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Exploring founder identity tension, resolution, and venture pursuit

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that venture founders from creative backgrounds can experience identity tension if they view artistic and commercial logics as competing. Whether they experience this tension and how it is resolved can have implications for their behavioral responses, ultimately shaping the development of their ventures. In this article, we adopt an identity work lens in a longitudinal study of venture founders from creative backgrounds. Our findings and subsequent model detail the circumstances that trigger identity tension and how founders from arts background experience and resolve it in different ways. This leads to practices that focus on different conceptions of performance and growth.

Introduction

New venture founders may find that unfamiliar pressures and logics challenge their sense of self (Solomon & Mathias, 2020; Wry & York, 2017; York et al., 2016). For venture founders from creative backgrounds, identity challenges may stem from wishing to prioritize creative pursuit and self-expression over commercial gain (Biraglia & Kadile, 2017; Mathias et al., 2015; Stinchfield et al., 2013). Some individuals from creative backgrounds even believe that entrepreneurial action can be antithetical to artistic action (Coulson, 2012; Gangi, 2015). This body of work suggests that competing logics may be inherent within creative pursuits and commercial imperatives (Coulson, 2012; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Gotsi et al., 2010). This can result in founders experiencing tension due to external feedback not aligning with their self-perceptions (Conger et al., 2018; O'Neil et al., 2020).

Understanding how venture founders from creative backgrounds experience and work on any tensions is important because identity has been linked to venture performance (Mathias & Williams, 2018; Morris et al., 2018). Founders can use their ventures as vehicles to affirm and defend their identities through

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different behaviors that can affect growth (Mathias & Williams, 2018; Powell & Baker, 2014; Solomon & Mathias, 2020). Inability to "resolve" potential tensions can also contribute to venture failure and adverse motivation and well-being (Amiot et al., 2007; Demetry, 2017; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009).

Although extant literature predominately takes a static view of identity and performance, emerging research has explored the behavioral processes that link them together (Demetry, 2017; Mathias & Williams, 2018). However, this process approach has not yet fully outlined how founder identity and venture trajectory unfold. We still lack nuance into why founders work on their identities differently and how this leads to different entrepreneurial behaviors (Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Wagenschwanz, 2021). To address this gap, we ask: When and how do creative venture founders experience and resolve identity tension? How is work on their identity linked to different priorities for venture performance?

To answer these questions, we adopt an identity work lens (for example, Down & Warren, 2008; Watson, 2009a). This perspective views multiple identity lenses (role identity, social identity) as threads that are woven together through working on the self. In adopting this approach we assume that venture development is shaped by the ongoing work individuals do to construct coherent identities in entrepreneurship (Anderson et al., 2019; O'Neil et al., 2020). *Self-coherence* refers to a relatively stable and secure sense of self that individuals strive for to reduce tension and promote psychological well-being (Amiot et al., 2007; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). In turn, individuals engage in behaviors consistent with their self-identities, using them to reinforce who they are (Leitch & Harrison, 2016).

In this article, we explore identity tension and resolution work through seven longitudinal case studies of art school graduates who faced decisions for the future development of their ventures post start-up. Our findings and model contribute to the literatures on identity tension in entrepreneurship and the link between founder identity and venture development.

Literature review

Founder identities, behavior, and venture development

There is a growing line of scholarship that views entrepreneurship through the lens of identity (for example, Cardon et al., 2009; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). This research has explored the links between founder identity and venture types, entrepreneurial behaviors, and performance outcomes (for example, Mills & Pawson, 2012; Morris et al., 2018; Stinchfield et al., 2013). Scholars have emphasized the importance of founder identity in how entrepreneurs select opportunities and pursue growth (Conger et al., 2018; Mathias & Williams, 2017, 2018; Wry & York, 2017).

Founder identities encompass both an individual's interpretation of the entrepreneurial role and the self-concepts they derive from identification with certain groups (Fisher et al., 2016). As such, existing studies on founder identity have drawn upon two approaches—role identity theory (Cardon et al., 2009; Stryker, 1980) and social identity theory (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity theory refers to how individuals see themselves as members of various social groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As such, goals and behaviors derive from the relationships, memberships, and categories that individuals compare themselves against (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). These comparisons create frames of reference for evaluating ideals and behaviors (Turner et al., 1987).

Role identity theory, alternatively, views the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role and its performance (Burke & Tully, 1977). An *entrepreneurial role identity* refers to the sets of attributes that are associated with the role, the tasks carried out to perform it, how the entrepreneur perceives this performance, and the importance of the role compared to other roles (Hoang & Gimeno, 2015; Morris et al., 2018). Role performance can evoke positive affect, which in turn can encourage certain behaviors (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2019, 2014). Passion for producing craft beers, for example, can lead to the intention to start a microbrewery (Biraglia & Kadile, 2017).

Existing research has conceptualized various founder identities and highlighted preferences for different entrepreneurial behaviors. However, this work says little about how these identities coevolve during the venture process (O'Neil et al., 2020; Wagenschwanz, 2021). In this article, we align with studies that seek to understand how founder identity is shaped in an ongoing process and adopt an identity work perspective (Anderson et al., 2019; Demetry, 2017; Down & Reveley, 2004).

The *identity work* perspective views identities as temporary stabilizations arising from dialogs between internal self-reflections and external discourses encountered within a social domain (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). They are molded simultaneously by the interactions between the personal self and the multiple social identities that make up the overall self-concept (Watson, 2009a).

The personal self and multiple social identities interact through internal and external reflection of narratives (Beech, 2008). To preserve a sense of coherence, individuals maintain these narratives through their identity work. To do this, individuals "relate to the social world," looking at "cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be" (Watson, 2009b, p. 431). Individuals encounter potential social identities or "personas" in everyday life. Parts of these personas can be internalized in their identity work ("I want to be like them") and also externalized through self-presentation and narratives ("I want to be seen like this") (Watson, 2009b).

To navigate multiple potential identities, individuals work toward situating themselves in specific contexts (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Down & Reveley, 2004). Individuals are constantly "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" their sense of self to create self-coherence and distinctiveness (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). A situated and coherent sense of self creates self-esteem, feelings of belonging, and positive conceptions toward future selves (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2014; Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). This in turn directs behavior to align with a sense of self (identity enactment—Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Vignoles et al., 2008). Identity enactment is the manifestation of old and new identities through various behaviors and actions (Anderson et al., 2019; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Thus, founder identities can be understood as socially situated, enabled, and acted upon (Anderson et al., 2019; Down & Reveley, 2004; Watson, 2009a).

Founder identity has been linked to different behavioral priorities and venture growth (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015; Mills & Pawson, 2012). Whether the venture strives for survival, lifestyle, managed growth, or aggressive growth is said to depend on the founder's identity (Morris et al., 2018). Although it is understood that founder identity and venture development are intermeshed, we still lack a processual understanding of how identity, opportunity, and venture coevolve (Mcmullen & Dimov, 2013).

