Making futures? Technology start-ups in Singapore
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Embodying the Entrepreneur

1. Introduction. Managing One's Capitalability

In this chapter, I continue to explore the promise of start-up futurities in terms of what sort of subjectivities and transformations they promote and explore their limitations. The previous chapter detailed how embracing entrepreneurial subjectivity meant embracing seeming openness, flexibility and risk-taking on the one hand. On the other hand, it also meant strategic management and control of oneself. I explained that it can be understood as a result of thinking of oneself as capital that one needs to speculate with to generate value in the future. In this chapter, I zoom in on how this entrepreneurial ideal required a mindset change and control over one's body to illustrate the implicit biases in this ideal. In this way, I want to highlight not only the amount of work that goes into sustaining this entrepreneurial ideal but also its limitations. The chapter shows how the contradictions held within the neoliberal ideal work out in practice as people struggle to realise this ideal. In particular, by approaching futurities ethnographically as they relate to the body and mind, it becomes visible how this ideal is steeped in global power relations and puts bodies that have a harder time adhering to it at a disadvantage. This chapter will address, in particular, how race and gender became issues as they were less malleable in the transformation that these start-up futurities called for.

The process of commodification of the self I started describing in the previous chapter happened neither effortlessly nor smoothly. Different identity markers were seen as having different values - race and gender, in particular, caused different levels of friction in the commodification process, and when commodified, they seemed to have different market values or abilities to attract attention and, along with it, potential financial capital. Melody's story at the beginning of the previous chapter illustrated how she deemed her body as in need of transformation to fit the entrepreneurial ideal - her voice had to change, she had to be taller, she had to be thinner, and the way she experienced and expressed her feelings had to change. Yet, unlike narrative futures expressed through pitches as described in Chapter Four, these embodied futures described in Chapter Five and here were less malleable. Therefore, we will see the attempts to strategically man-

age one's 'race' and 'gender' in a way that would yield some capital rather than entirely exclude them.

Nigel Thrift has pointedly articulated how the new economy at around the millennium was not only rhetoric but also was actively embodied and performed through bodies that were increasingly expected to display the ability to do more, be adaptable for ever-changing situations, be passionate and participative (Thrift 2001, 2000). Thrift also points out that the successful performance of such subjectivity and involvement in the new economy was harder for females (Thrift, 2001). In this chapter, I want to highlight how the discourse and practice of entrepreneurship are not only gendered but also implicitly racial, and I hope to show how my interlocutors explored strategies to deal with race and gender ideologies in ways that aimed to contribute to their capital rather than diminish it. I rely on Ferguson's notion of 'cultural style' (Ferguson 1999) to emphasise how culture is embodied and performative, but unlike the notion of 'habitus' developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) , cultural style allows me to explore the signifying practices that start-up entrepreneurs were learning to use and used, without necessarily having shared the same social-structural location. Moreover, the cultivation of cultural style allows space to account for both one's agency as well as structural constraints. As Ferguson explains,

> "The idea of style as a cultivated competence implies an active process, spread across historical and biographical time, situated both within a political-economic context and within an individual life course. Such a complex process involves both deliberate self-making and structural determinations, as well as such things as unconscious motivations and desires, aesthetic preferences, and the accidents of personal history" (Ferguson 1999, 101)

I will start by discussing how aspiring entrepreneurs' minds and bodies were seen as needing transformation. This dominant narrative speaks back to the global power hierarchies addressed already in Chapter One but reveals more closely how the 'entrepreneurial subjectivity' is not neutral but racialised and gendered. While I attended to it as a discourse, the main contribution of this chapter is to show how my interlocutors tried to navigate this environment where their bodies were not seen as 'capitalable' enough because they were racialised and gendered.

2. Transforming the Asian subject - The Shithole State of Mind

"Get out of your shithole state of mind!" was the call made by Khailee Ng to more than 500 people who had come for his keynote presentation titled "Dear Southeast Asian Founder" during the last day of the Startup Asia Singapore conference in 2014. Khailee is a Malaysian-born entrepreneur who started his first business in Malaysia and later became a managing partner in a popular venture capital investment firm in Silicon Valley. At the time of this event, he spent his time traveling between various countries in Southeast Asia and San Francisco, linking the ecosystems by introducing people and deciding on the investments to make. During the talk, he was bursting with energy, not unlike some popular self-help gurus one can see online, and he didn't shy away from using strong words to illustrate his simple message: Southeast Asian start-up founders need to change their mindset. Khailee presented his own life story as an example of the necessary transformation that other founders should also undergo. Fitting well within confessional narrative structures, Khailee's previous self was unhappy and didn't have much agency; the new Khailee, as we all could witness, was full of energy and excitement and fulfilled.

He told us how he, born in Malaysia, previously only used to complain about all the things that were not good instead of taking matters into his own hands. Through building his businesses, he gradually underwent a mindset transformation that allowed him to see that instead of complaining, he could change the things that bothered him. Along with this major sense of empowerment also came a realisation that currently, we live in "the world of abundance", and to capitalise on it, people need to "work at the speed of the internet" - "think faster and act faster." In order to see this abundance, succeed in this global world, and to "not be left behind" Khailee encouraged entrepreneurs to embrace a different, new mindset - the Silicon Valley mindset. His talk was accompanied by visuals asking, "Do you have a Shit Hole State of Mind or a Silicon Valley State of Mind?", as if these two were the only possibilities. Khailee invited the people to initiate a "consciousness shift that we need to undergo as founders in Southeast Asia". (Thursday 08.05.2014).

While Khailee's talk was brash, he was articulating something that I encountered in the field on a daily basis in more or less subtle ways - 'Asianness' was something that needed to be transformed in order to pursue start-up futurities. It was clear that the golden standard regarding how one should be was defined in reference to an ideal Silicon Valley subject or what Nigel Thrift has aptly called - *Homo Silicon Valleycus* (Thrift 2000, 688) - one that is incredibly mobile, always learning, always improving, one who is (or shall we say has the resources to be) creative and innovative, one who grabs op-

portunities and moves fast.

The idea that Silicon Valley is not so much a place as a mindset has been increasingly popularised by US tech elite directly benefitting from such framing and was addressed already in the earlier chapters, most clearly in Chapter One. What stands out in the context of this chapter is that in order to repeat the success of Silicon Valley, not only do cities and buildings need to be transformed into arrangements like Silicon Valley's, but people also need to embody this new subjectivity. As Khailee was arguing, the 'Southeast Asian mindset' belonged to the past, not to 'the world of the internet', while the 'Silicon Valley mindset' was presented as the mindset of the future. While the previous chapter explained the principles of this subject position and how it resonated in Singapore, this chapter will zoom in on what it meant when one had to embody this subjectivity.

'Asianness' as a problem

These ways of describing how one needs to adopt the Silicon Valley state of mind and become daring and risk-taking informed a wider narrative about 'Asianness' as a problem. During the early stages of my research, I was often struck, later upset by stories told by Singaporeans as well as foreigners that framed 'Asians' as 'risk avoidant', 'not creative enough', and favouring the rule of government, hierarchy and family over 'creativity', not challenging existing norms, not working hard enough, being too *kiasu*, etc. These 'Asian' shortcomings were explained interchangeably as a result of Singapore's overbearing and controlling government, rote education systems, or Confucian values, as well as a society based on communitarian rather than individual values. "Asianness" was seen as a problem addressed in conference talks, such as the one by Khailee, written about in blog posts and used as a way to explain to me the necessary interventions through government investment or educational policies or mentoring. Such essentialised orientalism (Pinches 1999, 2) dominated many of the analyses performed by start-up founders, investors, and bloggers and was actively recycled also in US-based or international media.

Over and over again during my fieldwork, I came across discussions that implicitly and explicitly assumed that 'Asians' (in start-up context usually assumed to be male, with females being rather invisible in this discussion, unless 'the gender' issue was the central one, as I will discuss later in this chapter. This contrasts earlier constructs where women were seen as the carriers of 'Asianness' (see, for example, Hudson 2013) were 'not good enough' entrepreneurs and needed to transform themselves. Instead of taking such claims at face value and assuming that there is an 'Asian' particularity, I

wanted to understand why such qualities as 'creativity', 'risk-taking', and 'embracing failure' were framed as not inherent to 'Asians' as opposed to 'the Westerners'. Why were the boundaries of creativity, for example, drawn around racial and nation-state categories, and what effects did such culturalist narratives have on the decisions my interlocutors made when they had to present themselves? I argue that to understand this, we need to understand two important discourses that inform the discussion about the 'Asian' entrepreneurs in Singapore. One is an older nation-building discourse in Singapore that constructed the ideal subject and citizen in terms of 'Asian values'. The new, entrepreneurial subject was introduced as antithetic to the older 'Asian values' subject and, therefore, was understood through the lack of necessary values. The other thread informing the claims about 'Asianness' as a problem was the Western capitalist discourse of 'creativity' that is based on the Western romantic tradition. When applied globally, it is highly exclusive and limiting. Understanding how and why such culturalist paradigms have spread can help to understand their particularity and question their validity.

Asian values and the new national subjects

The 'Asian values' discourse was popular in Singapore and Southeast Asia from around the late 1980s and tried to construct ideal citizens by defining them in terms of innate adherence to Confucian values. Political elites across East and Southeast Asia used the notion of 'Asian values', but Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad were the most famous for eagerly embracing them as part of their nation-building efforts (Pinches 1999). In Singapore, it was an attempt to "evolve and anchor a Singaporean identity" in a context of globalisation and a perception that Singapore's new generations are being exposed to predominantly "alien lifestyles and values" from the West (Prime Minister's Office 1991). The White Paper in which Asian values were institutionalised in Singapore argued that "Traditional Asian ideas of morality, duty and society which have sustained and guided us in the past are giving way to a more Westernized, individualistic, and self-centred outlook on life" and in order to "not to lose our bearings" suggests the following core values shared by all Singaporeans:

> "placing society above self, upholding the family as the basic
> building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus
> instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious tolerance
> and harmony." (Prime Minister's Office 1991, 1)

Rooted in Confucianist ethics, they prioritised focus on community, family, obedience to authority, and thrift. They also framed Singapore as part of the East Asian country group that was experiencing rapid economic growth at the time. Beng Huat Chua, among many other scholars, has well argued how 'Shared values' were essential ideological tools in Singapore's nation-building efforts, to create a distance from undesirable 'Western values', as well as to draw limits to how far the state needs to be involved in social security provisions (Chua 1995). 'Asian values' discourse was also actively embraced and amplified in the West to explain the success of economic growth across East and Southeast Asia during those years, as well as to criticize the authoritarian tendencies that the discourse seemed to legitimize (Chua, 1999). As Pinches has argued, one of the most powerful cultural constructions of the so-called Asian economic miracle is the idea, that it can be explained through 'Asian Values' (Pinches 1999, 2). The Asian values discourse lost its popularity with the Asian financial crisis, yet its moralising effects had not disappeared, as was evident in my fieldwork. My interlocutors often explained themselves or others in these culturalist terms that referenced Confucian values, such as respect for hierarchy and communal values, as opposed to individual values.

