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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how entrepreneurs within different settings reflect on social interactions to work on their identity. Using life story narratives, we explore a business membership network and a creative hub in the central belt of Scotland. Our subsequent model shows how individuals in these settings use different dominant interpretive repertoires, as represented by structural-instrumental work in the business network and relational work in the creative hub. We also show how the interpretive repertoires both shape and are shaped by what individuals strive for in their identity work: striving for esteem and striving for closeness. We discuss how our findings offer insight into the dynamics of social identities and how they are reproduced and maintained through situated exchange using specific interpretive repertoires and striving agendas.

Introduction

Entrepreneurial identity has been recognized as a key driver of priorities and behaviours (Leitch and Harrison 2016; Powell and Baker 2017). This recognition has spurred much scholarly interest in entrepreneurial identity, as it aligns with the quest to explain antecedents to entrepreneurial actions (Gruber and MacMillan 2017; Mmbaga et al. 2020). This work typically takes either a role identity or social identity approach to understand the categorization and self-definition of entrepreneurs (Cardon et al. 2009; Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Gruber and MacMillan 2017), which has yielded insight into variance in behaviours (Alsos et al. 2016; Powell and Baker 2017), strategic decisions (Mathias and Williams 2017; Powell and Baker 2014) and venture outcomes (Mathias and Williams 2018; O'Neil and Ucbasaran 2016).

This approach has also teased out different entrepreneurial roles and made connections with different motives, actions, decisions and performances (Cardon et al. 2013; Mathias and Williams 2017, 2018; Oo et al. 2019; York, O'Neil, and Sarasvathy 2016). Whilst the role identity lens has focused on the individual as decoupled from the social environment, the social identity lens has delved into social influences on individuals' identities. This perspective views identity as aligned with membership to certain groups and associated identity prototypes (Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Powell and Baker 2017; Tajfel and Turner 1979). This has paved the way for a more socially sensitive categorization of identities and sub-identities. Entrepreneurial social identities such as Darwinians, Missionaries and Communitarians switch the focus from 'who one is in relation to the task at hand' to 'who one is in reference to others' (Alsos et al. 2016; Fauchart and Gruber 2011). Similarly, the work of Shepherd and Haynie (2009) sheds light on entrepreneurial grappling with the seemingly conflicting social needs for belonging and distinguishing oneself.

This work, we argue, still stops short of fully capturing the micro-dynamics of identity taking place within different settings for entrepreneurs (see Anderson, Warren, and Bensemann 2019 for an exception). We believe that the social identity perspective in entrepreneurship would be enriched through the addition of setting-specific understandings of the micro-dynamics of identity construction. Given their nature, social identities are likely to vary from setting to setting, where social expectations and norms are different (Anderson and Warren 2011; Leitch and Harrison 2016; Warren 2004; Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011) and as individuals gain membership by aligning themselves with those norms (Bartel and Wiesenfeld 2013; Hogg and Terry 2000). Furthermore, we argue that the entitative categories of social identity presented in the literature do not easily lend themselves to micro-dynamic explanations of how individuals inhabit and work on their identities through interaction with their social environment. Having a micro-dynamic understanding of how individuals work on their social identities in different settings adds nuance that complements and extends current perspectives.

In this paper, we seek to contribute to the social identity perspective in entrepreneurship by viewing identity as both socially situated (Anderson, Warren, and Bensemann 2019; Dodd and Anderson 2007; Dodd and Hynes 2012; McKeever, Anderson, and Jack 2014) and something that the individual works on through interactions with others (Warren 2004; Watson 2008, 2009a). In line with this, we adopt an *identity work* perspective. Identity work is a process of working on one's sense of self through interactions taking place within specific settings (Anderson, Warren, and Bensemann 2019; Leitch and Harrison 2016). Work in this area has provided insight into how entrepreneurs utilize self-narrative to negotiate a sense of what it means to be an entrepreneur and sustain their entrepreneurial actions (Cohen and Musson 2000; Down and Warren 2008; Garcia-Lorenzo, Sell-Trujillo, and Donnelly 2020; Jammaers and Zanoni 2020; Muhr et al. 2019; Warren 2009). This perspective sheds light on the increasingly resonant positioning of entrepreneurship as socially embedded, with which our work aligns (e.g. Dodd and Hynes 2012; McKeever, Anderson, and Jack 2014; McKeever, Jack, and Anderson 2015).

The adoption of this perspective enables us to shift the focus from a static categorization of social identity (Alsos et al. 2016; Fauchart and Gruber 2011), to an understanding of identity micro-dynamics in specific settings. Core to the identity work perspective is the notion of reflecting on social interaction in which individuals engage in order to establish a sense of who they are in the specific setting (Storey, Salaman, and Platman 2005; Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003; Watson 2008). Through reflection, individuals create life-stories (Gabriel and Griffiths 2004; Watson 2009b), that define and provide meaning as derived from the collective (Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011). These life-stories are also the narratives entrepreneurs communicate, through verbal or written language, on how they construe identity and derive meaning from interactions (Mathias and Smith 2016; Yitshaki and Kropp 2016; Zozimo, Jack, and Hamilton 2017). Thus, in this paper we ask: *How do entrepreneurs involved in different settings reflect on their social engagements to work on their entrepreneurial identity?*

In this study, we selected two different social settings where entrepreneurship is practiced by individuals located in the same geographic region (namely, the central belt of Scotland). This allowed us to see the influence of the social environment on the person's ongoing entrepreneurial identity work. In one setting, the 'business network', emphasis is placed on the economic goal of accelerating growth of the business. In the other setting, the 'creative hub', the key driver is the creative endeavour and the fulfilment of one's artistic potential. In each setting, we appraised participants' identity work by exploring the various interactions that they reflect on and make sense of being important in their entrepreneurial identities.

The remainder of the paper unfolds by first reviewing different strands of the entrepreneurial identity literature before delving into the situated nature of identity and the role of interactions. We then outline our two research settings and explain our use of the life-story narrative approach to data collection, and inductive discourse analysis approach to data analysis. We present an emerging model showing how individuals in different settings use different *dominant interpretive repertoires*, as

represented by *structural* and *relational* identity work. We also show how these repertoires both shape and are shaped by what individuals strive for in their identity work: *striving for esteem* and *striving for closeness*. We conclude with a discussion on how our findings contribute to social identity literature by showing how otherwise-entitative identity categories (e.g. Fauchart and Gruber 2011) are reproduced and maintained. Additionally, we extend the work of Shepherd and Haynie (2009) on distinctiveness and belonging, by showing how in some settings identity is constituted through ideas of closeness or esteem. We also show the relevance of notions of imprinting to the micro-dynamics of identity work in different settings (e.g. Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Mathias, Williams, and Smith 2015).

Literature review

Identity, identity work and entrepreneurship

Existing entrepreneurial identity scholarship typically focuses on three theoretical approaches. The first approach, *role identity theory*, views the self as an occupant of an entrepreneurial role that is performed (Burke and Tully 1977; Cardon et al. 2009; Stryker 1980). This literature stream concerns itself with the attributes, tasks, performance and the relative importance of an entrepreneurial role compared to other roles (Hoang and Gimeno 2010; Mathias and Williams 2017; Morris et al. 2018). The roles that entrepreneurs perform can be deeply embedded in the personal self-identity which can, for example, elicit passion when performed (e.g. Cardon et al. 2009; Murnieks, Mosakowski, and Cardon 2014). Alternatively, they can be more situated and reflect a set of expectations that are elicited under different circumstances (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley 2008; Wry and York 2017; Zhan, Uy, and Hong 2020). Whilst this literature has shed light on the centrality, salience and affective outcomes of certain entrepreneurial roles from an individual-level perspective, its focus has not encompassed the impact of social drivers in identity development and enactment. This has been the premise of the social identity lens.