Recent literature seeks to unpack the relationship between identity construction, entrepreneurial behavior, and how ventures develop (Conger et al., 2018; Demetry, 2017; Mathias & Williams, 2018). This research details the identity work that founders do to integrate the logics of multiple identities (Barrett & Vershinina, 2017; Wry & York, 2017; York et al., 2016); create feelings of belonging within specific contexts (Essers & Benschop, 2009); "shed" existing identities to aid venture growth (Mathias & Williams, 2018); or take venture actions depending on future conceptions they have about themselves (Farmer et al., 2011; Kwong & Thompson, 2016). This work has contributed to explaining different parts of the process that links identity to venture performance but leaves gaps to be filled. In this article, we seek to fill these gaps in the context of founders from creative backgrounds, who may experience identity tensions.

Competing logics and their effect on identity construction in creative contexts

Institutional logics are the guiding principles that shape the actions, motives, and identities of individuals, groups, and organizations (Thornton, 2002). They encompass social norms and rules that determine organizational practices, procedures, and structures (Chua et al., 2015; Thornton, 2002). Different institutional settings have discreet logics, which create distinct dynamics when they interact (Glynn, 2000; Thornton, 2002). The literature on institutional

logics has provided insights into organizational practices and identity tensions that can be created when entrepreneurs subscribe to logics that are practically or ideologically divergent (for example, environmental or social—Wry & York, 2017; York et al., 2016). Creative workers also hold multiple logics that potentially create tensions in their organizing activities (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Glynn, 2000; Gotsi et al., 2010). These tensions may exist at the intersection of art and commerce and are said to span individual, organization, and field levels (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006) (Table 1).

At the field level, existing literature presents a prevailing dichotomy between arts and commerce. This is posited to exist when the desire to produce "art for art's sake" on one hand is not reconciled with a market orientation on the other (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). The arts logic promotes an esthetic performance imperative to create "new genres, formats and products" (DeFillippi et al., 2007, p. 513). The commercial logic promotes a need for economic viability through exchanging goods and services in markets, thus producing art for the sake of its market potential (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007).

At the organizational level, research has found that some creative workers prioritize the pursuit of creative avenues, funded through temporary, freelance, and project-based opportunities rather than planned financially sustainable arrangements (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006; Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). Commerce-based work practices are thought to be relatively more structured and commercially driven to compete in markets through production (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Stinchfield et al., 2013). These logics both drive and are driven by the individual motives of creative workers. Creative workers are often motivated by a need for autonomy and self-expression, while some can struggle to adapt to the commercial utility of commercial practices (Beech et al., 2012; Stinchfield et al., 2013).

The potential tensions that exist between arts and commerce can occur at the individual identity level (Beech et al., 2016; Coulson, 2012; Elsbach, 2009). These identities are not explicitly competing, but how individuals accommodate both logics of practice into their overall self-identity can potentially create tension. In organizational studies, creative workers have been found to

Table 1. Arts and commercial logics of practice.

Competing logics	Key descriptions
Field	• Esthetic performance versus economic market orientation (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006, Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007)
	• Creation of new genres, formats and products versus economic viability (DeFillippi et al., 2007)
Organization	• Spontaneous and unstructured versus planned and organized (Stinchfield et al., 2013)
	• Temporary, freelance, or project-based versus homogenous, formalized production (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013)
Individual	• Autonomy and self-expression versus commercial utility (Beech et al., 2012; Demetry, 2017; Hackley & Kover, 2007)
	• Idealism versus pragmatism (Bain, 2005)

negotiate their identities at the intersection of this tension (Hackley & Kover, 2007; Svejenova et al., 2007). Some organizations even have to regulate these paradoxes through practices aimed at synergizing creative and business roles (Gotsi et al., 2010).

These tensions have also been seen in creative workers' entrepreneurial pursuits where they struggle to adapt their identities to the demands that new venture creation creates (Bridgstock, 2013; Coulson, 2012; Gangi, 2015; Werthes et al., 2018). Demetry (2017), for example, highlights how tension is created when creative hobbies are turned into full-time businesses. Artistic practices are sacrificed due to the commercial demands of starting a business. This work presents creatives as resolving identity tensions through either "rebelling" against or "integrating" the logics of commerce into their identities as creatives (Bain, 2005; Elsbach, 2009; Gotsi et al., 2010). However, how individuals work to integrate creative and commercial identities, the behavioral manifestations and the implications on venture pursuits are yet to be fully addressed (Demetry, 2017; Werthes et al., 2018).

Research methods

The longitudinal multiple case study design we adopted allowed us to generate conceptual insights from rich empirical archives and interview data (Eisenhardt, 1989). The longitudinal nature of the research design allowed us to understand how founder identities are worked on over time and how this shapes behavior and venture development (O'Neil et al., 2020; Werthes et al., 2018).

Research context

Although acknowledging that all venture founders can apply creativity to entrepreneurship (Dimov, 2007), we operationally define founders from creative backgrounds as individuals with an art education who have pursued a venture in artistic, cultural, or craft practices (De Bruin & Noyes, 2015). There are several reasons why studying graduates from art school is compelling for identity work. Arts higher education traditionally focuses on the development of disciplinary creative and technical skills through experiential learning. The development of skills associated with entrepreneurship has less emphasis (Beckman, 2007; Bridgstock, 2013). It has been posited that not incorporating entrepreneurship training in arts programs fails to equip graduates fully to pursue arts-related ventures, which could lead to identity tension (White, 2013). Furthermore, graduates from arts-based education develop strong artistic identities that are carried forward into their careers (Bridgstock, 2013). This suggests that the transition from arts student to entrepreneur may be particularly challenging (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006).

Art school graduates typically pursue multiple different outlets for their practices through a patchwork of commercial activities (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006). This can lead to tension from multiple identity demands and may trigger a need to work to create a coherent sense of self (Michlewski, 2008). Additionally, there is an important call for research to take into account the institutional and social contexts in which entrepreneurship takes place to further our understanding of opportunities, activities, and outcomes (Welter, 2011). Therefore, understanding the development of ventures for art school graduates offers an avenue for study, where identity dynamics should be particularly transparent.

Research sample

We selected seven cases according to predefined criteria, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989). These required participants to: (a) be an art school graduate; (b) have founded a venture associated with their arts-based skills soon after graduating; (c) be located in the same City Center in Scotland; and (d) be a young firm, as defined by number of years from inception. Targeting cases located in the same geographic area ensured that participants operated their ventures in similar cultural contexts. These criteria helped avoid variation based on regional identity dynamics (Dodd & Hynes, 2012).

Our selected participants had all navigated start-ups, and their ventures were aged between three and six years (Table 2). We did not select founders with ventures under three years because entrepreneurial identity during early founding is thought to require a transition (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010). It was deemed appropriate not to include any new or nascent venture founders as this study was not focused on how founder identity is constructed but the interplay between identity and venture development.

All participants graduated from art school and utilized their acquired skills in a range of ventures in the creative and cultural industries (De Bruin & Noyes, 2015). Participants included design, photography, and fine art specialists who founded ventures ranging from service design to bag manufacturing. Table 2 contains an overview of our sample, their ventures, key events, and development.

Data collection

Our longitudinal data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to strengthen the grounding of theory development, immerse ourselves in each case's activities, and triangulate evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989). The wide range of data allowed us to cover the period from when each venture was

Table 2. Case profiles.