The coming of the new economy, which followed the Asian Financial crisis of 1997/1998 as a new focus for Singapore's national future, needed to build upon a new subject, an entrepreneurial one (Wong and Bunnell 2006; Olds 2007), which came to be understood as *unlike* the previous set of values. Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan described how:

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"for Singapore to transit effectively to a knowledge based economy,
we must infuse our society with a culture of creativity, entrepre-
neurship, enthusiasm for change, an appetite for risk and a toler-
ance of failure'." (Quoted in Coe and Kelly 2000, 418)
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Discursively, this call for more entrepreneurial Singaporeans then framed the previous subject as 'not creative', 'not entrepreneurial', etc. For example, Clancey describes how in Singapore, the entrepreneurial subject seemed to be less compatible with the historical imagination than it was in Hong Kong:

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"Here was a major divergence from Singapore's Anglo-Chinese sib-
ling Hong Kong, where labour, sweat, hard work and rags-to-riches
narratives would long remain operative, even in the biographies of
the elite. Hong Kong could nurture and celebrate the imagery of the
strong-armed and the risk-taking, the gangster and the entrepre-
neur, but Singaporeans would become post-industrial 'brain work-
ers'." (Clancey 2012, 16)
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Lee Kuan Yew, one of the most prominent spokespersons for Asian Values, in a 2002 lecture titled "An Entrepreneurial Culture for Singapore", argued that entrepreneurship based on profits from technological innovation is what will make the country wealthy, and for this to happen, values had to change. He explained:

> "In Singapore many of those who were most likely to succeed have
> been inducted into politics, the bureaucracy and the army, navy and
> air force. Hence, too few are in business on their own, and even
> fewer are entrepreneurs. However, Singaporeans can slowly change
> with changing circumstances. Our values and culture are not as
> deeply embedded because we are a young society of immigrant stock.
> Nevertheless, it will take time and effort to change them through
> education." (Yew 2002)

Education was perceived to play a crucial role in positioning Singapore as a knowledge economy and cultivating new citizen-subjects suitable for the new economy, as already addressed in Chapters One and Two. Despite this seeming break from the past in the way relevant subjects in Singapore's economy were reorganised, there were also continuities, and those can be understood through the notion of human capital. Despite the shift from Asian values to the new, risk-embracing entrepreneurial subject, from the perspective of the Singapore state, both have been thought of in terms of their capital and their ability to produce economic growth.

Lee Kuan Yew is also quoted as explaining that the production of entrepreneurs in Singapore is a matter of a next stage, possibly more difficult:

> "Where do you produce your entrepreneurs from? Out of a top hat?
> There is a dearth of entrepreneurial talent. We have to start ex-
> perimenting. The easy things—just getting a blank mind to take in
> knowledge and become trainable—we have done. Now comes the difficult
> part. To get literate and numerate minds to be more innovative, to
> be more productive, that's not easy. It requires a mind-set change,
> a different set of values." (Quoted in Thrift and Olds 2005 from
> Hamlin, 2002)

As argued by Chua, the technopreneur is "contributing to the shaping of a broader form of governmentality in Singapore" (Chua 2019) The clashing ideal subjectivities identified for changing modes of economic production are not experienced only in Singapore. (Allison 2009) describes a similar situation in Japan, where it is described predominantly in terms of generational conflict. Similar problems have been described

by (Ross 2003) in the United States of America. The question then is - how are these narratives used to legitimise particular interventions? In Chapters Two, Three and Four, I already addressed the various spaces for work and education that were created for the cultivation of these entrepreneurial subjectivities - such as Blk 71, The Accelerator and entrepreneurship training programs and events such as Startup Weekends.

Many of my interlocutors were beneficiaries of these educational reforms and had either arrived in Singapore because of them or participated in internship and exchange programs that were set up to ensure exposure to entrepreneurial and technology business practices elsewhere. Most notable of such programs was the Overseas College program (NOC) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) which allowed students from the NUS Business School to apply for a semester or a whole year to study and work at 'leading entrepreneurial hotspots' such as Silicon Valley, Stockholm, Beijing, Shanghai, Israel or others. I have already addressed their significant impact in Chapters One and Three. Multiple central players in the start-up scene referred to their exchange program as a formative experience that inspired them to pursue technology businesses and/or start organising activities to strengthen the start-up scene in Singapore upon their return. Also, shorter-term exchange programs for entrepreneurs were set up, such as going to San Francisco and programs that brought Silicon Valley mentors and entrepreneurs to Singapore. Just like Khailee, they had observed and absorbed the mindset modelled by entrepreneurs in these spaces, and these experiences shaped their practices upon their return.

Such programs can be understood as creating such spaces for transforming the 'Asian subject' into an entrepreneurial one and implicitly positioning the 'Homo Silicon Valleycus' as the holder of the knowledge 'Asian' subjects need to obtain, simultaneously rendering the 'Asian' subject as lacking the *right* entrepreneurial qualities. What characterised these programs, despite their differences, is that Western entrepreneurs and investors were seen as having knowledge and know-how. They were on the stage telling 'how things should be' and how entrepreneurs should think reinforcing again a particular social hierarchy.

Contesting the notions of creativity

While the 'Asian values' discourse functioned as background to which the new subject could be compared and thereby turn 'Asianness' into a problem, another important aspect to problematise is the nature of the tropes such as 'creativity', 'risk-taking' and 'fear of failure', which relied on an idealised, rather than empirically grounded, Silicon Valley example that was hiding behind a seemingly universal depiction of what a 'true

start-up entrepreneur' should be like. Their application always rendered the opposi-tional 'Asian' subject incompatible and lacking.

For example, the annual Start-up Genome report I described earlier in Chapter Three, in 2012 as part of the report created what they called entrepreneurial 'mindset index' - to compare how closely people of various locations around the world resemble a "great entrepreneur", which they defined as "visionary, resilient, has a high appetite for risk, a strong work ethic and an ability to overcome the typical challenges startups face" (Startup Genome 2012, 3). Such a definition, positioned as seemingly objective and universal, was then applied to many places around the world to conclude, with no irony or reflection, that Silicon Valley fulfills this definition fully, while all the other locations in the world are failing to achieve this ideal.
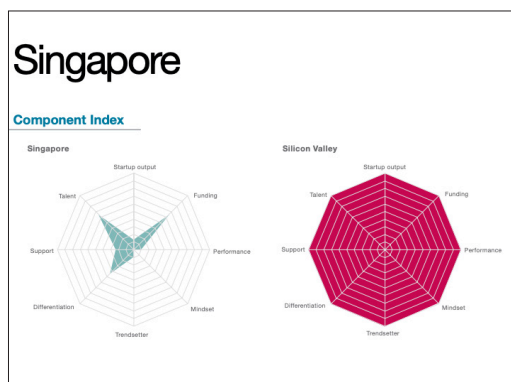
An example of Singapore being compared to Silicon Valley in Startup Ecosystem Report illustrates how Silicon Valley as an ideal is constantly positioned in contrast to other 'lacking' ecosystems. In this case, Singapore is deemed to have no entrepreneurial mindset whatsoever (100).

Such reports that aligned with and simultaneously enforced these culturalist nar-ratives had their effects, amongst which the most obvious was the legitimisation of various 'interventions' and training programs by people representing the Silicon Valley success in Singapore. They reinforced neocolonial and neo orientalist social hierarchies where the Asian subjects were seen as lacking in comparison to their Western, in this case, American counterparts.

Moreover, the lifestyle associations that come along with creativity, as postulated by Richard Florida (Florida 2002), for example, were modelled on a history of artists and hippies in Europe and the USA. I want to point out that the application of a typi-

cally Western understanding of creativity that is linked to democracy, playfulness and challenging authority is, by definition, going to exclude and render 'different' everyone who can't share that context. A good example of this is the small turmoil following an announcement by Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple, who in 2011 commented in a BBC interview that in "structured societies such as Singapore … all the creative elements seem to disappear". Wozniak's claim that Apple could not have been started in Singapore spurred a debate about whether or not Singapore is 'creative' and what accounts for it. Many agreed and added to Wozniak's analysis. For example, Willis Wee, the founder of 'Asia in Tech' start-up blog, wrote: "We're smart, but we are not the most open-minded and creative people because we've been stuck on this small island for so long" (Wee 2011a). The small size and short history of the independent nation, its educational system, fear of failure, and authoritarian government were all used as explanations as to why Singapore is 'not yet creative enough'. Again, just like in the government's approach, the transformation would be possible by 'leaving' Singapore or by incorporating foreign talent within it. This transformation also relied on a particular temporal politics - the 'Asian' subject was framed as a subject of the past, while the new, entrepreneurial one was the subject of the future. The 'Asian' subject emerged as the subject of tradition, while the entrepreneurial one as one of disruption. Another blogger commenting on Wozniak's comments wrote:

> "[..] ...everything is orderly and we have obedient citizens who
> learn all the rules and are afraid to break them. This is great if
> we make our living working at assembly lines, doing routine work
> and the world never changes. Unfortunately, that is not the reality
> we are in [..]" ("Singapore: Why can't we seem to Innovate," 2011)

Here, the author argued that Singapore's authoritarian rule stifles creativity and innovation, which were seen as inherently connected to democracy. Another commentator contested who gets to define creativity yet by the end, still conceded that Singapore simply needs more time to reach it:

> "Seems like anything to do with creativity is measured by the Amer-
> ican Standard of creativity and people everywhere are so keen to
> lap it up, even if they are not American. My take is that Wozniak,
> as creative as he is, is narrow minded and fails to see the big
> picture: that Singapore is a young nation and is still developing
> its own culture and the corresponding industries which will serve
> to support and boost the creative sector in time to come. Compared
> to the 200+ years America has had (since 1776 A.D.) to develop and

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come into her own — what is 50 years? So yes, of course we are
boring and uncreative compared to the likes of Silicon Valley and
her awesome tech and Broadway with its fantastical musicals!" (Wee
2011a)
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Equating creativity and innovation with the nation-state and situating Singapore as 'newly innovative' this author's challenge to the 'American standard of creativity' also unfortunately did "reinforce a center-periphery dynamic, with the West (or more specifically, Silicon Valley) standing as the global center of technological innovation around which these sites coalesce or move toward."(Avle and Lindtner 2016, 2234)

There were also people who disagreed and challenged Wozniak's authority and expertise to say anything about Singapore. Counter reactions typically called upon the need to have national pride and believe in Singapore's potential. The most notable counter-reaction to Wozniak's claims was a campaign called WEare.sg that was started by a few people who felt that this characterisation was unfair. They aimed to showcase the "ordinary Singaporeans who are doing extraordinary things" and challenge the stereotypical view of Singaporeans as a country of managers with little or no agency. As the founder of Weare.Sg explained, "Once we get to a hundred [profiles], we'll send this site to Mr. Wozniak, saying: Dear Mr. Wozniak: here they are. Kthxbye."[6]

Risk-taking and fear of failure

Fear of failure and risk-aversion often discursively emerged as the central 'Asian' problems, typically explained as a result of family pressure to take well-proven jobs in medicine or law, an educational system based on memorisation rather than critical thinking, social relationships that favour respect for authority and status quo, over-controlling government, and too comfortable economic climate to need to take risks. The assumption was that by fearing failure and not taking risks, entrepreneurs in Singapore were not able to challenge existing norms, innovate and introduce creative commercial solutions in comparison to Silicon Valley.

For example, in 2013 Singapore was represented by one of the leaders of Singapore's start-up community in prestigious South By SouthWest (SXSW) conference in the United States in a discussion panel: "Asian Entrepreneurs Struggle with Fear of Failure" accompanied by representatives from South Korea and China. The introduction to

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6   Kthxbye is an abbreviation of "OK! Thanks! Bye!" commonly used online to abruptly or dismissively conclude a discussion while being facetiously polite.

the event read:

> "To many young Asian entrepreneurs, starting a company is an act of
> rebellion. It means defying the lessons of parents, teachers, and
> culture, who say: Be proper. Find a stable job. Don't take risks.
> It means - in many cases - feeling uncertainty, shame, and fear of
> failure. It's a struggle that will continue as these entrepreneurs
> gun to compete with US companies, get funding from US investors,
> and partner with US corporations." (https://schedule.sxsw.com/2013/
> events/event_IAP3940)

As later reported online at politic365.com the 'Asian' experience of failure is dia-
metrically opposed to the one in USA:

> "The basic premise was that a fear of failure in Asian culture ham-
> pers entrepreneurs and startup culture in a way that is different
> from Silicon Valley's "badge of honor" for failure. In that sense,
> people in Silicon Valley value failure because it leads to triumph,
> whereas in Asia the idea of failing is an aversion for many people,
> according to the panelists." (Calderón 2013)

One of the panelists explained to me in a conversation that they were not particu-
larly happy with the title of the panel and instead wanted to treat it as an open question
rather than a statement describing a reality. However, from the reports covering the
panel, this aspect doesn't seem to have come through. For example, CNBC featured an
article asking "What are Asian Entrepreneurs Afraid of?" that one of my interlocutors
shared on social media. The answer the article offered was not surprising:

> "Asians are scared of failing, experts told CNBC, adding that this
> fear of failure is the biggest obstacle in the path of Asia's en-
> trepreneurs and the one thing that separates them from their U.S.
> peers." (Ranasinghe and Holliday 2013)

While all of the identified aspects can be true, and indeed, many interlocutors did
have experiences that had swayed them in those ways, the aspect that I am curious
about is why certain traits labelled as problematic were framed as particularly 'Asian',
as something that had to do with 'tradition' and the past. If anything, stories of Seth
as well as David earlier in this thesis attest that the experience of failing is painful no
matter the race. Moreover, Seth's story also showed how his former experience in the

new start-up he joined was appreciated in the Philippines in ways that seem likely to be somewhat similar in the USA. It seems peculiar that I have heard similar comments about fear of failure and lack of creativity in relation to Canadian as well as German entrepreneurs, suggesting that it is certainly not a particularly 'Asian' problem. More comparative research around various locations would, I suspect, reveal discoursive similarities as a result of Silicon Valley's dominant position and the temporalising strategies underlying technoorientalism I addressed in detail in Chapter One.