While role identity views the self as an occupant of certain roles, *social identity* views the self as a member of various social groups (Abrams and Hogg 1988; Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Tajfel and Turner 1979). This approach concerns the groups, relationships, social categories and collective goals, behaviours and characteristics that individuals identify and compare themselves against (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Sieger et al. 2016). Social identities are created and maintained though identity prototypes, which outline the attitudes, values and behavioural norms that distinguish one group from another (Hogg and Terry 2000) and form the basis for group membership (Bartel and Wiesenfeld 2013).

Within the entrepreneurship literature, Fauchart and Gruber (2011) highlight different social sub-identities which have effects on different entrepreneurial motivations and behaviours (see also Alsos et al. 2016). They distinguish between entrepreneurial social identities as Darwinians, Missionaries and Communitarians (Fauchart and Gruber 2011). Building on these entrepreneurial social identities, the construction of collective identity prototypes has been studied in the context of multi-founder new ventures. Work has shown how ventures can be used as a vehicle in which a founder affirms and defends their social identity, pointing to the relevance of social identity in venturing decisions and behaviours (Powell and Baker 2017). Social identity literature has also explored the inner conflict that entrepreneurs experience as they are torn between their need for distinctiveness and that for belonging (Gehman and Grimes 2017; Mathias, Huyghe, and Williams 2020; Shepherd and Haynie 2009; Solomon and Mathias 2020).

Social identity theory views identity (or sub-identity) as a relatively stable notion that entrepreneurs can be categorized into. However, this view neglects the nuance that is reflected through the variable identity work that is undertaken as founders strive for belonging within situated social contexts (Ashforth and Johnson 2001; Ashforth and Schinoff 2016; Warren 2004). In order to address these gaps, in this paper we adopt a third approach, the *identity work* perspective. This approach

aligns with social identity in as far as it recognizes entrepreneurial identity as socially constructed (Anderson, Warren, and Bensemann 2019; Berglund, Gaddefors, and Lindgren 2016; Lewis 2016). However, it differs from social identity theory in that identity is viewed as a 'live', discursive notion that is continually 'worked' upon (Hamilton 2014) rather than one that is entitative. As defined by Watson (2009a: 257), identity work involves:

> the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and strive to shape the various social identities that emerge in relationship to others in the various milieu in which they live their lives.

Through the process of identity work, therefore, identity is continually constructed through social interaction and self-reflection (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003; Watson 2008). Entrepreneurial identities are shaped from the norms and prescriptions that arise from social interactions (Anderson and Warren 2011; Leitch and Harrison 2016), developing over time through learning experiences (Watson 2008). The construction of entrepreneurial identity has also been viewed as a process for creating a sense of authenticity (Lewis 2013; O'Neil, Ucbasaran, and York 2020) and legitimacy (Navis and Glynn 2011; Swail and Marlow 2018; Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011).

Storey, Salaman, and Platman (2005, 1049) state that identity work 'consists of continuous processes of reflexive interpretation and narrative construction around various ideas and values.' The variability that Storey, Salaman, and Platman (2005) refer to points to the fact that it would be reductive to expect a consistent constitution of identity among a group notionally identified as 'entrepreneurs.' One should expect different interpretive repertoires, dilemmas and challenges that emerge through involvement in a specific context (Dodd and Hynes 2012; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003; Warren 2004). Within each context, identity 'is constructed and reconstructed through negotiation during a reflexive journey' (Warren 2004, 26). In this paper, we focus on the narrative constructions through reflection which shape entrepreneurs' collective identities in relation to the specific settings in which they interact and engage.

Collective identity narratives, situated social interaction and imprinting

Within their narratives, individuals socially negotiate, validate and affirm their identities (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016). They work not to situate themselves within an established membership, but to exemplify the attributes and practices of these collectives (Ashforth and Johnson 2001). Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that individuals situate their sense of self by making comparisons with individuals and groups to which they belong and groups to which they do not belong. They therefore work to establish 'who one is and who one is not' (Watson 2009b, 446), which makes the identity relational and comparable.

In entrepreneurship, for example, individuals learn about themselves through observing and interacting with peers and role models situated within certain contexts (Falck, Heblich, and Luedemann 2010; Zozimo, Jack, and Hamilton 2017). Through interaction with peers and role models, behaviours and decisions imprint on entrepreneurs (Kacperczyk 2012). The very intent to become an entrepreneur is imprinted on individuals through interaction with role models (friends and family) during sensitive years of one's life, making individuals more likely to focus on business venturing and associated growth and profits further down the line (Mathias, Williams, and Smith 2015). However, when the source of imprint comes from a particular hobby or activity in which one engages during sensitive periods, individuals focus less on growth or profits, prioritizing the pleasure that they derive from developing products and services related to these activities (Mathias, Williams, and Smith 2015). In the imprinting literature, 'sensitive periods' are defined as 'limited time intervals during which the entity exhibits intensified receptivity to external influence' (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013, 199). At this individual level, those periods may be their formative years, early career, or periods of significant economic change (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013).

Through interactions during sensitive years individuals create schemas, scripts, and normative assumptions about how to 'fit-in' to a collective (Dokko, Wilk, and Rothbard 2009; Marquis and Tilcsik 2013). Warren (2004), for example, show how women entrepreneurs in a network attempt to influence newcomers in their community of practice through stories containing narratives of the family-minded professional. However, the individuals engaged in negotiating an entrepreneurial identity are not passive recipients in these interactions. Individuals give different meanings to interactions, based on the level of identification and perceived similarities that exist between them and who they are interacting with. Stemming from notions of discursive identity, it is thought that an individual will 'position' themselves against others and make evaluations on how they align with them (Stapleton and Wilson 2005; Tracy and Anderson 1999). This is what Anderson and Warren (2011, 590) refer to as *socialized meanings of entrepreneurship*, demonstrating the value of understanding entrepreneurs as situated in a social milieu that 'supports, drives, produces and receives the entrepreneurial process' (Drakopoulou Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson 2007, 342). This positions identity wok as an accomplishment of interaction (Garfinkel 1967). However, 'current conceptualizations of founder identity discount the social aspects of the self and, as a result, the extent to which founders define themselves in terms of their relationships in the social world' (Fauchart and Gruber 2011, 938).

This is somewhat surprising considering that in the extant entrepreneurship literature local context and place has been found to have a large impact on the identity narratives individuals create. In their study of female ethnic minority entrepreneurs, Essers and Benschop (2007) for example, show how participants negotiate their discursive identity work at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and entrepreneurship based on conforming to the different communities they interact within. Each community has different dialogues, agendas and expectations which places demands on the entrepreneur (Essers and Benschop 2009). This creates different impressions of what entrepreneurship is, which individuals adapt to when engaged in different contexts. They create 'identity positions' through interacting, communicating and drawing from different discourses in particular spaces (Berglund, Gaddefors, and Lindgren 2016; Clarke, Brown, and Hailey 2009). In an entrepreneurial education setting Donnellon, Ollila, and Middleton (2014), for example, find that engagement with peers enables students to learn which activities are associated with an entrepreneurial identity. Through their interactions, students can encompass certain narratives and visual images to build their own identity legitimacy. Likewise, Anderson, Warren, and Bensemann (2019) highlight how change in a local community became attributed to one particular entrepreneur through their self-promoting practices. This caused tension amongst the collective of other business owners in the area who disapproved of the self-promotion in her identity narratives but approved of her narratives which promoted the local area.