Case	Degree, application for venture	Key event timeline	Employ. (Q1, 2015)	Employ. (Q1, 2018)	Venture trajectory	Key trajectory activities	Data collection*
Adam	• Graphic design • Used design knowledge to design, make, and retail bags.	• 2010–2012: Adam graduated art school, worked full-time doing graphic design and made and sold bags from recycled material in his spare time. • 2012–2013: Venture relaunched with an official product range and online selling platform. • 2013–2014: Adam moved to working full-time, hired a couple of employees on the business, and sales steadily increased. • 2015: Adam took on external investment and moved to a larger premise to scale production. • 2016–2018: Venture sales increased, product range increased, and products began stocking in global retailers. Hired three more employees.	4	7	Growth	• Appointed board of directors to oversee the 2016 investment. • Increased list of stockists. • Curated events to expand product reach. • Collaborated with recognized brands.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 19 media articles • Monthly newsletter.
Amy	• Sculpture and Environmental Design • Used knowledge and skills with laser and CNC cutting machines to offer services, design, manufacture, and retail furniture.	• 2012–2014: Amy recognized an opportunity to provide laser cutting and CNC services while studying at art school; she set up the venture while working part-time. • 2015: The venture slowly expanded through purchasing new machines and expanding service offerings. First employee hired. • 2016: Sales increase of 25% and expansion through designing, manufacturing, and selling a new product range. • 2016–2018: Sales increase, new employees, and online shop setup.	2	4	Growth	• Designed and developed a new product range. • Launched crowd-funding campaign to increase production capacity of venture. • Setup an online shop to sell new products.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 8 media articles • Monthly newsletter.

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Case	Degree, application for venture	Key event timeline	Employ. (Q1, 2015)	Employ. (Q1, 2018)	Venture trajectory	Key trajectory activities	Data collection*
Frankie	• Product design • Used design skills to create online directory for craft makers.	• 2012–2014: The venture idea was a final year art project, which Frankie received arts funding to create and build. • 2014–2015: Frankie joined and then left a technology incubator and accelerator program to take the venture in a nonprofit direction. • 2016: Frankie packaged her online platform so others could start open-access directories in other locations. • 2017–2018: The platform launched in several locations across the globe and a couple of other online tools for creative practitioners.	2	2	Sustain arts	• Made her online platform available via a creative commons license, with several new regions launched. • Collaborated with social ventures to launch two more online platforms aimed at promoting local artisan makers.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 11 articles • 15 blog posts • 4 video blogs • Monthly newsletter • Business plan.
Mandy	• Textile design • Setup arts boutique store and gallery to showcase her work.	• 2009–2011: Mandy realized there was an opportunity to set up a shop and studio for artists to work and sell their products through a central location and via pop-up shops. • 2011–2013: Mandy stopped selling her own products through the venture and relocated the business to a central arts center to be at the heart of the creative community. • 2013–2014: Venture experienced steady sales increase and became sustainable. Mandy hired two employees and focused her attention on her own design work. • 2015–2018: Mandy focused her work on finding new projects and collaborations.	3	3	Sustain arts	• Received funding and started doing "Meet your Maker" workshops with artists and designers that are stocked in her shop. • Focused on another venture aimed at designing and promoting textiles.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 7 media articles • 15 blog posts.
Mark	• Graphic design • Set up bookshop to display work and design skills to publish.	• 2012–2014: Mark recognized a need for self-publishers, mainly artists, to display and sell their work. He opened a voluntary nonprofit store in the back of café/music venue. • 2015–2016: Mark moved into a smaller premise and increased the number of book launches, fair, and art expeditions that they were able to do. Several new people joined the organization. • 2016–2018: Mark focused on new projects and collaborations, publishing several books.	5	5	Sustain arts	• Launched a publishing venture, aiming to showcase artistic work. • Run a number of workshops and events at various creative arts festivals.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 9 media articles.

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Case	Degree, application for venture	Key event timeline	Employ. (Q1, 2015)	Employ. (Q1, 2018)	Venture trajectory	Key trajectory activities	Data collection*
Sally	• Service design • Used service design degree to set up agency.	• 2010–2011: Sally launched her service design company with a business partner and slowly began to attract customers for small commissions. • 2012–2013: The size of contracts began to increase, and first few employees were hired, tension started to arise between the business partners. • 2014–2015: Among cash flow problems, Sally bought out her business partner and took the venture in a new direction. • 2016: Sally formalized service offerings, opened a second premises in London, and won larger contracts. She hired multiple new employees to meet this expansion. • 2017–2018: The venture continued to grow with multiple new employees hired.	10	24+	Growth	• Successfully moved into second premises at second location. • Expanded into international markets and started working with Fortune 500 companies.	• 3 semi-structured interviews, site visits • 10 media articles • 29 blog posts • 8 video blogs • Strategic planning documents • Monthly newsletter.
Steve and Ava	• Photography • Fine art • Used baking as a visual medium and set up artisan bakery.	• 2012–2013: Quitting their jobs in the arts, Steve and Ava started baking home goods while gaining experience in other commercial bakeries. • 2013–2014: Working from their home kitchen they grew a large following around their neighborhood and begin supplying local cafes. • 2015–2016: Steve and Ava moved into their first premises, hiring their first employees. They decided to stop selling wholesale and started hosting workshops. • 2017–2018: On the back of huge success, Steve and Ava decided to close the business, rejecting a trade sale.	6	0	Sustain arts	• Closed business to travel and take-up residencies at various bakeries throughout Europe.	• 3 semi-structured interviews • Site visits • 18 media articles • 9 blog posts.

*Site visits included visiting ventures for interviews, unofficial interactions with people who knew the participants, or small unofficial interactions with participants. This contact was not recorded, but notes were taken and helped with forming the wider context for cases.

founded until 2018. Semistructured interviews were collected in early 2015, early 2016, and late 2016. Archive and media sources were also used to gain an understanding of early venture development and track cases one year after the final interview.

Semistructured interviews

A total of 21 semistructured interviews were conducted, three with each participant, lasting between 45 minutes and two hours. Our interview format was designed to explore identity dimensions that we knew to be relevant from the literature (for example, Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hoang & Gimeno, 2015). In this study, identity was constituted through the ways people present themselves when explaining who they are (Beech et al., 2016). Since individuals' identities are reflected in the types of statements they make, we were able to assess the link between these identities and behaviors by analyzing our transcribed interviews (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011).

The first interview took place at the beginning of 2015 when participants were asked to tell "stories" about themselves and their experiences. The researcher conducting the interview would prompt participants to explain how certain events made them feel and how this affected them, why they made certain decisions, and how they processed what was going on. Within these stories we looked for insights that explained who the founders are and why they act as they do (Weinrich & Saunderson, 2003).

Second interviews were conducted at the beginning of 2016. The researchers focused on events, finding out what had happened and why since the previous interview. This allowed the researchers to gauge an understanding of how the participants dealt with events that posed challenges to their identity and how this impacted the venture. The final interview was conducted in late 2016, when the researchers could delve deeper into identity notions that had emerged through prior data collection and allowed for reflexivity. Finally, participants were also asked about future planning and where they felt the venture journey would take them.

