

7-15-2016

## Examining and Reconciling Identity Issues Among Artist-Entrepreneurs (Chapter)

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## EXAMINING AND RECONCILING IDENTITY ISSUES AMONG ARTIST-ENTREPRENEURS

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### Abstract

In business schools, research and pedagogy in entrepreneurship focus on new venture creation and management. Developing individuals to think like an entrepreneur and adopt an *'entrepreneurial identity'* enables them to more effectively build and grow businesses and enjoy financial success. However, the assumption that all entrepreneurs desire financial success may not hold across non-business entrepreneurs. For example, for artists, sacrificing for arts' sake - or enjoying artistic success at the hands of financial success - is a constant struggle. This *'artist identity'* stands in stark contrast to the *'entrepreneurial identity'*. Artists create to satisfy an artistic need, rather than a market opportunity. Given the continuing decay of artistic endeavours due to the lack of financial support, we ask: can these identities be reconciled so that the artist can be a successful entrepreneur?

To explore this question, we turn to identity theory for insight into the differences in identities of entrepreneurs and artists. Building on findings from identity theory and entrepreneurship pedagogy research, we develop a framework for an identity reconciliation process that artist-entrepreneurs experience. For researchers, this framework suggests artist-entrepreneurs are a unique form of entrepreneur, and that identity plays a central role in the artist's creative and financial success. For pedagogues, this framework unveils that designing curricula around the theoretical roots and approaches of identity research can help these individuals grapple with identity-issues to more successfully breed entrepreneurship among artists.

### Examining and Reconciling Identity Issues among Artist-Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs do much more for society than simply creating jobs and contributing to economic development. Entrepreneurs play a vital role in communities by creating unique and innovative outputs, developing and funding social programs, and becoming an institution with which employees, consumers, and community members can identify (Audretsch, 2005; Tracy, 2005). Similarly, artists contribute to society by creating artwork that can foster social inclusion, improve education and health, prevent crime, and increase the quality of life for those that live in the communities touched by the artist and their work (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010; Swan, 2013; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Thus, both entrepreneurs and artists produce something novel and unique that contributes to the development of society. Yet, they operate in very different social segments with very little interaction. Indeed, artistic endeavours are often only ancillary to entrepreneurs who may choose to support them for social or personal reasons. Further, financial betterment and market opportunities are often seen as detrimental to art (Griff, 1960). Given both entrepreneurs' and artists' importance to the development of communities, it seems that bringing together these two groups of individuals may be critical. Here, we propose that this may occur through an identity

reconciliation process through which artists become artist-entrepreneurs. We define artist-entrepreneurs as those individuals that achieve artistic and financial success by creating their own business of selling their artwork.

Burke (2004, p. 5) defines identity as *'the sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define what it means to be who they are as persons, as role occupants, and as group members.'* Individuals learn what these meanings are and the categories with which they are associated through interactions with others as well as through the work they perform, such as being an entrepreneur or being an artist (Burke, 2004). Being an entrepreneur is a core facet of the individual's identity and is directly linked to the enterprise's (and, relatedly, the entrepreneur's) financial success (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Navis & Glynn, 2011). Similarly, the artist's identity dictates who they are and what they do, and is the driver of creative success and artistic satisfaction (Stohs, 1991). In the words of influential American painter, Jackson Pollock, *'Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is.'*

To this end, both artists and entrepreneurs engage in creative construction—innovating and driving change (Agarwal, Audretsch, & Sarkar, 2007; Duchamp, 1975; Ketchen, Ireland, & Snow, 2007; Mark, 2003). They do so to develop and protect distinctiveness from other artists or other entrepreneurial firms (Mark, 2003; Van de Ven, Sapienza, & Villanueva, 2007). Thus, their work is a visual brand they create, reflecting of who they are and what they do (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Schroeder, 2005). Despite these similarities, differences in what drive satisfaction between artist's and entrepreneur's identities create a chasm between them. The entrepreneur identity seeks creation, innovation, and change for financial success to support organizational viability and continued operations. The artist identity also seeks creation, innovation, and change. However, the purpose is creative success, or the assemblage of *'novel combinations or rearrangements of ideas, technologies, and processes'* (Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2002, p. 447), which generates intrinsic satisfaction for the artist. In other words, the work itself is the ultimate reason for the artist's efforts—either because of its contribution to the arts community or due to the level of satisfaction the artist experiences while creating it.