At the macro-level context, current research considers environmental factors such as culture, history and regional policies as creating 'entrepreneurial communities' and shaping narrative identities (Dodd and Hynes 2012). These environmental factors shape the public discourse about entrepreneurship, creating frames of reference in which individuals perform their identities (Anderson 2005). This stream of research views images of what it is to be an entrepreneur as embedded within regional and national contexts, which individuals learn about through social engagement. Dodd and Hynes (2012) show this with their contrasting narratives of entrepreneurship in different regions. In Oxford, for example, they found entrepreneurship means world-leading technology, whilst in Cornwall, a peripheral rural region, the artisan entrepreneur struggling in the face of adversity is the typical role model. Similarly, taking a country-level perspective, Karhunen, Olimpieva, and Hytti (2017) show contrasting identity work between scientist-entrepreneurs in Finland, who embrace entrepreneurship, and Russia, where they distance their narratives from entrepreneurship.

At the individual level, it is the stories that individuals create that define and provide meaning to their collective entrepreneurial identities (Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011). These stories align the defining attributes of the group ('who we are') and the core practice ('what we do'). These stories are

also the narratives entrepreneurs communicate, through verbal or written language, and contain narrative *subjects* (focal actors), an *object* (goal), and a *destinator* (situational context) (Fiol 1989). Collective identity stories can enhance or inhibit legitimacy by creating coherent portraits which make groups more perceptible to internal and external audiences (Ashforth and Humphrey 1997). Coherent identity narratives emphasize similarities between group members and shared practices which differentiate them from other group identities (Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011). These group identities are situated within wider social contexts, such as established fields, markets or industries (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001; Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011), grounding individuals with a clear sense of 'who they are' in their local contexts (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016). In entrepreneurship, Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) for example, highlight contrast in passion and identity evolution in the life story narratives of entrepreneurs situated in high-tech and social entrepreneurship contexts. This strand of research adds an industry-level context to the national and regional context that may shape situated social identities differently.

Entrepreneurs' social identities, therefore, result from their socialization practices (Donnellon, Ollila, and Middleton 2014). They are formed as individuals relate to different cultural contexts and social groups via use of narratives, storytelling, stimulation of tacit knowledge, collective sharing and reflection of experiences (Aaltio 2008). Identity is learned and legitimized in various social settings, for example family and friends at home, customers and employees at work, or advisors and other role models in support and business networks (Rigg and O'Dwyer 2012). It is through dialogue and interactions in these settings that entrepreneurs frame their ventures and imprint meaning on what it means to be an entrepreneur within a specific context. The situational context, the narrative subjects who entrepreneurs interact with and the goals of these interactions, therefore, represent important starting points of which to explore how entrepreneurs construct situated social identities (e.g. Fiol 1989; Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn 2011).

Research methods

To explore our research question, we used two case studies of different settings where entrepreneurship is practiced by individuals located in the same geographic region, the central belt of Scotland. Despite sharing the same working region and city, the cases were purposefully selected as they represented distinct social settings in which entrepreneurs interacted. Also, each has socially desirable priorities and norms that diverge significantly from one-another, thus allowing us to see the influence of the social environment on the person's ongoing entrepreneurial identity work.

In one setting, the 'business network', emphasis is placed on the economic goal of accelerating the growth of the business. In the other setting, the 'creative hub', the key driver is the creative endeavour and the fulfilment of one's artistic potential. From our literature review it was apparent that the settings in which entrepreneurs choose to interact and socialize are likely to be influential on the creation of identity narratives. The purpose of selecting two distinct settings is to observe the full impact of the social context on entrepreneurs' identity work (Eisenhardt 1989; Gehman et al. 2018).

Business network

Our first setting is a business membership network organization (BN) which operates on a fee-paying membership basis. The network organizes events featuring experienced business practitioners as guest speakers covering several relevant topics for growth processes (e.g. exporting, resource acquisition, decision making, etc.). They also organize awards dinners and smaller peer networking sessions where members share their challenges and experiences with regards to a specific theme. Events follow a structured format, with speakers pre-selected based on their perceived expertise of a specific subject or success in running a business. The aim of this network group is to facilitate the business growth aspirations of its members. The BN had no 'entry tariff' and its members represent people at all stages of the entrepreneurial process, from start-up through to multinational owners.

Growth-orientated entrepreneurs are often regarded as 'aggressors', 'winners', 'risk-takers' and 'engines of economic growth' (Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2009). They are thought to be more ambitious than other business owners and more focused towards growing their businesses (Gundry and Welsch 2001). Entrepreneurs in the BN typically run ventures which have multiple employees and a sustainable turnover. For many, they have the experience of having run other ventures before.

Creative hub

Our second setting is a creative hub (CH), selected because of the community level emphasis on the creative pursuit alongside supporting business development. This community was significantly different in ethos from our other social context in that the focus is on the creative pursuit and artistic value creation rather than on economic value creation (e.g. Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). Creative, cultural and artistic entrepreneurs display behaviours that are regarded as being different to others, with their personal identities often engrained with their professional identities (Stinchfield, Nelson, and Wood 2013). They also show little responsiveness to market conditions or business growth and are motivated to pursue artistic form, which often takes precedent over economic logics (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007).

Entrepreneurs in the CH operated their businesses in creative workspaces in the same city centre, of which a leading institute for arts training was regarded as the epicentre. Interactions within the CH are serendipitous and structured around cultural as opposed to business events. The criterion for being a member of the CH was having roots in industries such as the arts and crafts. Many of the entrepreneurs in this setting have degrees in a variety of different artistic subjects – such as fine art, graphic design and sculpturing. The businesses they run are typically small ventures with under nine employees and much smaller turnover compared to the businesses in the business network.

Data collection

For both settings, we began by orientating to the context, spending time at events and in the material environment of each engaging with stakeholders. For the CH, that meant spending time observing the hub itself, interviewing key stakeholders in the creative sector and attending multiple events. For the Business Network, this meant attending their organized events as a participant observer, interviewing their invited speakers and interviewing the employees of the BN (Eisenhardt 1989; Gehman et al. 2018). From this orientation work, participants were purposively identified and approached to engage in interviews (Lincoln and Denzin 2000), principally informed by the status of their businesses. We wanted to have a basis of comparison across the two settings, so focused on 'established' firms, which were operating in a sustainable manner.

Study participants from the BN self-selected into the sample. The sample consisted of the founders of six businesses. The businesses ranged between five and ten years old, but all were identifiable as being established, sustainable businesses. Participants' individual characteristics varied across personal life-courses based on their previous careers, gender and family status, as presented in Table 1 (Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching 2013). The participants in the sample from the CH were the founders of seven different businesses, one firm had two co-founders, both of whom participated. The businesses ranged between three and six years old; all represented established, sustainable firms. Like the BN, participants' characteristics varied across personal life-course based on their previous careers, gender and family status, as presented in Table 1 (Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching 2013).

Participants were interviewed using a *life story* approach (Gabriel and Griffiths 2004; Watson 2009b), advocated for use in analysing entrepreneurial narratives to construe identity and derive meaning from interactions (Mathias and Smith 2016; Yitshaki and Kropp 2016; Zozimo, Jack, and Hamilton 2017). During the interviews, each participant was asked to 'tell their story' of the

Table 1. Participant profile.