Media articles

A total of 82 articles were utilized, from several local and national press sources. Many of these pieces were written by or contained interviews with participants. These accounts enabled rich in-depth details about individuals' perspectives and are advocated for use in studies of entrepreneurial identity (Mathias & Smith, 2016; Reveley, 2010). Many documents also contained external perceptions about the founder's identity and activities (for example, Navis & Glynn, 2011), which were used to triangulate the participants' own self-narratives. Throughout data collection, the researchers did extensive media article searches for each case study, from venture start-up through to the closing of the data collection window in 2018.

Archival and additional data

We also drew extensively on archival records, including blogs and monthly newsletters, which added rich in-depth details about individuals. We utilized personal blogs, video blog entries, monthly newsletters, strategic documents, and business plans. Additionally, each participant was followed on social media for the duration of the study. This data collection began at the time the first interview took place and was collected up until 2018. It served the purpose of keeping in constant contact with the participants, so that events and actions could be discussed in interviews. It also allowed the researcher to make informal observations on external perceptions of identity and self-presentations. Between 2015 and 2018, the researcher also made informal visits to venture sites and social events where details on participants and their ventures and activities were noted. Information on the data collection for each participant is presented in Table 2.

Data analysis

We carried out our data analysis by following guidelines to bring rigor to inductive theorizing (Gioia et al., 2013). Our process involved three steps.

Step 1

This involved analyzing the blogs, monthly newsletters, media articles, and interview transcripts to get a sense of each individual's venture development. From the blogs, newsletters, and media articles we compiled case stories containing key events, behaviors, and motives for key decisions, triangulating them with the entrepreneur's own version of events. We then shifted our attention to cross-case examination through an iterative process of reading and categorizing interview transcripts and media articles into initial codes. Media articles contained either interviews with entrepreneurs, autobiographical accounts written by entrepreneurs, or external perceptions of entrepreneurs and their ventures written by others. These documents were analyzed and coded in the same way as interview transcripts. The codes were then discussed between authors in an iterative manner and were refined (for example, Charmaz, 2006).

At this stage, we also reduced the amount of first-order codes into a more parsimonious number without oversimplification and loss of relevant detail. This streamlined the narrative by refining codes that weren't mutually exclusive (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These codes gave the researcher a notion of the important factors that shaped identity (for example, defiance toward certain roles or feelings of tension); insight into different venture activities (for example, formalizing processes, running marketing

campaigns); and how this influenced the entrepreneurial journey (for example, scaling the size of the venture; collaborating with arts organizations).

Step 2

To move from first-order codes to second-order concepts, we returned to the existing literature to gain additional analytical insight and connect our concepts to extant work (Gioia et al., 2013). This shaped and refined 15 second-order constructs. For example, the consultation with different strands of the literature (Hoang & Gimeno, 2010) and the iterative process between the authors and data codes resulted in breaking "identity tension" into two distinct second-order concepts.

Step 3

The final step involved distilling our second-order concepts into aggregate dimensions that addressed our research question. Again, we compared these overall themes with extant literature, refining labels to best fit our data. The dimension "basis of self-coherence," for example, was initially labeled "basis of self-evaluation." When comparing and contrasting with extant literature (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011), we realized that our data best described an evaluation of an internal identity standard as opposed to an external group standard. Thus, we adjusted our labeling accordingly. Our final aggregate dimensions were: sources of identity tension, identity tension, disruption to self-coherence, basis of self-coherence, commercial identity defiance work, commercial identity integration work, and identity enactment. Our final data structure is presented in Figure 1. Representative quotes for our second-order categories are presented in the online supplementary material.

Findings

In this study we aim to address how venture founders from arts backgrounds experience and resolve identity tension and how this work is linked to different priorities for venture performance. The findings presented in Figure 2 show a three-part process. First, participants experienced tension when enacting both artistic and commercial practices. Second, participants resolved this tension through an inner compass that aligns their core values and beliefs, which we label "basis for self-coherence." We find that this tension resolution work leads participants to either defy or integrate commercial logics into their identities. Finally, the work they enact to affirm their identities follows two divergent paths, indicative of the different priorities that founders develop for their venture. Some pursue artistic performance, and others pursue commercial performance. In the remainder of this section, we present our findings and develop propositions.
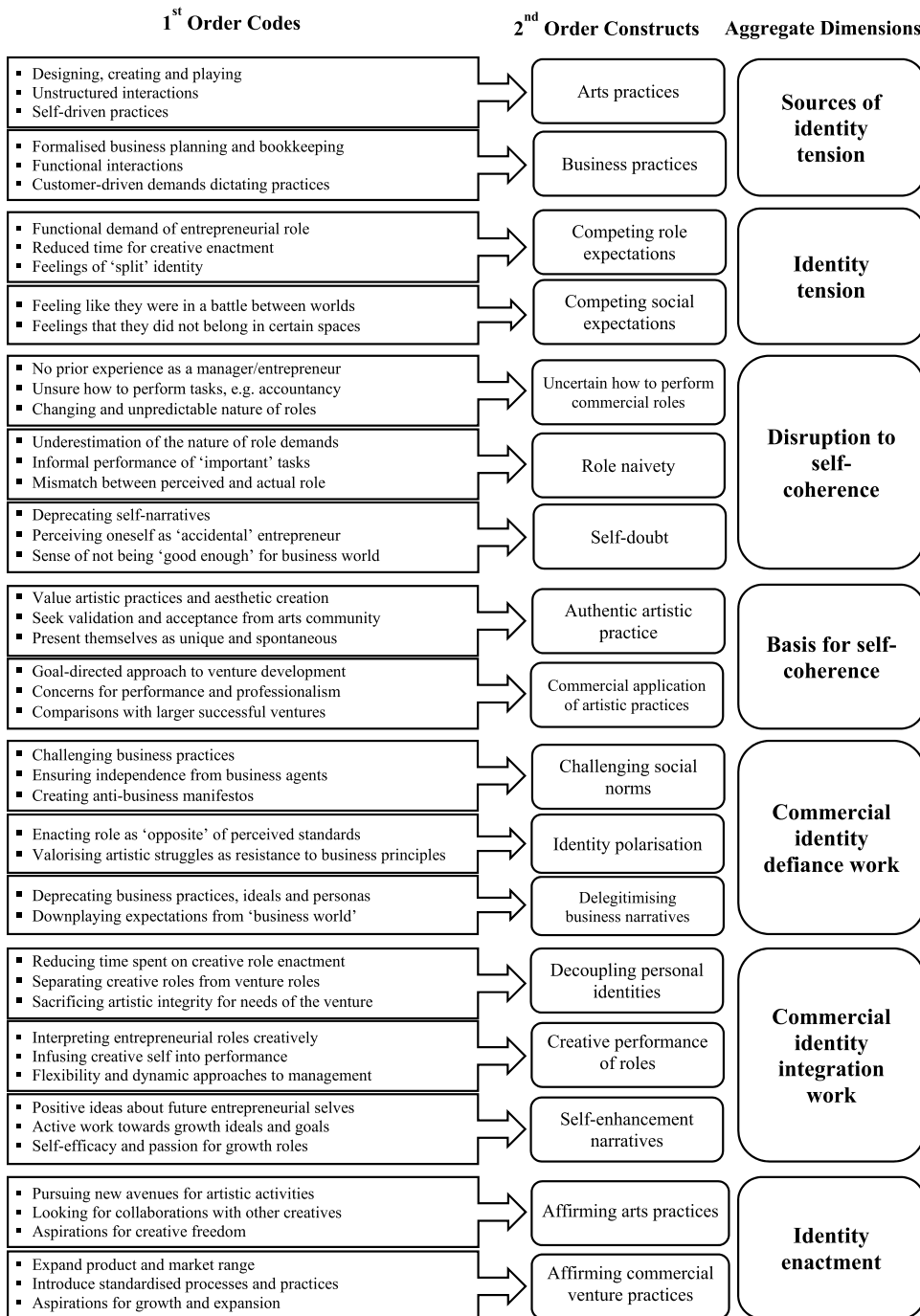
1st Order Codes   2nd Order Constructs   Aggregate Dimensions

