

The Evolution of Founder Identity as an Authenticity Work Process

ABSTRACT

Research has shown founders' identities have a significant impact on their ventures. Yet, the process through which founder identity evolves and takes shape remains relatively unexplained. This paper explores the evolution of founder identity through a qualitative study of first-time sustainable entrepreneurs, and their stakeholders, over a three years period. Our analysis revealed the importance of personal identity, the aspect of the self that defines a person as a unique individual based largely on values and beliefs. We found that first-time founders sought to align their personal identity with their evolving founder identity over time. Based on these findings we theorize a process model of *founder authenticity work*, defined as *the activities founders engage in to feel and seem authentic while engaged in entrepreneurial action*. This study thus details the significance of personal identity as a guidepost for founder identity evolution, complementing extant founder identity studies focused on role and social identities. In addition, our analysis enriches the current conceptualization of authenticity in entrepreneurship research by linking it to validation of personal identity and highlighting its negotiated nature in the evolution of authentic founder identities.

The Evolution of Founder Identity as an Authenticity Work Process

“There can be no happiness if the things we believe in are different from the things we do.”

Freya Madeline Stark

Executive Summary

Recent insights have highlighted the significance of founder identity for shaping the entrepreneurial process. This emerging stream has uncovered many role and social identities that are associated with being a founder. However, we note that research has often implicitly assumed that: 1) first-time founders seek to align themselves with a set of known role or social identities that they deem desirable and 2) these identities define their overall founder identity. In other words, the assumption has been that a transition into entrepreneurship is accompanied by knowledge of “who I will be” or “who I want to be” as a founder. While this is true for some, recent work has revealed that first-time founders may not fully understand the variety of possible identities implicated in entrepreneurship beforehand. Founder identity, therefore, is like to evolve.

Our research seeks to better understand the process through which individuals come to develop their founder identities when starting up their ventures. Becoming an entrepreneur is fraught with unknowns and uncertainties that may challenge one’s sense of self. The inability to develop a coherent, positive sense of self as a founder can adversely affect motivation and well-being and, eventually, could contribute to the demise of a venture. Understanding how first-time entrepreneurs work out a coherent founder identity, while simultaneously navigating the uncertainties of founding a venture, is thus a critical, yet unaddressed, question.

Using qualitative data from 61 interviews carried out over three years with a set of sustainable entrepreneurs and their stakeholders, we developed a series of novel insights into how first-time, sustainable entrepreneurs’ founder identities evolved over time. The process

we traced delivers an important departure from previous studies; these founders were not motivated by the desire to align with the role or social identities reported in the literature. Rather, they were strongly motivated by the desire to align their work as a founder with their personal identity – i.e. to be true to the fundamental beliefs and values they hold across situations.

We reveal a process of founder authenticity work, defined as the activities founders engage in to feel and seem authentic while engaged in entrepreneurial action. By so doing we offer two insights into founder identity and authenticity. First, we highlight the foundational role of personal identity plays in first-time entrepreneurs' evolving founder identities. Personal identity can be conceived as a guidepost that sets the direction of travel for many new founders by shaping the policies and practices of early stage ventures as well as guiding initial relationships relevant to entrepreneurship. Our second insight is to offer a broader conceptualization of authenticity. Authenticity work highlights that founder identity should not be viewed as simply taking on a founder role, but as an ongoing, reflexive project. We offer a broader conceptualization of authenticity explaining its internally facing, personal function. Performing activities that reflect the true self and associated values, evokes feelings of eudaimonia; a well-being quality of authenticity. Our analysis of the authenticity work performed also reveals the negotiated nature of authenticity as we observed how audiences became increasingly important to the process of working at one's authentic founder identity. As such, our study empirically shows interconnection between authenticity as consistency (to a personal identity) and authenticity as conformity (to other's expectations about founders and their businesses). Achieving a sense of authenticity as a founder requires time and effort; the outcome of which has important practical implications for the well-being of entrepreneurs and their ventures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship scholars have recently focused on the concept of founder identity as comprised of the multiple identities that are “salient to a founder in her or his day-to-day work” (Powell and Baker, 2014, p. 1409). Founder identity has been linked to the emergence of entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2009), the types of opportunities entrepreneurs pursue (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Wry and York, 2017, 2019; Mathias and Williams, 2017), the roles they take on (Mathias and Williams, 2018) and the reevaluation of their opportunities in response to the emergence of new market categories (Conger et al., 2018).

Despite the significance of founder identity highlighted by these studies, extant work has told us little about how founders’ identities evolve (Crosina, 2018; Powell and Baker, 2017). Instead, we have seen research deliver a growing number of role and social identities (e.g. Cardon et al.’s (2009) inventor, developer and founder role identities and Fauchart and Gruber’s (2011) Darwinian, communitarian and missionary social identities) associated with founders. Correspondingly, when individuals transition into entrepreneurship, founder identity scholars often implicitly assume that new founders seek to align themselves with known role or social identities that they deem desirable and these will define their overall founder identity. Recent work, however, challenges this assumption, revealing that first-time founders are unlikely to fully understand the variety of possible identities implicated in entrepreneurship beforehand (Mathias and Williams, 2018). Instead, first-time founders must simultaneously “develop their work identities” while “drawing the contours of their organizations” (Crosina, 2018, p. 101). Yet, we know very little about how this process unfolds (see Conger et al., 2018; Demetry, 2017 for exceptions).

Becoming an entrepreneur is a major role transition (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010) fraught with unknowns and uncertainties that may threaten the sense of self (Breakwell, 1983). If left

unresolved, the inability to develop a coherent, positive sense of founder identity can adversely affect motivation and well-being (Burke, 1991; Petriglieri, 2011; Thoits, 2003) and for first-time founders, can contribute to the demise of their ventures (Demetry, 2017). Understanding how first-time entrepreneurs work out a coherent founder identity, while simultaneously navigating the uncertainties of founding a venture, is thus a critical, yet unaddressed, question.

To develop theory on this process, we turned to the sustainable entrepreneurship setting. In sustainable entrepreneurship (see Muñoz and Dimov, 2015), identity dynamics can be particularly transparent and readily observable (York et al., 2016). Sustainable entrepreneurs must reconcile social and environmental value creation with profit generation (e.g., Dean and McMullen, 2007; Mars and Lounsbury, 2009; York and Venkataraman, 2010). As a result, these founders often experience tensions and external feedback that can trigger identity reflection (Conger et al., 2018), making them ideal candidates for studying founder identity evolution. Our study therefore seeks to address the question: *How do founder identities evolve for first-time sustainable entrepreneurs?* To address this question, we carried out 61 interviews as part of a longitudinal qualitative study of first-time founders engaged in creating sustainable entrepreneurship ventures.

Following our participants over three years, we observed how their founder identities evolved through a process we label *founder authenticity work*¹, defined as *the activities founders engage in to feel and seem authentic while engaged in entrepreneurial action*. These founders were not motivated by the desire to align with the role or social identities reported in the literature. Rather, we found that they were strongly motivated by the desire to align their work as a founder with their personal identity – the meanings that define a unique individual based on the fundamental beliefs and values they hold across situations (Hitlin, 2003; Burke

¹ Peterson (2005) introduced the idea of authenticity work to refer to *efforts aimed at appearing* authentic, and suggested various types, including “authenticity to constructed self,” or “remaining true to the presentation of self one claims” (p. 1089). We prefer to bound our term by prefacing it with “founder” to reflect the context from which it emerged.

and Stets, 2009). Thus, in our context, personal identity laid the foundation for evolving founder identities. The ensuing process yielded the realization of a founder identity that not only felt authentic to their personal identity, but was seen as authentic by others.

