

Transitioning to an entrepreneurial career as a process of individuation: a study of graduate entrepreneurs in Ethiopia and the role of their parents

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Abstract

Purpose – In the process of pursuing an entrepreneurial career, the role of the relational institution of the family depends on the economy in which the institutions are embedded. In emerging economies, parents play a more significant role concerning their children's career in contrast to those in developed ones. In this respect, there is limited knowledge regarding the process of pursuing an entrepreneurial career while simultaneously handling parental relations in a context that does not support entrepreneurship. This paper investigates how parental dynamics influences the process of an individual's transition to an entrepreneurial career after graduating from a university in a developing country.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a longitudinal study of 15 graduate entrepreneurs in Ethiopia who were in the process of transitioning to entrepreneurial careers. Data was collected and analysed during a two and a half year period (2018–2020) drawing on 45 interviews with, and observations of, these entrepreneurs, and six interviews with parents.

Findings – The paper identifies patterns of how entrepreneurs embedded with or dis-embedded themselves from their parental relations as they developed their ventures. The findings show that there were shifts in the entrepreneur–parent relational dynamics from the pre-startup phase to the up and running phase. Drawing on these findings, the paper develops a theoretical framework of graduates' transitioning to entrepreneurship as a process of individuation from parental relations. Further, we find that parents are both the context and the agents in the entrepreneurial process and that the graduates' pursuit of entrepreneurial careers is instrumental for their individuation process. The findings contribute to the literature on family embeddedness in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship career literature and individuation theory.

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Originality/value – Answering the call for research on family embeddedness in entrepreneurship, this paper explores the role of parental dynamics when a family member transitions to an entrepreneurial career after graduating from a university. The study proposes and shows how individuation theory is a relevant perspective for understanding graduates' transition to entrepreneurial careers.

Keywords Graduate entrepreneurs, Graduate entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial career, Family embeddedness, Parental relations, Individuation, Ethiopia

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The drivers behind individuals' entering entrepreneurship have received scholarly attention in the broader literature on careers (Burton *et al.*, 2016; Dyer, 1994) and specifically in the entrepreneurship literature (Dawson and Henley, 2012; Liguori *et al.*, 2020). Research adopting a processual view treats entrepreneurship as one of several steps in an individual's career development, rather than considering it the "final destination" (Fritsch and Storey, 2014; Obschonka *et al.*, 2012). This perspective shifts the focus from studying the characteristics of people who eventually become self-employed to understanding the paths that lead to entrepreneurship (Burton *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, career transitions get meaning in a context (Elder, 1987). Put differently, the decision to pursue a certain career does not occur in a vacuum and often emerges through family interactions (Lopez and Andrews, 1987). These discussions are prevalent in the literature on embeddedness (e.g. Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Wigren-Kristoferson *et al.*, 2022). From a family's perspective, parents' experiences as well as support are particularly conducive for entrepreneurship (Carr and Sequeira, 2007). Children whose parents have experience of entrepreneurship typically develop a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and have a higher propensity of becoming self-employed (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Dyer and Handler, 1994). In addition, parental financial support and encouragement contribute to developing a desire to become self-employed (Nanda and Sørensen, 2008). Studies on graduate entrepreneurs reveal that the immediate context, consisting of parents and relevant others, the context of the university and the national context are all important for understanding the choice to become a graduate entrepreneur (Meoli *et al.*, 2020) [1].

It is well established that entrepreneurs in developed countries often receive family support prior to setting up their own businesses (Au and Kwan, 2009; Edelman *et al.*, 2016; Meoli *et al.*, 2020; Tarling *et al.*, 2016), but less is known about the family's role in developing economies where parents often have negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship and lack experience thereof (Nungsari *et al.*, 2023). For instance, studies show that parents in developing countries prefer their children to become educated and pursue employment rather than self-employment (García-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2020; Schäfer *et al.*, 2011).

Nevertheless, despite being faced with parents' negative views about entrepreneurship, university graduates in developing economies develop entrepreneurial intentions and pursue entrepreneurship careers (Nungsari *et al.*, 2023; Romaní *et al.*, 2022). However, there is limited knowledge about how this process unfolds (Birch *et al.*, 2017; Nabi *et al.*, 2010), particularly in developing nations where the overall economic and institutional structures are less supportive of entrepreneurship (Nabi and Liñan, 2011).

Focusing on the relationship between an entrepreneur and their parents during the establishment of a new venture, this paper enhances our understanding of the role of parental dynamics and its embeddedness in a transition to an entrepreneurial career. More specifically, we contribute to the literature by suggesting a conceptual framework on graduate entrepreneurship as a process of individuation from parental relations. It illustrates how individual agency occurs in a context that does not favour entrepreneurial engagement and by connecting parental relations to phases of new venture creation, it shows that university graduates' pursuit of entrepreneurial careers is instrumental for their individuation process. By doing so, we add greater nuance to the literature on family embeddedness in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship careers and individuation theory.

2. Literature review and framework

2.1 Family relations and entrepreneurship career choice

There is increasing agreement among scholars that becoming an entrepreneur can be seen as a career choice (Bird and Brush, 2002; Liguori *et al.*, 2020). Ultimately, an entrepreneurial career choice is connected to an individual's decision to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities (Asante and Affum-Osei, 2019) and is a conscious and intentional choice (Krueger *et al.*, 2000). The decision to pursue an entrepreneurial career presupposes that the individual has developed a positive attitude towards an entrepreneurial career (Veciana *et al.*, 2005), has intentions of becoming an entrepreneur (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán and Fayolle, 2015) and has the motivation to pursue entrepreneurial outcomes (such as prestige and financial rewards) (Gabrielsson and Politis, 2011; Mahto and McDowell, 2018).

Entrepreneurship literature acknowledges that families including parents play a crucial role in the venture creation process (Reynolds, 2007; Steier, 2007). Family embeddedness, with its characteristics and dynamics, play a role for why, when and how individuals start a new venture (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Wigren-Kristoferson *et al.*, 2022). It is also assumed that family embeddedness may facilitate entrepreneurship through access to resources but also lead to feelings of guilt and obligations (Sieger and Minola, 2016). The prevailing assumption is that parents with an entrepreneurial background act as role models for their children and encourage them to pursue entrepreneurial careers. It is also known from development literature that interactions between parents and their offsprings contribute to the development of ego and self-esteem (Allen *et al.*, 1994); autonomy and relatedness (Pavlidis and McCauley, 2001); affect (Allen *et al.*, 1994); and offsprings' overall career decision self-efficacy (Lindstrom *et al.*, 2007).

A study of entrepreneurship along the career path becomes of scholarly interest because it provides an opportunity to study who plays what role in the process of transitioning to an entrepreneurial career and for seeing the influence of family relations in this process. Family support significantly contributes to children's career transitions (Metheny and McWhirter, 2013; Lindstrom *et al.*, 2007). In this regard, studies on the role of parents become interesting because they take part in many of the activities leading to a family member's transition to an entrepreneurial career. Oftentimes, career decisions emerge through family interactions and the transition of a family member to an entrepreneurial career mainly takes place in a family setting (Lopez and Andrews, 1987), meaning that family relations matter for career and vocational identity development.