Moreover, one should question why the fear of failure was positioned as a problematic issue that needed to be overcome. Or, more precisely, in whose benefit was it that aspiring entrepreneurs take on risks that come with failing individually? Gina Neff has written her monograph about the dot com bubble burst in New York and has argued that the dot com bubble and frenzy in the late 1990s was fuelled by a new framing of "economic and financial risks as inevitable, necessary, and beneficial for one's career and companies, reinforcing cultural messages about the attractiveness of risk."(Neff 2012, 3) Neff also points our attention to the "symbiotic relationship between the risks that companies and their investors take and the risks borne by labor." (Neff 2012, 5) Karen Ho, in her stellar analysis of the Wall Street practices, has convincingly shown how investment banking operates under the auspices of 'managing risk' while in her view, it is more about "leveraging and spreading it out" in a way that makes sure 'others' absorb the risk (Ho 2009a, 259). Similarly, Silvia Lindtner, in her monograph on hardware start-ups in Shenzhen, argued that the stories of both the success as well as the failure are essential for finance capitalism:

> "Both the story of success and the story of failure are crucial
> market devices of finance capitalism; while success stories produce
> feelings of promise and progress (and thus lure investment), sto-
> ries of failure enable investors to reduce risks and legitimize the
> redirecting of investment to the next success story, the next prom-
> ising start-up, the next "big idea." (Lindtner 2020, 136-137)

Being able to emotionally deal with the sense of risk was also a capacity that the entrepreneurs were learning in the start-up sociality. Within The Accelerator context, the mentors played a crucial role in helping the nascent entrepreneurs cultivate their 'capacity to aspire' as I described in the previous chapter when discussing the ways in which potential value was linked to embracing an extreme malleability of the product idea. Here, I want to develop that idea further by pointing out how the mentors also legitimised the insecurities of the nascent founders in a way that enforced my interlocutor's willingness to subject themselves to stressful conditions. An illustrative example

of this comes from Seth. Within The Accelerator, he had taken the engagement with the mentors as his primary task, allowing John more space for programming. He explained:

> "the experience of the mentors is actually very important because
> they bring a lot of knowledge with them. And I think it's… it also
> brings comfort and confidence to the students that somehow they can
> [also do this]. (..) Basically when, when the younger generation
> talks to the older generation, they realise that 'we have a similar
> problem'. 'Don't worry about it. If you're having a problem de-
> veloping your business model, it happens all the time.' I think it
> brings confidence to the students that they are experiencing those
> kinds of things. And eventually, the mentors still came out suc-
> cessful. He experienced that before. We're experiencing it right
> now. It's part of the deal. We have to go through it. And yeah."

By referring to the entrepreneurs as 'students', he was pointing out that the older generation was 'teaching' the younger ones. Moreover, by approaching mentors as 'idols' and the senior generation teaching the founders as 'students' of the younger generation, he was embracing the narrative of succession at the core of the 'ecosystem' ideal as described in Chapter Three. Similarly, my discussion of daydreaming in the previous chapter highlighted that the mentors were teaching how entrepreneurs should imagine the world. In this example, it is visible that the teaching also here is not about the specific 'in' and 'outs' of business, but rather it is about how one should *feel* about his or her own insecurities, doubts and worries. One needs to accept the unknowns, the struggles, and the worries. Importantly, they also legitimised the struggle by suggesting that the nascent founders would 'come out successful'.

This section on the changing Asian subject then speaks to the everyday forms of violence that the state-endorsed discourses of the necessary change for the new economy caused. This need for transformation seemed totalising as it was not only endorsed by Singapore's nation-building efforts but also by financial capital that sought to de-risk its investments and enterprising institutions and individuals looking for opportunities by offering to facilitate this necessary transformation.

3. Transforming and Controlling One's Body - Business Pitch

In her 1983 book "The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling", Arlie Russell Hochschild pointed academic attention to the degree with which emotions

and emotion management are used and expected to be used at work, calling it 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983). She described how airline stewardesses were trained to employ their smiles to assure and please their customers on the plane. As Mears, following a long line of other scholars, has argued: "One can't speak of either emotions or bodies in labor, because emotional labor enlists the body, just as body work requires the mind." (Mears 2011, 106) Similarly, becoming an entrepreneur meant learning to manage ones emotions and body according to certain ideas about what constitutes good entrepreneur.

I started the previous chapter by describing Melody's concerns about all the things she needed to change about herself to pursue an entrepreneurial career. Such concerns were not unique to her. The embodiment of entrepreneurial subjectivity required embracing certain flexibility on the one hand and tight control and management on the other. Body and emotions were the fields that were subjected to routine transformational work at The Accelerator programme as well as many other start-up related events.

Control over one's body

In the previous chapter, I addressed how The Accelerator mentor, Lars, required the entrepreneurs to figure out what they love doing and then focus on that. Love and passion were expected not only to be felt by entrepreneurs but also to be displayed in an appropriate way - in a way that created affect. Such a display of passion was supposed to attract and convince investors in the new business ventures. During entrepreneurial training sessions, I routinely heard comments from investors who acted as jury members advising entrepreneurs to express their energy and passion in the way they speak and move their bodies as they pitch their businesses. Comments such as "you are talking with very low energy - you've got to be excited!" were common. The audience had to be engaged with and 'kept on their toes'.

Metaphors that were used to describe the entrepreneurial journey often revolved around professional athletes who were seen as disciplined and had to be coached for victory. Entrepreneurs were introduced to running a start-up being like running a marathon to emphasise the needed resilience or a sprint to emphasise the needed intensity. Either way, both required the entrepreneurs to understand that they must 'give all' of themselves for this. Additionally, both metaphors emphasise physical transformation and mastering of one's body. For example, a coordinator of another five-week entrepreneurial training program told me at the end of this program that he noticed differences in the way people *are* when they enter the program and when they leave it. While changing mindset is one thing, he told me that he could even *see* this difference in the

photographs he took of the entrepreneurs when they graduated. He commented, "their bodies have changed". After I asked him to tell me more about this, he explained that humans communicate not only with words but also with body language: "We communicate 70% with our body language." According to him, after the training program, the entrepreneurs feel more confident about their business, and therefore they also carry their bodies differently - "they look in the camera, they stand straight" - all signs of conviction.

I encountered similar comments multiple times. An investor who had invested in The Accelerator and joined the program for mentorship at the beginning and end of the program also argued that he could *see* the transformation the budding entrepreneurs have experienced by how they carry their bodies. He told me that when the program started, he saw 'those young kids who didn't understand anything', but now, at the end of the program, he saw how they performed. At this moment in our conversation, the elderly investor straightened his back, pushed his chest to the front and raised his chin, all to illustrate the transformation that can be visually seen through the way the entrepreneurs carried their bodies. After his short performance, he added that he thinks this transformation is comparable to those seen on TV reality shows of singing idols who learn to sing and perform for the audiences. In these accounts of visible transformation, entrepreneurs' bodies signal one's ability to produce capital.

Business pitch, one of the central performances through which entrepreneurs tried to impress and entice their audiences about their businesses, was also the performance where convincing mastery over emotions and body had to be displayed. In Chapter Four, I described how the pitch was central for displaying the speculative labour and focused on the contents of the pitch — how the narrative constructed a social world, past, present and future, that needed the start-up's intervention. In this Chapter, I want to highlight how entrepreneurs needed to embody their visions and perform them through their bodies, as well as to highlight the labour that went into training one's body for successful performance.

In what follows, I will describe some of the experiences during the training that entrepreneurs underwent at The Accelerator as they prepared for Demo Day. While the intensity of The Accelerator training is somewhat exceptional, I encountered very similar advice in almost every single context where entrepreneurs were receiving feedback on their pitches. Pitch training was central to the transformation within these various training programs. At The Accelerator, too, the first moment the entrepreneurs got together and introduced themselves, it happened through a business pitch. As mentioned in Chapter Four, The Accelerator had even hired a professional actor and storyteller who worked exclusively with entrepreneurs to prepare them for this performance. Dave, an Australian actor in his 50s who had moved to Singapore and now ran his media com-

pany, explained to the entrepreneurs that, initially, they would practice every week, but towards the end, they would practice every day. Drawing on his theatre acting and rehearsal experience, he explained that preparation is "absolutely the key" to being able to connect with the audience and present 'with life, with passion'. Dave explained that unless entrepreneurs exercise to the point where they are able to forget about the pitch, the memorisation will interfere with being able to convey the message and truly connect with the audience.

"One has to use the body to tell the story", argued Dave, and he gave an example of how to tell a story where lions attack their prey - a story which can be embodied by its narrator in the way the narrator moves, pauses, raises their voice and suddenly silences it. In a similar way, the entrepreneurs were expected to embody the story of their business through the use of their gestures, mimics, voice tones, and the way they moved around or stayed put in the space. Their body had to convey the drama of opportunity, the potential for change and the promise of bringing it to life. Moreover, this performance had to work within a strict time-saving regimen - capturing the audience within the first five seconds and maintaining their attention through skilled use of one's body and storytelling was seen as central for a successful pitch delivery. If done well enough, the pitch should eventually lead to investors wanting to meet again. "Content is one thing, but it is largely the body with which you convey the message", Dave explained.

Dave's training included watching videos of well-known excellent public speakers such as Steve Jobs and Bill Clinton and even watching movies such as "King's Speech" (2010) that showed how King George VI overcame stammering with the help of a speech therapist in order to fully become the leader of the nation that he needed to become. What Dave wanted the budding entrepreneurs to understand was that in all the successful performances, the 'connection with the audience' could be achieved only through carefully planned and orchestrated bodily performances. The fact that all the examples of 'good speakers' were white males and native speakers of English somehow didn't seem to be an issue, even though most attendees were not.

"Let's design every second of that 10-minute journey", said the trainer to one of the entrepreneurs whose performance was deemed to be 'uncertain, lacking eye contact and showed the audience that the entrepreneur is out of his comfort zone', all characteristics which were seen as unwelcoming to investors and therefore also diminished the chances to attract capital. The pitch was scripted word for word, the necessary changes in the tone were discussed, and appropriate gestures were practised for the last 10 days of the program almost non-stop. I was often invited to act as an audience and support the memorisation as the entrepreneurs were practising. Approaching the Demo Day, it was a common sight to see someone standing with his eyes closed, gesturing, shifting his body and reciting their pitch again and again as a routine practice in order to

achieve the best result on the Demo Day.

In order to do that, bodily transformation was a necessary process, where the body would learn to feel and 'be' the story of the business. That could be achieved by learning to control the body. To gain control over their body, according to Dave, the entrepreneurs first had to become more aware of it. One of the tools they used was grounding yoga exercises. Entrepreneurs would lie on the floor of the conference room in a Shavasana position, breathe, and follow Dave's guidance in connecting with themselves. Another exercise involved exercising their vocal cords and getting acquainted with the range and power of their voice - from whispering to shouting.