Name	Context	Gender	Personal life course (marital status, childcare responsibilities)
Catherine	BN	Female	Married, no childcare
Jane	BN	Female	Single, no childcare
Karl	BN	Male	Married, shared responsibilities
Margaret	BN	Female	Single, main responsibilities
Penelope	BN	Female	Single, main responsibilities
Wesley	BN	Male	Married, no childcare
Adam	CH	Male	Co-habiting, no childcare
Amy	CH	Female	Single, no childcare
Frankie	CH	Female	Co-habiting, no childcare
Mandy	CH	Female	Single, no childcare
Mark	CH	Male	Co-habiting, no childcare
Sally	CH	Female	Married, no childcare
Steve and Ava	CH	Male, Female	Married, no childcare

entrepreneurial journey, describe memorable experiences of interactions with different people that were influential on their journey, and to reflect on the meaning of those interactions. Our participants often 'flashed back' and 'flashed forward' to recollect meaningful interaction and align their experiences with their motives and desired selves (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010; Shipp and Jansen 2011). When recounting past experiences, participants naturally focused on interactions that they found particularly meaningful for their learning and development (Mills, Thurlow, and Mills 2010).

The life story method is a narrative approach that focuses on the way participants express their identities through references to the past, present and future (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998). Participants were prompted throughout with rhetorical nudges, such as 'how did you feel after this interaction?' This approach invites participants to express themselves, appraise their activities and reflect on their identity work (Weinrich and Saunderson 2003). Our approach allowed participants to offer accounts of their experiences, which are highly selective and constructed on the basis of meaning derived by the participant as well as being *disciplined* by the rhetorical regimes that both inform and are informed by the discourses that surround the entrepreneur (Watson 2009b). We were able to understand how participants made sense of their identity construction through the 'messy' interactions they had in the past to create a situated sense of self in the present (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016).

In producing narratives, we consider these life stories to be constitutive of identity work, as they simultaneously report and reproduce the social realities that they represent (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). They also give participants the implicit scope to interpret and engage with the questions based on their own discourse conventions, allowing the narrative performance to naturally display identity (Akinnaso and Ajirotutu 1982). We see the participants' identity work as an ongoing project that is 'constituted through discursive regimes and shaped by available positions in discourses' (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). Their identity work is, therefore, manifest in the narratives they produce in engaging with the present research.

Data analysis

We follow a discourse analysis approach (Potter and Wetherell 1987), considering discourse to be 'analytically distinct from, but inextricably embedded within, aspects of the wider social structural context' (Finn 2008, 104). We focus our analysis on participants' approaches to narrating their identities, the stories they create and the meaning they derive from these (McLean and Pasupathi 2012). Our analysis, therefore, represents our own interpretation of the distinctive rhetorical and language strategies of the participants in their dialogue with us (Jammaers and Zanoni 2020). We

conducted the analysis, using systematic steps to ensure transparency in our inductive theorizing (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). When analysing our data, we captured identity by examining the narratives through which individuals 'explain' themselves (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016; Beech et al. 2016).

Our data structure is presented in Table 2. Our first step involved looking at each participant individually by examining the interactions that they represented in their reflections. These first order codes contained information that related to the way in which participants described interactions. At this stage, coding notes were kept general, for example 'entrepreneur expressing admiration for speaker', 'entrepreneur highlighting attributes of a rock star entrepreneur,' or 'entrepreneur empathizing with their accountant.' In our second step, the codes from each interview were organized into explanatory concepts. At this step we reduced the number of comments into a more workable number of codes which represented the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The third step involved grouping codes together into second order constructs which could help us explain what was happening theoretically (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). Comparing and contrasting our data from both the BN and CH allowed distinctive forms of identity work and motives to emerge. We labelled these 'structural-instrumental work' and 'relational work'. These represented the 'interpretative repertoires' that participants used to construct their identity. We described the motives which guided the creation of their narratives as 'striving for esteem' and 'striving for closeness'. This represented 'social identity striving' which helped participants to situate their identities within their social context.

In our final step, we checked for differences within each social context to identify patterns in the use of narratives and social identity striving in our sample according to various characteristics. This was to ensure that distinctions emerging between the two settings were not explained by other characteristics of the sample. At this stage, the time spent orientating and understanding the two settings through participation, observation and interviews allowed for data saturation to be recognizable and for any variations within and across the settings to be understood. Subtle variations existed across gender, age, family and business life cycle, however, these existed across both contexts, therefore they did not confound or change the distinctive patterns that emerged.

Interpretation and analysis

Our purpose in this study is to find out: *how do individuals in different settings reflect on their social engagements to work on their entrepreneurial identity?* We find that the identity work taking place is significantly different across the two social settings. Alternative interpretive repertoires prevail and are driving the approach to identity work. Among the BN, there is a *structural-instrumental repertoire* used to constitute and make sense of the participants' identity. Among the CH participants, there is a *relational* means of constituting identity. Our findings also highlight a difference in what participants *strived* to achieve through reflecting on these interactions, a sense of esteem for BN participants and sense of closeness for CH participants.

While comparison across the two settings revealed a difference in the overall types of identity work, some subtle differences were found within both settings in relation to characteristics of participants. Within the BN, one of our participants was younger and had less experience than other participants. Despite having predominantly structural-instrumental narratives, she also expressed more relational narratives than other participants from this setting. Two of the more experienced female participants were single parents and had more amplified structural-instrumental repertoires. Both attributed their strong esteem motives to wanting to be viewed as successful by their children. In the CH setting, subtle differences in narratives existed depending on the life cycle of ventures. The three that had scaling ventures also incorporated structural-instrumental repertoires slightly more prominently into their predominately relational narratives. Despite these slight variations, the findings presented show the prevailing and dominant disciplining effect of the respective interpretive repertoires on the narratives produced within the two settings. Different interpretive

Table 2. Data structure and illustrative narratives.

Illustrative narratives	1st Order Codes	2nd Order Constructs	Aggregate Themes
'We are very single minded about what we want from people and why we want them.' (Catherine, BN)	Presenting role models in utilitarian terms	Structural-instrumental work	Interpretative repertoires
'I picked a man called Luke Johnson, who is basically the [well known person] in the hospitality and leisure circle.' (Penelope, BN)	Acknowledging individual pedigree		
'You get to learn and essentially for me that is what it is about, it is about learning from people who are far better at business.' (Jane, BN)	Defining self through subordinate positions		
'We felt by being with people like that we could learn more, than just by going to a course somewhere with people at our level.' (Margaret, BN)	Referencing progress within a social hierarchy		
'I asked lots of pertinent questions … It was about leadership and he told us absolutely nothing.' (Catherine, BN)	Evaluating interactions on instrumental benefit		
'Some of them [customers] have become our closest friends that we have in Glasgow.' (Steve and Ava, CH)	Mutual engagement and sharing experiences	Relational work	
'I have lunch with them every day. We talk about whatever is happening. It might be about work; it might be about art. I also do work for them.' (Amy, CH)	Swapping issues and experiences with peers		
'Sam, he is also a designer and went to Art School with us and is again a really brilliant person. He runs his own freelance consultancy' (Frankie, CH)	References to 'friendliness' of people		
'He is a friend; we have known each other for 10 years. He would always talk to me about stuff at the friendship level and the business level as well' (Sally, CH)	Creating personable narratives		
'We will be much bigger within 3 years. If things go the way, we are anticipating it will be a £25 million business within the next 10 years.' (Penelope, BN)	Aspirations for success and business growth	Striving for esteem	Social identity striving
'Sometimes I need to hear what his pitch is going to be, but sometime when I make a decision, I am expecting him to implement.' (Karl, BN).	Demonstrate superiority over others		
'To me it was just a natural extension of who I am, and I didn't see it as scary, but a lot of other people did. A lot of other people didn't understand.' (Jane, BN)	'Othering' less successful people		
'It's great that there are so many other self-employed or small businesses and creatives who are in here – you have someone to have lunch with or a coffee. It's not the alienation that I [was] worried' (Amy, CH)	Feeling that they are part of a community	Striving for closeness	
'I'd love to visit one of the big bag manufacturers, someone like Timbuk2 perhaps. They might not make the nicest product, but I'd love to see." (Adam, CH)	Eliminating boundaries and structures		
'We all support and look after each other. There is a socialization as well, everyone is quite good friends. It is a very open and friendly place.' (Mandy, CH)	Emphasizing social bonds		

repertoires can co-exist and run in parallel and our data showed this, yet, as Tannen (1990) notes, through consideration of broader patterns we can discern the prevalence or dominance of one over another.