In career choice decisions, family members' connections play both supportive and constraining roles (Holden, 2010). The reasons for parents developing preferences for and attitudes towards some professions (for example, Bryant *et al.*, 2006) may be because of their prior experience, education or the social values attached to these professions. As a result, parental orientations influence the preparations that their children make in the development of their occupational career trajectories (Jayawarna *et al.*, 2014). The level of socialization and the embeddedness of an individual in the family context influences his/her career preferences and skill aspirations (Swail *et al.*, 2014) because families make up the microsocial space within which business startups often happen (Kessler and Frank, 2009). Consequently, families directly influence young family members' career choices and socialization, contributing to the legitimation of entrepreneurial careers (Krueger, 2007). Vocational studies indicate that family support aids young entrepreneurs in career transitions (Scott and Twomey, 1988; Schröder *et al.*, 2011). The family context and its social system thereby impacts entrepreneurial aspirations, depending on the value and practicality of business as a career (Scott and Twomey, 1988). Embedding relational institutions in the entrepreneurship process underscores the relative importance of family institutions in emerging economies (Newbery *et al.*, 2018, 2024; Nungsari *et al.*, 2023). The family plays a more significant role in developing economies than in developed ones, with parental interference in children's career choices being reported as either support or resistance (Zhu *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2023). However, while parents' views and expectations are important for children's career preferences, children also set their own ambitions when pursuing a career (Krueger and Carsrud, 1993; Meoli *et al.*, 2020).

Surprisingly, only a few studies discuss the influence of parents in the career development process when an offspring aspires to become an entrepreneur (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020; Zhu *et al.*, 2017), particularly in contexts that are not supportive of entrepreneurial careers.

2.2 Individuation theory

Individuation reflects the development of an individual's sense of self as the person matures over a lifespan (Blom and Bergman, 2013). It entails the person's separation and attachment to external factors including parents and the overall social setting (Blum, 2004). It is believed that an individual's self is shaped by the interplay between developmental processes and the individual's circumstances and experiences over her/his lifespan (Blom and Bergman, 2013). Both attachment theory (need for dependence) and separation-individuation theory (need for independence) help in understanding such processes (Blum, 2004; Grotevant and Cooper, 1986).

Individuation theory views an individual in a social framework rather than solely concentrating on the individual as a singular entity (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986). Levpušček *et al.* (2018) report that individuation (measured as children's parental relations) predicts children's career aspirations. Children's career aspirations are significantly explained by parental authoritativeness, openness to offspring issues and concern about promoting career exploration (Kracke, 1997). Moreover, children who are highly attached to their parents tend to become more career indecisive and enmeshed in familial relations (Downing and Nauta, 2010). The more attached children are, the less likely they are to be involved in exploring alternative careers (Kracke, 2002; Scott and Church, 2001) and the less likely they are to form an entrepreneurial self and entrepreneurial identity (Newbery *et al.*, 2018).

Depending on the attachment and individuation process during a child's development process, individual family members face both the conformance requirements of the family in which they are embedded, and the self-interest assurance processes through counteraction and reinforcement (Daniels, 1990; Levpušček *et al.*, 2018). Although the individuation process has been documented in family business literature (Hall, 2003; Hall *et al.*, 2001; Rogoff and Heck, 2003), individuation as a process of dis-embedding from family norms in the process of entrepreneurship in general is less acknowledged. Individuation theory can therefore provide valuable insights in a study of transitions to entrepreneurial careers (Leitch and Harrison, 2016).

2.3 The Ethiopian context

The empirical context for this study is Ethiopia. Ethiopia has a multifaceted sociocultural setting and an estimated population of 126.5 million (UNPA, 2023). Despite being the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa with significant natural and human resources, Ethiopia's economy remains one of the poorest. However, for the last 3 decades, the country's economy has experienced an increasing growth rate. A significant proportion (above 58%) of Ethiopia's population is estimated to be between 15 and 64 of age, and the early adulthood population (ages 15–29) account for 33.8% (UNPA, 2023). With the largest early adult population in the sub-Saharan region, Ethiopia is challenged by an increasing demand for employment creation (Berhe, 2021) for its nearly 25.3% unemployed youth (CSA, 2018).

Several challenges have been reported in the attempt to promote job creation and entrepreneurship in Ethiopia. First, entrepreneurship policies and strategies have historically focused on reducing unemployment among graduates (Biru *et al.*, 2021). These policies primarily focus on employment creation through the state bureaucracy and donor support with a focus on promoting micro, small and medium sized companies. Another challenge comes from the sociocultural setting of Ethiopian society, which tends to be less conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation (Biru *et al.*, 2021). This manifests in various societal attitudes, such as the widespread negative perception of entrepreneurship and the insufficient support for young entrepreneurs (Brixiova and Ncube, 2013). In Ethiopia's multicultural, religious, conservative and collectivist society entrepreneurship and innovation are discouraged as they are equated with greediness (Minkov, 2018). Parents influence their

children's career choices significantly and encourage regular employment (Kumar, 2016). In a culturally communal and religiously conservative society like Ethiopia, a typical family tends to discourage competitiveness, viewing it as profiteering. Schools and universities by and large prepare students for the workforce rather than for self-employment. Regarding the causes of rising unemployment among graduates in Ethiopia, most studies point to formal institutional and policy-related factors as major constraints faced by graduate entrepreneurs (Ahmed and Ahmed, 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1 Access and choice of participants

The data collection for this study emerged step by step. During the last ten years, incubators, especially in Addis Ababa, have become important actors on the entrepreneurship scene. The first author of this paper was drawn to this emerging trend of private incubator-based business development. By early 2018, he observed that Agri Pivot (name anonymized) had made a call for new applicants for its second round of admissions. He interviewed the incubation centre's two coordinators for information about the incubation centre's background, its purpose, business model and how it selected candidates. In December 2018, he was introduced as a visitor and researcher to the team of co-founders of the 2017 and 2018 entries to the incubation centre. To gain a better understanding of the incubation process, the first author rented a desk at Agri Pivot for two months (January and February 2019), participated in three training sessions, talked to the co-founders about their projects, and took part in pitching and launching programs and the Startup Ethiopia Challenge 2019. The author was able to identify 15 entrepreneurs (see Table 1) to be included in the interviews for this paper.

3.1.1 Longitudinal interview study. This paper drew on a processual approach for understanding the role of parental relations in the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career. Specifically, the paper investigated how new graduates' parental relations may influence their entrepreneurial careers. To study the parents' role in the process, the authors drew on a longitudinal interview study where data was collected and analysed across periods of time during change (Hermanowicz, 2013), in this case during a two and a half year period. This period marked the transition for entrepreneurs as they moved through the incubation process and progressed into the operational phase of developing their ventures. Since the paper focused on exploring *what* role parents played and *how* parental relations influenced the transitioning process to an entrepreneurial career, an interpretative (Lueger *et al.*, 2005) approach was considered suitable for addressing these questions.

The paper looked at the relational meaning of transitioning to an entrepreneurial career in a communal family context (Boblin *et al.*, 2013) in its "naturalistic" setting (Welter, 2011). The interview process was designed to situate an entrepreneur's activities within various overlapping contexts, including the parental context, training sessions in the incubator and efforts in venture creation. The inquiry was developed through an iterative process of interviews and conversations (Jackson *et al.*, 2007) with the participants.