Our findings and resultant model offer two contributions to the founder identity literature. First, our close empirical scrutiny of the founding process reveals the importance of considering personal identities in entrepreneurship. Personal identity represents one of the three bases of identity alongside role and social identity (Burke and Stets, 2009) but has been largely ignored by founder identity scholars. In our data, we were struck by our participants' rejection of the "entrepreneur" label as well as the degree of uncertainty they experienced in relation to how they viewed their founder identity. Instead, we found their desire to validate their personal identity guided our participants through the early stages of venturing. As such, we argue that personal identity plays a foundational role in sustainable entrepreneurs' founder identity evolution. Personal identity, therefore, can be conceived as a guidepost that sets the direction of travel for many new founders by shaping the policies and practices of early stage ventures and guiding initial relationships relevant to entrepreneurship which, in turn, shape founder identity. We elaborate on Wry & York's (2019) assertion that, particularly in the early stages of the entrepreneurial process, personal identity might hold considerable explanatory power in understanding founder identities and their behavioural implications such as how they enact their entrepreneurial opportunities. In sum, our findings help inform an emerging debate about the significance of personal identity vis-à-vis the significance of role and social identities for entrepreneurship (see Pan et al., 2019; Wry and York 2019).

Second, through our exploration of the role of personal identity in the venturing process, we expand on the importance of authenticity for entrepreneurship scholars. Feelings of authenticity are an outcome of successfully enacting one's personal identity (Burke and Stets, 2009; Stets and Carter, 2011) and our study shows how the quest for authenticity influences

founder identity evolution. In doing so, we advance an understanding of authenticity that goes beyond it being an asset used to gain legitimacy for the venture (e.g. Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). Rather, our model highlights the significance of authenticity for founders and the important role it plays in guiding entrepreneurial action and shaping founder identity over time.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.

2.1 Foundations of Founder Identity Theory

Founder identity studies have primarily drawn upon two theoretical streams: 1) Identity Theory (IDT) (Stryker, 1980; Stryker and Burke, 2000), which views the self as based on a person's roles that hold specific expectations, and 2) Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) which views the self as based on identification with social groups in which group members think and act alike. Common to both theories is an overarching view of identity as "the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others, and locates one in a social space through relationships implied by the identity" (Hitlin, 2003, p. 120). In other words, self and society mutually shape and influence each other (Mead, 1934; Cerulo, 1997; Smith-Lovin, 2003; Thoits, 2003). In IDT, our roles help define who we are and provide guidance on how we are to behave (Thoits, 2003). For SIT such behavioral guidance is provided through group membership and comparison to "out" groups. Notwithstanding the significance of these theories, we identified a number of theoretical tensions that emerge when considering the context of first-time founder identity evolution.

2.1.1 Founder identity as known. First, in the extant literature, there is a common underlying assumption that individuals engage in entrepreneurship to align with a *known* role or social identity. New founders are assumed to have an understanding of what entrepreneurs do (i.e. their role) and aspire to take on that corresponding role identity (Cardon, et al., 2009; Hoang and Gimeno, 2010; Farmer et al., 2011). Indeed, variations in entrepreneurial motivations and behaviors are largely framed as manifestations of known, pre-existing roles

(cf. Cardon et al., 2009; Wry and York, 2017; Zuzul and Tripsas, 2020) and/or social identities (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). Individuals are therefore seen as entering entrepreneurship as a way of aligning their work (“doing”) with a particular desired role or social identity (“being”) (Farmer et al., 2011; Powell and Baker, 2014).

Jain and colleagues (2009 p. 931) question these approaches, suggesting founder identity requires “crafting”, an assertion very much in line with the identity work tradition. Identity is shaped by the work one does (Pratt et al., 2006) but given the uncertainties and challenges of entrepreneurship (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006), first-time founders cannot foresee how work they have yet to carry out (Crosina, 2018) will shape their founder identity. We therefore question the extent to which first-time founders have a clear idea of which role and/or social identities to adopt during and after the transition into entrepreneurship. Indeed, Demetry (2017) has shown that some individuals begin the journey towards creating their ventures without yet identifying themselves as entrepreneurs. Importantly, unlike our sustainable entrepreneurs, Demetry (2017) reports that her participants had already begun self-identifying as entrepreneurs by the time of formally founding a venture.

Because of the varied and uncertain roles individuals must perform as they engage in entrepreneurship, Mathias and Williams argue that first-time founders are unlikely to fully understand the variety of possible (role) identities implicated in entrepreneurial activity; rather, these “...are discovered and negotiated” (2018 p. 274). If roles, relationships and group memberships are indeed discovered and negotiated over time, this might explain why, within entrepreneurship, so many role identities (e.g. Cardon et al.’s (2009) inventor, developer or founder identities; Grimes’ (2018) scientific or visionary identities; and Zuzul and Tripsas’ (2020) discoverer or revolutionary identities) and social identities (Fauchart and Gruber’s (2011) Darwinian, communitarian and missionary identities) have been elucidated by extant

research. We note, however, this body of work says little about how these identities evolve during the process of starting a new venture.

2.1.2 Founder identities as a given. Second, even if these role and social identities were known beforehand, the existing literature is unclear about why (or why not) first-time founders might identify with these in the venturing process. In a rare study that combines both role and social identities, Powell and Baker (2014: 1427) observed how founders' social identities (e.g., "patriot," "environmentalist") drove them to select appropriate roles, causing role identities to be adopted over time. Yet, they do not offer an explanation as to why and how these particular social identities came to be salient in the founder in the first place. This lacuna in the literature suggests we may need alternatives to role and social identity theories to understand the evolution of a founder's identity. Guided by our initial empirical findings, we looked to the notion of personal identity to help us.

2.1.3 Personal identity as an alternative. Personal identity - a third but somewhat neglected base of identity relative to role and social identities - can be conceptualized as being at the "core" of the self, as the meanings that define a person as a unique individual across multiple situations (Burke and Stets, 2009). These meanings are derived from the history, experiences, orientations and behavioral intentions that make an individual unique (Hitlin, 2011). An individual's personal identity represents who they are and what they value across their roles and relationships (Stets and Biga, 2003). Hitlin (2003, 2011) explains that personal identity is anchored to one's constellation of values; values form the core of the self from which people then assemble and structure other important (role or social) identities. Relevant to our study, Stets and Biga (2003) consider "environmentalist" to be a personal identity which encourages the development of environmentally conscious practices across all facets of life. Values, therefore, cause us to possess a sense of a unified, trans-situational personal identity that operates as a "master" identity (Burke and Stets, 2009). Scholars have demonstrated how

individuals can feel uncomfortable and inauthentic when their actions are incongruent with their values and corresponding personal identities (Ibarra, 1999; Hitlin, 2011).

Because personal identities are tied to an individual rather than a particular role or social position (Stets and Burke, 1994), they are more likely to be activated across situations (Gecas, 2000); individuals "... don't 'put on' and 'take off' these characteristics as they might 'take on' and then 'exit' particular roles" (Burke and Stets, 2009, p. 125). At the same time, personal identities may infiltrate the meanings associated with role and social identities (Stets and Carter, 2011, p. 211) and influence choices by signaling "...which groups 'feel' right and which roles seem appropriate" (Hitlin, 2003, p. 124). Thus, it is often in ambiguous situations, such as creating a new venture for the first time, that value-based personal identities guide our behavioral choices (Hitlin, 2011). In our field work, we were initially struck by repeated instances of our participants seeking to remain "authentic" to the values underpinning their personal identity. This puzzle led us to examine authenticity in the entrepreneurship literature.

2.2. Authenticity and Entrepreneurship

Personal identity and authenticity are inextricably linked; authenticity is the outcome of personal identity verification (Burke and Stets, 2009). In line with identity (control) theory (Burke, 2006), Stets and Carter (2011) report that when an individual's perception of who they are in a situation (often based on feedback from others) does not match up with their personal identity (the set of meanings they attribute to themselves as a person), an identity discrepancy occurs. This elicits negative emotions which motivate a change in behavior to help achieve identity verification. This identity verification process is illustrated in Conger et al., (2018) who demonstrate how the process of B-Corp certification can trigger what they call "identity reflexivity" whereby one reflects on whether their identity is being verified. They go on to explain how verification (or lack thereof) can lead to: 1) the revaluation of opportunities and 2) concluding that joining a category serves as an opportunity to pursue authenticity and self-

verification. While extremely relevant to our study's findings, Conger and colleagues do not elaborate on the notion of authenticity which they describe as "the enactment of important values and identities" (p. 194) nor are they specific about the identity that is being verified.

