduled interview. Again, these questions require an informed consent. Please identify yourself at the top of the questionnaire as Entrepreneur #____. The pre-interview questions should take no longer than approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Also, I would like to schedule a time for our interview. We can conduct the interview via telephone or Skype. Since I am working with 6-10 participants, would you please provide me with at least three 45-60 minute periods when you are available to be interviewed within the next two weeks?

Finally, I would like to reiterate that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Should you consent your participation in the study, your participation will help me contribute to an important body of literature by learning more about the experience of newer entrepreneurs.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Stephanie Raible
Raible.s@husky.neu.edu
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies

IRB# CPS18-07-15
Approved: 8/27/18
Expiration Date: 8/26/19
Appendix E: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for One-on-One Interviews

Northeastern University, Department
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Margaret Gorman, Principal Investigator & Stephanie Raible, Student Researcher
Title of Project: Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study; however, the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are an entrepreneur.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the professional identity transitions of new entrepreneurs. This study plans to capture the authentic experiences of those who have transitioned into entrepreneurship within the past 3.5 years in order to better inform educators and mentors of real-life experiences of new entrepreneurs.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a few written questions about you and your professional background and participate in up to two one-on-one interviews for questioning about your experiences as a newer business owner or founder, particularly your professional identity transition.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The one-on-one, telephone interviews will be convened at a time that is convenient for the research participant. Each of the two interviews is anticipated to take approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants will be asked to participate in two interviews total.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

The only foreseeable risk associated with your involvement in this research is the possibility that your participation, and only your participation, could be discovered by other individuals. To minimize this risk, your name will never be recorded on any of the written or electronic materials involved in this study. Rather, your identity will be identified as an Entrepreneur followed by a number, such as Entrepreneur 1. Thus, your identity and participation in this study should not be revealed to anybody.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help educators and mentors to increase their understanding of how new business owners and founders

IRB# CPS18-07-15
Approved: 8/27/18
Expiration Date: 8/26/19
experience their professional identity transition when bridging into their new career.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being a part of this project. To minimize this risk, your name will never be recorded on any of the written or electronic materials involved in this study. Rather, your identity will be identified as an Entrepreneur followed by a number, such as Entrepreneur 1. Thus, your identity and participation in this study should not be revealed to anybody.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you participate, you can withdraw at any time.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Stephanie Raible at raible.s@husky.neu.edu or (609) 975-9211 the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Margaret Gorman at m.kirchoff@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate in the study?**

The research participant will not incur any cost as a result of this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be an entrepreneur, start-up/organization/project founder, and business owner of a company or organization who changed to this position within the past 3.5 years.

IRB# CPS18-07-15
Approved: 8/27/18
Expiration Date: 8/26/19
I agree to take part in this research.

Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

Printed name of person above
Appendix F: SurveyMonkey.com Pre-Interview Questions

Thank you for your submitting your signed consent form to me at Raible.s@husky.neu.edu and for your interest in participating in the research study, “Exploring professional identity transition: A narrative research study of new entrepreneurs.” This study aims to explore the professional identity transition of new entrepreneurs through capturing the authentic, lived stories.

In order to get to know you and your background prior to our first phone interview, please respond to the following questions:

1. What was your previous work role/job?
2. What is your current work role/job?
3. How long has it been since you transitioned into your present work role?
4. Can you briefly describe your career so far? How did you start your career, and how did you get to this point?
5. Did you ever start your own business/organization [OR start your own initiative/project] before?
6. Did anything in your life or career particularly help you to make the transition to starting your own business/organization [OR started your own initiative/project]?

Thank you for your time and participation. If you have not already done so, please send me three possible time blocks for our interviews via email to Raible.s@husky.neu.edu and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Raible
Raible.s@husky.neu.edu
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
Appendix G: Interview Protocol and Schedule

Intervewee (Pseudonym):  

Interviewer:  

Part I: Introduction

Thank you for being able to speak with me today. You have been selected to participate in this research study because you have been identified as someone who has recently transitioned from traditional employment into an entrepreneurial role within the past 3.5 years in the United States. The research project focuses on the lived stories of new entrepreneurs, in order to understand their professional identity transition during this time. Your total participation in this study will be no more than three hours of your time between interviews and correspondence.