3.1.2 Data collection. In total, the first author conducted 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews with graduate entrepreneurs in three rounds over two and a half years from 2018 to 2020, thus following the process in real-time. For the first round of interviews during December 2018–February 2019, the participants were asked semi-structured, open-ended questions about their decision to start new firms and their families' reactions to their decision. The second round of interviews was conducted from July 2019 to September 2019. These follow-up interviews focused on how the families reacted to the startup process over time and how the participants managed their entrepreneurial careers alongside their parents' aspirations. The third round of interviews was conducted telephonically (the COVID-19 outbreak did not allow in-person meetings) in February–May 2020. These interviews concentrated on entrepreneur–parent relations in connection with the up and running business development phase.

Table 1. Profile of the entrepreneurs and data collection

| Cofounder | Company | Role | Age and gender | Education and field of study | Interviews 1st round | Interviews 2nd round | Interviews 3rd round | Observations |
|-----------|-------------------|------|----------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Abdu | Garden farms | CTO* | 27 Male | BSc Civil Engineering | Jan 2019 90 min | Aug 2019 65 min | May 2020 40 min | 2019 Incubation entrants of 2019 at Agri-Pivot are trained in team building |
| Amanuel | Bunna filter | CEO* | 25 Male | BSc Mechanical Engineering | Dec 2018 73 min | Aug 2019 60 min | Apr 2020 45 min | Attending a coaching programme on branding given by the training team and supported by video shows at Agri Pivot |
| Amelu | AmChe AD | COO* | 22 Male | BSc Construction Management | Feb 2019 90 min | Aug 2019 80 min | Apr 2020 60 min | A branding evaluation session—where judges listened to the presentations of the incubator teams on their branding strategy |
| Boru | Carbon fert | CEO | 27 Male | BSc Software Engineering | Jan 2019 61 min | Sep 2019 60 min | Feb 2020 46 min | Startup Ethiopia 2019 Challenge competition in which Agri |
| Chekol | AmChe AD | CEO | 24 Male | BSc Civil Engineering | Jan 2019 60 min | Jul 2019 60 min | Febr 2020 45 min | Pivoters and other startup entrepreneurs participated 2020 |
| Dame | DaMa | CEO | 24 Male | BSc Chemical Engineering | Feb 2019 82 min | Aug 2019 53 min | May 2020 45 min | Visits to parental homes |
| Getaw | Bunna filter | COO | 26 Male | BSc Mechanical Engineering | Dec 2019 60 min | Aug 2019 64 min | May 2020 45 min | |
| Kiros | Carbon fert | CMO* | 25 Male | BSc Mechanical Engineering | Jan 2019 66 min | Aug 2019 65 min | Mar 2020 52 min | |
| Matewos | DaMa | CMO | 27 Male | BA Chemical Engineering | Feb 2019 80 min | Sep 2019 66 min | Feb 2020 63 min | |
| Meri | Ani feed | CEO | 29 Female | BA Marketing | Jan 2019 65 min | Jul 2019 55 min | Mar 2020 44 min | |
| Olana | Loon | CEO | 26 Male | BSc Software Engineering | Feb 2019 60 min | Aug 2019 50 min | Feb 2020 58 min | |
| Rebecca | Damat tech | CEO | 24 Female | BSc Civil Engineering | Jan 2019 76 min | Sep 2019 56 min | Apr 2020 45 min | |
| Tedi | Green landscaping | CMO | 26 Male | BA Law | Dec 2018 62 min | Aug 2019 40 min | Feb 2020 44 min | |
| Zak | Green landscaping | CEO | 29 | MA Law and Environmental Engineering | Dec 2018 60 min | Jul 2019 63 min | Mar 2020 40 min | |
| Zerubabel | Carbon fert | CMO | 26 | BA Mechanical Engineering | Feb 2019 65 min | Sep 2019 66 min | Feb 2020 55 min | |
| Total min | | | | | 1,050 | 903 | 727 | |
| Av. min | | | | | 70 | 60 | 48 | |

Note(s): * CEO = Chief executive officer COO = Chief operation officer CMO = Chief marketing officer CTO = Chief technology officer

Source(s): Authors' own work

In addition to the interviews, brief informal coffee break conversations occurred regularly until they were halted by the outbreak of COVID-19. Moreover, to complement the interview data, a shadowing approach was used (Hamada, 2019; Quinlan, 2008) with unstructured observations about the incubation company and the entrepreneurs' activities (see Table 1) (all the names of individuals and companies reported in this paper are anonymized).

The material was triangulated through interviews with six parents of the entrepreneurs, focusing on their parental roles and perceptions during their children's venturing process. A limited number of parents were included in the study because the entrepreneurs were reluctant to grant access, primarily due to their perception of resistance from their parents, as illustrated by Chekol: "I don't want you to make interviews with my parents about my business because I myself didn't tell them." (Chekol, AmChe AD). Therefore, interviews were conducted only after permission had been granted by the entrepreneur. Most of these interviews were conducted during the up and running phase and therefore they included retrospective answers about the whole process. Male parents had a history of employment, while female parents were either unemployed or self-employed in small trades. Table 2 lists the parents interviewed.

Table 2. Parents interviewed

| No | Entrepreneur | Name of the parent | Relation with the entrepreneur | Month, year | Duration (Hours) |
|----|--------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Amanuel | Lemlem | Mother | April 2020 | 3 |
| 2 | Amelu | Enat | Mother | June 2020 | 4 |
| 3 | Getaw | Lake | Father | September 2020 | 2.5 |
| 4 | Matewos | Bekelu | Mother | July 2020 | 3 |
| 5 | Zak | Mitiku/Mulu | Father/Mother | May 2020 | 4 |
| 6 | Zerubabel | Wonde | Father | February 2020 | 2 |

Source(s): Authors' own work

3.1.3 Analysis. The authors were inspired by the grounded theory tradition and the Gioia method (Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Gioia *et al.*, 2013) and followed a step-by-step inductive interpretation and coding process with the intention of understanding emergent concepts and themes. This allowed the enquiry of how entrepreneurs' parental relations may influence their propensity to pursue an entrepreneurial career. The unit of analysis was the entrepreneurs and how they experienced their relationships with their parents during the process of starting a business with complementary inputs from the parents. The coding and interpretation of the data was done after the authors repeatedly read the empirical text of each interview iteratively. First-level empirical interpretations of the empirical material (quotes) were conducted, followed by interpretations of first-order codes and second-order themes, which were then theorized into aggregate dimensions.

To grasp the process of transitioning to an entrepreneurial career, the data structures were developed along three phases of a new firm creation process from pre-startup to startup and the up and running phase. The coding and organization of the empirical material was done following the occurrence of activities, events, conversations or emotions along these three artificial phases.