While identities – social, role or personal – operate in a similar way with respect to the identity verification process outlined above, they are likely to differ in the outcomes of verification. The outcome of social identity verification is a sense of belongingness and a heightened sense of self-worth while role identity verification activates a sense of efficacy (Stets and Burke, 2000). In contrast, the outcome of personal identity verification is authenticity (Burke and Stets, 2009). Authenticity can be defined as "the unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis and Goldman, 2006, p. 294; Taylor, 1991). This definition aligns with the view of authenticity as *consistency* between internal values and external expression of those values (Lehman et al., 2019). Along these lines, Powell and Baker (2014, p. 1424) revealed how founders used "authenticating narratives" to show stakeholders that their business is run to reflect "who I really am."

Authenticity, however, can also be based on conformity with social norms and expectations. This authenticity as *conformity* view, is especially prevalent in research on organizations (Lehman et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship scholars have tended to align with this view, suggesting authenticity as a means of attracting kudos, legitimacy, or appreciation from audiences. For example, Fauchart and Gruber (2011, p. 944) refer to the authenticity of "communitarian" founders for whom authenticity is an "asset" derived from their "firsthand insights into the needs of fellow community members." These insights enable the design of products that are judged as "authentic" by others in the community (see also Powell and Baker, 2017). While these studies do not proceed to track this authenticity-audience dynamic, Powell and Baker (2014, p. 1430), suggest authenticity may be a "fundamental factor in the

development of salient identities” and call for future research on this “important topic” (see also Caza et al., 2018).

In sum, moving back-and-forth between our initial empirical insights and the extant literature suggests the need for: 1) a deeper examination of founder identity evolution over time and 2) a closer consideration of the inter-connected concepts of personal identity and authenticity in examining *how founder identity evolves for first-time sustainable entrepreneurs*.

3. METHODS AND DATA

In-depth longitudinal qualitative research is recommended for studying little understood processes like founder identity evolution (Crosina, 2018). Following a logic of discovery (van Maanen et al., 2007) for our exploratory case study (Yin, 2003), we gathered qualitative data over three years from sustainable entrepreneurs and their stakeholders. Over a three year period, we carried out 61 semi-structured interviews, amassing a total of 520 single-spaced pages of interview data, and gathered additional documents such as blog posts, media coverage, and websites (see table 1). Our longitudinal, qualitative approach enabled novel insights to emerge due to: 1) the process of gathering rich, contextualized data from the lived experiences of participants and 2) rigorous, systematic exploration of patterns in the participants’ accounts and behaviors to develop theory (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.1 Research Setting

Dacin and colleagues (2010) argue that prosocial contexts – such as sustainable entrepreneurship – are suitable for generating new insights into entrepreneurial processes. In such hybrid settings, founders face considerable uncertainty and complexity (Mars and Lounsbury, 2009; Muñoz and Dimov, 2015) stemming from the need to successfully integrate social and commercial aims (Wry and York, 2017) while reconciling multiple salient identities (York et al., 2016). Founders of hybrid ventures often experience identity tensions that can trigger identity-driven reflexivity (Conger et al., 2018). Therefore, we agree with Powell and

Baker (2017) that hybrid settings might be especially revealing in terms of how founder identities evolve, as the identity dynamics at play may be more transparent and readily observable. Aligned with Wry and York (2017), we believe personal identities may be rendered visible in such contexts, especially in the early stages of entrepreneurship. Given these insights, we argue that early stage sustainable entrepreneurship represents a fertile setting in which to explore the evolution of founder identity.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Sampling. We began our fieldwork with a purposive sample (Charmaz, 2006) of first-time founders of early stage sustainability-oriented ventures (launched between three and 18 months prior to the first interview)². We identified interviewees via an online directory of “green and ethical” business start-ups. We included businesses from a variety of industries to minimize peculiarities related to any industry-specific sustainability agendas. We designed the first round of interviews to explore how the interviewees accounted for their decisions to launch sustainable ventures. As our fieldwork progressed, we moved from the initial purposive sampling to theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with the aim of elaborating and refining “categories in [our] emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 96).

Towards the end of our first interviews, we asked “do you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?” as we thought this could give us insight into the label these founders preferred - e.g. ecoentrepreneur, social entrepreneur, ethical entrepreneurs, etc. However, the answers were firmly along the lines of “I am not an entrepreneur” (Matilda) and participants instead emphasized their decision to act to “make a difference” to an issue close to their hearts. These responses were surprising, as the existing literature suggested that founders would be expected to hold aspirations to take on an entrepreneurial identity (e.g. Hoang and Gimeno, 2010). In

² The upper age limit used by researchers for new ventures can be as much as 8 years (see McDougall, Covin, Robinson and Herron, 1994). Closer to our study, Fauchart and Gruber report the average age of their new ventures as 5 years (2011, p.943). See table 1 for the venture ages at the time of our first interview.

terms of sampling, this “direct[ed] us where to go” next (Charmaz, 2006, p.100). Rather than add more cases and gather more general data about starting-up as sustainable entrepreneurs, we wanted to explore, in greater depth and over time, if and how our participants were adjusting to “being an entrepreneur”. In other words, we evolved our research design in response to the emerging categories. Thus, our data collection benefited from having “start[ed] in the present and move[d] forward in real time using longitudinal studies of unfolding processes” (McMullen and Dimov, 2013, p.1505).

Our theoretical sampling further evolved during the second round of interviews when we came to recognize the growing importance of others in our founders’ accounts. As a result, we decided to interview a subset of their stakeholders which enabled us to develop and verify insights from the main participants. Finally, because we wanted to continue to observe the process of founder identity evolution, we conducted a final round of interviews a year after the second round.

When conducting the third round of interviews, we determined that we had reached theoretical “saturation” (Charmaz, 2006). This does not mean that the participants’ identities were now fixed, but rather that we were not hearing details that generated new insights. As founders who had now been in business for up to nearly four years, their accounts were starting to become more retrospective than contemporary and at times repetitive. While we recognize that an individual’s identity is an ongoing project (Brown, 2015), we concluded that the window of data collection about *early stage* founder identity evolution was drawing to a close.

3.2.2 Interviews and data. We conducted 61 interviews over three years, including three rounds of founder interviews and interviews with stakeholders. Each founder interview lasted between 45-90 minutes and stakeholder interviews lasted between 20-60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. In total, we analyzed over 520 pages of single-spaced transcriptions. On average, each founder interview transcript was

12 single-spaced pages and each stakeholder interview transcript was six single-spaced pages. The founder interviews followed semi-structured and evolving protocols in line with theoretical sampling principles. Each interview protocol is available from the first author upon request.

By interviewing our participants multiple times over three years, we were able to capture real time data and diminish retrospective bias. It is important to note that when “researchers are interested in capturing individuals’ lived experiences, informant bias and subjectivity are not problems to be addressed, but rather the essential nature of what the researchers are studying” (Graebner et al., 2012, p.281). Our approach also provided us with opportunities to perform “member checks” (see Nag et al. 2007) during the analysis to ensure that our emerging findings were consistent with the participants’ experiences.

Finally, we gathered supporting documentation (e.g., blogs, media coverage, etc.) to triangulate accounts, while continuing to leverage our interviews for insights into founder and stakeholder perceptions of, and reactions to, these accounts. Table 1 offers a summary of the participants and all data collected.

