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Everyday Entrepreneurship—A Call for Entrepreneurship Research to Embrace Entrepreneurial Diversity

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This essay contrasts a perspective that places an excessive focus on technology businesses and growth with a view of entrepreneurship that embraces its heterogeneity. We challenge a taken-for-granted belief that only certain kinds of entrepreneurship might lead to wealth and job creation and additionally suggest that these two outcomes (wealth and job creation) need to be placed within a broader context of reasons, purposes, and values for why and how entrepreneurship emerges. We suggest that a wider and nondiscriminatory perspective on what constitutes entrepreneurship will lead to better theory and more insights that are relevant to the phenomenon.

Looking for Entrepreneurship in All the Wrong Places?[1]

What follows is a gambol, an excursion through the field of entrepreneurship. Our intention is to embrace a panorama of ideas, context(s), methods, outcomes, and

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1. This is a play on the words from the song "Looking for love in all the wrong places" (Mallette, Morrison, & Ryan, 1980). You might want to play the song while reading this article: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAyDmJvjxbg (to give you a somewhat corny sense of emotional heartfelt longing for a future that doesn't yet exist—but could).

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paradoxes that would see entrepreneurship more broadly. Our “straw man” is the view that many entrepreneurship scholars still tend to have a rather narrow perspective regarding what the phenomenon of entrepreneurship comprises. Our primary thesis is that as entrepreneurship scholars we may be systematically closing ourselves off from seeing a useful multiplicity of perspectives on entrepreneurship and thereby hindering our ability to observe the phenomenon and develop theory in ways that offer insight and value. This, of course, begs the fundamental—and too frequently unexamined—question, “Insight and value for whom?” We recognize that the insights we offer will appear as new and interesting to some readers but as obvious to others (Davis, 1971). By analogy, this is the “Columbus Effect”: some may see us as suggesting that we are discovering territories of entrepreneurship scholarship that are actually much-lived-in spaces for others. Some of our comments are also consistent with a recent chorus of critical and reflexive studies in entrepreneurship (just to mention a few of the books, special issues, and articles in this area: Berglund, Johannisson, & Schwartz, 2012; Hjorth, Holt, & Steyaert, 2015; Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008; Hjorth & Steyaert, 2010; Rehn, Brännback, Carsrud, & Lindahl, 2013; Sørensen, 2008; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2003, 2006; Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers, & Gartner, 2012; Verduijn, Dey, Tedmanson, & Essers, 2014). So, we beg forgiveness to those scholars already working in areas that we suggest are less inhabited than what we portray as more mainstream views of the entrepreneurship field.

The remainder of this editorial is structured in the following manner. The first section mulls over what we see as an excessive and exclusive interest in high growth/technology businesses in entrepreneurship. We segue into a commentary on a tendency in the entrepreneurship field to dichotomize various categories of entrepreneurship in ways that marginalize research on some types—by in effect casting them as “other”—of entrepreneurs (and entrepreneurship) rather than to embrace, celebrate, and understand the diversity inherent in entrepreneurship. We end with a few thoughts on how and why to make research on the “other” central to our field.

Focus on the “Highs” of Growth and Technology

High-growth, technology-enabled, venture capital-backed businesses that do big initial public offerings, make billionaires of their founders, create thousands of jobs, and provide products and services that change the way we live are exciting and important. This is often characterized as the Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship. Such ventures are of interest to researchers across many fields as well as to policy makers and they have, unsurprisingly, long captured the attention of popular media and the general public across many countries. The founders of such organizations, whether treated as heroes or villains, become celebrities; entrepreneurship groupies hang on their every move or utterance. Unfortunately, this extraordinarily rare sort of entrepreneurship has similarly captured much of the field of entrepreneurship studies. Our theories and the questions we treat as interesting in this regard are strongly shaped by the valorization of the sages of Silicon Valley and by the presumption that these “gazelles,” or more recently, “unicorns”—new ventures valued at a billion dollars or more—represent both the pinnacle and the primary goal of entrepreneurship.