4. Findings

This paper identified six key aggregate dimensions from an analysis of entrepreneur-parental relations as the entrepreneurs developed their entrepreneurial careers (see Figures

1–3). The aggregate dimensions show the dynamics of entrepreneur–parental relations along the three phases: pre-startup phase: (1) relational tensions and (2) career goal incompatibility; startup phase: (3) parental scaffolding and (4) attracting parents to business conversations; and up and running phase: (5) parents’ ambivalence towards children pursuing an entrepreneurial career and (6) entrepreneurs’ interest in letting go of parental influence. The next sections outline these dimensions.

4.1 Pre-startup phase

Figure 1 provides an overview of the early phase of entrepreneur–parental relations when an entrepreneur transitioned to an entrepreneurial career. The first aggregate dimension, *business intentions triggering entrepreneur–parent relational tensions*, captures tensions that arose between the graduates who developed an inclination for entrepreneurial careers and their parents. The second aggregate dimension, *perceived entrepreneur–parent career goal incompatibility*, shows intra-familial competitive views of the career choice.

4.1.1 Entrepreneur–parent relational tensions. The pre-startup was characterized by parental frictions and tensions. A career choice in business was neither a usual career choice nor encouraged by societal norms where parents associated career values with economic and social goals and advised their children to choose an occupational career after university graduation. This is because they associated employment with quick means of securing an income and social prestige. Since the family system is characterized by authoritarian parenting, the graduates were expected to obey the rules and norms to avoid relational conflicts. However, the graduates were empowered by the coaching and inspirational training services in the incubation centre, which may have given them the courage and motivation to choose their own careers in business even though they understood the possible resistance from their families. The graduates used different approaches for managing their parents’ perceived resistance in relation to their career choices. The authors identified two approaches to managing *entrepreneur–parent relational tensions*: getting attached to supportive family members and self–distancing from non-supportive family members.

The entrepreneurs shared ideas about their ventures with some chosen family members, usually their mothers, and had limited interactions with family members who they thought would object to their entrepreneurial careers. For instance, graduates Amelu, Chekol and Amanuel shared their business ideas with their mothers when they started their businesses, but they kept them a secret from the rest of their family members:

I shared with my mother that I had decided to become involved in a new business and she is the only one in the family who knew what I was doing (Amelu, AmChe AD).

Amelu’s mother trusted her son and wanted to support him in his interests. She showed her support as a mother without focusing on the business based on parental sentiments and instead focused on encouraging her son’s efforts. She said:

I believe that it is better to say positive words of encouragement rather than sending him negative messages when my son comes up with new ideas. This is what I do, unlike his father who rejects his ideas (Enat, Amelu’s mother).

Chekol shared his business ideas and details of his business intentions with his mother because according to him he was confident that his mother would not discourage him when trying something new. He selectively socialized with his father on non-business and non-career matters and instead preferred sharing his business and career matters with his uncle who he believed would be supportive:

Only my mom knew about my startup to begin with, but later my uncle also knew about it (Chekol, co-founder, AmChe AD).

Another entrepreneur, Amanuel, was very attached to his mother who gave him the opportunity to easily share his emotions:

I won't share my son's business details with other people till I see him being successful. I don't want the information about his business spreading early and everyone discouraging him (Lemlem, Amanuel's mother).

Amanuel was very happy with her support:

When I shared information about my business with my mom, she encouraged me to check the risks that may accompany a business (Amanuel, co-founder Bunna Filter).

Kiros' parents had encouraged him to pursue employment after graduation, and he did not want to go against their expectations, at least not during the initial stages of starting his business:

When I took the step to start a new company, I kept it a secret from my parents. I did not tell them right away because I did not want to hear negative comments (Kiros, Carbon Fert).

Another entrepreneur, Abdu, normally reported his day-to-day activities to his parents but he suspected that they would oppose a business startup, so he did not share information about his business with them:

I did not tell my parents about my startup activities right away. It was only on the last day that they got to know about it. To be *honest* my dad was excited, and he did not know what to say (Abdu, co-founder, Garden Farms).

Getaw only partly told his parents about what he was doing – inventing a machine for coffee drying – since he believed that his parents would not understand a business and therefore wanted to avoid their possible negative influence:

I am very good at receiving advice on whatever I think is necessary, but the person who gives me advice must be the one in the business or in the sector that I am involved, you know! I have no room to be influenced, especially not by people who do not understand what I am doing even if it is my parents (Getaw, co-founder Bunna Filter).

4.1.2 Perceived entrepreneur–parent career goal incompatibility. Parents primarily encouraged occupational careers because of the social value attached to them and high-risk perceptions about self-employment and business. These disparities in parental career expectations and the new graduate's entrepreneurial career aspirations led to *career goal incompatibility*. For example, Zak, the co-founder of Green Landscaping came from a family who had been in business but never encouraged the children to get into business:

My mom and dad have been in business for more than 20 years, they had a milling plant providing milling services and a retail store for grains. When my siblings and I went to their workplace after school, they did not allow us to stay with them. They wanted to keep us at a distance from their business and they did not ask for our services in their business. Instead, they encouraged us to get well educated and employed (Zak, co-founder and CEO, Green Landscaping).

Thus, there were contradictions in career goals between the two generations of family members. For example:

In our generation, we valued and gave more prestige to those who were educated and worked in the government system. Our society gives prestige to rulers, governors, and soldiers, not to businesspeople. My husband and I wanted our kids to get educated and we were committed to that (Mulu, Zak's mother).

The entrepreneurs stated that their parents oriented them towards occupational careers during family conversations. Because the graduate entrepreneurs were young, they had fewer opportunities for social networks beyond their families, especially during the

initial stages of their career transition and they had to make career decisions that went against their family's expectations. One parent provided the societal view about running a business:

I am from a family of farmers who were illiterate. My parents were among the very few who sent their children to school. Their expectation was that I would study hard and become employed. Society saw traders as less prestigious, because trading was done using animal transportation with horses and donkeys. Those involved in such a trade were not given social respect and were associated with maleficence (Wonde, Zerubabel's father).

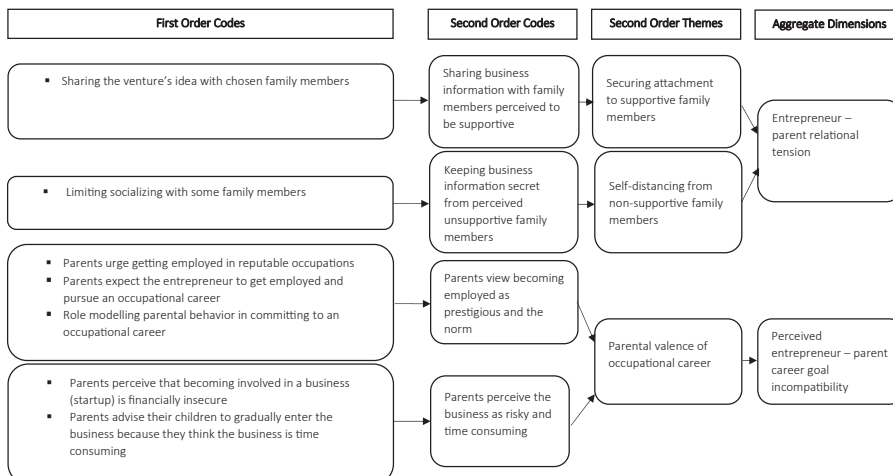
Parental aspirations of their children's employment were more than a mere exchange of ideas for an occupational career and passive suggestions:

My family expected me to apply for a vacant post in my field and get employed. They refused to give me permission when I told them I wanted to start a business (Olana, co-founder, Loon).