----insert Table 1 about here ----

3.3 Data Analysis

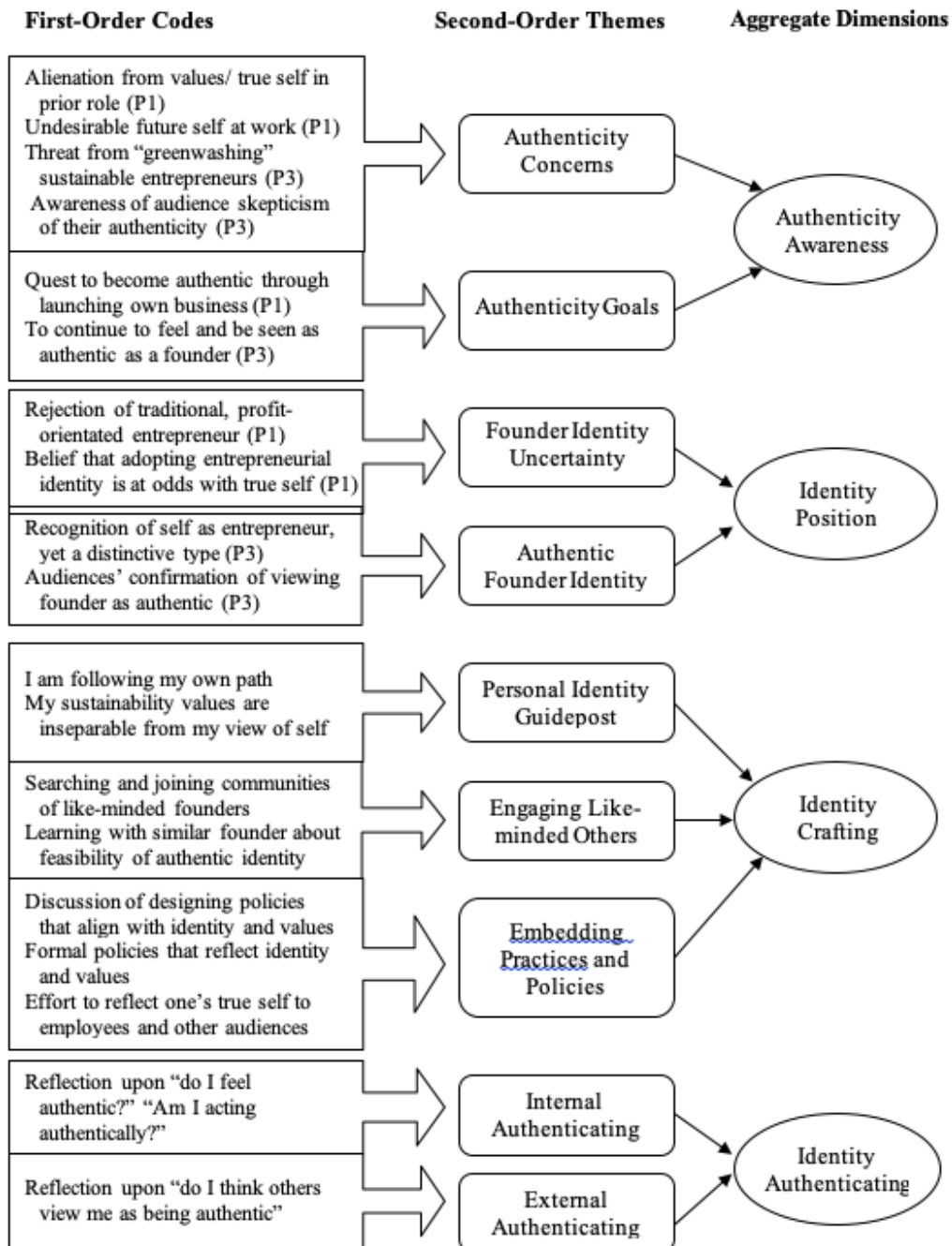
We carried out the formal data analysis by systematically following a series of steps to bring clarity and rigor (Gioia et al., 2013) to our emergent theorizing. Throughout the process we used QSR NVivo software for data storage and to facilitate data categorization.

Step 1. To remain close to the participants’ own words (e.g. “following own path” as articulated by Annie), the first author engaged in an iterative process of reading and categorizing the interview transcripts into first-order codes. Armed with the initial codes, the first and second author discussed and debated them. The second author expressed some doubts over meanings and overlaps, which led to a joint reworking of the first-order codes. For example, we consolidated early codes such as “identity constraints due to the nature of a

previous role” and “identity expression limited by necessary business practices or the industry/work setting” into a final code: “alienation from values/true self in prior role.”

Following further discussions, we finalized the first-order codes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Data Structure



Step 2. In moving from first-order codes to second-order themes, our aim was to begin to piece together “what’s going on here theoretically” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20). Van Maanen

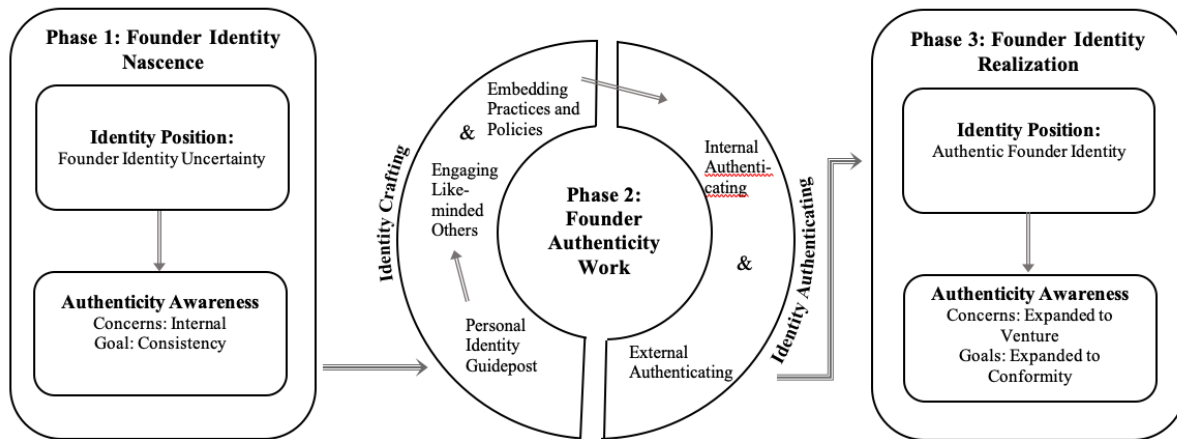
et al. (2007) stress the importance of returning to the literature to obtain additional analytical insights at this stage. Connecting our data to concepts in the extant literature (Gioia et al., 2013) enabled us to consolidate our first-order codes into nine second-order themes. Some codes were straightforward to cluster together at this stage (e.g., “authenticity concerns” and “authenticity goals”) while other themes took longer to finalize. For example, we initially clustered codes about others’ acceptance of their authentic founder identities and how the founders assessed their founder identities against those of other, like-minded founders, together into a second-order theme, “relational validation of identity.” Later on, following our refreshed understanding of the data and the literature, we realized that the latter was part of a new cluster, “engaging like-minded others,” and the former was a separate cluster, “external authenticating.”

Step 3. Next, we distilled our second-order themes into aggregate dimensions. At this stage, we paid close attention to how our themes fed into answering our research question. After much reflection, we finalized four aggregate dimensions: Authenticity Awareness, Identity Position, Identity Crafting and Identity Authenticating. We present our final data structure in Figure 1.

Step 4. In the final stage, we worked from our data structure to develop a process representation (Langley et al., 2013) of the themes, aggregate dimensions, and temporal dimension of our findings. Carefully considering our in-depth knowledge of the founders’ journeys, we used a temporal bracketing strategy (Langley, 1999), to identify three phases that represent the overall authentic founder identity evolution process explained below. Each phase is linked to the aggregate dimensions from our model (Figure 2 below): Phase 1 includes the aspects of Authenticity Awareness and Identity Position that correspond to *Founder Identity Nascence*; Phase 2 includes Identity Crafting and Identity Authenticating as part of *Founder*

Authenticity Work; and Phase 3 includes the Identity Position and Authenticity Awareness that correspond to the later stage *Founder Identity Realization*.