The assumption and imagery suggesting that these ventures are what is most interesting and compelling in entrepreneurship, and in fact singularly constitutes *bona fide* entrepreneurship, has continued to shape and strongly limit our field of research. This narrow focus is reflected in empirical research, where analyses may encompass only the “top” 1% of growth ventures and attempts to create them. Overall, much of our research continues the highly skewed quest to develop our understanding of entrepreneurship by studying a tiny group of outliers, while frequently ignoring the vast bulk and diversity of what we label "everyday" entrepreneurship. Not only are the gazelles and unicorns perhaps not as important as we have presumed, but by implicitly defining everyday entrepreneurship as neither important nor interesting we have failed to understand its rich variety and importance. We believe that by such continued obsession with the exceptional ventures and relative neglect of the majority, that is, the cows and horses of entrepreneurship, both our theory development and the practical relevance of our work remain stunted.

Why has our field developed in this way? An obvious reason is the public prominence of innovative, high-growth, technology-based, and venture capital-backed ventures that have become household names around the world, such as Apple, Google, and Amazon. These remarkable firms feed public and media enchantment with the Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship.

The development of our field also likely reflects the direction of recent public policy. It would be hard to overstate the impact of David Birch's claims in the early 1980s about the predominant role of new ventures in creating jobs (Birch, 1981), and the extension of such arguments to claims that most such job generation was done by a handful of gazelles. Government organizations such as the Office of Advocacy of the U.S. Small Business Administration and similar agencies of governments in Europe that faced huge issues with unemployment, made profligate use of such claims in establishing the importance of their own work and mandate in the context of great fears of unemployment during the 1980s. Also exerting some influence has been the concomitant proliferation of university entrepreneurship programs in the United States and their reliance on raising money from and therefore celebrating successful entrepreneurs/donors (Katz, 2003).

This growth came partly at the expense of traditional small and family business programs which were considered by many as too practitioner-oriented and a theoretical to gain legitimacy as scholarly fields in the research universities that were beginning to explore entrepreneurship more actively. An important correlate of this has been expressed through the construction of deprecatory distinctions between real "entrepreneurship" and a variety of contrasting "other" activities that came to be classified as nonentrepreneurship during the 1970s and 1980s (Cooper & Dunkelberg, 1986; Stanworth & Curran, 1976). For example, Carland, Hoy, Boulton, and Carland (1984) published an influential paper in the *Academy of Management Review*—a rare outlet for entrepreneurship papers at this time, titled, "Differentiating Entrepreneurs from Small Business Owners: A Conceptualization." This trend toward invidious distinctions culminated, perhaps, in Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) agenda-setting attempt to define a distinctive domain for entrepreneurship research in a manner that makes entrepreneurship largely a function of large corporate entities while excluding the vast majority of new business founders as not entrepreneurs.

As Gartner has long maintained, the words "entrepreneur" and "entrepreneurship" have taken on a wide variety of sometimes nonoverlapping meanings (Gartner, 1990). His suggested solution (Gartner, 2001), building on Low and MacMillan (1988), is that scholars should be more explicit about what definition of entrepreneurship they have in mind. This approach effectively eliminates the need to seek legitimacy and status by embracing some arbitrary assignment of our proper "domain," or through association with the wealth and glamour of a handful of outliers and celebrities. Entrepreneurship is already legitimate (Baker & Welter, 2015). But we want to go beyond Gartner's good general advice. We suggest that each of the forms of the "other"—which together constitute the bulk of everyday entrepreneurship—is both more theoretically interesting and more practically important than the development of our field has led us to believe. Our somewhat radical argument is that what is now the other should take its place at and as the core of entrepreneurship research.

It should also be noted that even if one were to restrict attention to the celebration of venture growth and wealth, technology-oriented and venture capital-backed ventures would often not predominate. So, for example, in the *Forbes* magazine list of the top 50 wealthiest individuals in the world, we find owners of companies in such industries as retail (e.g., Amancio Ortega—Zara; three children of Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart; the Albrecht's—various supermarket chains, Stefan Persson—H&M), food (e.g., three children of the founders of Mars; Jorge Paulo Lemann—beer; Maria Franca Fissolo—chocolates), and shoes (e.g., Phil Knight—Nike). If we were to look at the characteristics of some of the 5,000 fastest growing firms in the United States from 2010 to 2013 according to *Inc*. magazine (http://www.inc.com/inc5000/2014/facts-and-figures.html) the majority of these firms would not be in industries associated with venture capital but in, for example, health, financial services, energy, human resources, construction, consumer products, logistics and transportation, advertising, food and beverage, and education. Even if we did for some reason only care about ventures that create large-scale growth and wealth accumulation, why should we focus so much on high technology and venture capital-backed ventures? We suggest that by being restrictive about we treat as "real" entrepreneurship we simply lose too much of the rich empirical world. We have a lot to gain by being more inclusive and even expansive about what we view as important to our field (Audretsch, 2012; Audretsch, Kuratko, & Link, 2015).