Contrasting interpretive repertoires: structural work and relational work

Participants would refer to people with whom they had an important interaction within their business. These were integral to the participants' progress, helping them learn or inspiring them. We saw identity being constituted through reflecting on interactions with others within the social context, but the interpretive repertoires being used to make sense of these interactions was different in its character between the two cohorts. It became apparent that the BN participants were principally concerned with making sense of their identity in terms of a perceived hierarchy and they used instrumental markers to help determine this. Conversely, the CH entrepreneurs' identity work was principally concerned with a relational interpretive repertoire, looking to account for the closeness they had with key people in their venturing.

Structural-instrumental identity work (business network)

In the BN, participants use a structural-instrumental interpretive repertoire to negotiate their identity work. We use structural-instrumental as a compound term because the constituent parts are intermeshed in the way they are used in the participants' narratives. By structural we mean constituting their identity in terms of a subjective and relative position within a perceived hierarchy or stratified social order that is legitimizing and affirming. By instrumental we mean paying attention to and evaluating interactions based on marked material, technical features or characteristics. For example, setting up an e-commerce platform, mentoring, how much money one makes, having something to offer, among others. These instrumental features also act as a proxy by which one's relative position within the stratified social order can be discerned. Therefore, we see participants constituting their identity in these structural-instrumental terms based on whether one is superior or subordinate – or on a par – to those with whom they engage and relating to others based on instrumental or utilitarian value.

Penelope, for example, lists characteristics that define a role model's utility in her making sense of her entrepreneurial self. She notes the size of his business, his success, and his intelligence,

> I have learned a lot from him on a personal level, on a business level and he is the same age as me, a little bit older but not much, runs a business that is bigger than mine, but not massively bigger. Very successful, very clever, international, they sell high value products to most countries in the world (Penelope, BN).

Penelope refers to her contact with this individual almost exclusively in structural (relative age, relative business size) and instrumental (his assets/capabilities) terms. Here, Penelope can identify with the role model in terms of an aspirational entrepreneurial self. She focuses on the instrumental value that flows from the role model to her and it is presented in utilitarian terms. In another example, Catherine prefaces the interactions she has with a role model by acknowledging his 'business pedigree', she summarizes his credentials as a seasoned entrepreneur:

> One guy called, David [Surname], he is involved with 20 companies, chairman or founding member . . . he is in his 60s, and he has been involved in running and starting lots and lots of businesses. He gave me new ideas and he gave me confidence that some of things I was doing were really well, he gave me confidence that there were some things that I needed to re-evaluate. (Catherine, BN).

Catherine's anecdote is concerned with the fact that the advice she received came from a legitimate source. There are subtle, yet revealing, references to instrumental markers: number of companies, positions of power within those companies, even mentioning the person's age in this context frames it as a marked and valuable characteristic. She is constituting her entrepreneurial self in structural terms based on her subordinate position to that of a role model and at the same time referencing her

progress within that hierarchy. She also accounts for what he 'gave' her, repeating 'he gave me' three times. She constitutes the relationship in terms of what she gets from him as someone in a superior position. This is reinforced in another quote from Penelope:

> So that's what, kind of, the essence of the relationship is, somebody to bounce ideas by who wasn't going to mince his words, who was going to say do you really think that is a good idea … (Penelope)

Here, Penelope frames the relationship based on what she gets from it and thus it perpetuates a structural-instrumental constitution of identity. Although she refers to a 'relationship', she is evaluating the relationship based on its instrumental benefits to her in her progress as an entrepreneur. She quantifies the 'essence' of the relationship as being represented by three separate instrumental things that she gets from it: a sounding board for ideas, someone who tells her the truth, someone who challenges her ideas.

Relational identity work (creative hub)

In the CH, participants use a relational interpretive repertoire to negotiate their identity work. By relational we mean constituting their identity in terms of closeness or intimacy with others. We refer to intimacy in its technical sense, as opposed to suggesting there is a romantic agenda at play.

A feature of the relational interpretive repertoire is the representation of turn taking in the engagements described. Participants would discuss interactions and give account of the back and forth between them and people they engaged with. This gives a sense that it is the mutual engagement and shared experience that is a pivotal feature of the identity work, as opposed to the material or instrumental features of the narrative. A structurally different means of representing their key engagements was used by the CH participants, foregrounding the engagement itself and amplifying the equity and co-creation of it. They would often give voice to the people they were referring to, accounting for both sides of the interaction in the way they discussed it or give a sense of the perspective of the other party.

Mark, for example, refers to a role model figure (Depp), but although there are salient instrumental features to the narrative, there is attention paid to laying out their interaction, a sense of a relationship being built. Mark almost labours the point, representing both sides of a seemingly mundane exchange. However, when considered that this is an example of a relational interpretive repertoire in action, it becomes clear that the point is to present the fact that the relationship exists rather than what instrumental benefits it may yield:

> A guy called Depp and he has taught us everything we might know about business. What we do is, we learn from Depp. "Depp how do you do this?" And he goes oh I do it like this. And we do it differently. He runs [a record shop]. He is running quite a similar business to us. We have stolen quite a few things from [Depp's way of running his business]. Like the way we display books we try to do it in the same way. It is a way that people will know how to flip through things. Depp will always turn around to us if we sit down and have a chat and go 'how is [your business] doing?' (Mark, CH).

The reference to stealing from Depp also amplifies a sense of intimacy in the relationship. Stealing, in its demonstrative sense would indicate dishonesty, but it is evident here that Mark is seeking to amplify the closeness of the relationship whereby *stealing* indicates a privilege he enjoys as someone who has a close relationship with Depp. The quote ends with Mark telling us that Depp takes an interest in the business, this is prefaced with 'sit down and have a chat', reinforcing the image of them sharing and thus Depp asking how the business is doing is constituted as a means of indicating closeness.

Mandy's identity work is also about sharing the commercial journey ('we run this completely together'), Mandy ran, with two other self-employed creative workers, a community interest cooperative which collects textile designs to display. Although Mandy kept her own commercial retail work separate from this, there was a shared sense of belonging together in what they did, swapping issues and experiences with each other:

> *Marion and Avon who form part of [community cooperative] . . . So, we run this completely together. But it has also been quite useful, they talk to me about any issues they have with [their business], and I speak to them about issues with [my business]*. (Mandy, CH).

Mandy reflects on enacting the self-employed persona and sharing it with peers. We see, again, turn-taking and mutual engagement being used in the way she constructs the narrative, amplifying the importance of relational engagement to her. These participants reference community, friendliness, and the spontaneity of talk. This is shown in Amy's quote below,

> *[Fellows in the creative hub] provide a huge amount of help, being self-employed and being on your own they provide someone to talk to! They are kind of the friendly faces; they are the nice people to be around*. (Amy, CH).