The hope is that this research can be used to help inform entrepreneurship educators and mentors on how new entrepreneurs shifting from traditional employment into entrepreneurial roles may experience a professional identity transition.

Before we begin, I want to emphasize that you and your participation, as well as that of all the other participants involved in this research study, are assured confidentiality. Moreover, you should be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question or chose to withdraw from the research entirely at any time. At this time, I would like to for us to re-review the research participant consent form.

[Review NEU Consent Form]

Thank you. Before we begin, I need to say that because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say. Therefore, I would like to record our conversation today. At this time, I would like to ask your permission to audio record this interview? Is this okay?

[Wait for response]

I will also be taking written notes. However, to assure that I have a complete record of our conversation, I will have a professional transcriptionist transcribe the entire interview. I can assure you audio recording will remain confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. All audio recordings will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Once the audio recording is transcribed by Rev.com, I will email you an electronic written copy for your review. Is this okay?

[Wait for response]

Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections. Will this be okay?

[Wait for response]
I have planned this interview to last no longer than about 45 to 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Therefore, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Also, there may be moments where I may probe you to go deeper in your explanations.

As we are about to begin, I want to thank you once again for agreeing to participate in this study and completing the pre-interview questions.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions?

[Wait for response]

Okay, let us begin.

**Part II: Interview Questions**

I am now going to ask you questions focused on the topic of the study, which is about the professional identity transition. Some of the questions that I am about to ask may have been presented to you within the pre-interview questions. In this case, I would like you to simply restate your answer, but please do feel free to elaborate as needed.

Questions:

1. Can you speak to the causes that led you to want to start your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]? Why did you want to do this?
2. What would you say is the primary reason why you decided to open your business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]?
3. When did you first think about starting your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]?
4. Was there a turning point that caused you to decided to change your career?
5. Was there anything about the timing within your career that was particularly meaningful? Can you think of any moments or events that might have been meaningful for your transition?
6. Was there anything about the timing within your life that was particularly meaningful? Can you think of any moments or events that might have been meaningful for your transition?
7. Can you describe your life right before you left your last position?
8. Can you describe your life as you were transitioning from your former position to your current role?
9. Can you describe your life now, now being in your current role ___ years/months?
10. Overall, how has the transition been so far?
11. Has anything changed about how you view yourself professionally over the past few years? Do any events or experiences stand out as being meaningful?
12. Before you started your current role, how would you describe yourself? How did you view yourself professionally? How did you feel about yourself when you were in your previous role? Use a metaphor (animal) for yourself before your transition and one for yourself now?

13. In your current role, how would you describe yourself? How do you currently view yourself professionally? How do you feel about yourself when you were in your previous role?

14. Describe your social networks before making the choice to start your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.].

15. Describe your social networks now.

16. Have there been any people that were particularly helpful before making the decision to start your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]?

17. Have there been any people that were particularly helpful while making the transition to start your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]?

18. Have there been any people that were particularly helpful now?

19. Have there been any changes within your social networks or affiliations since changing your position?

20. Have there been any events, activities, or experiences that have stood out in helping you start your own business/organization [OR project, start-up, etc.]?
Appendix H: Member Checking Email

Dear [Entrepreneur],

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me on (XX-XX-2018). I appreciate the time you spent speaking with me, and I also enjoyed learning about your experiences of transitioning into entrepreneurship full time.

As we discussed, I am sending you this follow-up email so you can review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (please see attached). Please feel free to edit the transcription as necessary, as well as to offer any additional thoughts, ideas, or reflections you may have had since our interview.

When you are finished, please send the transcription with notes back to me as soon as possible. If you have nothing to change or report, please send me a quick email to let me know. You can also contact me by phone at 609-975-9211.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Stephanie Raible
Raible.s@husky.neu.edu
Doctoral Candidate, Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
Appendix I: Notification of IRB Action

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: August 27, 2018
IRB #: CPS18-07-15

Principal Investigator(s): Margaret Delaney Gorman
Stephanie E. Raible

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Exploring Professional Identity Transition: A Narrative Research Study of New Entrepreneurs

Participating Sites: N/A

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: AUGUST 26, 2019

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.

2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.

3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.

4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.

5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.

6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix J: Certificate of IRB Training Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Stephanie Raible successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

Date of Completion: 04/01/2018

Certification Number: 2624043