Part of the training at The Accelerator. Aspiring entrepreneurs practicing bodily awareness that will be the basis for embodying the business. Photograph by author.

Another important area that the entrepreneurs had to practice was pronunciation and articulation. Most of the participants spoke English as their second or third language; some had what were deemed to be 'thick accents' that needed correction. The reasoning was that you simply don't want it to be difficult to understand what you are saying - one's performance had to be friction-free to attract capital. Various exercises, such as quick repetition of phrases such as 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog', were used to practice clear pronunciation of English. Dave drew an anatomical depiction of a head with a mouth and vocal cords to explain to the entrepreneurs how the body generates sound. In situations where the teams were not of one mind about who of their team was the best performer, the organisers took the freedom to step in and direct who should be the person pitching on the Demo Day - the one who was

more assertive, more clear in their pronunciation, not necessarily the CEO or the person whose idea informed the beginning of the start-up. To attract the capital, the providence mattered only briefly.
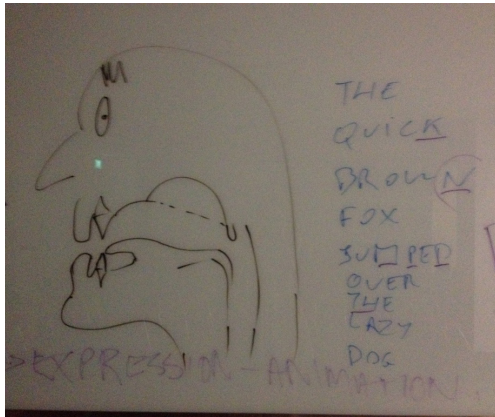
Dave's drawing on a whiteboard explaining how bodies generate sound. "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" pangram he invited the entrepreneurs to practice for sound articulation. Photograph by author.

In these exercises of increasing self-awareness and exploring the limits of one's body, I see a similar pattern as described in the previous two chapters that discussed the commodification process of ideas and commodification of the self. In this chapter, we see that the entrepreneurial body also had to undergo a commodification process that first stressed the importance of greater self-awareness, then explored flexibility and followed it up with strict control over one's movements, emotions and gestures.

Pitching the 'Asian way'

A conversation during one evening back in 2012 when I was 6 months into my fieldwork brought out how the discourse regarding 'Asianness' related to the practice of pitching. With a group of start-up entrepreneurs and some investors, we were sitting in the Hackerspace neighbourhood, smoking shisha. All of us were in our late 20s and early 30s, all well-educated and well-travelled; some were Singaporeans, some from Europe, some from the USA, some had lived in Singapore for just a few months, and others for more than a decade. As the night progressed, we talked more and more about our lives and the experiences shaped by our work. I knew most of the people rather well, but I hadn't spoken yet to one of the guys - Dong. Amongst the start-up entrepreneurs, he was a celebrity and also a 'Hero' mentor at The Accelerator because a couple of years ago, he had sold his start-up company to a large, rather well-known American company. At the time, he represented the ultimate start-up success story in Singapore. He had started his start-up with his university friends, and they had built it up to be

a company whose value was recognised by an American tech giant. Now, he was investing in other start-ups in Singapore and was often invited to give speeches at events discussing Singapore's high-tech aspirations. He mentored new start-ups and shared his feedback as a judge at various start-up pitching events.

His parents were Indonesian Chinese who had fled Indonesia at the time of racial unrest in 1997 and moved to Hong Kong. When the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred to China, his parents wanted to 'secure a way out' in case that was necessary. Therefore, Dong had to study abroad. As he told it, the choice back then was between South Africa, Hawaii and Singapore. Since Singapore gave him a scholarship, his family chose Singapore. In an interview we had later (19.07.2012), he explained that he sees his path to entrepreneurship as consisting of three major steps. The first was studying engineering at NUS; the second was reading books like The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story by Michael Lewis (1999) and watching movies like "The Pirates of Silicon Valley" (1999), where he could understand 'who are the people and how do they do things'. The third step was his participation in the NOC exchange program, during which he went to Silicon Valley. He compared these three stages as first 'seeing a car, then understanding the engine' and being in Silicon Valley as 'seeing the whole garage where the car is built' and getting a sense that "yes, this actually can be done!"'.

That particular night, though he wanted to tell me about something else - he leaned towards me so that I could hear him well over the chatter and noise around our table:

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"Ok, I will tell you a secret. I tried pitching the 'American
style'. But I can't. So, I made a conscious choice to pitch in a
humble way. I knew that from 10 investors, 8 will write me off, but
2 will feel that there is more at what we can, and that will stim-
ulate the mentor and support type of attitude. See, when I try the
American way, it comes out inauthentic."
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Overhearing this, another start-up entrepreneur from France added that this is exactly why it is good that his own team has a North American member. 'He is a professional bullshitter,' he added, laughing. The conversation went on about the various choices Dong made in building their business, but this note on pitching his business in an 'Asian' way stuck with me. Dong identified presenting the business in a humble way by not exaggerating its potential too much, neither in words nor in the way he carried his body and used his voice as an 'Asian' way of presenting the business. What he also meant was that he presented himself not as someone who has mastered the labour of speculation and was knowledgable and in control of everything, as would be seen as the default, aka the American entrepreneurial style, but as someone who needs men-

torship and guidance from the investors. His modesty would be carried in his body with less assertive motions and gesticulations. His comment not only distinguished 'American' and 'Asian' ways of presenting the future and distinct ways of presenting and positioning oneself but also acknowledged that the 'Asian' way of being and carrying oneself had a lower ability to attract capital. In fact, he was rather specific that the 'Asian way', despite being more authentic, would reach only 20% of the investors because eight investors would not recognise his performance as convincing enough.

On the one hand, Dong's awareness of these differences in entrepreneurial style, which would also manifest in different ways in carrying one's body, and how they are being appreciated by capital, shows great affluence and space for cultural improvisation. On multiple occasions, my Asian interlocutors described themselves as "bananas - yellow outside, white inside", meaning that even though they 'look Asian, subjectively and intellectually, they identify more with white Western culture. On the other hand, Dong's conclusion that doing it 'the American way' felt inauthentic, and the comment by the white French male, to me shows the limitations of the entrepreneurial ideal and the chances to successfully enact it by those who do not match the white American male ideal implicitly inherent in it.

Many of my interlocutors also pointed me to the fact that the evaluations 'local' start-ups receive are much lower than similar start-ups in Silicon Valley would have, and that many Singaporean investors would pay much more to include a 'Silicon Valley' start-up, just to have a 'SV' company in their portfolio rather than a Singaporean company which provides similar services. While I have not analysed the information in this way and can't approve or disprove such claims, the fact that these complaints circulated indicated to me that at the level of perception, there was a sense of being de-valued or under-appreciated as Singaporean or, as it was often put, 'Asian' founders.

In a related way, this sense of Singapore-based entrepreneurs not being skilled at appreciating and showing off their own success was also a matter of discussion between investors. For example, one afternoon at The Accelerator before the start of the program, Wei was discussing with one of The Accelerator's mentors, who was also an entrepreneur and investor, the fact that Singaporean start-ups don't announce their exits - meaning they don't share online how much money they have made. They both felt that 'people in the ecosystem' should be told and celebrate the fact that others have 'made it' and that 'people get a lot of money out of that'. Wei explained to the mentor that Oscar, at that moment, was in a meeting with the government officials to improve the story about the ecosystem because, as Wei put it:

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"in the States, when somebody has a minor success, [they show it to
everyone as] "look everybody, I had a baby!"."
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"Oh my God, I sold it for two peanuts and a youtiao" The mentor in an exaggerated squeal of excitement added to this imaginary baby announcement emphasising that even if it isn't sold for too much (youtiao is a donut-like pastry), in the United States that would be a source of pride. To which Wei agreed saying that "Here, we need to have some of that."
The mentor continued the spiel by now switching to Singlish and pretending to be a humble Singaporean talking about a big exit in an evasive manner: "No, lah, I don't...very little, lah, 45 million dollars, lah, not like you lah,"
Wei laughed, entertained by this little show of national differences. The mentor then switched to an American accent and, in an aggressive, bragging tone, continued: "45 bucks, yeah! I will be a very successful entrepreneur and exit, hei, hei, ho...this is very important". Wei nods in agreement - "Yes, indeed, so we need to change that."

Here, the sense was that even if Asian founders are rewarded, they will not celebrate it or appreciate the value that they have generated publicly by making themselves loud and visible, perpetuating this socially enforced belief that they are not worthy.

A conversation with one of the Singapore-based investors, Vijay, who was supporting The Accelerator, also made clear the sentiment that 'Asian' founders are 'lacking something intrinsic'. Expressing his concern that he expects The Accelerator start-ups to show actual revenue rather than just growth in users, he explained that he doesn't see 'phenomenal ideas' coming from Asian founders and alluded to an 'entrepreneurial gene' that Asians seem to lack in comparison to founders in Silicon Valley or Israel:

"..if you are in Silicon Valley, you are a smart guy. You understand creative IP [intellectual property], you create it, and users want it, and therefore, you have a huge user base, and then you monetize it. But here, where is that earth-changing idea? Where is that creative IP? Where is that phenomenal idea.. which I can't stop myself from using? It's not there. So it's a mediocre idea following the same Silicon Valley process, and they will run out of money and out of business. (..) There are only two places in the world - Silicon Valley and Israel - where you see the marrying of technology and economics. Every guy in Silicon Valley understands economics, investor deck. Somehow, every Silicon Valley guy who is ...they are born with it...that gene is given to them. Because of the ecosystem, they grow up with it."

In this section, I have described how the body had to be transformed in order to attract capital and entice the investors through a carefully planned and orchestrated bodily performance. It required both an increased bodily self-awareness and control and management of every move, every pronounced word. Through the story of Dong we also learn that not all bodies were deemed equal in this process and in their ability to attract capital. 'Asianness' was seen as less compatible with entrepreneurial subjectivity and, therefore, struggled to be appreciated also in terms of capital. This highlights how start-up futurities, despite their seemingly universal accessibility, were, in fact, unable to escape the reality of particular bodies that tried to embody them. Racialised bodies found it harder to adhere to the 'white youthful American male' ideal that seems inherent to start-up futurities. The next section will discuss another important aspect, namely gender.

4. Masculinity & Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship as a practice and economic activity is interlaced with gender ideologies and is typically seen as a masculine activity that favours the male body. In economic theory, the entrepreneur is typically implicitly assumed to be male, or if it is a female, then she is mostly discussed through her lack of participation and, therefore, implicit incompatibility with entrepreneurship: "Masculinity constructs the definition of entrepreneurship, and male entrepreneurship is used as the benchmark for entrepreneurship as a whole." (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio 2004, 16) Despite assumptions that the new economy is more inclusive and democratic, the prototypical successful start-up entrepreneur is a young, well-educated, English-speaking white male. The gender biases, but also age biases, were so widespread that they were barely noticed. For example, the Straits Times featured an article discussing people who work at Blk71 as the 'whiz kids', which seemed really appropriate, considering that, indeed, many of those who worked at Blk 71 were either still or freshly out of the university. Yet, it also overlooked the many entrepreneurs who were married and much older and would never be addressed as 'kids', enforcing the message that start-up life is a youthful and playful activity.

If we take the Startup Ecosystem Report to be indicative of any sort of reality, then their estimate is that in Singapore's 'start-up ecosystem', 5% of the involved are females and 95% males (Startup Genome 2012, 99). It is not clear when someone was counted as part of their data set and when not. If I were to make my own estimates, the attendance at events would be closer to 20% women to 80% male, with certain events and places

more popular for females. While I did encounter some conscious discussions about how to engage more female audiences, for the most part, 'the boy's world' was quite unselfconsciously taken as a norm. In the stories of success and failure shared in public events, the entrepreneurial persona would almost always be addressed as 'he'. A telling example is how at the Echelon 2014 conference Mohan Belani, one of the founders of e27 in his opening remarks starting the two-day conference which at the time claimed to be the largest Asia's Tech conference, argued that one of the trends they have noticed over the years is the increasing maturity of the start-up entrepreneurs who are "growing literary from boys to men" ("Echelon 2014 Opening Remarks: Mohan Belani, CEO and Co-Founder, e27," n.d.). Wearing scruffy sneakers and a jacket over a t-shirt, Mohan himself, a Singaporean male in his early 30s, definitely signified this transforming figure from a boy to a man.