Here Amy is exercising her entrepreneurial identity ('being self-employed and being on your own), but her identity work in that regard is constituted in her belonging to a community and the engagement she discusses is not contingent on anything. She references people's familiarity with 'friendliness', she mentions talking to people but not necessarily to any end, and she talks about being around people to whom she feels an attachment.

In Adam's quote below, he is fundamentally describing a form of business advisor or mentor, who gives 'great marketing advice', but it is constituted in terms that amplify the relationship and almost passively refer to the instrumental-structural features. Adam interprets the offer of advice as an expression of interest in Adam and his business: 'he is, like, kind of a fan'. There is a sense that Adam is most touched by the expression of interest and the advice is seen as the vehicle for that interest rather than the end in itself:

> *A guy called Mark. He is, like, kind of a fan. He is also very involved. Mark is a sustainability expert. He has a totally unique way of looking at the world. I should really pay him but he just really likes our stuff and he is just one of these people, who you put something on the line he will call you and tell you how amazing it is, and sometimes you need that. Sometimes he will call you and give you great marketing advice or introduce you to someone.* (Adam, CH).

Through this interaction Adam is expressing a meta-narrative that he wants us to know about someone with whom he has grown close through his entrepreneurial activities. The use of 'involved' is a marker of intimacy or closeness. Traditional ideas of structures and authority are subverted when Adam refers to Mark simultaneously as someone who gives advice but is also a fan. He also acknowledges that this would normally be considered a commercial relationship, but he interprets it differently from that, 'I should really pay him, but he just really likes our stuff'. Therefore, it emerges that what Adam values and is referring to is the relationship with Mark

Social identity *striving*

Participants were evidently attending to an identity goal in the narratives they were constructing. It was clear that as they constituted their identities in their responses, displaying their respective interpretive repertoires, there was also something they were striving towards which gave their identity work meaning. The different interpretive repertoires that informed this striving gave a different character to the striving work of both groups. The BN group espoused a need to build and legitimize a sense of esteem in their identity work, whereas the CH group were striving for a sense of closeness. The BN group used their interpretive repertoire to make positionality explicit and then attribute instrumental markers to those positions to qualify their own sense of esteem as entrepreneurs. The CH group sought to bypass normative indicators of business dynamics and focused on the features that demonstrated closeness and relationship-building on a more intimate level.

Striving for esteem (business network)

The BN entrepreneurs strive for esteem in their identity work. This is characterized by a consistent effort to elevate and embellish their entrepreneurial identity. Interactions were discussed in terms of whether they were 'one-up' or 'one-down', and there were regularly examples given from beyond the entrepreneurial realm that served to affirm their entrepreneurial identity.

There is a pattern of constituting their identity in relation to instrumental and structural markers of esteem, aligning or evaluating themselves against these markers. Their work is tangible, it is effortful and reflects a sense of struggling or grappling on two fronts. These entrepreneurs constitute their identity in positional terms and strive in their identity work to map the route to greater esteem. On one hand they are aspirational in a normative sense of the word, corresponding to ideas of upward mobility. On the other hand, they work downwards to reinforce and demonstrate their superiority over others.

Margaret's quotes below are illustrative of her being recognized as an entrepreneur who gives speeches and mentors others. She uses instrumental-technical language to describe these interactions: *I do this, he did that*, and she accounts for things in terms of 'success':

> [Business partner] and I do a lot of speaking at universities and colleges about entrepreneurship and about our journeys.

> I met Brian and mentored him and know the business. [...] Alan came in to run the business, but for the year and half that I mentored him it was fantastic, because he was young and enthusiastic and desperate to make a success of it. It is great to mentor someone like that. I have mentored people through [the local] chamber of commerce, four or five. (Margaret, BN).

Margaret is reinforcing her esteem being constituted in structural terms by referring to mentorship and engagement with the community as something she does *to* the community. In describing her mentoring, she attributes the 'fantastic' outcome to the mentee's youth, enthusiasm, and desperation to 'make a success of it'. Although this is a reference to a relationship, there is no sense of Margaret valuing the closeness with the individual, rather she reinforces instrumental features that are valued (youth, enthusiasm, appetite for success) and her recognition of these features serves to legitimize the superior position she is setting out for herself. Margaret's anecdote is built around presenting herself as occupying a position of esteem. The examples given show her reproducing and reinforcing the structural-instrumental repertoire using reference to valued instrumental features.

In another example, Karl draws structural-instrumental boundaries of 'otherness' with a sibling:

> My sister disagrees with the fact I make money. It meant that I stopped speaking to her, she basically decided that there was more to life ... (Karl, BN)

It is noteworthy that the breakdown in the relationship is attributed to an instrumental feature of Karl's entrepreneurial work, making money. Karl also claims agency in the ending of the relationship, 'it meant I stopped speaking to her'. Making money in this case is seen as a marker of esteem and the breakdown of the relationship is presented in such a way that Karl does not give his sister's position credence. Particularly, he uses the word 'basically' as a device to target his reasoning, without giving full attention to what motivates his sister's opinion. By saying 'she basically decided there was more to life', he is acknowledging that there are other (less basic) motivations for his sister's feelings, but he chooses not to give account of them. This serves to discredit the actions of Karl's sister and, by implication, legitimizes Karl's making money. His response elicits the idea that the interpretive repertoire of the BN participants is a deep-rooted, ontological disposition and the relative position to others, both insiders and outsiders, is a necessary part of constituting the esteem they associate with their identity work.

In Margaret's quote below she constitutes what people have to offer her based on their instrumental value. She talks about business advisors (from an economic development agency) and simultaneously positions herself as occupying a superior position and discredits what they have to offer:
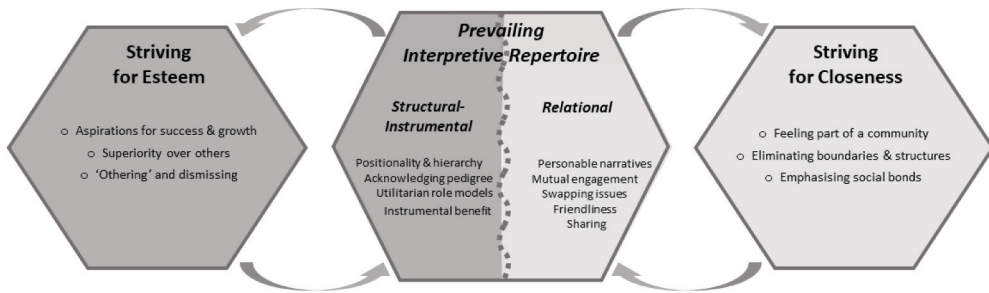
Figure 1. Summary of findings.

> *The challenge is that the advisors have rarely run a business themselves, whilst they can sprout a theory with all the things you are supposed to do, they can't empathise, they can't mentor you, they can't provide you with any experience, they can't provide you with any experienced advisory services because they don't know what it's like.* (Margaret, BN).

In Margaret's identity work there is a reference of 'otherness', those who 'don't know what it's like'. The language remains structural instrumental based on what she can get, or others can provide and, indeed, seeing value from only those deemed to be insiders. By constituting her identity relative to others in terms of their value to her, Margaret is doing two things: she is prescribing a set of instrumental characteristics that determine whether someone is 'an entrepreneur' or not (otherness) and she is actively constituting her own identity in instrumental terms by discrediting what those 'others' may have to offer her. Margaret is legitimizing her entrepreneurial identity based on experiences she has had and setting-out this identity as structurally superior. The reference to this group in Margaret's anecdote is revealing at a meta level too. It can be seen to principally service the constitution of her position of esteem because, by evincing the things advisors cannot do, she is indirectly expressing her own instrumental capacity and her sense of esteem.