Either/Or?

Dichotomies can be useful for trying to explore a "messy" phenomenon such as entrepreneurship and as a beginning point of theories that allow us to make sense of the mess. But in entrepreneurship research, this process has too often taken the form of invidious distinctions implicitly serving a functionalist notion of entrepreneurship that valorizes economic outcomes of wealth accumulation and job creation as the supreme and often the only goal. The patterns of dichotomous distinctions introduced below follow this pattern.

Compare the left side (valorized) to the right side (disparaged) of the following comparisons:

opportunity versus necessity-based
venture capital backed versus bootstrapped
formal versus informal
men-owned versus women-owned
innovator versus replicator
promoter versus trustee
growth-oriented versus lifestyle
entrepreneur versus small business owner/proprietor
. . . and so on.

We see several problems with such distinctions. First, and most broadly, taken as a group, (with the exception of the gender distinction) the categories on the right represent most entrepreneurship in the world. Therefore, while easing the theoretical and empirical challenges of studying entrepreneurship, these distinctions do so at the cost of excluding most of the phenomenon by implicitly labelling it as uninteresting for scholarly study and theory building. Second, the distinctions have rapidly become reified and taken-for-granted by large swaths of entrepreneurship researchers and their students. One of us was at an international entrepreneurship research conference a short while after the "distinctive domain" paper took hold, and a younger scholar acting as discussant for an empirical paper that had just been presented stood up, recited the Shane and Venkataraman (2000) definition, noted that the paper he was to discuss did not match the definition, declared it not an entrepreneurship paper and sat down. While the cognitive constraints may not be so obvious in every case, we have too often come to see the distinctions not as exploratory tools beholden to a context and place in time, but as somehow inscribed on the stone tablets of reality as absolutes.

Third, and relatedly, by essentializing many of the distinctions at the individual level, we end up too often ignoring issues of both life course and context. For example, the characteristics of women-owned businesses become theoretical extensions of some narrow view of what it is to be a woman in contrast to being a man, rather than being contextualized in terms of structural and cultural features that have an impact on the characteristics of women-owned firms and shape their development paths and strategies as well as the resources available to them. Such contextualized cultural and structural features have been a longstanding theme in "other" research on women's entrepreneurship (e.g., Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, & Welter, 2012; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Jennings, Jennings, & Sharifian, 2016; Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Similarly, entrepreneurship done out of "necessity," leads us to think of—and let's face it, largely disparage—the individuals engaging in this entrepreneurship as somehow "necessity entrepreneurs," who just do this as some kind of last resort activity and for survival, with little, if any, potential for innovation and growth of these ventures. We spend too little time worrying about what has caused the apparent lack of "opportunities" they face, and even less time wondering about what they may have done earlier or may do later in their work lives. We also typically fail to understand pathways through which ventures started from necessity might sometimes even innovate and grow.

Fourth, by enshrining simplistic economic goals as the primary functionalist imperatives of entrepreneurship and therefore of our research, we encumber ourselves with blinders (blinkers) that keep us from seeing all of the rich and heterogeneous motivations that actually drive entrepreneurs to create new ventures (Carter, Gartner, Shaver, & Gatewood, 2003; Shaver, Gartner, Crosby, Bakalarova, & Gatewood, 2001). Most of us know, based both on research evidence and on our own interactions with entrepreneurs that the primary motivations behind most venture creation do not match the functionalist economic teleology of wealth accumulation and job creation. It's very simple: entrepreneurs' goals in creating businesses are much richer than the functionalist goals presumed in many of our theories. By ignoring this robust and obvious observation we doom ourselves to developing micro theories of entrepreneurial motivation, and relying on implicit theories of entrepreneurial motivation in our macro theories that are not just oversimplified but are simply incorrect. In addition, we systematically devalue entrepreneurship as a whole, by failing to see the pleasures and benefits of entrepreneurship unless they can be accounted for in wealth accumulation and job creation.