- Designing, creating and playing
- Unstructured interactions
- Self-driven practices

→ **Arts practices**

- Formalised business planning and bookkeeping
- Functional interactions
- Customer-driven demands dictating practices

→ **Business practices**

Sources of identity tension

- Functional demand of entrepreneurial role
- Reduced time for creative enactment
- Feelings of 'split' identity

→ **Competing role expectations**

- Feeling like they were in a battle between worlds
- Feelings that they did not belong in certain spaces

→ **Competing social expectations**

Identity tension

- No prior experience as a manager/entrepreneur
- Unsure how to perform tasks, e.g. accountancy
- Changing and unpredictable nature of roles

→ **Uncertain how to perform commercial roles**

- Underestimation of the nature of role demands
- Informal performance of 'important' tasks
- Mismatch between perceived and actual role

→ **Role naivety**

- Deprecating self-narratives
- Perceiving oneself as 'accidental' entrepreneur
- Sense of not being 'good enough' for business world

→ **Self-doubt**

Disruption to self-coherence

- Value artistic practices and aesthetic creation
- Seek validation and acceptance from arts community
- Present themselves as unique and spontaneous

→ **Authentic artistic practice**

- Goal-directed approach to venture development
- Concerns for performance and professionalism
- Comparisons with larger successful ventures

→ **Commercial application of artistic practices**

Basis for self-coherence

- Challenging business practices
- Ensuring independence from business agents
- Creating anti-business manifestos

→ **Challenging social norms**

- Enacting role as 'opposite' of perceived standards
- Valorising artistic struggles as resistance to business principles

→ **Identity polarisation**

- Deprecating business practices, ideals and personas
- Downplaying expectations from 'business world'

→ **Delegitimising business narratives**

Commercial identity defiance work

- Reducing time spent on creative role enactment
- Separating creative roles from venture roles
- Sacrificing artistic integrity for needs of the venture

→ **Decoupling personal identities**

- Interpreting entrepreneurial roles creatively
- Infusing creative self into performance
- Flexibility and dynamic approaches to management

→ **Creative performance of roles**

- Positive ideas about future entrepreneurial selves
- Active work towards growth ideals and goals
- Self-efficacy and passion for growth roles

→ **Self-enhancement narratives**

Commercial identity integration work

- Pursuing new avenues for artistic activities
- Looking for collaborations with other creatives
- Aspirations for creative freedom

→ **Affirming arts practices**

- Expand product and market range
- Introduce standardised processes and practices
- Aspirations for growth and expansion

→ **Affirming commercial venture practices**

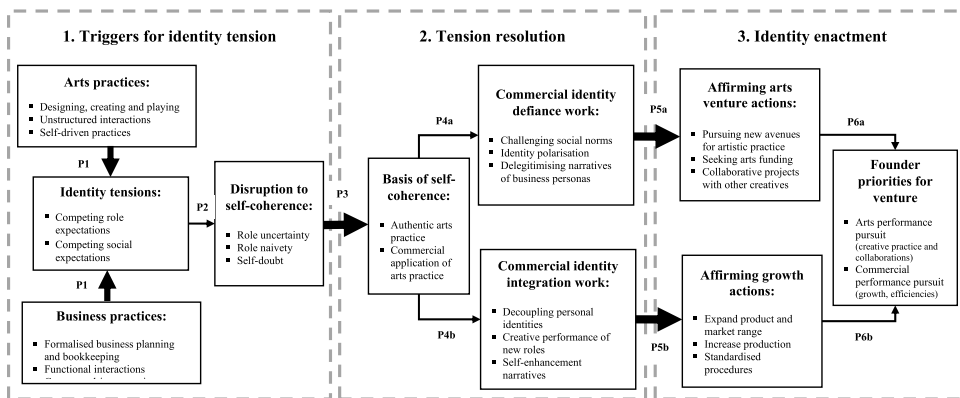**Identity enactment**

Figure 1. Data structure.

Figure 2. A model of identity tension, resolution, and enactment.

Triggers for identity tension

Identity tension and sources for tension

The first part of our model focuses on the triggers for identity tension. Each participant had an arts-based degree and verified their role identity as such: "I am a designer. At the end of the day you want people to like your designs" (Adam); "I am a product designer; I have a degree in product design and worked within product design" (Mark). It is clear that these identities were salient as they were strong, resilient and central to who participants were as people: "I was [doing] design. That was really my core and passion" (Sally). As the previous quote illustrates, enacting "artistic practices" such as designing or creating elicited strong feelings. These practices were often unstructured, and participants were self-driven to enact them.

Participants also had a strong sense of collective identity and categorized themselves within a creative group as well. They often referring to shared "art school" attributes and values they possessed:

> We have grounding in art practice in which we've been taught to think through the process and as a result we are not fazed by people coming in and requesting some strange things. (Amy)

> It is nice being an independent business but being a part of a larger organization. There is still, you don't feel special when you start-up, you can be isolated and this is a nice varied mix, a creative environment to be in with a lot of other businesses. (Mandy)

As they navigated venture development, the tension they experienced between the "creative" and the "commercial" aspects began to build. This tension existed through the competing role and social expectations placed on them (example quotes in Table 3 of the online material). Participants found themselves enacting commercial related practices, which included business planning, bookkeeping, and other functional activities. Participants often

regarded these practices as "mundane," getting in the way of the enactment of artistic activities, as this quote from Steve illustrates: "We run a bakery business at the minute. Like you said, it has to be a bakery business because it has to make money. But it did use to be far more creative" (Steve).