Figure 2: The Authentic Founder Identity Evolution Process



4. FINDINGS

In this section, we introduce and explain our findings in line with our model which charts the founder identity evolution process as experienced by our participants (see Figure 2). Phase 1 – Founder Identity Nascence – is characterized not only by uncertainty about founder identities but also by a clear drive to achieve a true-to-self identity in their work. As the founders engage in requisite entrepreneurial activities they enter a cycle of Founder Authenticity Work in Phase 2. In the absence of a known founder identity, first-time founders draw on their personal identities as the foundational base for their founder identity. This base serves as a guidepost through identity crafting activities such as engaging like-minded others and designing practices and policies to reflect their personal identities. Identity crafting is accompanied by two reflexive practices; internal authenticating (as a founder, do I feel authentic?) and external authenticating (as a founder, do others view me as authentic?). Taken together the elements of Phase 2’s founder authentic work shapes the participants’ founder identities such that they accommodate personal identities as well as an emerging recognition of being an entrepreneur. The move to Phase 3 – Founder Identity Realization - occurs as the participants have now

developed their authentic founder identities. However, in this Phase authenticity concerns expand outwards and new authenticity goals emerge from having built their ventures to mirror their authentic founder identities.

Each phase below begins with a short illustrative vignette about one of our founders – Annie – and her experiences at each phase. We further support our findings by including additional evidence in Tables 2, 3 and 4. All participants have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

4.1 Phase 1: Founder Identity Nascence

The initial phase in our model is characterized by a degree of *uncertainty* experienced by our participants about their founder identity yet also a high degree of *authenticity awareness* about their desire to be authentic to their values. The vignette below illustrates how Annie’s initial authenticity concerns stemmed from a lack of alignment between her previous career and her values. While founding a business was the chosen route to solve this, Annie rejected the idea of being an entrepreneur.

Founder Identity Nascence: Annie

Prior to launching her business, Annie’s “*dream job*” at an environmental charity had not lived up to her “*romantic idea of what it’d be like*” as she felt she wasn’t doing enough to actively solve environmental issues. Annie commented “[*My husband and I*] talked about how we could take those values that we hold in our lives and translate them into a business...*being true to yourself but so you contribute something positive as well.*”

When we asked Annie to elaborate on her motivations she replied: “*So it was never about ‘we want to be business owners, we want to be entrepreneurs’. No, it was more about we want to do things our own way and the only way you can do that is to do it on your own.*”. As our conversation about this continued she told us “*I have never introduced myself to anyone [as] an entrepreneur*”, we probed for confirmation by asking “so you don’t consider yourself to be an entrepreneur?” Annie replied: “*No I don’t think I do.*”

4.1.1 Identity Position: Founder Identity Uncertainty. In our first interviews our participants did not appear to identify with being an entrepreneur. For example, Grace told us: “Am I an entrepreneur? No!” Matilda, the founder of a zero packaging store told us: “It’s an issue I care about and I wanted to find a way of doing it, but I am not an entrepreneur...The whole entrepreneur thing is a bit loaded...[it] sounds sort of arrogant.”

Initially, the participants were highly skeptical about incorporating “entrepreneur” into their identity. Leo, the founder of a fair-trade, ethical jewelry brand told us: “Talking about yourself as an entrepreneur, it’s pretty much like, you know, referring to yourself as a superstar or something.” Scholars have suggested that those transitioning into entrepreneurship already possess entrepreneurial role identities (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010) or visions of possible selves as an entrepreneur (Farmer et al., 2011) and have revealed a diverse array of existing identities that draw people into entrepreneurship (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; York et al., 2016). In the aftermath of founding their businesses, our participants did not relate to any heroic “entrepreneur” identity (for critique of this metaphor see Clarke and Holt, 2017); they were experiencing deep uncertainty about how compatible being a founder was going to be with their values and corresponding personal identity.

4.1.2 Authenticity Awareness. In the absence of a clear entrepreneur identity, the founders drew upon the constellations of personal values and beliefs that they attributed to their “true self.” Our participants displayed considerable *authenticity awareness* that is, “possessing, and *being motivated to increase*, one’s knowledge of and trust in one’s motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions. It includes, for example, understanding one’s...*goals and aspirations...*” (Kernis and Goldman, 2006, p.284, italics added). Building on this concept, our insights reveal two connected components of authenticity awareness at play in the first phase of our founders’ identity evolution: *authenticity concerns* and *authenticity goals*.

Authenticity Concerns: Internal. We heard how previous workplaces left our participants *concerned* about a sense of alienation from their values or “true selves.” Lucy, who had set up a branding consultancy specializing in sustainability focused businesses explained, “Previously I was just generating electronic waste. I couldn’t use greener alternatives because the policies of the company were not under my control...I got so frustrated.” This lack of alignment between their work roles and personal identities was a key trigger to seek

alternatives. Lucy told us, “I just thought, ‘I can’t make any progress, environmentally, being an electronic engineer.’” Similarly, in a blog, Herbie, who had worked for a large banking group, explained, “The longer I stayed in a world where the central objective was boosting share prices on stock markets with little corporate concern for people or the impact on the environment, the less desirable the outcome would be for me.”

This feeling of misalignment between prior work and their personal values precipitated authenticity concerns. In turn, to address these concerns, we saw our founders articulate clear goals directed towards experiencing what Weber and colleagues refer to as “the inner subjective experience of authenticity with personal values” (2008, p. 544).

Authenticity Goals: Consistency. Imogen, who co-founded an environmental cleaning products company, told us “I was thinking more about what I’m on the planet to do... in the past, it’s been a bit more clinical. It’s been about hitting targets, or develop this product, or make more money out of that. I mean, it’s never been something I’ve been passionate about.” Likewise, founder of an eco-packaging business Grace recounted a reflection that took place while on vacation: “I was thinking, ‘You know, work is really not going the way that I envisaged it,’ having one of those really sappy moments, and then I thought, ‘Oh my god! I really have to do something; it’s now or never.’” Being aware of potential inauthenticity in work is not uncommon (see Costas and Fleming, 2009) but our participants explained this as the catalyst for their entrepreneurial activity. Herbie commented on his departure from the corporate world, “I wanted to set out on my own to just focus on doing social good and doing things that I care about so I can keep my integrity, rather than having to do things that I have to do to keep my job.” Zane, founded his charity communications business: “to achieve an ethical [agenda]...environmental, social justice, equality...the things that float my boat.”

Our findings show how *personal identity* pertaining to an enduring constellation of values and beliefs (Hitlin, 2003; Burke and Stets, 2009) – relating to sustainability for our

participants – inherently drove the decision to launch a business. Rather than acting to live out an aspiration to become an entrepreneur, the goal was to take action to feel authentic to their personal identity; this was the heart of their early founder identity.

In sum, Phase 1, *founder identity nascence*, is characterized by two closely related features. First, a rejection of any stereotypical entrepreneur identity and uncertainty about their founder identity. Second, a desire to address authenticity concerns by aligning their work behaviors with their perceptions of their true selves. As such, entrepreneurship was not about enacting an “entrepreneurial” identity, it was a means to shape their work identity in alignment with their personal identity. The desire to verify their personal identity (Burke and Stets, 1999) and experience authenticity was paramount in these early stages. While entrepreneurship scholars have touched on the idea that founders may (to varying degrees) experience authenticity by aligning their internal values with their business (Conger et al., 2018; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009), we found little elaboration on this process. In the next phases in their founder identity evolution we track how our participants sought to achieve this alignment.

----insert Table 2 about here ----

4.2 Phase 2: Founder Authenticity Work

In Phase 2 we observed our participants’ “strivings for meaning, coherence, and significance” (Gecas, 2000, p. 101) throughout their work as founders. Collectively, we labeled these strivings as *founder authenticity work*, defined as *the activities founders engage in to feel and seem authentic while engaged in entrepreneurial action*. The founder authenticity work process that starts with 1) *identity crafting* to align personal identity with their emergent founder identity and moves to 2) *identity authenticating* based on evaluating “as a founder, do I feel authentic?” (internal authenticating) and “as a founder, do others see me as authentic?” (external authenticating).

Founder Authenticity Work: Annie

Annie's personal identity was the guidepost for her founder identity evolution. Thirty months into the business, she told us "*It's very, very personal. The whole reasoning behind setting up a business in the first place was that [expressing values], and I'd say it's just as important now.*"

Annie had forged her community by joining up online with other sustainable entrepreneurs which "*has an ongoing effect, like a buoying effect*" and that sharing "*ideas and good practices*" was a positive – and identity reinforcing – consequence of engaging like-minded others.