I discussed my business decision with my parents and my husband. My parents commented on the risks in my startup and the challenges of owning a business in terms of capital requirements and the effort it would take as a mother of two. They insisted I should find employment in a secure job (Meri, Ani Feed).

Getaw discussed his thoughts with his parents at an early stage, influenced by his father's extensive 30-year career as a government employee and agronomist for the Ministry of Agriculture. His father recognized that the returns from employment were limited and wanted more for his son. He advised Getaw to first gain employment and accumulate experience, and then gradually develop his own company. Moreover, he expected his son to get married and support him as his first-born son:

It will give me great pleasure if Getaw gets an income and makes his own home. What would more make a father happy than *seeing* his grandchildren? (Lake, Getaw's father).



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Entrepreneur–family/parent relations during the pre-startup phase

4.2 Startup phase

Figure 2 provides an overview of the entrepreneur–parent relations during the startup phase with two aggregate dimensions. The first dimension, *parental scaffolding*, shows that parental support was gradually given to the entrepreneurs' activities. The second dimension, *inviting parents to business conversations*, shows the entrepreneurs' attempts at discussing business issues and developing family relations which included their businesses.

4.2.1 Parental scaffolding. During the startup phase, the entrepreneurs engaged in explicit startup activities while living in their parents' homes or depending on their parents' support for living expenses. The entrepreneurs decided to pursue entrepreneurial careers even though they perceived resistance from their parents. Many of the entrepreneurial activities during this phase were characterized by explicit rather than implicit entrepreneurial activities. During this time, the parents and the rest of the family members observed and heard that something was going on in the life of the offspring. The main feature of the startup phase signified high resource needs for setting up the ventures for which the entrepreneurs needed to pool resources (financial and non-financial), formally register the businesses as legal entities, and partner with others for support.

Many of the parents (particularly fathers) and the rest of the family members who were not informed about the business in the pre-startup phase now received information from public sources that their offsprings were engaged in some type of business activity. Parents, especially fathers who had the authority over the family's resources, became aware of the entrepreneurs' business activities. Consequently, business matters became a topic of conversation within the families:

My business had become the topic for family talks on coffee ceremonies and dinners. My father gradually understood the value of my business especially for smallholder farmers and he ceased pushing me to get employed. He shared what I was doing with my uncle who works in the regional agricultural office of a biochemical pesticide business in seeking his expertise support. My mother often tells her small business customers and her neighbouring coffee partners about my business looking for clients in her network (Dame, Co-founder DaMa).

Parental scaffolding implies that parents disregarded their expectations of occupational careers and instead supported their children's business efforts. Living with their parents and sharing resources, the entrepreneurs' behaviour while working on business projects created a new dynamic with their families. While the entrepreneurs sought parental support, the parents and the rest of the family members showed an increasing interest in what was going on in the lives of the entrepreneurs. This led to an exchange of information and emotions about the business and an increasing interest among family members to understand and know about the business.

Family support included emotional encouragement and instrumental support through resources and investments, symbolizing increasing parental scaffolding. Zak's father, Mitku, illustrated this support:

My son, Zak, is unique as he always wanted to start his business although I and his mother did not support this choice. When he continued working on it, we could no longer ignore him and started supporting him emotionally. Also, we told his brothers and sisters who live abroad to support him financially (Mitku, Zak's father).

Additional examples of encouragement and material support are captured in the following three quotes:

My uncle watched out for me at every step of my business' progress and encouraged me (Chekol, AmChe AD).

My mom made follow-up calls quite often. I saw that my mom had the capacity to assess things from a risk perspective. I usually shared with her what we were doing in the startup project, and she

usually cautioned me from a risk perspective. And my parents continued encouraging me whenever I faced financial shortages because of my time commitment to organizing my startup and covered my living expenses and contributed seed money. Their support gave me energy (Amanuel, Bunna Filter).

When they saw my success, my parents were happy. They saw me becoming influential among many startups and being invited for motivational speeches and getting media coverage. My parents were encouraged and started sending positive messages that I was becoming an owner of a company (Meri, Ani Feed).

4.2.2 Inviting parents to business conversations. This dimension captures conversations between the entrepreneurs and their parents to reduce the entrepreneurs' feelings of being neglected and ignored by their parents, particularly by their fathers. Here, the entrepreneurs tried to explain their business activities to their families. Due to resource demands and a desire to maintain parental relations, the entrepreneurs tried to convey a positive impression of their businesses to their parents. This was done via stories and narratives around the business that would catch their parents' attention. For instance, Amanuel shared stories of his business' success with his parents to catch their attention and convince them that he was doing fine:

When we won a one million Birr award in the Startup Ethiopia Challenge 2019, I told my parents about it. My mother cried and told me that she was very happy (Amanuel, Bunna Filter).

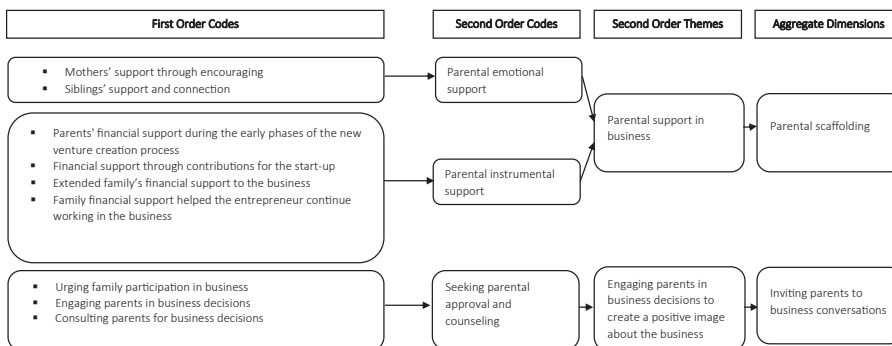
Amelu shared his business' progress with his mother to keep her motivated and for receiving her continuous support:

I was quick to tell her breaking news about our startup and progress. Whenever we received an order and signed a contract, whenever we attended big meetings and conferences, she was the first to be told (Amelu, AmChe AD).

In addition to the entrepreneurs' efforts to engage with their families, the families actively sought updates on the business's performance and progress:

During the startup's early phases, whenever I told them there was a peak, my family was happy and whenever there was a dormant phase or nothing was happening or taking more time than I thought it would, they told me that I was not moving forward (Meri, AniFeedi).

When I informed my siblings about my start-up, they wanted to know more about the business and started following up (Rebecca, Damat Tech).



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. Entrepreneur–parent relationships during the startup phase

4.3 Up and running phase

Initially discouraging their children from pursuing business, followed by a growing interest, parents eventually tried to dissuade the entrepreneurs from continuing their business careers during the up and running phase. As the entrepreneurs expanded their social networks beyond the extended family, they became interested in letting go of their parental influence (see Figure 3).