This tension was particularly evident for Frankie and was reflected in external perceptions about her in the media:

> She is constantly conflicted between her ambitions as a designer and as a solo tech founder; troubled by phrases like "exit strategy" and the pressure to grow for-profit rather than for impact. She is in the process of learning to speak the languages crossing design, arts, manufacturing, public funding bodies and tech start-ups and she is still to find a sustainable business model. (Frankie, external perception)

Frankie, reached a "breaking point" where she could no longer play the two competing roles, resulting in a lack of coherence in the way her company was projected:

> It got to a point where I can't play both these roles anymore. I cannot be two people anymore. It just felt so wrong; it also meant the communications that would come out through the company just felt really conflicted. (Frankie)

Participants also experienced difficulties in the social expectations that others placed on their identities. Frankie and Steve and Ava referred to this tension as a "battle":

> I had to keep that part of it really hidden so I could get into those worlds, but at the same time disagreeing with a lot of the stuff that was going on in those worlds. So that's been quite a battle. (Frankie)

> So, our first break is in October next year and we intend to break and stop having a bakery with a big B [commercial focus] and fighting the battle [to pursue a creative focus]. (Ava)

These tensions were expressed with more intensity by Frankie, Mandy, Mark, and Steve and Ava. This tension was experienced to a lesser degree by other participants with regard to competing role expectations. Collectively, this tension disrupted the coherence of participants' identities. In light of this, we put forth the following proposition:

> *Proposition 1 (P1): Role and social expectations between arts practices and business practices create identity tensions in venture founders from arts backgrounds.*

Disruption to self-coherence

The tension between "art" and "commercial" practices disrupted the identity of participants. This caused feelings of uncertainty on how to perform commercial roles, a sense of naivete about what role enactment involved, and self-doubt into their own abilities (example quotes in Table 4 of the online material). Initially, the enactment of the commercial role triggered

uncertainty, which derived from a lack of experience. Sally, for example, experienced uncertainty during initial growth periods: "The team was growing; we didn't really know how to handle our operations manager" (Sally). Likewise, Adam struggled with how to perform marketing functions: "I knew nothing about how that works. And also, how to communicate on those platforms, without coming across as selling something" (Adam).

As well as a sense of uncertainty on how to perform roles, participants reflected on underestimating the extent of certain roles that they had to perform in business. There was a misjudgment between how they initially perceived the role of a business owner compared to what the role actually entailed. As the quote from Adam shows, he reflected on the importance of the application of artistic practices to commerce as being more important than he initially realized:

> You can design products and sell it all over the world, as if by having a good product it is going to sell really well. That is how I thought it would be, and that is just not how it works. You can have the best product in the world, but [it is useless] unless you get it out there. (Adam)

Frankie, when reflecting on herself as running a business, expressed that this naivety was inherent to who she was: "I guess [I am] slightly idealistic or naive and Utopian. That definitely comes across in the way I want to run the business." Sally also expressed being overly optimistic: "I have a tendency to be almost too optimistic to a point of denial, believing things will improve when actually they can get a lot worse."

Other explanations into why participants believed they were naïve included not receiving enough business training in art school, not experiencing the skills or tasks of different roles in another job, and creatively minded people running and designing their own methods of business. This naivete stemmed from the novelty of the new entrepreneurial roles they needed to adopt and uncertainty on how to perform them.

The tension they experienced also created self-doubt in their abilities as businesspeople. Adam expressed his naivete as causing a series of mistakes: "Because of the way we've grown and my background—I'm not in any way a businessman really—I've made tons of mistakes". Frankie, however, was more extreme in her reaction to the tension, believing that she did not belong in the "business world": "That moment, where I was just like, oh shit I am so out of my depth! Like this is a world I should not be existing in." These findings lead us to propose:

> *Proposition 2 (P2): Identity tension in venture founders from arts backgrounds triggers experiences of disruption to self-coherence.*

Tension resolution

Basis of self-coherence

Throughout data collection, participants expressed a strong sense of self-coherence as either stemming from the authentic pursuit of their artistic practices or concerns for how their practices were applied. This basis of self-coherence was the underlying driver for their identity work and held their ideals and behaviors to an internal standard against which to evaluate their identity (for example, see Table 5 quotes in the online material).

For Frankie, Mandy, Mark, and Steve and Ava, the main source of value was the crafting or dedication to their products or services. For example, Steve and Ava were committed to their baking: they didn't take any shortcuts for quality, they made everything by hand, sourced their ingredients from diaspora networks, and created a story for every item they baked. This dedication to their "artistic practice" was something that they reflected on in the media:

> We feel that craft is at the heart of what we do … and it is an important part of [venture's] appeal. We aspire to return to a traditional and old-fashioned way of baking—we use only the most basic of ingredients which we source locally where possible; we bake daily, in small batches, laminating dough and pressing pastry by hand. In our kitchen we also invent, develop, and create, playing with new aesthetics, ingredients, and bakery creations. (Steve and Ava)

These participants would need to maintain creative autonomy when running their ventures. Being spontaneous and distinctive were central to their self-coherence. Mandy, for example, was excited by the changeable nature of her creative practice:

> One thing you'll learn is that you can't plan everything. Some things work straight away; others take time. You'll probably find you get approached with ideas or projects you hadn't planned that are too good to say no to. I like that though; I like variety … It's good to have goals and ambitions, but it's quite exciting to not know exactly what's going to happen. (Mandy)

The main source of external validation came from creative communities and other practitioners. It was important to these participants to be seen as a part of the creative community. They expressed concern for their self-presentation, wanting to be seen as an artist while also running ventures, as the following quotes by Steve and Ava show:

> We used to be a part of—in the arts there is a really tight community. Everyone knows each other. They all inspire and bounce off of each other. (Steve)

> People are like, oh [venture] are working with the [Centre for Contemporary Arts] and they are working with the Boffy project and it puts us back in line with the creative industries a bit more. (Ava)

Comparing the narratives between participants, the most evident contrast was their commercial goal-related attitudes to their ventures. Adam, Amy, and Sally were proactive in their planning and had a vision for how they wanted their ventures to grow. During interviews, they frequently expressed targets they aspired to reach:

> But at the moment we are trying to build up sales, at the moment we are going from 100 to 400 bags, and then the sales will have taken care of themselves a bit more. (Adam)

> 25% growth in a year is good. How that comes to in our end of accounting year at the end of August and how that ends up being we will see. It seems pretty good. I am pretty pleased. (Amy)

> I have turnover expectations and profit expectations. I have set the next three years per quarter; this is what we aim to take. (Sally)

Their original motives for pursuing artistic endeavors were also slightly different as their enjoyment and interest came with the application of the artistic practice rather than the practice as the end in itself. Sally, for example, when reflecting on her values, expressed she had always been interested in the practical delivery of products from her time at art school, a value she maintained throughout the development of her venture:

> I don't think I have lost any of the values; I am always optimistic, always thinking at a system level. All my designs . . . all my products, I was designing a coat hanger but then designing a way it would get delivered through the post and you would order it online. I always had the excitement of what we were delivering now as an organization. So, I feel like I have the exact values, principles, and methodology. (Sally)

These participants would experience positive feelings from the commercial production of their products. They would experience joy and pride when they were recognized by other successful companies and their customers, which provided external validation for their venturing efforts. Taken together, this leads us to the following proposition:

> *Proposition 3 (P3): Venture founders from arts backgrounds appeal to their basis of self-coherence to resolve identity tensions.*