Annie's ethical policies and practices were designed into her business. The ethical policy stated: "*We actively choose to sell our web and hosting services to responsible and positive businesses and organizations only.*" Embedding her personal identity into the policies and practices of the business was integral to Annie's founder authenticity work.

Annie explained how her founder identity evolution was connected to her work: "*You are so busy and just getting on with it [starting a business], but from that what you are essentially doing is defining a purpose for yourself. So that [“doing”] has a knock-on effect on the way you feel about yourself, and what your identity will be [“becoming”].* Annie held herself to account by considering her purpose. Yet, others provided more critical feedback: "*...people thought we were being silly cutting out areas of a market with our ethical policy. But we decided that if we didn't do that, it wouldn't be the business that we wanted to run. Indeed, we have turned away very lucrative jobs because those clients would have contravened our ethical policy, but we haven't regretted it for one second.*" (Blog)

Annie viewed external others' bemusement of her authentic approach as evidence that her evolving founder identity was emulating her core values (i.e. personal identity); she had no regrets from undertaking the founder authenticity work.

4.2.1 Founder Authenticity Work: Identity Crafting. By our second interviews the participants had begun receiving external recognition (e.g. awards for best new business in a region) and others began referring to them as “entrepreneurs”. Eco-design founder Monty's alma mater, a prestigious arts school, asked him to talk to students about being an entrepreneur and some prestigious start-up events hosted him as “a successful entrepreneur”. Matilda's mentor told us she was the “poster girl” at a social entrepreneurship start-up hub and her entrepreneurial activities had been receiving media attention. As the ‘entrepreneurial’ recognition increased, the founders worked to protect and maintain their sense of authenticity. In the ensuing *identity crafting* process, we find three components at play: *personal identity guidepost*, *engaging like-minded others* and *embedding practices and policies*.

Identity Crafting: Personal Identity Guidepost. Tamsin, the founder of an electric moped business told us her business was an extension of herself: “It would be very difficult to detach [my business] from who I am...for me I feel this has a weighted groove, I want to stick

at this because I believe in it so strongly, I've got spun into it and I'm excited about the future.” Matilda attributed the existence of her business to her passion to reflect her environmentalist personal identity as a “greenie” who “cares about the issues.” The participants were now fully enacting their personal identities as founders rather than “just sitting there” (Teddy, green transportation entrepreneur). These examples illustrate how participants’ environmental and social values were guiding their decision-making, behaviors, and the evaluation of events (Gecas, 2000) in relation to entrepreneurship. Indeed, for these new sustainable entrepreneurs, both “doing” (i.e., entrepreneurial activity) and “becoming” (i.e., developing a founder identity) were unfolding concurrently (Crosina, 2018) but the guidepost in this uncertain context was their personal identities (“being”).

Identity Crafting: Engaging Like-minded Others. With their personal identity guidepost in their minds, the participants’ identity crafting efforts next extended outward as they engaged with others. We heard how participants sought like-minded business founders by joining online forums or attending local networking events. Zane told us, “the good thing about small business, so the kind of people like me...they are all entrepreneurial. I mean, enough to set up their own networks as well. So, we all talk to each other about who you must go and see and that’s a good thing...[The] best way that I found talking about business development is to get together for a drink and share our experiences.” Lucy had become very active on social media and used various forums to make connections, which helped her make sense of entrepreneurial role. “There’s a community website... it strengthens the whole market as you give each other advice and some tips about how to be a values-led business.” Lucy perceived there to be great benefit from building friendships with businesses that might have been framed as “the competition” as this helped her understand how to “do” sustainable entrepreneurship.

Seeking out and bonding with supportive communities played an important part in how the founders’ identities evolved from their personal identities; this aligns closely with the

concept of *commitment*. Burke and Reitzes (1991 p. 248) describe commitment as “one of the ways in which individuals infuse roles and social structure with self-meanings and motives.” By engaging like-minded others, participants learned from one another and gained insights into alternative ways of being an entrepreneur. While perhaps an unintended consequence of finding a community of similar businesses, this enabled them to envision founder identities that could, as Annie put it, “be both ethical and entrepreneurial.”

Identity Crafting: Embedding Practices and Policies. The third step in identity crafting was the implementation of informal practices to demonstrate authenticity to broader audiences. This step occurred in parallel to engaging like-minded others in an iterative manner as ideas and practices were shared and discussed with their supportive communities. For example, Grace told us how important it is to her to show that environmental principles are “integral to everything we do.” She shared how she had physically demonstrated to her skeptical warehouse manager how to reuse cardboard packaging and avoid the use of normally ubiquitous shrink-wrap. Employees noticed her commitment. One of Grace’s employees told us she hoped to absorb Grace’s passion and ethics by working for her.

Participants also described how reactions from clients provided opportunities to reinforce practices that conveyed authenticity. For example, Zane explained that green practices “is what we are about” in response to one of his clients who was bemused when Zane arrived on his bike. Tamsin explained how she was inspired to actively engage with the local community, something she believed her competitors never did. Attending community and school events to talk about environmental issues had given her company:

...a completely different environmental edge...we are actually going that one step further and getting in there, 8:30 a.m., rolled-up sleeves, focusing on the philosophy behind why the project is important to us, as opposed to just selling the product... that’s what gives it a weighted groove for me.

In addition to these informal practices, the participants embedded a sense of authenticity in their formal policies. Teddy was particularly keen to devise specific policies to reflect his values and their connection with the business:

In the training, we talk a lot about it [environmentalism] ...The welcome pack has a large section on the values of the company and the environmental side of things, which we go through in quite a lot of detail...Then it's an ongoing thing. So, it's the environmental initiatives...[for example] we introduced a more comprehensive recycling scheme.

Showing how his business was connected to his personal identity, Zane told us how he “wrote specific ethical aims into...the legal structure: Commitment to equal opportunities, commitment to the environment, commitment to openness and accountability” to demonstrate a “personal commitment to running my business in an ethical way.”

We found these examples demonstrated how practices and policies can be mutually reinforcing; policies were a way of formalizing authenticity-driven practices. For our participants, these practices and policies were less about persuading external audiences of their legitimacy (e.g. Zott and Huy, 2007) - Zane told us that most of his clients “interestingly enough they have never given a toss about it! [reading his policies]” - and more about effort to verify their personal identities to assure themselves that they were on the way to achieving their goal of being authentic (e.g. Burke and Stets, 1999; Gecas, 2000).

Throughout the identity crafting process, the participants used their personal identities (i.e. “being”) as the foundation from which they developed their entrepreneurial actions and evolving founder identities. As they engaged in more early stage entrepreneurial behaviors (i.e. “doing”) with their personal identities serving as a guidepost, their “being” and “doing” comprised the two indivisible elements of “becoming”. By sharing ideas and practices with like-minded founders, they came to better understand how to be authentic to their personal identity as a founder. They next moved in to a reflexive process of evaluating their authenticity, that we label *identity authenticating*.

4.2.2 Founder Authenticity Work: Identity Authenticating. Our participants' aim here was to assess whether the founder identities they had been crafting *felt* authentic (*internal authenticating*) and whether relevant stakeholders *deemed* their founder identities to be authentic (*external authenticating*).

Identity Authenticating: Internal Authenticating. We found our participants reflecting on whether their personal identity was being verified by evaluating if “as a founder, do I feel authentic?” Herbie told us:

I mean one thing that came up when I left the corporate world was that everyone thought I was a bit strange. So especially people I knew best, so “why are you giving this up?” “Isn't Herbie behaving a bit weird?”... about a year or so ago, someone emailed me who had said precisely that and said “I know exactly why you did it!” [so] you are not play acting, and I don't think you set yourself up for a fall, I just think it is so important to be yourself.