As a consequence of these differences, artist-entrepreneurs face a conflict in identity not experienced by other entrepreneurs. On one hand, they ought to create work to satisfy a market demand and thus gain financial success (driven by their entrepreneur identity). On the other, they work to fulfil their artistic drive, thus gaining creative success (driven by their artist identity). The purpose of this article is to explicate the dynamics of the artist-entrepreneur identity—or coexistence of opposing entrepreneur and artist identities—and why these identities might be in conflict.

### Theoretical Context

#### Identity Theory

Identity theory is rooted in the works of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), who explained how social structure can influence self, and reciprocally, how self then affects social behaviours. Society, through an identity theory lens, represents *'a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organized, embedded in an array of groups, organizations, communities, and institutions and intersected*

by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and other variables' (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285). Accordingly, individuals hold multiple identities to answer these complexities of society.

To understand how identity impacts one's tendencies and behaviours, (1) individuals hold multiple identities based on who they are as an individual (*person identity*) and what they do (*role identity*), and (2) these identities differ in terms of both their *salience* and the individual's *commitment* to them. Identities that are more salient will form a base for action in diverse situations (Stryker, 1987). According to Burke (2004), the most salient identity is a person identity: it distinguishes one as a unique, identifiable individual who possesses certain characteristics and qualities that other individuals use to verify their own identities. Person identity is at least partially enacted regardless of the context expectations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Whereas person identity is relatively stable and not dependent on context, role identities are context-specific. An individual holds multiple role identities that are triggered through interactions with others and groups. This simultaneous existence of person and role identities provides some independence of behaviour from immediate contextual demands. This accounts, at least partially, for creativity and unpredictability of human behaviour (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

Identity commitment is a process through which individuals establish and maintain their different identities (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). More specifically, commitment is represented by the extent to which an individual maintains relationships with others by thinking, acting, and reacting in ways that are in line with others' expectations of that individual (Stryker & Statham, 1985). The salience of the identity is a function of the individual's commitment to it—as the identity is reinforced through interaction with significant others, commitment to that identity increases, hence increasing its salience.

Thus, '*an identity is like a compass helping [individuals] steer a course of interaction in a sea of social meaning*' (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p. 91). Identifying as an artist or an entrepreneur not only indicates identity to others, but it also solidifies the identity for the individual by guiding how they live. As indicated by, Niklas Zennstrom, co-founder of Skype, '*If you want to be an entrepreneur, it's not a job, it's a lifestyle. It defines you.*' Similarly, Elbert Hubbard, an artist of the Arts and Crafts Movement, stated, '*Art is not a thing, it is a way.*'

### The Entrepreneur Identity vs. the Artist Identity

Within business schools, research and pedagogy in entrepreneurship focus on new venture creation, growth, and survival (Gartner, 1985; Gilbert, McDougall, & Audretsch, 2006; Shepherd, Douglas, & Shanley, 2000; Timmons, 1999). Entrepreneurs are trained to adopt or develop three main attributes: innovativeness, opportunity recognition, and propensity to take risks (Baumol, 1968; Falck, Heblich, & Luedemann, 2012). For example, Falck and colleagues (2012, p. 42) argue that entrepreneurship courses in business schools generally provide students with experiences such as '*[writing] business plans, [meeting] successful entrepreneurs who tell their powerful and attractive success stories, and also often [receiving] individual level technical advice and assistance in starting up a business.*' These experiences are important for developing entrepreneurs because through it they learn '*who they can be*', construct stories of '*who they want*

to be' and work towards enacting their storied identity. In this sense, *'learning is becoming'* (Rae, 2000, p. 151). By developing individuals to think like an entrepreneur and adopt an *'entrepreneur identity'*, they can more effectively build and grow businesses with the goal of financial success.