4.3.1 Parents' ambivalence towards their children pursuing entrepreneurial careers. During this phase, parents shifted from supporting their children's entrepreneurial pursuits to discouraging them, regretting their children's career choice as it reduced their potential for parental support. Given that it took time for a business to generate money, this reduced the possibility of parents receiving financial support from the entrepreneurs. Parents were discouraged because the business did not yield profits as quickly as they expected, and they saw the entrepreneurs' increased commitment, investing time and resources in the business:

When we understood that Amanuel's business was not generating money as per our expectations, we started regretting the support we had provided. We insisted that he should not continue investing in an insecure startup and find employment instead. We were afraid that our son was taking a risk and as parents we needed to protect him from risks (Lemlem, Amanuel's mother).

Amanuel could sense them doubting his capabilities:

They [my parents] doubt that I am doing fine even when I tell them that we are getting contracts for sales. They believe that generating sales income from the business is not sustainable. The voice in which my parents ask me about the happenings around my business signals that they are passing a message that I have not yet matured as per their expectations (Amanuel, Bunna Filter).

Zak's father, who previously showed his support, also changed his mind along the way:

As you grow old, it is normal for you to depend on your children's support. It was our choice that Zak should get employed soon after his graduation rather than killing his time in business development. It would have been better if he got married and raised kids and supported his parents. We are aged and no longer work and earn money (Mitiku, Zak's father).

The entrepreneurs recognized that it was customary to meet parental expectations of providing them support even though this was more implicit than explicit in parental conversations:

My parents expect support from me not in the short term but in the long term. I am also interested in supporting them (Getaw, Bunna Filter).

Parental expectations of getting support from their children became increasingly demanding especially when parents faced social problems, and community expectations also put pressure on the entrepreneurs to support their parents. For example, Olana said that his parents expected support from his business income:

My parents do not understand when I tell them that I am working on my startup and not earning any money yet. They lose patience. When my mom needs money, she expects me to provide it because she thinks that I am generating money. But she never asks directly. She does so through my dad because dad can put pressure on me (Olana, Loon).

Some entrepreneurs perceived that their parents developed negative attitudes towards the business regardless of a promising performance, and other parents gradually withdrew their support for their children's entrepreneurial careers because they became doubtful of their viability. For instance, Matewos said that his parents urged him to get a job because the startup was not profitable in the expected timeframe:

As time lapsed, my parents tended to send signals that I should find employment in a company that they suggested and they even connected me to an employer, but I resisted (Matewos, DaMa).

Parental safeguarding indicates that parents become more eager to know about the progress of their children's businesses over time. In this phase, parents wanted to see that their children

were on a good career path before they left them alone. They wanted assurance that their children's lives, including education, career, marriage, and childcare, were progressing favourably. Therefore, parents increasingly followed up on the progress of the businesses. Parental involvement increased in terms of following up on day-to-day activities, updates on the progress of the business, and giving advice. Parents expressed their concerns in different verbal and non-verbal cues. For example, Kiros felt that his father expected periodic reports on the progress of the business and provided some advice:

After founding our company, my dad continued requesting me to tell him what was new in my business' progress. After he knew that I had started a business, my dad started giving advisory services to the business (Kiros, Carbon Fert).

In another example, Getaw's father Lake insisted on accompanying a team of his son's company, Bunna Filter, on a business trip to Jimma, one of the coffee producing regions in Ethiopia, 358 km from the capital Addis, to create a linkage with a coffee farming company. Lake suggested that he would connect them to a company he knew in his network while he was working as a government employee in Jimma. He was worried that his son and his companions were too young to do good business deals.

As an exception, Kiros told us that his parents provided advisory comments once they understood the business context, but it was from the point of view that the entrepreneur was a child who needed guidance:

When I told him [my father] that for now, we had paused the business, my dad said, "Cool down, it will be fine!" He added, 'You need to remember that a business naturally takes time and grows gradually. Maybe you are so young that you expect the outcome in a short time.' So, he advised us to instead see how we could earn an income in a short period of time (Kiros, Carbon Fert).

4.3.2 Entrepreneurs' interest in letting go of parental influence. During this phase, the entrepreneurs aspired to be independent. However, their family relational independence was not automatic and involved negotiations between them and their parents. At this point, the entrepreneurs wanted to be regarded as "*entrepreneurs*" rather than being treated as sons or daughters. When the entrepreneurs moved further into the new venture creation process, they had a dire need for resources for the development of their businesses which was more than what their parents had been providing them in terms of pocket money and living expenses. The entrepreneurs committed themselves to resource pooling tasks through working on projects on a part time basis, networking with investors through pitching their projects, dealing with potential customers, and finding business partners. These tasks diverted the entrepreneurs' focus from their parents and other family members, shielding them from direct parental influence. The entrepreneurs' main associates became those they directly engaged with for business partnerships. For instance, Getaw felt that his father could not see him as an independent entrepreneur and chose not to turn to him:

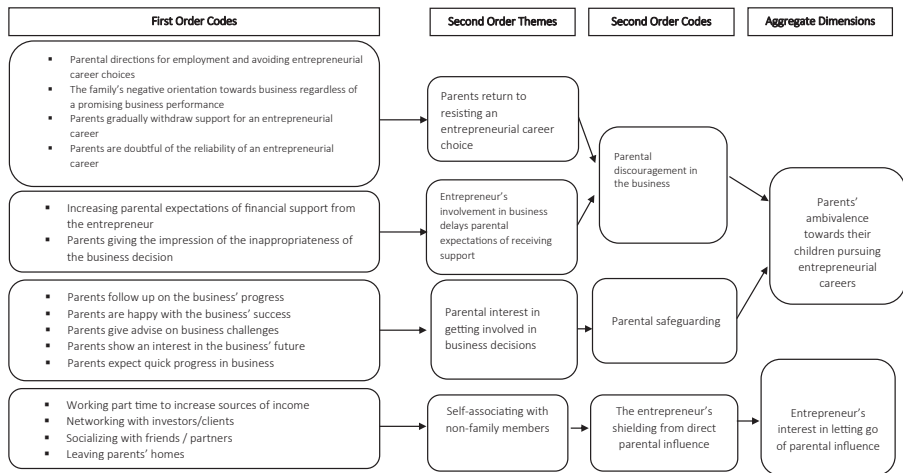
Although I have established and own a company, and was able to gain recognition, my father still advises me as if I am a little boy and does not believe that I am a grown-up entrepreneur (Getaw, Bunna Filter).

With gradual advancement of the businesses, the entrepreneurs engaged in income generating projects which occupied their time and limited their availability for socializing with their parents and the rest of their family members:

I have rarely talked to my parents in the last three months because I won a contract to work on a machine design and energy conservative tools with a Germany based development organization (Amanuel, Bunna Filter).

Boru confirmed that he had no need for his parents' support:

I joined my friends and found a system that helps develop business incubation services. We were sponsored and this has helped us a lot in making progress in our startup (Boru, Carbon Fert).