Fifth, even when we focus on the narrow set of goals assumed in much entrepreneurship research and in the sorts of distinctions listed above, a focus on the ventures on the left-hand side of the comparisons renders our work not only less interesting, but also much less useful than it might otherwise be. For example, it misses the opportunity for entrepreneurship research to embrace one of the great social challenges facing developed economies today: increasing economic and social inequality (Baker & Powell, 2016). What is more useful to the world and to entrepreneurship writ large—some incremental contribution to our understanding of interactions between entrepreneurs and venture capitalists (that is, by the way, unlikely to ever affect the behavior of either)—or a deeper and engaged understanding of how impoverished female entrepreneurs starting informal ventures in contexts of deep cultural misogyny can improve their chances of survival and generate some degree of autonomy? More generally, which is more useful—work that describes and theorizes how ventures on the left-hand side of the comparisons come to succeed (in terms of any set of goals), or work that figures out how those characterized by the right-hand side descriptors may improve their outcomes? In many ways, by focusing on the left-hand side, entrepreneurship scholars have taken both the easy path and the less useful path.

The problem we are describing is, fortunately and unsurprisingly, not hegemonic. As we mentioned in the introduction to this essay, groups of researchers have focused on several aspects of the "right-hand side" of the dichotomies. Their work throws into relief the value and interest of studying everyday entrepreneurship—the "ninety nine percenters" or the "others." Taken as a whole, this work also demonstrates the rich, blooming heterogeneity of entrepreneurship across wide-ranging contexts. In a few cases, theoretical ideas, for example those regarding entrepreneurship under resource constraints and under conditions of adversity (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Bradley, 2015; Corbett & Katz, 2013; Powell & Baker, 2014), have found fairly broad applicability to work on everyday entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, the dichotomies have nonetheless resulted in research ghettos (Baker & Welter, 2016), largely separate bodies of work investigating—for example—women's entrepreneurship, informal entrepreneurship, ethnic entrepreneurship, family business, etc.—that have not come together effectively toward generating a general theory of "everyday entrepreneurship." In such a theory, the study of the one-percenters will be a rare and special case: an intriguing outlier.

Our brief review below suggests some of the rich heterogeneity that is hidden when most of entrepreneurship is defined as the "other." For example, classifying motivations into necessity and opportunity, push and pull, or similar categories obscures the dynamics of entrepreneurship. Individuals learn and they change their behavior accordingly, and necessity motivations may not be specific to individuals but rather temporary for particular individuals during specific episodes of time. They are not there for life, hindering a business' growth and development as much of the literature has assumed. Not surprisingly, research has concluded that initial start-up motivations cannot reliably predict subsequent survival, size, or growth (Dahlqvist, Davidsson, & Wiklund, 2000; Solymossy, 1997). So even if specific entrepreneurial actions or events, such as creating a venture, are primarily driven by necessity or opportunity, it is inappropriate to place entrepreneurs as individuals into such categories (Smallbone & Welter, 2003).

A similar caveat applies to simple links between goals of different types of entrepreneurs and business success. Research on women's entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurs, and informal entrepreneurship has for some time argued for a wider perspective on understanding business success. For example, business development can be usefully viewed as inextricably intertwined with family goals (Carter & Ram, 2003), thus acknowledging and illuminating a specific role that (social) context plays in entrepreneurship (Ram, Abbas, Sanghera, Barlow, & Jones, 2001; Welter, 2011; Welter & Gartner, 2016).

Researchers have also started to argue for a differentiated perspective on the varied contributions that different types of entrepreneurship make to economy and society. Some may create "only" their own employment, as, for example, most of those entrepreneurs that start a business out of unemployment (Van Stel & Storey, 2004). Some entrepreneurial ventures, such as the famous Fairchild Semiconductor, never contribute much in the way of jobs or growth themselves. Although Fairchild ultimately failed, however, it is typically credited with creating Silicon Valley by spawning a host of start-ups and spinoffs, including Intel, which are widely referred to as Fairchildren (Klepper, 2016). Others may contribute little to economic growth, but serve other objectives and foster societal change. For example, Valliere and Peterson (2009) show that while both opportunity- and necessity-based entrepreneurship are important to predict and explain economic performance, their effects differ in emerging versus developed countries. They suggest that one of the reasons for a smaller contribution of high-expectation entrepreneurship in emerging countries may be thresholds that prevent business-owners from formalizing their activities. Thus, they implicitly draw attention to the economic contribution of informal entrepreneurship, previously recognized solely for its important role in individual survival and sustenance.