Similar to entrepreneurs, an artist's work is a reflection of self (Bain, 2005). For artists, identity stems not only from the work they create, but also from their drive to oppose conformity and challenge societal assumptions (Sternberg, 1999; Stohs, 1990). Artistic success implies work that is *'unusually distinctive, satisfying, and/or productive in opening new ground'* (Caves, 2000, p. 202) and is independent of financial success (Delmestri, Montanari, & Usai, 2005). It is possible, then, for artists to achieve artistic success without financial success. Given this, a salient identity that most artists experience at one time during their careers is that of a *'starving artist'* (Filer, 1986). Part of being an artist means sacrificing for art's sake, or enjoying creative success without experiencing financial success (Stohs, 1991). In fact, artists that focus less on financial success may in fact be more artistically satisfied with their career (Stohs, 1990, 1991). For artists, the importance of embracing the identity as an artist—which means being *'creative, varied, and useful'* (Mishler, 1992, p. 22) is paramount and outweighs the financial independence or even societal recognition for their work (Griff, 1960).

### The Emergence of Identity Conflict

Identity conflict emerges (1) when there is a mismatch between situational and identity meanings; or (2) when multiple salient identities are invoked at the same time. First, the conflict may emerge due to the inability to verify an identity in a particular context (Burke & Stets, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Certain contexts will enable salient identity verification, while others will severely limit or disallow verification. This constrains and/or eliminates behaviours associated with the salient identity. In the situation in which verification of the highly salient identity persistently fails, individuals may resist further negotiation efforts, reject identities others are seeking to impose on them, and leave the situation (Cast, 2003). In other words, *'when choice is possible, people choose roles and groups that provide opportunities to verify their person identity'* (Burke, 2006, p. 11).

Second, the conflict may also occur when meanings contained in two identities are opposing but activated together at the same time, leading to an inability for both to be verified (Burke, 2004). The artist identity, focused on artistic success, rivals the entrepreneur identity, which seeks financial success. Can these identities be reconciled so that the artist can be a successful entrepreneur, without sacrificing either identity? Identity theory suggests that in the situation where identities are not highly salient, identity standards will shift toward a compromise so the conflict can be removed (Burke, 2004). However, we have limited insight into how the conflict is reconciled when conflicted identities are high in salience. In the following paragraphs, we provide a theory-driven framework for identity reconciliation in the context of artist-entrepreneurs. In doing so, we seek to provide insight into the dynamics of reconciliation and explicate theoretical and pedagogical implications.

### **A Framework for Reconciling Identities in Artist-Entrepreneurs**

Identity is a fluid dynamic (Burke, 2006) due to the continuous negotiation of meanings that individuals engage in as they enter different contexts and assume new roles. Burke (2006, p. 93) argues that identities *'are always changing (though slowly) in response to the exigencies of the situation. Insofar as an identity cannot change the situation (and the meaning contained therein), it adapts slowly, gaining control where it can, and adapting where it must.'* We build on this insight to argue that artist-entrepreneurs endure a process of identity reconciliation that occurs as they endeavour to make sense of the new context (i.e., assume an entrepreneurial identity). This process provides the opportunity for identity becoming (Rae, 2000) in which their artistic and entrepreneur identities are integrated as exemplified through the work that they do. We suggest that artist-entrepreneurs experience at least three stages in the identity reconciliation process: *detachment*, wherein the artistic and entrepreneur identities are kept separate; *fusion*, where the artistic and entrepreneur identities conjoin; and *integration*, where the artistic and entrepreneur identities merge to shape the person identity of the artist-entrepreneur.

#### **Detachment**

In the detachment stage of the process, the artist keeps two identities separate and enacts each one in the context in which it will be verified. In one context, the individual creates art for artistic success (thus enacting and verifying the artistic identity) without generating much if any sales from it. In other words, the artist identity enables the individual to create artistically successful work regardless of its potential to generate financial returns. These artistically valuable pieces of art allow the individual to further develop their common theme or style (Mark, 2003). At the same time, however, the artist also creates pieces solely to sell to others (thus enacting and verifying the entrepreneurial identity). This can be contract work (for individuals, organizations, or institutions) or art that has commercial appeal (Griff, 1960). The financially valuable art generates financial success for this artist. However, the artist does not derive artistic satisfaction from these creations.