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 3. Entrepreneur–parent relationships during the up and running phase

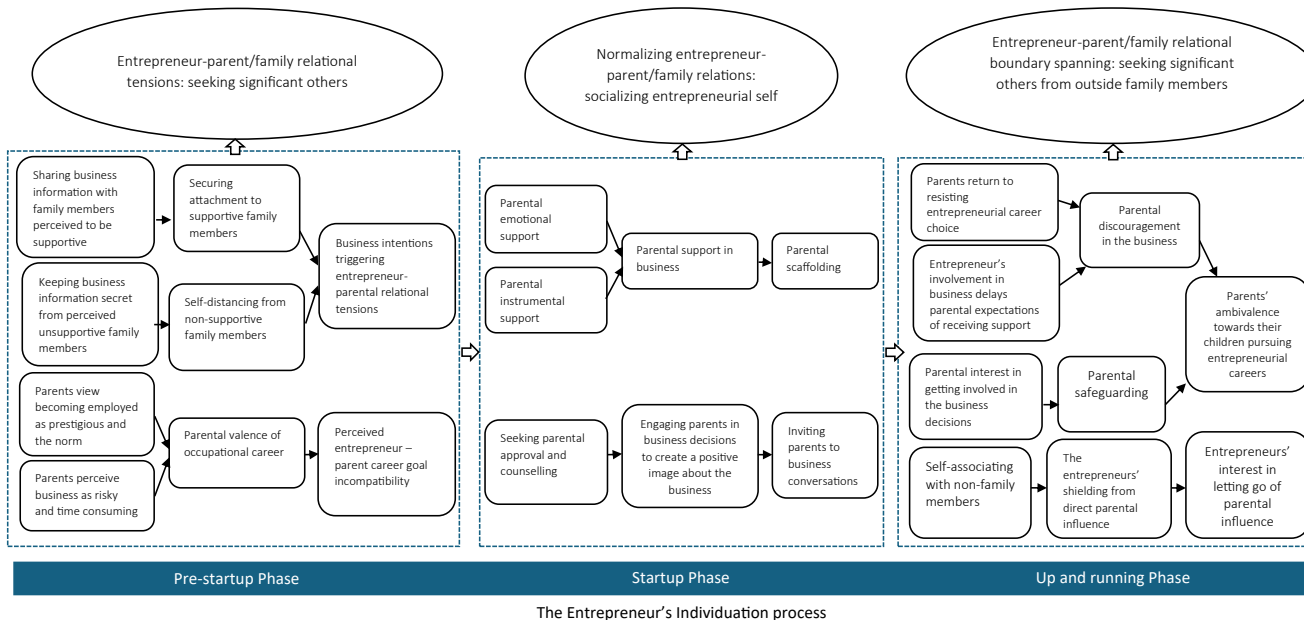
5. Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, this paper suggests a conceptual framework of graduates' transitioning to an entrepreneurial career as a process of individuation (Figure 4) (Hietanen and Ruismäki, 2021; Newbery *et al.*, 2018) as moderated by parental relations.

The framework demonstrates the individuation process along three phases of parental relational transitions; during the pre-startup phase, entrepreneur–parent relational dynamics are characterized by entrepreneur–parent relational tensions; during the startup phase the dynamics are characterized by normalizing entrepreneur–parent relations; and during the up and running phase, these dynamics are characterized by entrepreneur–parent relational boundary spanning–seeking significant others, other than the parents.

The individuation to an entrepreneurial career occurs through a processual development as the entrepreneur manages parental relations and passes through an experiential learning process in various entrepreneurial activities alongside the processes of a business startup. A transition to an entrepreneurial career develops step-by-step as the individual entrepreneur detaches from parental relations – despite an attraction to such relations – since they are embedded in a business unfriendly family setting. Here the graduate entrepreneur involves in dealing with parent relations in the process of business startups influenced by parental expectations.

During the *pre-startup phase*, the graduate entrepreneurs psychologically distanced themselves from unsupportive family members and defined and sought support from supportive significant others among core (primarily mothers) and extended family members (cf. Andersen and Chen, 2002). This finding complements other studies (Baron *et al.*, 2012; Solesvik, 2013) which report that entrepreneurs develop coping mechanisms to overcome negative emotions. However, our paper extends prior research by showing how graduate entrepreneurs regulated negative emotions by managing their parental relations. Moreover, it shows that one reason for relational tensions during the pre-startup phase of pursuing an entrepreneurial career was intergenerational differences in relation to career expectations – occupational (employment) career and entrepreneurial career. Even if earlier research has shown that parents' occupation, education level and expectations define their children's career aspirations (Berzin, 2010), most studies draw on the general notion of a Western culture where an entrepreneurial career is largely encouraged by the family, for instance, when teenagers'



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 4. Transitioning to an entrepreneurship career as a process of individuation

own aspirations were most strongly influenced by parental aspirations (Schoon and Parsons, 2002). This differs in the context of this study due to intergenerational career goal incompatibility arising from cultural and societal norms.

The relationality between the parents and the entrepreneur during the *startup phase* of normalizing entrepreneur–parent relations is reflected by mutual co-influence between entrepreneurs and their parents (Lerner et al., 2015). While parents provided instrumental and social support, the entrepreneurs distanced themselves from negative family perceptions about the business by only providing periodic updates and by conveying news about the business’ successes, awards and exemplars. This mutual influence contributed to revising the parent’s perception of an entrepreneurial career and generated an interest in business conversations. In effect, in parent relational dynamics the entrepreneur started developing an “entrepreneurial self” (Kelly, 2006; Peters, 2001), seeing themselves as independent individuals and entrepreneurs. Parental support helped entrepreneurs transition to an entrepreneurial career particularly during the startup phase of a venture creation, but also provided more nuance to the fact that parent–entrepreneur support was not merely based on transactional and economic relations but also on familial relations drawing on the logic of parental scaffolding.

This finding supports Xu et al. (2020), who report that family support in entrepreneurship relates to the family’s expectations of returns (economic or social). However, the findings of our paper show the existence of heterogeneity among parents in terms of their support. These findings thus contradict the implicit assumption in extant family embeddedness literature that the family at large supports an entrepreneurial career choice (Dyer and Handler, 1994; Osorio et al., 2017). This was seen, for instance, in the up and running phase, when entrepreneurs transitioned to a stage of spanning the parent relational boundaries because they focused on seeking support from significant others outside the core family. These findings clearly show that parental support and resistance are not linear in the entrepreneurial career process. Instead, they are manifested in relational transactions between the parent and the entrepreneur. Although the impact of career choice decisions on family relations has been addressed in earlier studies (Elder and Caspi, 1989), this paper departs from these findings showing that parental embeddedness intersected with children’s transition to adulthood, in the form of university graduation. Because of their family’s embeddedness in a business unfriendly social setting, the graduate entrepreneurs in this paper were challenged by their parents’ career expectations, parenting style, level of parental control and attachment. More specifically, their career decisions were significantly influenced by family dynamics (Schultheiss et al., 2002), kin relationships (Finn, 2017) and connections to self, others and society (Motulsky, 2010).

When the graduate entrepreneurs moved through the phases from pre-startup, startup, to the *up and running phase*, their parents became less significant. This reveals that the graduate entrepreneurs were going through the last stage of an individuation process and developed into becoming an entrepreneur (see Figure 4). Individuation combines parent–entrepreneur relational dynamics with entrepreneurial activities and refers to graduate entrepreneurs’ step-by-step development in their transition to an entrepreneurial career. This is characterized by: (1) entrepreneur–parent relational tensions during the pre-startup phase, (2) normalizing entrepreneur–parent relations during the startup phase and (3) entrepreneur–parent relational boundary spanning during the up and running phase.