Unproblematic masculinity and the problem of 'women in tech'

In much of the literature, especially scholarship stemming from economics and management, concerning entrepreneurship, gender is an issue framed mainly as 'the problem of women' or 'how to increase women's participation in entrepreneurship', arguing that entrepreneurship and femininity are somehow incompatible and the women studied are compared as outliers. While I will turn to this issue later, now I want to attend to the flip side of such an assumption, which is rarely interrogated - that masculinity and entrepreneurship are compatible in frictionless ways. While quite a few scholars criticise the implicit definition of entrepreneurship as almost effortlessly compatible with masculinity (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio 2004), it is rare to see the interrogation of the ways in which males are struggling to perform their masculinity for entrepreneurial success appropriately. Yes, it is true that most technology entrepreneurship spaces were geared towards males and celebrated values and characteristics typically assumed to be masculine, but by zooming in closer to the actual contexts and understanding that gender and race intersect in crucial ways that can rarely be disentangled, will allow us to explore the tensions that pervade the crafting of the entrepreneurial subjectivity and embodying it that is always unavoidably gendered. Again, we will see the varied ways in which racial and gender ideologies play out, shaping the possibilities for my interlocutors to capitalise on their bodies and selves. While 'women in technology entrepreneurship' has been a hot topic in international media, 'men in technology' is so much taken for granted that it is perceived as a non-issue.

Paying attention to how masculinity features in the discussions and performances of the entrepreneurial project can problematise this assumed conflation between entrepreneurship and masculinity not by pointing towards the lack of gender diversity, but by showing the particular gender specific challenges that are typically faced by men and women. To open up the discussion about major ways in which entrepreneurship didn't align with the dominant ideology regarding masculinity, I'll start by re-telling one of my interlocutors' complaints about how hard it is to be a Chinese guy in Singapore.

One evening in 2013, Elijah, a Chinese Singaporean in his early 30s, told me, "There is nothing worse than to be a Chinese man in Singapore". We were sitting on a bench outside a massive shopping mall, snacking on finger foods, and had just amused ourselves by discussing the worst ethnic and national stereotypes one can be subjected to. Elijah was an active member of the start-up community and was always involved in one or multiple start-ups. I found Elijah's emphasis on the combination of his ethnicity and gender interesting and asked Elijah to explain to me what he meant. I was especially intrigued because Chinese men compose the majority of Singapore's political and economic elite, and hearing someone argue that being a Chinese male in Singapore is 'the worst' possible option was therefore peculiar.

According to Elijah, being a Singaporean Chinese man is the worst thing for multiple reasons. One of his first concerns was that Singaporean girls prefer Caucasian partners, but Malay and Indian girls are more likely to choose partners within their own ethnic groups. This, according to Elijah, places Chinese males at a disadvantage when it comes to chances of finding a partner. This inequality is further exacerbated by the compulsory two-year military service that all male citizens and permanent residents above the age of 18 in Singapore are subjected to. According to Elijah, even if doing military service is rhetorically positioned as an honourable duty, in the everyday experience, family members and female partners do not show recognition that it also means taking more time to establish oneself financially. To illustrate this, he caricatured a typical situation at home where a mother and sister are watching TV news coverage about a successful Malay entrepreneur and then scorn that their son and brother has not yet achieved anything. On the one hand, military service meant a delay in establishing oneself financially in a context where being 'the breadwinner' was ideologically positioned as the core of Singaporean masculinity. On the other hand, Elijah also felt that telling his family members how hard it is to combine military service with his start-up aspirations could potentially be seen as not masculine, as not fulfilling his duty. Interestingly, Israel, a country with also a mandatory military service, was often used as a comparison

for Singapore to aspire, arguing that Israel's military culture was actually encouraging traits necessary for start-up entrepreneurship (see, for example, Yap 2013).

Elijah felt that as a Chinese man, he had to play a game with unfair rules because of the asymmetry between the expectations put forward by family and the state, and the position in the hierarchy where "ang-mohs dominate". Ang-moh was a term often used unofficially to refer to white people in Singapore. It originates from Hokkien and literally means 'red hair(ed)'. Following Hudson's analysis of gender representations in Singapore, Elijah's concerns about women who don't prefer to date Chinese men and mothers and sisters who are not appreciative of male contribution to the family could also be read as a result of the more "general climate of anxiety about loss of narrative control" over the gender representations, where the emancipated 'new Singapore woman' refuses and challenges to reproduce the masculine nation (Hudson 2013, 164). Yet, it also indicates that the supposed alignment between entrepreneurship and masculinity is not as even as commonly discussed.

This sense of vulnerability was exacerbated because by doing a start-up, Elijah's ability to conform to expectations became even harder. This had much to do with his cramped and irregular income, which limited his ability to lead a lifestyle that a middle-class, university-educated person of his age is expected to lead - to take out his girlfriend to restaurants and shopping, to entertain his friends, and ultimately to purchase an apartment and car. Nirmala PuruShotam has argued how being middle class in Singapore means continuous work towards improving life, where "the production of upward mobility is understood and judged in terms of the consumption of 'better' goods, services and ideas than 'before'."(Puru Shotam 1998). Another male interlocutor answered when asked how his start-up journey influences his relationships with his female partner: 'Oh, we're fine, as long as I can take her out shopping in the weekends, she is good [with me doing the start-up]'. According to Elijah, while he could argue with his family about his career choice, his girlfriend's parents were even more sceptical. In his case, he thought they would have recommended their daughter not to go out with him unless they were wealthy themselves.

My interlocutors often lamented that in Singapore, success is measured by having the 5Cs - Condominium, Credit Card, Car, Country Club membership and Cash. Daniel Goh has described how the 5Cs make up the 'Singapore dream' (as distinct from the American dream) (Goh 2010, 25) For example, Chua and Ean describe how in Singapore, "A car is a high-status positional good which can be afforded only by those in the middle class or higher, making it the premier cultural icon of the middle class in Singapore." (Chua and Ean 1999, 141). Moreover, they have described the high rates of inter-generational upward social mobility in Singapore where children have higher education and better pay than their parents. It is important to recognise that parents

also expect their children to do better. Yet, start-up entrepreneurship did not promise a clear path to financial success. Even 'worse' - as discussed earlier in the chapters - discursively, it was 'not about money' or becoming rich. Neither does entrepreneurship hold the prestige that working for a well-known global brand would hold. Therefore, it is fair to say that embracing the entrepreneurial path meant breaking with middle-class expectations.

Breadwinner and family life

Entrepreneurship, according to my interlocutors, often clashed with their ability to confirm their gender roles. This clash was particularly pronounced in the area of familial relationships. A large majority of the people involved were without their own families, or if married, then without children. Many of them also had additional income that they could spend on travelling and living rather mobile lives. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many younger interlocutors reasoned that 'trying out' entrepreneurship right after university was the best time to experiment before they got married and had a family to take care of. Such reasoning incorporated a typically gendered imagination of a life trajectory, where entrepreneurship didn't necessarily seem to sit as comfortably with masculinity as commonly assumed in literature.

One of my interlocutors, who was in his 40s and, in contrast to many others, had children, admitted, 'this start-up life is for single, young guys'. He was referring to how he found that the family man's lifestyle did not match the kind of lifestyle start-up entrepreneurs are expected to lead - working nights and very long, unpredictable hours, attending networking sessions in the evenings, and sleeping in late. He had to wake up early to drop his kids at school, work during the days and in the evenings pick his children up and spend time with them, bringing them to extracurricular activities. A lifestyle that is more in line with the 9 to 5 work routine rather than the hectic and intense start-up work where hours in the office blur together with conversations over food and drinks. After struggling for a while, he decided to find a 'regular job' both to match his and his children's schedules, but more importantly, also to be able to 'provide regular income for his family'. He maintained his connections to the start-up world through his friends who were hanging out at Hackerspace.

When it comes to parents, the lifestyles and relationships of foreigners and Singaporeans were dramatically different. In Singapore, where housing availability is closely tied to the establishment of a heteronormative family (PuruShotam 1998; Oswin 2010), many of my Singaporean interlocutors were living with their parents. Some were living with their parents rather than spouses as they were in the queue for when their apart-

ment would be built. Interlocutors who had travelled to Singapore were predominantly living together with people from work or renting out rooms and maintaining their relationships with families through the convenience of smartphones.

Especially those who had travelled to Singapore and had to give up the comforts of their families suddenly found themselves in charge of their own laundry, food and shopping, which was a new situation to many of the entrepreneurs who had been raised in families where their mothers or maids would take care of such matters. An email from one of my interlocutors shows how entrepreneurship can break with a typical gendered task division in a household. I asked Ben to tell me how his everyday life has changed after he finished taking part in the very intense 100-day start-up accelerator program. After detailing his work-related experiences, in the last paragraph of the email, he also came to discuss his life at home:

> "So back to day to day life, another big difference is that I'm
> actually home in the evening now. Before, I'd usually get back home
> around 9 or 10 at night. My girlfriend has a normal job, so she
> usually gets home from work at around 7ish. That worked out fine,
> but these days we've got a sort of 'stay at home Dad' type of feel-
> ing going on, where when she gets back home I'm already at home.
> And since I'm home a lot, I may as well do the washing etc. etc.
> That's a weird feeling--maybe there's something to be looked into
> in start-up/self-employment and it's effects on gender roles? No
> big difference in day to day life, but it definitely feels differ-
> ent."

In the email, Ben indicated that the generated task division that used to work 'fine' had shifted the moment he started to work from home while his partner went off to work.

Many struggled with managing the distance and closeness to far-away families since family seemed to be both a source of support as well as of pressure. The following conversation with one of my interlocutors from the Philippines who moved to Singapore to pursue his start-up was telling of the complex ways in which entrepreneurship clashed with and fuelled his aspirations to adhere to gender roles.

> J: as much as possible, I just want to separate the family thing
> from here…I mean, I came in here.,..it shouldn't be….basically, the
> personal thing shouldn't bother this thing [start-up].
> Z: are they?
> J: I kind of regret…so basically I bring in the paper [money] at
> the family, so I'm worried that I'm not earning anything right

> now…but it's like this…I mean, I came in here with all the think-
> ing that I will have this risk and will have to explain to them
> why am I doing this…. It's because of them also…I mean, I came in
> here with an idea; hopefully, I would have an itch to scratch. But
> at the same time, I wanted to scratch the itch with some benefits,
> hopefully for my family, too…I mean, I don't care whatever happens
> to me as long as they are ok…well…I don't need to get rich-rich…I
> just want to support my family.
> Z: are you in contact [with your family now]?
> J: always, actually. Actually, I just want to do it like once a
> week, because if I do it like more often, [I'm] starting to like
> break down…this is my first time abroad, and I haven't been away
> from them like forever…like…so, especially when they talk about my
> dog - he's always waiting on my door….

The distance from the family was also experienced as a painful loss and an import-
ant resource that allowed them to deal with the failure and risk that the entrepreneurs
were expected to embrace. Seth, John's partner, for example, explained it in this way:

> "So when I think… It's easier to fall here in the Philippines, but
> there are a lot of people who get you up on your knees. But when
> you're in Singapore, you feel alienated. Not so much because peo-
> ple there don't care, actually. A lot of people are kind in Sin-
> gapore, but [it's] extremely different when you're talking about
> longtime friends and longtime family members for the longest time.
> Sometimes, you don't even have to ask them, and they'll be there
> for you. And I think that's, that's a huge difference between what
> Singapore was rather what the Philippines is."