This implies that the artist-entrepreneur must be ambidextrous in their ability to detach their activities and maintain two opposing, yet equally salient, identities. However, the artist-entrepreneur that detaches their artist identity from their entrepreneur identity will never be associated with the work they gain artistic success from, but only with the work they sell for financial success. The consequence is that artist-entrepreneurs maintain two salient, yet detached, identities connected to the two separate activities in which they engage, thus reaching limited development as an artist or an entrepreneur (Burke, 2004; Cast, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In this sense, the artist's work never secures full artistic value (because the artist pursues and sells work that they feel less artistic satisfaction from), nor does it secure full financial value (because the artist still creates work that they gain artistic satisfaction from, but there is no market for).

#### **Fusion**

A lack of congruity between the differing identities (i.e., entrepreneur identity and artist identity), forms a state of tension that individuals look to resolve by altering the conflicting meanings and searching for alternate contexts that will allow them to fuse two identities (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). In doing so, the artist searches for market

opportunities for which their artistic work fits. The artist can capitalize on these market opportunities (Caves, 2000; Griff, 1960) to concurrently generate artistic and financial success. The artist-entrepreneur begins to recognize how the two identities can coalesce.

Creating art that simultaneously generates artistic and financial success verifies the emergent identity of the artist-entrepreneur. The artist creates artistic success through the work they create, but also gains credibility as an entrepreneur by exploiting a market opportunity specific to their work and subsequently generating financial success as well. However, that market opportunity for the artist's work is restrictive (Griff, 1960)—it may be small or temporary. As a consequence, the tension that the individual experiences is at least partially fuelled by differing meanings, requiring the identities to negotiate when financial success supports (and when it corrupts) artistic success (Burke, 2006). Thus, similar to the identity conflict occurring in detachment, in this instance, the artist-entrepreneur still creates art solely for artistic success, and other art for financial success. The difference lies in the artist-entrepreneur's additional creation of art that fuses both artist and entrepreneur identities, creating artistic and financial success simultaneously. Artist-entrepreneurs that fuse their artist and entrepreneur identities gain market recognition not from the art they create for artistic success, but rather the art they sell for financial success.

**THEORY**

**Integration**

The final stage in the identity reconciliation process entails verification of the artist-entrepreneur identity and full integration of meanings. This verification began in fusion, where individuals occasionally searched for opportunities to create pieces of art that enable them to achieve both financial and artistic success. Over time, these opportunities created a context in which the fused identity is repeatedly verified (Burke & Stets, 1999; Cast, 2003). As their identity is verified and meanings are accepted, the new identity—identity of artist-entrepreneur—is stabilized (Mcfarland & Pals, 2005). The conflict between the two identities is removed as the artist-entrepreneur's identity becomes legitimized by society (Griff, 1960) and the artist engages in work that has potential to be sold to the market but generates artistic value as well.

**Discussion**

Using existing literature on artist-entrepreneurs and identity theory, we examine how artist-entrepreneurs might reconcile two competing identities of artist and entrepreneur. The framework identifies a process of identity reconciliation in which the artist-entrepreneur moves from detachment of identities, to fusion, to integration. In the first stage of the process—detachment—the artist-entrepreneur keeps their artist and entrepreneur identities separate. This results in the artist separating the work that creates artistic success from that which generates financial success. In the second stage of the process—fusion—the artist-entrepreneur identifies ways to fuse the artist and entrepreneur identities. They still separate the work that generates artistic success from that which creates financial success, but also search for market opportunities to sell some of their artwork. In the final stage of the process—integration—the artist-entrepreneur fully integrates their artistic and entrepreneurial work to sell art that has both financial and artistic value without any separation between the two.

### **Theoretical Utility of this Research**

This framework suggests artist-entrepreneurs are a unique form of entrepreneur because they do not just search for market opportunities—they also search for artistic actualization. We suggest that identity plays a central role in guiding the work that the individual pursues—whether it be of artistic or financial value. To this end, our framework contributes to the existing entrepreneurship literature that suggests that the entrepreneur's identity is a reflection of who they are and what they do (Navis & Glynn, 2011). More specifically, we show that artist-entrepreneurs that detach their artist identities from their entrepreneur identities (who they are) will never be associated with the work they gain artistic success from, but only with the work they sell for financial success (what they do). The artist-entrepreneurs that fuse their artist and entrepreneur identities (who they are) are associated with some of the art they sell for financial support and success (what they do). The artist-entrepreneurs that integrate their artist and entrepreneur identities (who they are) are associated with work that gives them artistic satisfaction, and this work also creates financial success (what they do). As a consequence, our framework illustrates that additional theoretical and empirical research is needed to understand the process of identity reconciliation in this context.