Drawing on individuation as a process of transitioning to an entrepreneurial career, this paper provides an alternative context of individuation in a non-Western context during the process of pursuing an entrepreneurial career. The findings of this paper are different from individuation as it is commonly referred to in extant literature (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986; Meeus et al., 2005) for two reasons. First, prior studies are based on cross-sectional data drawn from life course-based adolescent transitions to adulthood, from lower school to college (Kim and Nuñez, 2013), whereas our study builds on a longitudinal approach of graduates’ transition to an entrepreneurial career. Second, this study did not rely on child–parent dyads assuming an authoritative parental system of the Western culture. Rather, this paper considered intra-family relational dynamics in relation to graduate entrepreneurs (cf. Levpušček et al., 2018) embedded

in a context characterized by extended family structures that typically feature authoritarian parenting systems that discourage child individualism and self-development, and thus challenges the usual context of other studies on individuation (Carlson and Corcoran, 2001).

6. Conclusion

This paper provides insights about the role of familial dynamics in the process of an entrepreneurial career transition of a graduate family member. Specifically, it positions the role of graduates' parents during their children's transition to an entrepreneurial career. It adds to other works on family embeddedness in that it provides more nuance by illustrating mothers' and fathers' influence in this process.

The paper confirms earlier research which suggests the importance of the embeddedness of the family in studies on the entrepreneurship process (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Klyver, 2007; Heck and Mishra, 2008). It explains how parental relations change when a family member makes a career choice in entrepreneurship through a business startup. Further, parents take part in the career formation of their children (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014) and this paper shows how parents influence the process of career formation and their engagement (Wang *et al.*, 2023; Klyver, 2007). The paper indicates how the context provides a setting for socialization and how parental interactions affect the transition to entrepreneurship particularly when the graduate is embedded in a family context which is unsupportive of entrepreneurship and they are to make their career choice.

The developed framework explains the stage-by-stage development process illustrating the interfamilial relational dynamics as the entrepreneur transitions to individuate to become an independent entrepreneur. Research often detaches and controls for the direct influence of the parents on entrepreneurship. This study, however, connects parental relations to the entrepreneurship process, thus, extending an understanding of the role of parental relational dynamics in the transition to an entrepreneurship career after graduation.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Through conceptualizing parent relational dynamics and an entrepreneurial career, this paper contributes to literature on family embeddedness in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship career literature and individuation theory.

First, viewing entrepreneurship as a relational act (Breen and Leung, 2020), the paper demonstrates that parents play a significant role in terms of encouraging or discouraging an entrepreneur's business ideas, giving approval or disapproving, setting expectations and becoming the basis of psychosocial and emotional contexts. While mothers played the main supportive roles during the pre-startup phase of the entrepreneurial stages and fathers showed more resistance, fathers showed support during the startup stage. The paper thus contributes to the emerging premise that families are both the context and the agents in the entrepreneurial process (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Heck and Mishra, 2008). Moreover, it demonstrates that entrepreneurship, embedded in a family, is not a universal phenomenon but rather context-specific (Wigren-Kristoferson *et al.*, 2022).

Second, this paper extends earlier models developed on an entrepreneurial career (for example, Dyer, 1994) adding that entrepreneurship as a career is seen as a processual approach of individuation from parental relations. It adds insights into how parents act as not only a context in a career choice but also how parental relationships matter for career development. The paper complements the view that individual entrepreneurs have the capacity to influence their career progressions in their parental relations characterized by pre-set norms and values induced by a negative attitude towards entrepreneurship (Marshall *et al.*, 2019).

Third, the paper contributes to individuation literature which is normally discussed in child development literature to the identity development process as it occurs in child-parent relations. By connecting parental relations to phases of a new venture creation, the paper

shows that university graduates' pursuit of entrepreneurial careers is instrumental for their individuation process.

6.2 Policy implications

This paper demonstrates how parental dynamics influence entrepreneurial careers among university graduates, taking the perspective of family embeddedness characterized by authoritarian parenting (Gray and Steinberg, 1999), and a communitarian society, where children's careers are pre-set by parental expectations, and entrepreneurship is less socially accepted. These findings inform entrepreneurship policymakers and entrepreneurship development programs by accounting for parental issues in their development programs for the sustainable promotion of entrepreneurship. Incubators and support programs normally focus on developing individual entrepreneurs through career development interventions (for example, training, mentoring) (Trusty et al., 2005). However, graduate entrepreneurs are by and large influenced by the family, which provides the setting for socialization and interaction. Entrepreneurship policymakers in developing and emerging economies, therefore, may redesign their intervention programs to fit and accommodate local contexts that promote family and community level entrepreneurship legitimacy. This may help increase acceptance and scaling-up of entrepreneurship practices because the family structure is built on the fabric of communitarianism rather than individualism. Family level entrepreneurship training and development programs may help boost the acceptance of entrepreneurship and the efforts of pooling the family's resources for joint business development both culturally and psychosocially (Marshall et al., 2019). This paper found that parental gender is an important consideration in the support of graduate entrepreneurs (Eyal, 2008; Gofen and Blomqvist, 2014). Therefore, policymakers in developing economies can incorporate such differences when designing entrepreneurship development programs.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This paper's limitations provide inspiration for future research. First, prior studies on graduate entrepreneurs have highlighted the importance of being in supportive contexts such as having a supportive family, being in a university setting that encourages entrepreneurship, as well as in a national context which induces entrepreneurial behaviour (Meoli et al., 2020). Our paper focuses on the immediate context of the family in a country unfavourable for entrepreneurship. We show how graduates handle parental dynamics as they start their own ventures given these two contexts. However, we did not study the role of the incubator or the university in this regard. While there is research investigating the role of universities for graduate entrepreneurship, they lack depth combining an individual-level and a university-level perspective (Beyhan and Findik, 2018). Therefore, future studies could investigate the role of the university context for graduate entrepreneurs in developing countries, including location preferences in these studies will add an interesting dimension. This is because graduates launching new ventures in developed nations are often inclined to establish a business if they graduate from a university in an urban area and are also more likely to establish their ventures in the same location as the university (Larsson et al., 2017) or if they return back home (Fini et al., 2022).

Second, and relatedly, this paper was inspired by the relational approach to understand how entrepreneur-parents' relations affected entrepreneurial career formation through an entrepreneur's individuation reflected in the venturing process. However, future research may focus on studying the role of other significant others for graduate entrepreneurship.

Third, our findings show that mothers were the main confidants during the pre-startup phase. This raises questions about the different roles that parents may take in such a process. Among the graduate entrepreneurs, we left the perspectives of gender and identity aside, which are also topics that need further attention. For example, how does the individuation process inter-relate with the development of an entrepreneurial identity, and how does it differ for male and female graduate entrepreneurs?

Notes

1. A graduate entrepreneur is defined as an individual who ventures into self-employment after completing their university education. The typical timeframe for categorizing someone as a graduate entrepreneur ranges from immediate effects (Meoli *et al.*, 2020) to three years post-graduation (Larsson *et al.*, 2017).

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