Yet, overall, family and the need for it were not necessarily addressed as something
to reminisce about or long for. Interestingly, for example, an archive search on the histo-
ry of Blk 71 reveals that at the time of it being a manufacturing industrial estate, it had
children's day-care centres to take care of the babies while mothers were working. In
my experience over the years, I saw just one toddler at one of the events during evening
hours. In start-up-related conversations, typically, family was featured in a positive
way only when it was a resource to draw upon - in terms of networks, introductions,
places to stay or, importantly, experiences that shaped some insights and could be com-
modified. For example, how an entrepreneur's father's illness inspired him to build a
service that takes care of your parents who live far away from health checkups. Another
team in The Accelerator was developing an online service designed to help parents stay

connected to their child's life moments—events often missed due to demanding work schedules and long work hours. Such a situation was acutely familiar not only for the entrepreneur leading the project but also for investors who seemed to share similar experiences.

Another team in The Accelerator was working on an online service that would help parents to maintain a connection with their child's life moments, which were introduced as missed because parents are working too much - a situation familiar to the particular entrepreneur as well as investors.

Military service

I would like to turn to Elijah's complaint about military service, which he experienced in relation to his entrepreneurial journey as time on hold, paused when the world kept moving, and him not being able to act on his (professional) life. In Singapore, men who are citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and above must do a mandatory two-year national service (NS) plus serve an additional week every year. That week is considered paid leave. A lot of the discussions in the entrepreneurial circles posited military service as a hindrance to the entrepreneurial career because it either interrupted the entrepreneurial journey that one had started or delayed it and added extra pressure for males to succeed financially after their return from NS, thus leaving less space for 'exploration' of an entrepreneurial career. Additionally, military service is seen as yet another instance where Singaporeans are encouraged to mindlessly follow orders and rules instead of following their interests and passions. For example, the article "Want a top-notch start-up sector? Reform the Singapore Armed Forces" at SGentrepreneurs argues that in comparison with Israel, Singapore's military service does not encourage risk-taking, competition and creativity.

Concerns about how military service will affect one's ability to continue a start-up were in the minds of many of my interlocutors and on the agenda in entrepreneurial forums. For example, an Open Forum discussion of how to cope with entrepreneurship during the national service and whether that can be done at all, an aspiring entrepreneur shared his experience that:

> "A lot people I know in my social circle are really do [sic] keen to start something but due to national service, they pushed their plans 2 years back. I personally feel it is very wasted. As this 2 years could possibly boom a company and make a company profitable."

Someone who was writing drew upon the experience of their younger brother who was also his co-founder and explained that:

> "He was unable to help much in the business when he entered NS a
> year ago. He still has 1 year more. Initially before he got his
> vocation (do you call it vocation?), he's always in [..] and can
> never use computer much except for NS stuff. [..] he also rarely
> has time for the business. The only time he tries to help out is
> during weekends when he gets to come home. But even then its really
> tough as he does need to juggle business, rest more, getting back
> to friends etc. I think his vocation is too heavy. So despite his
> workaholic nature, facts are facts. We just have to be realistic on
> the level of commitment between NS & business requirements."

Another member joined the discussion, explaining that he managed to start his current start-up while at the NS:

> "I actually just went through this myself. completed 2 years of army
> myself and managed to start my company ([the name of the company])
> over the 2 years. Almost got into some troubles with the military
> moonlighting laws but the risks and sacrifice were totally worth it
> :) Also if you have a team things become exponentially easier since
> you can be there to support each other"

One of my interlocutors recalled how his earlier business failed once he went off to do the National military service and left the day-to-day activities of the business to be maintained by his parents. That turned out to be too demanding for his parents, and being unable to attend to it himself, he was forced to close down his start-up. On the other hand, many of my interlocutors also agreed and often recounted how the military has been a unique experience of networking and getting to know the various facets of Singaporean society and life. Even more so, many of my interlocutors had actually gained their technical training and chance for experimentation with computers and programming *exactly* during their military service. The connections established during the service were long-lasting for many and played a role in their future. Similarly, Lowe has argued that military service contributes to

> "cultural capital that allows Singaporean males to construct mascu-
> linity and assert a male identity in various social settings whilst
> gaining access to elite networks of power." (Lowe 2019, 687)

To summarise, despite the seemingly unproblematic affinity between masculinity and entrepreneurship, many of my interlocutor's experiences attest to the complex ways in which being an entrepreneur clashed with their gender roles. This invites us to pay more attention to entrepreneurial subjectivity and identity in intersectional terms, recognising that not all bodies are seen as equal in their ability to attract capital.

5. Femininity: Professionalism Before Gender

In Singapore, whenever a question about 'gender' was raised during my fieldwork in start-up spaces and various meetups, it was usually in the context of the 'lack of women in the technology space'. It also immediately involved a sense of unease amongst the people who discussed it. The attitudes ranged from an exhausting despair of not knowing how to 'make it better' to a downright rejection of any 'problem'. This was reflecting what Kelan has termed "gender fatigue" - a situation in which "they [in her study ICT workers in Canada] are tired of seeing gender discrimination and prefer to see a world that is gender egalitarian, where gender no longer matters" (Kelan 2009, 198).

"I'm not a woman in tech"

Coinciding with my first extended fieldwork period in 2012, two women-specific groups were started - Geek Girls and Girls in Tech, both aimed at providing 'space' for women to share, learn and discuss matters about technology and business. Despite the existence of such initiatives, I was continuously struck by how insistent my female interlocutors were on *not* being 'framed as women'. For example, Rhia, who was a well-known female start-up entrepreneur, was invited to speak on International Women's Day in a large international technology company. Feeling unsure about what exactly to talk about, she turned to her Facebook friends and asked for advice:

> "Speaking at a [name of the company] event this Tuesday for International Women's Day but I have no idea what to talk about. Suggestions? Some facts: First, I'm a human. Secondly, there are many other nouns I would use to describe myself before including "woman". Even though it's International Women's Day, and it's all about highlighting women in the tech sphere, women-focused topics need not come to the fore. I don't really like such topics either; it is really a noun I don't think much of, and [it] doesn't drive much of

what I do. (..) Perhaps, despite all, why I still chose and accept-
ed to speak at this women-focused event (and a handful of others,
including another upcoming one next month). Cuz different variables
matter differently to different people, and I'm highly aware that
"being a woman" matters more to some. For whom that's true, and to
whom I may be able to share parts of the learnings of my life that
they may learn from, why not? Effectively finding a commonality to
this "they" - which consist predominantly of women - and connect by
way of that."

Reducing one's gender to a 'noun', a 'variable' that does not define one's actions, and actively speaking against being labelled as a 'woman in tech' was outspokenly done by also another female participant when she was included in a list of "Singapore's Influential Women in Tech'. She asked to be taken out of that list and explained her position in a blog post:

"Some weeks ago my picture was included in a FB photo album on wom-
en in tech. I was very, very uncomfortable with that idea and had
it's owner to take my picture down.
Recently the topic of women in tech came up again, so I wanted to
address this — *I'm not a woman in tech*.
I've played that "women in tech" card before, getting into press
and taking advantage of the affirmative action made available to me
simply because my biological sex makes me a minority in the commu-
nity. I mean, the benefits are out there and I didn't want to short-
change myself by not grabbing it.
But I've since grown to hate it — I know I'm more than the makeup
of my chromosome. *I want to be recognised, to be respected for my
work, for the results I bring, and for the impact I've made in peo-
ple's lives… not for my boobs (ok, figurative, not literal boobs).
So don't call me a woman in tech.*" [Emphasis in original]

She explained that she had "played that women in tech card", but now she didn't want to. Why resist the commodification of one's gendered identity in the pursuit of entrepreneurship when other aspects of identity (e.g. fatherhood, being a child, parent, someone who cares about travelling, etc., as described before) were routinely commod-ified and presented to attract capital? My analysis suggests that being seen and labelled as a 'woman' seemed to be too much of a threat to their ability to perform themselves as an entrepreneur, even to try to commodify it. Ghosh's ethnographic account of female entrepreneurs in India in 2017 similarly describes how women entrepreneurs often

found themselves fulfilling the task of 'gender representation' in start-up competitions without their work being seriously considered for investment (Ghosh 2022).

An interlocutor I met in 2013 felt that her work as an entrepreneur was not being recognised because she focused on addressing a problem that was experienced and viewed as a superficial female issue. Celeste began a start-up that focused on helping users discover fashion brands and new styles, focusing on Singapore's young fashion-focused female market. She had some users sign up, yet in pitching sessions, she found it very hard to communicate the opportunity and relevance of her idea to the all-male investors. In training, the need to make the investors 'feel the pain' that the start-up is addressing and solving was emphasised. Yet, it made Celeste wonder how she could convey that her start-up addresses 'a real' opportunity rather than a 'frivolous female issue'. In the pitch event where we met (21.02.2013), she was the only female founder presenting her business. Also, the audience of investors was male, with one exception. It seemed that her attempts to communicate the struggle many women have in deciding what to wear daily didn't resonate with them. Celeste felt that the investors were unable to appreciate the opportunity she knew was there simply because the concerns that she was addressing didn't relate to their life worlds. Recognising that investor perceptions and understandings of social worlds, in combination with how they value the performance of entrepreneurial style, shape their investment decisions, it is not surprising that women-led start-ups would find it harder to attract funding. As yet another male investor explained to me in a lengthy conversation about the power dynamics in board discussions after the start-up has received the investment - the best thing for him, as an investor, is to be working with *great people*, "the ones who are taking your advice, with whom you share the vision and thinking about things." (Kartik, 20.03.2014) and while such formulation might sound neutral and meritocratic, the chances that a 20-year-old female is going to be viewed by a 40 or 50-year-old man as someone he shares vision and thinking with, are in fact rather low.

Additionally, in Chapter Three, in describing the hierarchies of the start-up ecosystem, I attended already how networking and partying with 'those in the club' into the night were common features. I was told that a lot of 'relationship building' between the male entrepreneurs and investors was also happening at places such as strip clubs, for many women partaking in these activities would risk being misread as 'not professional' and interpreted in sexual terms. Thus, paradoxically, in order to access the networks, they would have to render themselves unprofessional and disqualify themselves. Ghosh, who unlike me encountered almost an equal distribution of male and female founders, describes how the female entrepreneurs struggled to be recognised as such:

"The gendered divide in investment was therefore not due to a lack

of women entrepreneurs but a small minority of women venture cap-
italists and investors. Investors are almost always men and most
find it difficult to strike up the kind of informal relationships
that they do with male entrepreneurs. Masculinity therefore does
not necessarily translate to only to innovativeness in the start-up
field. Rather, it translates to an ease of doing business. Investors
know how to read, assess, develop relationships with male entrepre-
neurs. They know the cues to look for, the questions to ask and the
networks to ply." (Ghosh 2020, 76)

Many women felt they had to actively resist sexist stereotyping, which also could hide behind naturalised interpretations of how femininity could be rendered compatible with entrepreneurship (thus, in fact, first assuming it is not compatible) - for example - 'because women are caring, they do a good job at managing employees', or because 'women are nonconfrontational', they are better at conflict resolution and strategy, etc. A good example comes from Melody, who sent me a furious e-mail describing how such gendered stereotyping happens in mundane contexts. In the e-mail, she described how during a lunch meeting, her male boss had interpreted her quick reactions to an accident in terms of her potential motherhood rather than recognising her as a professional. Email titled "Stereotypes" sent to me April 18, 2012:

"Ugh.... For your anthropological databank:
Today when I grabbed a napkin after someone spilled something on
him during a daily meeting [he said] "you're going to be such a
good mom! Now all you need is for us to find you a man who can give
you that."
I brushed it off bc I was focused on work...but omg. Someone is
competent and knowledgeable in anticipating needs and comes pre-
pared- if I was a guy, Would I be told aww how great, you'll be a
great dad! And aww, let's get you a baby making machine (..)
Actually if I was a guy I'd probably be told: Wow you would be a
great biz guy for a start-up bc you can get shit done! WTF"