### **Pedagogical Utility of this Research**

This framework suggests that putting artists in traditional business entrepreneurship courses may not be the most effective way to create and develop artist-entrepreneurs. This is because many of these courses focus on exploiting market opportunities to satisfy demand (Timmons, 1999). However, the product that artists create—art—is not made to exploit a market opportunity. Oftentimes, it is made to intrinsically satisfy the artist—translating thoughts, experiences, or emotions into something tangible (Griff, 1960). Thus, the artist struggles with identifying how to create art with market, rather than artistic, value.

Instead, a curriculum specific to artist-entrepreneurs is needed—one that addresses the potential conflicts between the artist and entrepreneur identities and that allows artist-entrepreneurs to reconcile the two identities and achieve sustainable financial and artistic success. Our framework illustrates that going through the identity reconciliation process allows artist-entrepreneurs to achieve a better understanding of how their identity shapes the work they create, and the process of detaching, fusing, and integrating their artist and entrepreneur identities. Students should be exposed to varying contexts in order to discover opportunities for new identity verification.

### **An Exercise for Discovery and Identity Verification**

Identity is discovered through self-reflection and learning about oneself (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As a consequence, in order for students to learn how to reconcile their different identities, they must engage in discovery and self-reflection first. Here, we offer a three stage project encompassing both in- and out-of-class activities that help students learn about their person identity and discover different role identities through interaction with others. The three stages encompass (1) identity discovery; (2) understanding alternative identity claims and how they may exist in tension with identity; and (3) reflection on the tension and integration of the two identities.



In the first stage, students are required to complete an identity chart. The chart allows them to discover their person and role identities by providing words to describe who they are and how others see them (person identity) and words describing what they do and how they define success (role identity). Based on this description they should identify as either an artist or a business person/entrepreneur.

In the second stage, students are required to interview a person (outside of the class) that identifies with the opposite category that they selected (e.g., if the student identifies more with the business person/entrepreneur category, they must select an artist to interview). The interview provides insight required to complete an identity chart for the interviewee, as well as learn about the opposing identity claims. The student conducts an interview with this person seeking discovery of their person identity (e.g., How would you describe who you are? How would others describe who you are?) and their role identity (e.g., How do you describe what you do? How do you define success?). The student also asks the interviewee a series of questions about the knowledge they've gained in their profession (What do you attribute your success to? What obstacles have you overcome? Tell me about a time or event that you believe had an impact on your career.). After the interview, the student completes an identity chart for the individual they interviewed.

In the third stage of the project, the student is required to integrate the information they collected about themselves and the interviewee, and reflect on the complete experience. The student compares and contrasts their identity chart from the interviewee's noting similarities and differences. The student also reflects on what they learned from the interviewee, and how they might utilize that information to further their own career, despite the fact that the student and the interviewee differ in the categories with which they identified (i.e., artist vs. business person/entrepreneur).

A classroom experience, such as the project described above, helps students to discover more about their own identity but also explore the identity of a person that is seemingly different than themselves. In doing so, students become aware of how identity plays into career choices and how success is defined. Further, it allows students, through comparing and contrasting with a dissimilar other, to learn from the insights of a person with an ostensibly different identity. As a point of departure, students are equipped to understand that a person's own career can be positively influenced by the integration, rather than conflict, of seemingly different identities.

Artist-entrepreneurs are a unique part of today's society—contributing to both economic and social value creation. However, artist-entrepreneurs also deal with a unique problem that other entrepreneurs do not likely experience—that of identity conflict. The suggested framework puts forth a process of identity reconciliation in which individuals reconcile the artist and entrepreneur identities by detaching, fusing, or integrating them. Once fully reconciled, the two identities form a whole identity of an artist-entrepreneur, with the purpose of creating art that generates both artistic and financial success simultaneously.

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## THEORY

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