Similar to Herbie, most participants were deeply reflective about who they were becoming as is evident in Zane's reflections:

They always say it in a jokey way. My whole business, my whole shtick, is based on not being capitalist, right? And they call me, “You are a right little capitalist, aren't you?” because I employ people and I make a profit. But it does stick in my mind, because it is true. Of course it's true. I do make profits. It's my own company. If I wanted to wind it up or if it went up the swanny, it would be me that would be affected, you know? At the end of the day, it's my own profit and I'm the shareholder, which makes me a right little capitalist now [laughs].

Now more experienced, our participants appreciated that their personal identity could be enacted by engaging in entrepreneurial activity even though some behavioral norms might feel inauthentic. Finding a way to feel comfortable with being called a “right little capitalist” was key to achieving a sense of authenticity. Instead of changing who they were, they could rationalize their own way of “doing” entrepreneurship (i.e. the practices and policies they embedded in their businesses) as it enabled them to experience feelings of being true to themselves. In this stage, we found the participants *reflecting* on the three-way relationship between “being” (personal identity), “doing” (engaging with others and embedding their

practices and policies), and “becoming” (evolving founder identity) we observed during identity crafting.

Identity Authenticating: External Authenticating. Another key element of identity authenticating was externally-oriented. Tamsin told us how important it is that people understand “how much I believe in it”:

I've not only just experienced that side where people love the whole ethos of it, they know what they are buying into but I've also had customers that say, 'oh you know you are polluting because you're burning coal to power the bike' and we say 'no because you can use renewable [energy]... I want them see how much I believe in it.

Matilda disclosed that her friends and family joked about her passion for sourcing packaging-free food but she was pleased that others could see her business was “what I’m all about.” At the same time, being so invested in the business meant being vulnerable to others’ judgments; Matilda told us “It’s like being a musician: You put your album out there and wait for people to come back and say something. It must be awful if they all come back and say, ‘No, your music is shit.’” One founder, Teddy, told us “I admit that people will always say, ‘Well, what are you, green or a businessman?’ So, you know, it’s ‘Get lost. I’m both.’” In spite of this, when asked about how his closer stakeholders viewed the business he commented:

[we have been] trying to move the whole impression of green away from expensive, and away from political ideas, and away from shoddy, with which I believe it had been associated...The perception is that we've managed to achieve that by staying true to our own philosophy and values.

Overall, identity authenticating effort helped the founders determine both if they were achieving alignment between their personal identity and being a founder (as a founder, do I feel authentic?) and if others perceived them as authentic (as a founder, do others view me as authentic?). Similar to the concept of self-verification highlighted in IDT – the need for others to see them as they see themselves (Swann, 2012) – identity authenticating reveals the link between internal self-evaluation and reflecting on feedback. Feelings of authenticity are not just influenced by an internal sense of the self, but are influenced by external audiences in a

“dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions” (Ybema et al., 2009: 301). Indeed, audiences can be viewed as important “arbiters of authenticity” (Peterson, 2005, p. 1090). For our founders, achieving authenticity was thus both internally and externally determined.

In sum, Phase 2, *founder authenticity work*, helps explain the transition from *founder identity nascence* (Phase 1) to eventual *founder identity realization* (Phase 3). The founders entered Phase 2 as a consequence of their authenticity goals, yet found themselves working iteratively to craft their founder identity as they developed their venture. The *founder authenticity work* we observed in this phase – comprising *identity crafting* and *identity authenticating* – shows that as time advanced, our novice sustainable entrepreneurs had learned by doing (Bartel and Dutton, 2001) and were now accommodating meaningful aspects of the roles they were performing (Mathias and Williams, 2018) into their evolving founder identities.

-----Insert Table 3 about here -----

4.3 Phase 3: Founder Identity Realization

As a result of the authenticity work that took place in Phase 2, in Phase 3 we saw a shift in identity position to an *authentic founder identity*. While our founders had a much clearer sense of their founder identity now, we observed challenges from the external environmental start to emerge, with potential consequences for their identity. As a result, Phase 3 is also associated with expanded *authenticity awareness* vis-à-vis Phase 1.

Founder Identity Realization: Annie

Having been in business for four years, Annie told us: “*People do say that to us “you are social entrepreneurs”. I think it’s because they are thinking this is a completely new way of doing business... [we are doing] a bit more than just running a business.*” We asked if she considered herself to be an entrepreneur; “*Probably more so now because rather than just setting up a business and being very focused on “we’ve got to do it this particular way” ... I think the entrepreneurial side now is more about the web design side of things than the ethical side of things. Because the ethical side of things is natural.*” Compared to earlier in her journey, Annie had adopted a framing of herself as an entrepreneur which was very much aligned with her ethical values: “*yes we didn’t compromise.*”

Being entrepreneurial had become part of Annie’s work self and, beyond enabling her true self, it now also encompassed how she worked i.e. “*dynamic*” and “*new ways*” and “*developing.*” Annie also

elaborated; “*Along with the other ethical businesses in our community...everybody is working towards the same things, in terms of authenticity -that you are fulfilling yourself by doing what you want to do.*”

However, Annie wrote a blog about others hijacking sustainability: “*It is also true that not all of these businesses are as genuinely committed to being environmentally friendly as they’d have us believe...One person’s view of green or ethical is likely to be very different from the next person’s view, but just because some may be using these terms to name some questionable practices [i.e., greenwashing] doesn’t mean we all are.*”

Annie’s efforts had come to focus on “authenticity as conformity” (Lehman et al., 2019). Having established an authentic founder identity, Annie’s authenticity goals expanded to showing authenticity to a business peer group that shared her values.

4.3.1 Identity Position: Authentic Founder Identity. When we returned to our participants for final interviews, three to four years after founding their businesses, we observed an identity shift; the founders now understood themselves to be entrepreneurs. As Imogen put it: “I am an entrepreneur...I kind of never really saw myself with that label, but I suppose I am really...yep, we are entrepreneurs.” Henry explained:

I can call myself a green entrepreneur now and I have a lot more confidence in myself, whereas before when we were starting out, everything was very uncertain... when it came down to it neither of us had ever actually fully set up or run a business. And so it was quite an unknown world.

While such statements from a business founder might seem platitudinous, it was striking in our research because participants had previously rejected the entrepreneur label. The participants were now telling us about their founder identities in terms of how others saw them as well, i.e. for Annie and her husband as “social entrepreneurs”. Herbie told us “I think I am fairly well-known now as a social entrepreneur. I hope it is chiseled into my gravestone!”

Some of the founders’ stakeholders revealed how the founders were appreciated by others as authentic in terms of consistency to their values. For example, one of Annie’s clients said:

I can see that they are coming at it from a very personal perspective. Both of them, in their lifestyle and how they live, have a very strong sense of responsibility towards the planet and towards other people. So, it is more of a kind of moral obligation and they have built that into their ethos as business owners.

Some stakeholders were slower to accept the founder as being authentic as one of Teddy’s employees illustrates:

When I initially heard of [the transportation company], I really thought it was a business gimmick. The environmental side of it, I was a bit skeptical in that respect... [but after] being there for a couple of months I realized, "Hold on a moment. The policies in and around the office in respect of dealing with waste, electricity, heating, all that sort of thing...it's not a gimmick, it is very much part of their personal ethos. They are really serious about the environment."

Indeed, from observing Teddy's "doing" this employee acknowledged Teddy as an authentic sustainable entrepreneur. A key external stakeholder for Elsie's ethical suppliers directory business also confirmed Elsie as being authentic: "[The company] is holistically, 360 degrees ethical, if that makes sense. It runs through everything they do. They are very true to it. They actively live the ethics messages, which shows integrity and consistency."

Our data analysis reveals that following Phase 2 came wider acknowledgement of the founder as being authentic. The ability to enact a personal identity while performing the entrepreneurial role yielded an internally experienced sense of authenticity and personal identity verification (Burke and Stets, 2009), and over time, led to being perceived as authentic by others, highlighting the socially constructed nature of identity (Mead, 1934). But the process did not end there. Our final interviews revealed that as sustainable entrepreneurs "completed" their founder authenticity work they developed deeper understandings of what being authentic as a venture entailed. Consequently, we found there to be an expanded authenticity awareness at Phase 3.