Melody felt that her quick thinking and acting, her anticipatory skills, all of which would suit entrepreneurial traits, were not recognised; instead, her qualities were tied to a gendered future role that she was without a question assigned to. Moreover, her male boss further removed her agency in that matter by suggesting that it was his responsibility to find her a partner so that she could fulfill her role as a mother. Being female, she was not recognised as an 'entrepreneurial' subject in that sense. In a similar way, Wang and Keane in their study of female start-up entrepreneurs in China have

argued that

> "besides the difficulty to sustain a creative-based entrepreneurial
> identity, the hyper-competitive and masculinist fields of digital
> entrepreneurship and technical fields, combined with traditional
> gender roles and family responsibility, results in a devaluation of
> female entrepreneurship." (Wang and Keane 2020, 407)

Resistance to gender-specific allotments became apparent in an interview with another female entrepreneur. A journalist reported:

> "In a sea full of male technopreneurs, Krystal is akin to a mer-
> maid. However, this constant 'mythical-creature-like' portrayal
> seems to be a bête noire for her.
> "I'm constantly being asked on what it is like to be a woman in the
> male-dominated tech industry and I've difficulty answering that,"
> Krystal confesses, her voice slipping into a slightly vexed tone.
> "I see myself as an individual and my traits are not gender-specif-
> ic. I don't think I bring any 'feminine' traits to the industry."
> (Yap 2015)

Here, Krystal, similar to many other women in technology, denied having any specific feminine qualities; she emphasises her humanness above all. The article itself, though, goes to great lengths to comment on Krystal's looks, emphasising her 'beauty', 'vulnerability' and 'hourglass figure':

> "Her vulnerability doesn't go unnoticed; underneath her auburn
> tresses, sultry gaze and impressive hourglass figure. Going by Krys-
> tal's appearance, it is easy to make assumptions: cue the side-
> eye glances and snide undertones. However, as a CEO of a start-up
> called Wander, Krystal seems free of artifice – zipping around her
> office on a scooter in a white bodycon dress and red puma high-top
> sneakers. Her positivity is infectious as she introduces her team
> and makes light-hearted comments on how she cannot sit still. (..)
> She's a triple threat with beauty, brains and personality." (Yap
> 2015)

I do not recall any article discussing male entrepreneurs that would go to such great lengths to describe the figure, the hair, the eyes and handsomeness of male entrepreneurs. Also, Alice Marwick, describing sexism in Silicon Valley, remarks how the

media's depictions of female entrepreneurs pay an inordinate amount of attention to looks and "base a woman's worth of her looks rather than accomplishments, lessening women's contributions to the scene and positioning them as objects rather than actors." (Marwick 2013, 266)

In their content analysis of the portrayal of female entrepreneurs in the two leading newspapers in Singapore - The Straits Times and The Business Times starting 1987 till 2020, the researchers Ling Han, Chengpang Lee and Gracia Jieyi Lee note that while the emphasis on women entrepreneurs as also being caring mothers and dutiful wives seems to loose its strong grip starting 2000s, nevertheless "it is still implied that marriage and motherhood are the preferential life goal for women." (Ling, Lee and Lee 2021, 54) They note an increase in the depiction of women entrepreneurs starting around 2010, but then as 'mumpreneurs', where the flexibility of entrepreneurship to combine it with motherhood allows to have both professional and emotional fulfilment. Strikingly, they also observe that unless women entrepreneurs can be embraced simultaneously as mothers, their gender is not mentioned, arguing that

> "This obscuring of young female entrepreneurs by de-linking them from their gender in the news media further reinforces the dominant image of the female entrepreneur as one that embraces her gender role as a mother." (Ling, Lee and Lee 2021, 54)

Unfortunately, in paradoxical ways, this denial often also meant an insistence of start-up space as a 'gender-neutral' space that was both reinforced as well as reinforced the belief in meritocracy. This was very evident in my conversation with Ananya, a very well-known community member, after I asked her opinion on the fact that there are not many girls in the tech community. She seemed somewhat upset about me enquiring on this and went on a long speech:

> "Oh boy! You are going to record this, right? Ok, I think I will just say it straight away. I am kind of anti-anything-girls-in-technology-kind-of-thing. This is my take in it. I believe in once again that mankind and humanity are at a stage where, where let's say, a significant percentage of women can say in their life that "I've never been sexually harassed," "I've never been made to feel that I am a girl and hence I am supposed to do that". I know the percentage is small, but maybe 20% or 30% of the world can say this because of all the women in the past century who did that for us. The bra burning and whatever. Significant percentage of human[kind]. And I believe that I am part of that percentage of women that has

never been sexually harassed, never molested, my husband never made
me feel so, my father never made me feel so, and I have been given
the chance to have the best education in my life to go to an en-
gineering school. (..) I may be the only girl in the world but I
believe that because of the women, what they did in the past cen-
tury, I am one of the fortunate ones not to feel so at all. (..)
And when I see women in tech group in situations that girls like me
have been brought up I kind of think that there is a better use for
it.
Secondly, the tech groups that I go to - they are free and open. If
the women really wanted to learn programming, they jolly well go
and find these groups.
And thirdly. If you want to be the best painter or singer in the
world - don't look for your own race, don't look for your own gen-
der, don't look for your own family, look for the best ones. That's
how you will learn. And I don't know. Yeah, I mean, I am working
with men in so, in my life, and I have never found the need to cre-
ate this [division based on gender]. And all I can ever say is that
if you are a girl, yes, come and ask me how you do it, but look
at all these groups and attend these meetings instead of creating
these groups which are for women-only. Go and talk to groups which
are the best in what you are doing." (Ananya, 12.07.15)

It felt like Ananya had given this a lot of thought, as she spoke to me without need-
ing a moment to think. Paradoxically, even though she recognised that her privileged
position was a result of the political actions of other women in the past, she refused to
describe her experiences in the technology community as political or to acknowledge
any need for any collective organisation based on gender. Ananya embraced the meri-
tocratic ideal as a description of reality by claiming that the spaces she used, as she saw
them, were open to all, and one should learn from the best rather than associate based
on gender. This corresponded to the two strategies Kelan has identified women in Ca-
nadian ICT use to navigate the ideological dilemma of "constructing the workplace
as gender neutral and acknowledging gender discrimination", namely, constructing
gender discrimination as happening in the past (not anymore) and as an individual
problem, that can be overcome with appropriate behaviour rather than a structural is-
sue (Kelan 2009). Similarly, PuruShotam's analysis of the middle class and gender in
Singapore also depicts very well how the sense of increased choices for middle-class
women also goes together with a sense of gender equality:

"There is little sense of gender-based discontent within the domi-
nant texts of middle-class modernity. The perception is that women

have advanced and will continue to do so. Equality has happened and
will continue to happen." (PuruShotam 1998, 142)

Also, Hudson, in her analysis of gender representations in Singapore, has argued that the male anxiety over the 'new Singapore woman' has to do with the perception that emancipation has happened (Hudson 2013). This resonates with Ananya's argument that one shouldn't focus on women-specific events in technology, as well as Rhia's outcry to her Facebook friends when she was asked to share her experiences on International Women's Day. In addition, this emphasis on 'gender neutral' spaces was reinforced by the belief in meritocracy that my interlocutor was also expressing by saying that one should 'just learn from the best'. Alice Marwick notes a similar pattern in Silicon Valley:

"Although even successful women in the scene will say they do not
want to be a "woman in tech" but just a woman "in tech," their gen-
der affects how people perceive their accomplishments. While the
technology industry is supposedly egalitarian and democratic, it
privileges the voices and experiences of men." (Marwick 2013, 270)

She also argues that this belief in meritocracy undermines meaningful attempts to address gender inequality "because it implies— incorrectly—that those who do not rise to the top are less capable than those who do." (Marwick 2013, 272). In this context, where women had a harder time being recognised as entrepreneurial, and the value of the speculative labour they were investing was devalued, insisting that they are not being viewed as 'women in tech' made sense.

Strategies of managing femininity

Despite these assertions that start-up entrepreneurship has nothing to do with gender, throughout my fieldwork, I encountered many strategies that were adopted by females to manage their everyday lives. Commonly, these strategies involved close monitoring of one's own behaviour and looks, and they stemmed from a recognition that the female body is an intruder in this masculine space and will naturally be understood as a sexual object.

An interlocutor, for example, though disagreeing with sexism in the industry earlier in our interview, later continued to explain to me that especially newcomers have to be very clear that 'they are not here to search for a husband, because otherwise, it

will be only natural that guys will test her and approach'. Referring to her conversation with one girl who recently had become part of a specific circle of entrepreneurs, she explained:

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R: "And I was like, you know what - you gonna be inundated with
people going after you, because, just because in such an environ-
ment whereby, whatever, you know…in a seventy to thirty or even
eighty to twenty percent [male to female ratio], you are gonna be
seen as a 'potential', but ahm… (..) it depends on how you adjust
your own behaviour."
Z: but then it depends on your own behaviour?
R: Ya! Exactly, right? So… and the behaviour part - like what we
talked about the last time - who you are seen with, how even just
casual interactions [can be misinterpreted]… how.. yeah … does that
answer your question?"
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She explained that because she herself has been around here for long enough and has monitored how her acts are seen publicly,

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"People have established from my behaviour, that, hopefully, you
know, I am not a sexual object, so it helps."
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While agreeing that women are being firstly seen as sexual objects in the male-dominated environment, she also attributed the ability to change this perception over time to the women themselves. For that, they had to be cautious about the kind of signals they send out. Thus, by strategic and careful management of what they wear, where they go and with whom, they could gradually convince people that they are 'professional'. "Even casual interactions", she noted, are always up for at least internal scrutiny of "what kind of impression they might give" and how that could potentially threaten her image as 'professional'. This corresponds with what Nadesan and Trethewey have argued, that especially for women, "negotiating and performing a 'professional' identity is a process requiring much time, energy, and self-surveillance" (Nadesan and Trethewey 2009, 223).

As a researcher 'hanging out' with the start-up entrepreneurs and investors, I encountered a fair share of sexist advances, including friendly yet unwelcome touches and comments that I felt the need to jokingly brush off, all while knowing that they were inappropriate. For example, on one occasion, I was told that the possibility of interviewing some people working for a gaming start-up was a gift that their male boss gifted to them because the boss knew that the male employees would enjoy being

interviewed by a 'cute' woman. I was also asked why I was spending time in the evenings with some male interlocutors, implying that there must be 'more' to it. Also, Rhia, a well-established female founder, recognised some of my experiences. After I told her about an investor hugging me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable, she acknowledged that such situations happen and comforted me saying "I know what you mean, and sometimes you know, it feels fairly friendly, you know, but sometimes not …". Just like my interlocutors I too thought carefully about what I wore and how much of my skin was exposed.

For example, another female working in a start-up training program in anticipation of the new run of the program starting and the incoming group of mostly men told me that she would dress 'very ugly' from now on. I asked why, and she said that she would do so because she doesn't want guys to ask her out because she feels bad about saying no to people (19.01.2012). Note that she was already anticipating that this is how she will be viewed.

Another female interlocutor, who however took a lot of pride in her looks by dressing very feminine, told in an interview that if you are a female in the technology industry and you look good, and you take care of how you look and what you wear, people assume that you are not smart or 'that you are trying to get something based on your appearance'. She went on:

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"I always preach to all the girls at Girls in Tech - Don't lose
your feminity! Like, you can have, you can be in tech, and you can
be, you can dress up and wear make-up and be feminine and, but also
to, like, play sports, you know, you shouldn't limit yourself based
on stereotypes and based on what other people think. And I have
never let myself in that trap, but many other women do. Because
they are afraid that, one, they won't be thought of as smart, two,
they will be sexually harassed, and three, competition from oth-
er women at workplace. I don't care about any of that. I mean, you
shouldn't care about any of that."
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It was clear that Gabriela spoke from a very privileged position in which she could afford 'not to care' about not being respected. Yet the fact that she recognised that because of her looks, she also has a harder time being viewed as a professional is important. Before I had met her, I had already people - men and women - discussing whether she was a 'tai tai': a woman married for her looks by a rich husband, or was she really 'someone'.