Commercial identity defiance work

Frankie, Mandy, Mark, and Steve and Ava were all driven in their pursuit of authentic artistic practice. The commercial ethos of business ownership was seen as the necessary evil that enabled them to enact their artistic identities. As such, they defied social practices and norms associated with the commercial aspects of entrepreneurship and presented rebellious self-narratives (see Table 6, for example, quotes in the online material). Steve and Ava, for example, operated their business with untraditional opening hours and methods of production even at the risk of annoying customers. As a quote

from one reviewer expresses, their "commercial pursuit" was considered unorthodox:

> This plywood-lined bakery cum café, with its hand scrawled signs, completely erratic opening and closing times, bake-then-open-till-sell-out mentality is clearly the move to commercial professionalism. Business on a shoestring? Why not? But wouldn't it be a good idea if you bake and someone else sells instead of doing both yourself? (Steve and Ava, external perception)

Another motive was to retain independence from outside sources that could compromise the integrity of what they were doing. As such they would sacrifice comfort and efficiency to maintain autonomy. Mark expressed this through a "rebellious" attitude:

> We don't want a manager; ideally we don't want a landlord. [The venture] does exist in the way it does exist in a way of rebellion. Soft rebellion. Independence . . . There is no one watching over us. We have always avoided government funding because then you always have to answer to someone. (Mark)

> By specializing in art-zines produced by their own publishing house, and numerous others from around the globe, [venture] effectively make original works of art available to everyone. Much of the work is playful, fun, challenging, and reminiscent of a punk or hard-core mentality that insists on a distinctly DIY attitude. (Mark, external perception)

As well as ensuring their autonomy, these participants would often focus on "antibusiness" narratives when describing their venture. They polarized descriptions of their identities from "typical" businesspeople, priding themselves on resisting commercial enactment, as the quote from Ava expresses:

> We aren't interested in making millions or in competing with the open-all-hours supermarkets. . . . People nowadays expect to be able to get anything they want whenever they want. We're trying to resist this. We want to make people appreciate their food and to think about where it comes from, to think about the care and passion and time that went into making it. (Ava)

Delegitimizing entrepreneurial narratives were used to describe their interactions and experiences while running a venture. These participants would not identify with other "traditional" business owners and would resist the temptation to grow ventures to remain true to their artistic pursuit, as the quote from Frankie emphasizes:

> I think a lot of people are, why are you not obsessed with growth? It is not important; it is not important really to me. Achieving the vision and achieving the work is important. The size of the company isn't important. (Frankie)

Frankie viewed herself as stubborn and resisted sacrificing her artistic principles for the sake of the venture. By knowing who she was not, she was able to make sense of who she was. She maintained a clear sense of self, even when she faced social expectations to adapt her identity: "But it is tricky. If

I am clear, I am clear to me, I am never going to be what these people want me to be." This was a view shared by the other three defiant participants and was often expressed through narratives defining their "terms of operations" as antibusiness manifestos. These were often published, with participants ensuring these were expressed openly. We, therefore, derive the following:

> Proposition 4a (P4a): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who base self-coherence on authentic arts practice will engage in commercial identity defiance work.

Commercial identity integration work

Adam, Amy, and Sally, driven by the application of their artistic practice, focused on integrating their creative roles into the enactment of their entrepreneurial role. To do this, they were more willing, when faced with identity conflict, to sacrifice some of their artistic integrity. The biggest sacrifice they faced was reducing the time that they spent in creative roles. To manage this, participants would look to decouple their personal identities from the venture (see Table 7, for example, quotes in the online material). Sally, for example, aimed to make sense of what elements of the business were her own personal practices and what were the ventures practices: "I have started to think about the company as [venture name]. What should [venture name] do and what should I do personally." This occurred when the venture expanded into a new market location, rebranded, and consequently employed a lot more people to deliver new work. This prompted Sally to reflect on an emerging venture identity: "Even going to the rebrand feels like a new thing, it feels like a new mask, or costume for the company." Amy also experienced this "duality" and related with a friend who was also experiencing this:

> But it is also one of those things when now I need to separate myself from the business. Because before I have always sold the jewellery and stuff I sell in shops as [venture name]. Because when we first started up, it was a very good way of getting the name out there. But now, that needs to be separate. . . . So, is it that I need to sell it as [Amy]? Do I go back to being me? Or do I sell it as [Amy] as the designer for [venture name]. How do you work that? That is something that [friend] at [friend's venture name] has had a bit of duality with. She has gone back to do design work as herself and as a separate entity to [friend's venture name] being the service. (Amy)

Another strategy that these participants adopted was to creatively perform various subroles that were inherited with entrepreneurship. Their narratives legitimized the performance of an entrepreneurial role, so long as it was performed creatively. Adam, for example, was able to relate a marketing role to the design process and elicit joy:

> I think even marketing, coming up with marketing concepts is almost a design process as well. Because you are looking at what you achieve and what a good solution would be. I actually find that I enjoy that a lot. (Adam)

Likewise, Sally was able to compare the overall development of her venture to the design process: "I feel my role now that I am not working on the delivery is definitely like I have to run and design a business." These participants created self-enhancing narratives as a means to create positive ideas of their future entrepreneurship, self-efficacy, and passion.

Adam, Amy, and Sally would express more their intentions for growth and the visions for their business, in contrast to the defiant participants who wanted to maintain flexibility. They detailed how they had changed, favoring being organized and proactive over being spontaneous. Ultimately, this integration work enabled them to identify more with their entrepreneurial role, creating a sense of coherence and efficacy:

> I feel now more like an actual owner that we have done stuff, as opposed to someone at the start who just does everything. (Sally)

> I think we are one and the same. Personally, the business is me. I am a business. I am a little bit more than a business. . . . I would say that a good 50% of me is the business. . . . It is a part of me, which I find easier as something more to talk about. The business doing really well makes me feel more confident. (Amy)

These findings lead us to propose:

> *Proposition 4b (P4b): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who base self-coherence on commercial application of art practice will engage in commercial identity integration work.*

Identity enactment

Affirming arts venture practices

The work that Frankie, Mandy, Mark, and Steve and Ava did, driven by the pursuit of artistic practice, led to the development of an arts orientation for the venture. Their defiance work resulted in them affirming who they were and what the venture did through the pursuit of arts-related activities (see example quotes in Table 8 of the online material). They would act in ways that were counterintuitive to more traditional commercial logics. Mark, for example, downsized his business premises to get more control so that he would not have to make any compromises:

> We did have a much bigger space before, and yeah we have downsized, but we don't compromise with anyone anymore. This is our space—we can open and close it when we want. We can hold events when we want. There were a lot of compromises being based in [previous location]. (Mark)

Collaboration with other creatives was also high up on the agenda for these cases. Although collaborative practices brought in revenue to their ventures, this was not the main priority, and founders would enjoy this type of engagement. Diversification was also another common activity, with founders

looking to explore their art form and the benefits their venture could provide to their communities, as illustrated by Ava:

> It will be nice to get the nice mixture of events happening here and things we are involved in elsewhere that maybe help people like doing the [arts center project]. We haven't done anything like that for a while, and it felt really nice, and we actually want to be more affiliated with these things. (Ava)