Striving for closeness (creative hub)

The relational interpretive repertoire used by the CH entrepreneurs means that they espouse a different kind of striving in their identity work. This is a strained form of striving, thus there is a similarity with the BN in the sense of there being material effort to establish where they are, but rather than grapple with structural position, they grapple with relational closeness. In their striving for closeness these participants are looking for ways to eliminate boundaries and structures. Whereas the effort on the part of the BN group came in striving for upward mobility whilst also reinforcing their position downwards, the CH group's work came from absorbing and empathizing the different logics of engagement they encountered. Amy, for example, reflects on her interactions with her accountant:

> *[Accountant] probably would have been really matter of fact and practical about it. But actually, I wanted to know really silly things. Like how much work is it? How does it affect my customers? Whereas my accountant is not going to give me that.*

> *[Gabi and I] also have the same accountant which we have just realised. You can talk to them. It is one of those things you can talk about. [...] VAT is a really boring subject. But with accountants. If you go to the pub and talk about being VAT registered, 9/10 people would not give a shit. But you know, something about running your own business makes VAT really interesting.* (Amy, CH)

In this extract, Amy is casting the position of her accountant as being challenging in terms of what their means of engagement was: 'matter of fact and practical'. By implication, Amy is showing that she does not adopt a matter of fact and practical approach, she is looking to engage differently. It is evident that she is working hard to be empathetic to the approach of the accountant by

characterizing her questions as 'silly'. She indicates that she recognizes an alternative interpretive repertoire being in play, but also is still looking to attend to the things that she thinks are important in her work.

When Amy describes her relationship with her accountant, she refers to it in two relational ways. First, she notes that another business owner, Gabi, has the same accountant as her. Second, she frames the subject matter of accounting conversations as being a means by which one might bond with others in the pub. Amy is constituting the affairs of business accounting as a means of connecting to others. She is doing this literally, by noting how her accountant connects her to other entrepreneurs, but also seeing accounting as something over which she might now be able to bond with certain people. The two parts of Amy's narrative communicate how the CH entrepreneurs demonstrated the striving work they did to achieve a sense of closeness, making a point of demonstrating their efforts to establish empathy and find common interests or connections.

Similarly, Sally from the CH also reflected on recent engagements with business professionals:

> [Business advisor] … he came via the [enterprise support organisation], just a network connection, he had been helping me and [ex business partner] out, but actually really just liked me and wanted to see me grow. (Sally, CH).

Sally bypasses the functional utility of the relationship with the advisor and focuses on how the advisor wants to see her grow and how they liked her. This shows Sally reimagining the relationship in terms that bring her and the advisor closer, constituting it in more intimate terms: being liked personally and looking for personal growth, rather than business growth.

Dispensing with the instrumental features of a relationship and constituting it in its closest terms is also seen in Adam's quote below. He explicitly refers to the business associate as a friend: 'I actually have a friend', and this is constituted by its subversion of what might be called capitalist logic as Adam notes how the friendship supersedes competitive agendas:

> Although, in theory I am starting a business that one day might compete with them, they are just giving me loads of information and advice. I have been really pleased with the lack of competition in a good way. I actually have a friend. There is a company called [X] … and they do it very well. It is quite a different product to ours. I met the guy in a show, and I met the guy and I thought well actually we are directly competing, and he is the nicest guy in the world. (Adam, CH).

Adam cites a 'lack of competition' as a positive feature of the dynamic and he focuses on the associate's interpersonal qualities: 'he is the nicest guy in the world'. It is evident that Adam is reaching beyond the assumed dynamics of business and seeking to establish a relationship on terms that are as intimate as possible.

Summary of findings

The findings demonstrate a process at play that sees interpretive repertoires and striving agendas reciprocally influencing each other. This process leads to the expression of distinctive forms of entrepreneurial identity work. Figure 1 illustrates the process represented in the findings.

It is necessary to reinforce the fact that our findings demonstrate a prevailing interpretive repertoire that relates to the striving agenda. In both settings there was evidence of the alternative interpretive repertoire being deployed. This is important for two reasons, first because instrumental markers of entrepreneurship are still necessary to identify the venturing process and, therefore, even in the case of the CH participants, structural-instrumental language was still used. Second, the use, or lack thereof, of a particular interpretive repertoire at a particular moment would not substantiate the characterization of an entrepreneur's identity work. The findings identified a dominant pattern of use – both within and across the participants – from each setting that amounted to a distinction in the way the different interpretive repertoires related to a striving agenda.

Discussion

The work of Shepherd and Haynie (2009) suggests that distinctiveness and belonging pull in opposite directions along the spectrum of differentiation and assimilation (Brewer 1991), so the entrepreneur who is preoccupied with distinctiveness pursues this at the expense of belonging. They frame a lack of belonging as a potential dark side of entrepreneurship. This is echoed in Mathias, Huyghe, and Williams (2020), who frame distinctiveness and belonging as oppositional. Our findings suggest that, rather than being the opposite ends of a spectrum, distinctiveness and belonging are at the core of situated entrepreneurial identities in different settings.

The *structural-instrumental* interpretive repertoire extends the notion of distinctiveness by showing how identity work in the BN setting is concerned with one's position and esteem in relation to others. Participants in the BN used a curated array of rhetorical symbols to create an 'intersemiotic, interdiscursive dialogicality' (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 23), employing a structural-instrumental interpretive repertoire to differentiate between themselves and others.

However, the CH participants did not negotiate in 'positional' terms, rather, they used a relational approach. The *relational* interpretive repertoire extends the notion of belonging by illustrating how identity work in the CH setting is concerned with attachment and closeness with others. We find that closeness (attachment) is the very grammar by which individuals constitute their social identity in the CH setting, using a relational interpretive repertoire to strive for closeness. Conversely, structural-instrumental means to distinctiveness are dominant in the BN setting. We are not suggesting that individuals who use structural-instrumental means to distinguish themselves do not sacrifice belonging, instead we find that to frame distinctiveness as an imperative in entrepreneurship only represents certain settings, i.e. those where structural-instrumental interpretive repertoires prevail (e.g. Frederiksen and Berglund 2020). Warren's (2004) work on identity transition highlights the diverse discourses that are constructed and engaged with during the course of the entrepreneurial process. Some of these discourses emerge as heterodox or conflicting. This is evident in our findings in the way the interpretative repertoires shape how entrepreneurs negotiate dynamic and complex territory in different settings.

What we contribute to this literature is that there are other entrepreneurship settings where social identity is founded upon closeness with others. Shepherd and Haynie (2009) talk about *the dark side* in a way that suggests all entrepreneurial environments are governed by a neoliberal approach to striving, achieving esteem, dominant positions and market distinctiveness. Our findings suggest that this is not the case in all settings. This frames Warren's (2004) notion of entrepreneurship not only as a *complex lived experience*, but also as a diverse one. To use the same quote as Shepherd and Haynie (2009): '*If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away*.' – Henry David Thoreau

Interpretive repertoires and entrepreneurial imprinting

Finally, the pronounced difference seen across the two settings, particularly the identity work of the CH participants suggests that imprinting is exposed when interpretive repertoires are engaged in context. Marquis and Tilcsik (2013, 216) note that 'jobs, occupations, and professions are susceptible to imprinting and are likely to carry a legacy of the institutional environment in which they were formed.' We see such imprinting among the CH entrepreneurs, who carry forward their creative sensibilities into the entrepreneurial environment. A feature of the literature is that the imprinting being considered often has a common denominator, for example attitudes towards risk depending on economic conditions at career entry (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013).