Another example of how work and lifestyle intersect with the practices associated with gender and relationships is regarding the intensity of work. In an interview with a

female-oriented news portal, Quing Ru recounted their story of hard work that turned into success when her start-up exited in 2014. In a section where she recalls the suffering and sacrifices that she had to undergo before turning a millionaire, her experience is captured by the journalist in the following way:

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"Stress and long working hours turned her skin sallow. She talks
self-deprecatingly about how she stopped bothering with makeup and
haircuts, and wore cheap, baggy pants ("the sort from the pasar
malam!") to work as she had no money to shop.
"I would think, 'How can I care about clothes when I have sh*t to
do!?'" she says with a laugh. Even her boyfriend started hinting
about her sloppy dressing. "He met sharply dressed women in his in-
vestment banking job... and then he'd meet me," she deadpans.
The two broke up several times, partly due to the strain of their
jobs, but they always got back together; they're still dating now."
(Tai 2015)
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Especially telling is the section where she contrasts herself to other females through the gaze of her boyfriend. She was not dressing up and taking care of herself in the way that other 'professional women' do. The emphasis on looking good and taking care of her role as a female is one of the defining characteristics of 'middleclass femity' in Singapore. Taking care of oneself and family has been the dominant narrative in constructing how women should play role in the nation: "Women are also expected to cultivate themselves, as national and family subjects." (Hudson 2013, 22). Not adhering to the class expectations is also hinted in the reference to the cheap pants bought at *pasar malam* (night market in Malay).

Thus what we see is that working in the technology scene seemed for many incompatible with femity both due to the lifestyle it required, but also due to the kind of expectations tied to being feminine. Many of my female interlocutors had to actively work to decrease their sexuality to emphasise professionalism. Yet, a conversation with two male investors in their 30s and 40s, made me wonder to what extent can this be regulated, since in the sexist stereotypes they shared with me I sensed an ingrained disbelief in the capacity of women to even have a 'true', innate drive for change. Each of the investors provided a different story to make their point. One drew upon a thought exercise that his wife had also confirmed to be true, and it involved a woman and a man falling into a deep pit. In this scenario, according to the investor, the man will do all he can to get out of the pit, but the woman will supposedly focus her energy on making the pit nice and comfortable. In his narration, this is simply how humankind has always been - the men went out to hunt, while the women stayed in caves and took care of the

'home'. The other story similarly challenged the female propensity to envision and act for change because from puberty on, regardless of their own will, women are subjected to menstrual periods that 'simply happen to them', so they learn to accept 'life as it is'. The implicit part of the story is that there is nothing that happens to men's bodies without their own will, and therefore, they don't settle and are always ready to transform the world. If these are the lenses through which they saw women's contribution and agency, then I suspect the chances for women to be recognised as entrepreneurs were slim no matter the management of their looks and behaviours.

Girls in Tech and Geek Girls - fostering the neoliberal feminist subject?

Late 2011 and 2012 was a special time in Singapore because, along with many events for technology start-ups also, two initiatives aimed at addressing female audiences, in particular, took off the ground. One was called "Geek Girls" and the other "Girls in Tech". The titles of both emphasise the less sexual and also more youthful notion of 'girl' rather than 'woman'. By using these two examples I want to show how gender inequality was dealt with and argue that they promoted what other scholars have called a 'neoliberal feminist subject' -

> "this subject is feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women. This same subject is, however, simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus. The neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair." (Rottenberg 2014, 420)

Both organisations wanted to encourage the presence of females in technology circles, yet each had different strategies and also 'audiences'. SG Geek Girls wanted to increase the female presence by focusing on technical skills acquisition - inspired by the international Rails Girls initiative that focuses on building up technology skills of women, they were offering introductory level courses in programming, working with Photoshop and other technical engagements, next to events that featured panels of 'role models' - females who were already technology entrepreneurs or had high standing

positions in technology corporations. Their mission statement read:

> "SG Geek Girls is a local initiative that serves as a platform for
> females to share, contribute, mentor and learn from each other. We
> want to empower the next generation of women in technology through
> fun, informal and interactive activities."

Girls in Tech, however, focused more on a skill set related to entrepreneurship and networking. Thus, rather than identifying the problem as a matter of lack of technical skills, they emphasised the entrepreneurial knowledge and social capital building for females. Events usually featured lengthy drinks and conversations with some inspirational panels and Girls in Tech explained their raison d'etre as:

> "Girls in Tech is a social network enterprise focused on the en-
> gagement, education and empowerment of like-minded, profession-
> al, intelligent and influential women in technology. (..) GIT was
> born out of a need to provide a place for women to cultivate ideas
> around their careers and business concepts involving technology."
> (https://www.eventbrite.com/org/333203209?s=6784443, last accessed
> 15.02.2012)

Logos of the two
female oriented groups.

Not surprisingly, they also attracted overlapping but also slightly different audiences. Girls in Tech seemed to be the choice for women, mostly already practising marketing or other 'softer' professions related to the technology world. Geek Girls, however, seemed to be more popular with younger, often high school and university level students who thought that programming would make the 'male world' more accessible to them if they would pick up programming. It was not rare to meet young girls at events organised by both of these organisations. One girl whom I met for the

second time explained that she is really enjoying these meetings and having the chance to listen to female entrepreneurs in technology - that for her it is something new, 'not a mainstream in Singapore' according to her.

Yet both of them were based on increasing the networking possibilities of women or improving their skills or access to capital. Thus, all these events try to incorporate market rationality in their ways to correct inequalities. The proposed solution to the inequality then was increasing individual women's capacities. Even more so, both these organisations emphasised that they have *nothing* to do with 'politics' and avoided discussions about larger political agenda or structural inequality. Women spoke about their and other women's *choice* to become entrepreneurs and their own individual responsibility to combat the obstacles that they are facing.

With the lack of any coherent larger political agenda, most female-oriented, specific events can be seen more as a niche market orientation rather than a feminist call for female empowerment and gender equality. Scholars call this 'neoliberal feminism' - a feminism that offers no critique of neoliberalism and the wider context of production (Rottenberg 2014, 419). It seemed that this niche market involving females in technology was quite interesting for many who were trying to build their businesses around the start-up ecosystem.

For example, in 2013, I was told by an active mentor in the start-up ecosystem in his 40s that he was considering developing a new start-up training program, one that focuses on young women in Singapore. As he saw it, young girls are an 'unrealised market' for start-up education - a market niche that hasn't been 'tapped'. According to his analysis, the 'female market' should actually make sense because, according to the way he saw it in Singapore, there is quite a substantial group of well-educated and 'fairly wealthy' girls. Additionally, girls have less pressure to perform career-wise, have no Military Service requirements and thus might have more time and leeway in the eyes of their families to try start-ups. However, while detailing his plans, he was also quite explicit that the kind of female entrepreneurship that he knew at the moment in Singapore did 'yield nothing'. Referring to one co-working space that attracted a predominantly female audience, possibly thanks to it also being run by a female founder, he pointed out that 'they are just hanging out there, and nothing comes out of it' (21.02.13), making me wonder how able he was to actually see the value of the people he wanted to 'transform'.

Later in 2014, a new network for women was started called Woomentum. During the public event I attended on 22.04.2014, the founder explained that Woomentum is not only about women, even if its title drew on the terms 'Women' and 'Momentum'. In a one-on-one conversation after the official opening, the founder was more open

about the inequality in access to funding that women entrepreneurs face. However, as she reverted back, the mission is about spotlighting females rather than initiating political change. The strategy that Woomentum wanted to employ was to highlight the contributions of women entrepreneurs and, by giving more attention, render their presence more normalised in these masculine spaces. Here, I saw some potential for a more political approach since the organisation seemed to want to expose more women to male-dominated spaces and thus transform the masculine gaze, yet my fieldwork had come to an end by the time Woomentum started to operate. I would expect that the start-up space has changed somewhat in the years since the end of my fieldwork in this regard.

To summarise, women's bodies were 'othered' in the otherwise masculine spaces. They were read primarily in sexualised terms, and women's motives for partaking in the start-up events were questioned based on whether they were here primarily to 'find a husband'. Being a 'woman' seemed more of a liability than something that successfully added to their 'capital'. This information was about the strategies that women entrepreneurs employed in return. First and foremost, they insisted on not being singled out as 'women in tech' but recognised as 'humans' and 'professionals'. Additionally, they tried to enforce this message through tight self-management - of how they dressed, where they went and with whom and so on, which also meant that they were excluded from important networking and relationship-building contexts. Embodying the entrepreneurial dream was caught up in the fact that bodies were gendered and the ideal did not align with socially expected gender roles. Addressing this, though, was challenging as the promise of meritocracy was not inherent only in the start-up futurities but also was one of the central tenets of Singapore's nation-building. The women-focused events avoided addressing this as a political issue of inequality and instead focused on enhancing individual women's capabilities - either in terms of networking or by providing technical knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Chapter Six focused on the entrepreneurial subjectivity paying attention also to bodies, expanding on the previous chapter that showed how embracing an entrepreneurial mindset means embracing openness, flexibility, risk-taking, and strategic self-management. This chapter focuses on how these ideals demand a transformation of both mind and body, highlighting the labour involved in sustaining this entrepreneurial ideal.

Becoming an entrepreneur means not only particular ways of thinking and working as described in previous chapters, but also specific ways of engaging with one's body. In this chapter, I describe how it also means learning to project the potential value through how one moves one's body and uses one's voice and emotions. Embracing entrepreneurial subjectivity means displaying passion and adaptability, as seen in the training sessions at The Accelerator accelerator, where entrepreneurs were coached to embody energy and excitement in their pitches. This process involved meticulous training in body language, voice modulation, and physical presentation, highlighting the extensive labour required to meet entrepreneurial expectations.

The material shown in this chapter further challenges the feasibility of start-up futurities as bodies were less malleable in the face of future expectations. It particularly examines how global power relations manifest in racial and gender inequalities within entrepreneurial contexts, emphasising the challenges and frictions encountered by bodies that do not conform to the normative entrepreneurial ideal. Bodies are racialised and gendered, and this chapter examined the ways in which my interlocutors tried to account for this. Some strategies involved tight monitoring, such as women entrepreneurs who tried to always be conscious of how their actions, dress and decisions about with whom to socialise in which contexts will be perceived. Female bodies were treated by men and women as transgressors in entrepreneurial spaces. Many female entrepreneurs resisted being labelled as 'women in tech,' as a gendered reading of their presence was seen as a threat to their professional abilities. Despite the rise of female-oriented initiatives like Geek Girls and Girls in Tech, these efforts often focus on enhancing individual skills rather than addressing structural gender inequalities. Other strategies meant embracing the social reality that racialised bodies will be attributed different abilities to project the potential value and working with that.

Even though entrepreneurship is often seen as a masculine activity, by looking at the intersection of masculinity and race, this chapter also shows the ways in which it clashes with gender roles in Singapore and how this shapes the experiences of male entrepreneurs. It recounts Elijah's lament about the difficulties faced by Chinese men in Singapore, highlighting the societal expectations of financial success and breadwinning that clash with the uncertain and financially unstable nature of start-up life. The chapter also discusses the impact of compulsory military service on Singaporean men's entrepreneurial journeys, noting how it delays their professional progress and adds pressure to succeed quickly.

While the start-up ecosystem promotes a seemingly universal entrepreneurial ideal, it fails to account for the fact that this ideal is steeped in power relations and is biased in particular ways. The promise of meritocracy inherent in entrepreneurial narratives and Singapore's nation-building discourse often masks the structural inequalities that

impede the full participation of diverse bodies in the entrepreneurial space.

This way, the chapter again highlights the work that goes into pursuing an ideal and how people tried to absorb these frictions in an individualised way. The categories of gender were also deeply entwined with race, age, and social class, pointing us to the importance of examining the patterns of inequality and opportunities intersectionally.