These actions shaped the positioning of the venture. Future ambitions were to develop "independent" self-sustaining ventures in which they could explore creative freedom. This guided decisions about development—for example, employing fellow artists as opposed to business professionals. In the case of Steve and Ava, they took extreme action to defend the authenticity of their arts practices. They closed the physical location of their venture, as it had become overcommercialized, and were exploring different possible forms that the next iteration of their venture could take. This decision to close the business was deeply ingrained in their identities as "artists":

> We care deeply about what we do at [the venture] and the experience we have created —it is us and we are it.... We feel that we need to make a change and to reassess our practice. We don't want [the venture] to expand, we don't want to step back, and we don't want to sell "the business" because in our understanding [the venture] is a happening, an experience, an endeavor—we are the hands that make, create, and provide, and as we want the time, energy, and focus to explore other means of doing what we do, the [venture] in its current form can't go on. (Steve and Ava)

From this, we derive the following propositions:

> *Proposition 5a (P5a): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who engage in commercial identity defiance work will enact and affirm their identity through arts venture actions;*

> *Proposition 6a (P6a): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who enact arts venture identities and actions will pursue artistic performance as the priority for their venture.*

Affirming commercial venture practices

Adam, Amy, and Sally were driven by the commercial application of their artistic practice, which led to prioritizing venture growth. Through their integration work they were able to create a coherent sense of self as creative entrepreneurs and affirmed this through pursuing growth for their ventures. The activities that they pursued included expanding into new markets, offering new services and products, increasing the scale of their production, and taking steps to formalize business practices and procedures. Adam, for example, looked to expand his product range and consolidate his supply chain. He reduced his number of suppliers, became more cost-efficient in his manufacturing, negotiated better deals, and reduced wastage:

> What we are trying to do is streamline our production. We are trying to limit the [number] of different places we buy materials from. So that we have stronger relationships with our suppliers really. (Adam)

These actions shaped the orientation of the venture, with future aspirations and clear strategic direction for growth. Adam took on private investors to realize his growth, resulting in an ambitious strategy to scale production:

> So, our basic strategy was we're going to front load on our workshop space, move into a bigger space where we could accommodate a lot more product. Get the machinery up to a point where we could make a lot more, so we were basically . . . overstaffed and then built the sales to meet that. (Adam)

The willingness to take risk, innovate, and seek growth opportunities, driven by the founder identity, became embedded in the ventures' actions. This created the overall growth pursuit, as Sally expressed: "Everything that we are building, everything that we are documenting, everything we are working on as a team is about growth."

We therefore infer that:

> *Proposition 5b (P5b): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who engage in commercial identity integration work will enact and affirm their identity through commercial venture actions.*

> *Proposition 6b (P6b): Venture founders from arts backgrounds who enact commercial venture identities and actions will pursue commercial performance as the priority for their venture.*

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we set out to explore when and how venture founders from arts backgrounds experience and resolve identity tension and how this work is linked to different priorities for venture performance. Our findings and subsequent model contribute to two main bodies of literature—the literature on *identity conflict in entrepreneurship* and the literature *linking founder identity to venture development.*

By delving into the dynamics of when and how individuals both *experience* and *resolve* identity tension, we add nuance to the identity conflict debate. This is currently polarized between individuals working to either "accept" or "rebel" against the logics of commerce being incorporated into their creative identities (Bain, 2005; Demetry, 2017; Elsbach, 2009; Werthes et al., 2018). We contribute to this debate by highlighting when founders from arts backgrounds experience identity tension. We find that tension occurs when founders find themselves caught between significantly different practices associated with both arts and commerce that they perceive as discordant.

The identity work done as a result of tension we find to be driven by the value and goals of each individual (which we label "basis of self-coherence"). Participants' self-coherence either stemmed from authentic artistic practices or concern for how arts practice is applied. These internal standards act as a basis for navigating tension and developing ventures. Depending on the basis of self-coherence, participants' response may range from fully embracing integration of commercial logics associated with the business venturing to outright defiance. There is scope for future research to explore this mechanism across different contexts with founders from different ventures to understand the full range of responses to tension. Exploring how tension is experienced differently can shed light on the link between founder identity and venture performance.

Adopting a view of founder identity as dynamic and integrating self-identity, role identity, and social identity to create a coherent sense of self adds value to current literature. Previous research has looked at role identity balance (Demetry, 2017; York et al., 2016) and social psychology drivers of identity in isolation (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). By bridging the two and taking a dynamic perspective, we contribute additional insights into the identity tension and resolution process. That is, individuals from creative backgrounds may not always feel that they are sacrificing their artistic ideals when they embrace commercial practices, as previously conceived (Bain, 2005). Rather, some resolve to embrace new roles at the intersection of art and commerce as a means to self-enhancement (thus aligning with Vignoles et al., 2008). These entrepreneurs are not necessarily "shedding" their arts identity, as Mathias and Williams (2018) suggest, but use it as a means to feed their process of continuous self-development.

Our study also looks at the behavioral manifestations of identity tension resolution and their impact on founders' priorities for venture performance. Thus, we offer dynamic, processual insights that advance the link between identity and venture growth trajectories (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015; Morris et al., 2018). The approach we take highlights that the founder's identity in relation to entrepreneurship is not predetermined at the start of the process. It evolves as individuals respond differently to the identity tensions they may experience. Some embrace the "entrepreneurial" identity (that is, the commercial endeavor), and some rebel against it. The idea that founder identity may be formed during the venture process (aligning with Newbery et al., 2018) has implications for future research. It suggests that the entrepreneur identity that venture founders embrace may not be determined a priori, and the point in time in which their entrepreneurial identity is embraced is significant.

Our findings also suggest a more complex picture in the link between founder identity and growth than currently held. Previous work has suggested that founders of low-growth ventures self-identify as entrepreneurs, although not as strongly as founders of high-growth ventures (Jaouen &

Lasch, 2015; Mills & Pawson, 2012; Morris et al., 2018). We find that founders who do not aim for venture growth as their priority actively defy entrepreneurial identities when they believe they are attached to ideas of commercial goals. The meaning our participants attached to both entrepreneurship and artistic labels differed. Therefore, the entrepreneurial identity of the founder should not only be considered from a saliency point of view (strong or not strong) but by the means in which the entrepreneurship label is interpreted by the individual.

We found that individuals had different conceptions of performance and growth. For those who embraced venture growth as a priority, performance aligns with mainstream markers of commercial success (for example, increase sales, enter new markets). For those who embraced artistic practices as a priority, markers of performance are collaborations with other artists and new avenues for artistic expression. These entrepreneurs did not directly aim for commercial markers of growth. They aimed for a qualitatively different form of growth that focused on enhancing their creative skills and outputs. However, a person striving for artistic pursuit cannot exclude commercial performance as artistic products are contingent on how well the market receives them. Hence, the founder's artistic priorities for the venture and commercial performance are not mutually exclusive. We call for future research to investigate the relationship between founder priorities and their interpretation of venture performance.

To conclude, our study revealed the process founders from an arts background go through to resolve identity tension. The underlying driver of this process was their basis of self-coherence, which was an internal ideal upon which they evaluated their identity as they navigated the venture process. We argue that self-coherence can be viewed as a foundational base in founder identity development. It can serve as a guidepost for understanding different venture trajectories and perceptions of growth.

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