Recently, informal entrepreneurship has gained more importance as a "missing piece in the entrepreneurship jigsaw puzzle" (Welter, Smallbone, & Pobol, 2015), which we need to include in our assessments of the entrepreneurial potential of different regions. Studies on informal entrepreneurship have confirmed repeatedly that many more ventures than we want to acknowledge have development potential—for example, as a stepping-stone toward more substantial businesses (e.g., De Castro, Khavul, & Bruton, 2014; Webb, Tihanyi, Ireland, & Sirmon, 2009; Williams & Horodnic, 2015; Williams & Nadin, 2012). This research also emphasizes the wider role entrepreneurship can play for our economies and societies, and suggests how often, as scholars, we miss this point (Calas, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009; Davidsson, 2003; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006; Zahra & Wright, 2016).

A Call for Studying Diversity in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a broadly available social technology for creating organizations that may pursue myriad goals. We believe that entrepreneurship research can and should be a window into and a tool for shaping social and economic equity, construed to include not only issues of structural inequality but also empowerment and emancipation more broadly (Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009). A closer embrace of the "other" should be central to this project. We should not restrict ourselves to a singular meaning of entrepreneurship, but should instead fully embrace heterogeneity and differences. A closer look at the "other" also forces us to ask whom should our research serve? We have become rather self-centred in the development of our research, narrowing down our themes and focus pretty much to a sole group our research aims to serve—academia and to a substantial degree a sole group our research seeks to celebrate: the wealthy and successful. That is understandable, given the criteria most of us face to gain tenure, which increasingly has focused on scholarly publications in a limited set of journals. But it is not understandable given the value our research should and could create for those involved in entrepreneurship. The "others" represent normalcy: the everyday presence and nature of entrepreneurship. They remind us that entrepreneurship, understood broadly, is heterogeneous, blooming, messy, and a sometimes glorious social tool that is widely available. It is not just a pursuit of heroic "Silicon Valley" entrepreneurs, but it can produce heroes of many kinds: of their own lives, families, communities, and myriad other contexts.

We recognize the irony of this essay: By championing the "other" in entrepreneurship, we in effect reproduce the very dichotomies which we claim have defined too many forms of entrepreneurship as not central to the field. So, let us be clear: our argument is against theoretically privileging any one narrow special case of entrepreneurship as the distinctive domain of entrepreneurship scholarship. Although our field of study is now extraordinarily legitimate and institutionalized to the point of being fully taken-for-granted, our theories are primitive. We simply do not know enough about entrepreneurship to close ourselves off to studying any facet of the phenomenon. Part of why the field is so exciting is that we remain in exploratory mode, needing to observe, assess, and understand the full range and richness of differences and variations that flourish around us.

We believe that generating more broadly valuable insights into the phenomenon of entrepreneurship depends on where we look and what encumbrances we accept in deciding what is interesting and useful. Maybe we have not been looking in all of the right places? Or maybe it also depends on how and when we look? So, we leave you with a well-known story (and a challenge):

> A police officer sees a drunken man intently searching the ground near a lamppost and asks him the goal of his quest. The inebriate replies that he is looking for his car keys, and the officer helps for a few minutes without success then he asks whether the man is certain that he dropped the keys near the lamppost. "No," is the reply, "I lost the keys somewhere across the street." "Why look here?" asks the surprised and irritated officer. "The light is much better here," the intoxicated man responds with aplomb.[2]

Perhaps the "light is better" around the Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship. It certainly leaves more easily accessible archival traces. We challenge ourselves and our colleagues, however, to look in other directions. Looking at the "other" is looking at entrepreneurship. There is no one type of entrepreneurship. No one best way. No ideal context. No ideal type of entrepreneur. Differences matter, and, if we actually believe this, then, we need to be looking for where, when, and why those differences matter most. And, we need to pay attention to our language: does it extend to such variety, differences, and heterogeneity?

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