In the case of our CH entrepreneurs, we are seeing how the imprinting of their relationship with the creative community relates to the prevailing interpretive repertoire and striving agenda. Carroll and Hannan (2004, 293) note that individuals go through 'key developmental stages' where

imprinting occurs, which have lasting impacts on behaviour and performance. Mathias, Williams, and Smith (2015) find that there is strong evidence of imprinting at an individual level among entrepreneurs in relation to family, hobbies and prior professional roles. Our findings show that when the prevailing interpretive repertoire is deployed in the situated exchanges presented by the participants it reveals individual level imprinting. This is seen in the struggles of the CH entrepreneurs, the relational interpretive repertoire and striving for closeness do not always seem a natural fit with what they are trying to do, yet they persist in negotiating their environment through these regimes and, we suggest, imprinting informs this persistence. Thus, we are seeing how the setting imprints on the micro-dynamics of the individual's identity.

This has significance for the literature on imprinting within entrepreneurship, which has predominantly looked at the imprinting on ventures based on the founders (Fauchart and Gruber 2011; Marquis and Tilcsik 2013), but has inconsistently considered imprinting at the individual entrepreneur level (Mathias, Williams, and Smith 2015). Considering identity work and imprinting together brings to the surface a sense that, not only can we consider there to be distinctive ways of doing entrepreneurial identity work, but that these ways are stubborn and resilient to the normative gaze individuals may experience in their environment, such resilience can be explained by imprinting.

Implications: policy, practice and education

Our findings have potential implications for entrepreneurs themselves, economic development policy, and for approaches to entrepreneurship education. What we are seeing in our work is a discomfort among one group with the idea of constituting themselves in terms of esteem and distinctiveness. One of the reasons for this is because, as creatives, the identity of the venture is intimately intermeshed with their own social identity. This means that, since they navigate their territory in relational terms – striving for closeness – to be confronted with a logic that discredits that approach feels as though the venture itself is being discredited. As much as we support Shepherd and Haynie's call to 'embrace the fact that there are potential downsides to entrepreneurship' (2009, 317), what is evident from our findings is that this embrace could be solicited at an even deeper level. Rather than suggest venturing be merely tolerant of a potential need for belonging it could be conceived of and supported on the basis of a logic of 'belonging', one where belonging and attachment are in fact the very apparatus around which people form their entrepreneurial identities. Our findings suggest that acknowledging this fact would make an important coalition of entrepreneurs (specifically those in the creative field) feel more affirmed and supported in their endeavours, as opposed to potentially feeling stigmatized.

There are also implications for entrepreneurship education. Donnellon, Ollila, and Middleton (2014) note that within the higher educational setting students need to experiment with the development of decision-making logics. They also talk about it being inevitable that they 'take on' an entrepreneurial identity. Our findings show that, in acknowledging entrepreneurial identities may be constituted through different interpretive repertoires, educational approaches to entrepreneurship may benefit from ensuring that in engaging with the 'how' and 'why' questions of entrepreneurship, education does not take for granted the interpretive repertoires that may be disciplining the means by which people negotiate their environment. This would allow students to 'take on' identities but in a less prescriptive way.

Donnellon, Ollila, and Middleton (2014) state that: 'Rigg and O'Dwyer (2012) illustrate ways in which the entrepreneur negotiates dialogues and stories in interaction with critical others to legitimize the identity being constructed. It is through such storytelling, and the associated negotiating and interaction with others, that the entrepreneur demonstrates entrepreneurial experience gained.' We propose that education should recognize that such dialogues and stories are enmeshed in the various interpretive repertoires at play and one can take on an entrepreneurial identity as much from striving for closeness as they can from striving for esteem. Such an approach opens

avenues for further research too. In the same way Levinson (1997) notes the variance of cognitive impact of language on spatial awareness, there is potential for considering entrepreneurial cognition in relation to different interpretive repertoires. From an educational perspective this is tantamount to neurodiversity, whereby reinforcing a relational interpretive repertoire as a valid way to negotiate entrepreneurial identity may create a more inclusive environment for those potentially interested in entrepreneurship.

In the present study, neither group represented particularly positive experiences of engaging with economic development agencies. This creates a sort of *catch 22* for such agencies. On the one hand, the BN entrepreneurs communicate a sense of disinterestedness with them because their perceived position is not valued, therefore what they have to offer is discredited. On the other, it seems that these agencies adopt more structural-instrumental interpretive repertoire in their engagements and therefore their approach creates a sense of stigma among the CH entrepreneurs because they are pursuing an instrumental means of engaging with people who are negotiating their identity work relationally.

Although further research that specifically examines the interactions between development agencies and entrepreneurs in these terms would serve to expand on these points, we offer the following based on the present research. Economic development agencies engaging with businesses that are identifiably in the creative sector would benefit from remaining open to a more relational approach. This could be achieved by building the relationship on the basis of more intimate questions such as, 'what is important to you?', 'who is important to you?', 'What excites you most about this venture?'. The responses to such questions may elicit the technical-instrumental content that development agencies require, but they would do so in a way that engages creative entrepreneurs and makes them feel acknowledged in terms that fit with their interpretive repertoire and affirms their striving agenda.

For more normative 'growth-orientated' entrepreneurs, such as those from our BN setting, development agencies need to emphasize two things about their position relative to the entrepreneur. First, they need to differentiate between the value of lived experience and the value of technical-instrumental insight. A representative of an economic development agency may not be able to show the battle scars of the lived experience of an entrepreneur, but they can reinforce the instrumental expertise they offer by virtue of engaging with multiple businesses on a continuous basis: having oversight of innovations, trends and challenges that exist on a meso and macro level that individual entrepreneurs may not otherwise have exposure to. Second, their position as an instrument of regional and national entrepreneurial ecosystems privileges them with perspective and access around the structure that is integral to the things these entrepreneurs' value. This means that development agencies can frame their value as enablers of structural mobility by virtue of a unique position that individual entrepreneurs could not replicate. Such an approach would serve to avoid agencies being discredited. It would also reinforce that the agencies do, indeed, have something to offer, both structurally and instrumentally.

Whilst the present study offers insight into entrepreneurial identity work in a developed Western nation and, as such will have resonance in principle for those considering social identity in similar contexts, it is, however, a relatively small study which will undoubtedly have regional and local idiosyncrasies embedded within it. That being said, the methodological approach and opportunities for considering similar contexts for study are straightforward to operationalize. This study could, therefore, serve as the basis for further investigation of the dynamics of entrepreneurial social identity. This work has looked at different settings, but there is scope to engage more directly with the relationship between entrepreneurial identity and space. Although space was not a unit of analysis, the opportunity to consider identity work in space would add further depth to the findings made here.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings show a divergence in the way identity is constituted by entrepreneurs in different settings. The dynamic approach taken in this research contributes to previous work by considering how identities are constituted. This contributes to the literature on distinctiveness by showing that some entrepreneurs may in fact constitute their identities in terms of concepts of belonging rather than distinctiveness. We have also discussed how the nexus of the setting and the interpretive repertoire exposes individual level imprinting, when the prevailing interpretive repertoire is deployed in situated exchanges and persists despite evident resistance. This shows how the setting imprints on the micro-dynamics of an individual's identity. By linking different entrepreneurial settings with specific interpretive repertoires and striving agendas, our analysis invites further research to explain variation in social identity dynamics across the numerous places and spaces in which entrepreneurship is enacted.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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