4.3.2 Authenticity Awareness

We found that our participants' authenticity awareness expanded in Phase 3 to include authenticity concerns and goals relating to "authenticity as conformity" (Lehman et al., 2019). This meant that their venture will both feel and be deemed by others to be authentic to the values they had woven into their business during founder authenticity work.

Authenticity Concerns: Expanded to Venture. Over time we noted a shift in the nature of the founders' authenticity concerns. Leo described how a competitor's claims to sell conflict-free diamonds "doesn't stack up to much." Elsie lamented how increasing criticism of

“the whole greenwashing agenda... gets put on us genuine ethical businesses as well.” Teddy had a very similar comment: “... the sector’s got a lot of greenwash and people coming in who don’t really care, they’re just there to make some money because they see it as a gravy train and so as a result that puts pressure on.” Indeed, participants expressed general awareness that their carefully crafted founder identities, and businesses, might be threatened by those who were hijacking sustainable entrepreneurship for personal wealth generation.

At the end of the study period, our participants were concerned that these new entrants, “getting away with” (Leo) less than perfect sustainability values and practices, could have an impact upon how others perceived them and their businesses. However, this situation was also affecting some stakeholders’ perceptions:

Is it there as a private business? Is it there as part of a movement or social commitment?...I think the leader has to go out of their way to demonstrate and underpin what they are doing to clarify that...you have really got to continue to be very transparent in everything you do. (Anonymous Stakeholder)

Having crafted and authenticated their founder identities and having achieved resultant feelings of satisfaction, participants developed a new set of authenticity concerns due to the context surrounding their ventures and industries.

Authenticity Goals: Expanded to Conformity. As founders interacted with more diverse stakeholders, there was a need for continuing effort to maintain feelings of authenticity. A quote from Matilda epitomizes the fluid and relational nature of founder identities: “I have become aware of what I am capable of by doing it... [but] I am still not sure of how I am reflecting who I am in terms of what I am trying to achieve.” At Phase 3, in spite of having satisfied their own internal strivings for authenticity at work, we saw that new threats to one’s authenticity start to emerge as their authenticity concerns expanded. With growing concern with greenwashing and “hijacking” we saw a shift in the target of founders’ authenticity goals.

It became important to show their venture as an authentic type of sustainable venture as opposed to a “greenwashing” newcomer. Grace exemplified this response:³

The company is built around my personal approach and transparency, [people] need to know that ethics are central and they know that we are not just another company that is using the trend of green to generate sales... and I think that needs to come from them seeing, from every move I make, that it's integral to the business.

Some responses to newcomers were more hopeful of a collaborative approach, yet this did not always come to fruition. For example, Matilda told us that initially she was happy advising new zero waste stores but got fed up with doing it for free and sacrificing her own business goals. Similarly, when talking about facing new “copycat” businesses, Teddy expressed his disappointment about collaboration with new entrants:

We had high hopes for doing a kind of collaborative, green service provision, all the environmental cab companies coming together and working together, providing a much bigger sort of fleet. And basically, it's just there's so much tension in the market, not personal tension but just in terms of what we do... There are a few players in it who are complete [redacted], that doesn't help.

However, our data unearthed an interesting way of rationalizing these newcomers.

So hopefully we are proving that being green is commercially viable... it's having an effect on existing players. So there are copycat companies that have come in doing exactly what we're doing... Actually it's not a problem for us... we are very service-led as well, it's not just about being green we have to support that with “we have a really good product”...

Instead of trying to outperform competitors in terms of being authentic to his green credentials, Teddy turned to service quality and interestingly, he emphasized their commercial success and profits. Indeed, the response to potential authenticity threats appears to be to highlight the venture's ongoing effectiveness. Annie's response is similar as she describes “...the entrepreneurial side now is more about the web design side of things than the ethical side of things...that more dynamic part is now in the actual service we offer.”

³ We thank one of the reviewers who invited us to expand upon the question “How do entrepreneurs respond to these challenges?” While the purpose of the paper was not to examine this specifically, we did want to touch on a couple of the interesting responses as we believe it links to just how far their identities and ventures had come.

In sum, by Phase 3 our founders had realized authentic founder identities, but their notion of authenticity was extending beyond feeling and being seen as authentic. Our findings show that once founders become more established and gain greater contextual knowledge, authenticity became not only about consistency to one's personal identity, but also about the *venture*; authenticity concerns extend to being deemed an authentic (as an extension of the founder) commercially viable sustainable business.

----- Insert Table 4 about here -----

5. DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore how founder identities evolve (Mathias and Williams, 2018; Powell and Baker, 2017) in new venture settings. We add to recent evidence (Demetry, 2017) suggesting that there can be different paths to founder identity evolution and that the journey can be circuitous. Our longitudinal study of early stage sustainable entrepreneurs highlights the significance of personal identity in explaining their founder identity evolution. We inductively developed a process model of the three distinct phases of founder identity evolution we observed. Our findings and resulting model reflects the interactions over time between “being” (drawing on existing self-knowledge through personal identity), “doing” (establishing an entrepreneurial venture, interacting with like-minded others, engaging in founder authenticity work) and “becoming” (realizing an individualized authentic founder identity). This model offers two central theoretical contributions: 1) the introduction of personal identity for explaining founder identity evolution and 2) an extended conceptualization of authenticity for entrepreneurship by highlighting founder authenticity work.

5.1 The Role of Personal Identity in Founder Identity Evolution

Relative to role and social identity, personal identity has been largely overlooked by both identity theorists (but see Burke and Stets, 2009) and entrepreneurship scholars (but see Wry and York, 2017; 2019). Despite calls to include personal identity in the identity “toolbox”,

a comprehensive understanding of its role in entrepreneurship is missing. Our first contribution stems from illuminating the role of personal identity in the development of founder identities for first-time founders. Our work highlights the importance of including personal identity as a complement to role and social identity. We support Wry and York's (2019) recommendation that scholars be cognizant of founders' prior exposure to entrepreneurship when researching founder identities, as this may be significant in terms of which theories and bases of identity are most appropriate. Our findings lead us to question the extent to which neophyte entrepreneurs might know enough about the various role or social identities depicted in the extant literature (Cardon et al., 2009; Farmer et al., 2011; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011) to readily adopt them.

We suspect that personal identity is particularly important for those with social and/ or environmental purposes and those new to entrepreneurship, as this group in particular may not have a clear understanding of relevant role or social identities within this context. Our focus on sustainable entrepreneurship is a boundary condition of our work. We would expect that, as founders gain experience and interact with broader stakeholders, they come to identify with certain role expectations and social groupings (such as those presented by Cardon et al., 2009 or Fauchart and Gruber, 2011, respectively). However, our findings suggest that personal identity can serve as a guidepost that sets the direction of travel for first-time founders as they are more likely to take on and identify with roles that are closely aligned with their personal identity because they feel more authentic in them.

Similarly, personal identity can act as a guide when forming initial relationships relevant to entrepreneurship. We saw our participants were drawn to individuals who shared their values and from whom they could learn about entrepreneurship. Over time, as individuals devote more time and attention to social interactions relevant to a particular role, this drives commitment, which in turn increases identity salience (Stryker, 1980; Stryker and Serpe, 1982;

Burke and Reitzes, 1991). Therefore while growing commitment explains increasing salience of a founder identity over time, our results suggest that personal identity can explain the origins of this commitment (Burke and Reitzes, 1991). We do not negate the importance of role and social identities in the entrepreneurial process, but rather, seek to show that for early stages of new venture creation, personal identity may also be a critical consideration.

Thoits and Virshup (1997) advocate that when analyzing identities, it is important to draw a distinction between the psychological state that is activated, that is, if the focus is on “me” or on “we”. In SIT, because personal identity and social identity are viewed as being mutually exclusive (Burke and Stets, 2009), when one begins to identify with a particular social grouping, the focus shifts from “me” to “we”, from the individual to the group. Therefore, over time and with increasing experience, we would expect founder identities to evolve in alignment with social identities (such as those explicated in the literature) to a greater extent. We began to see this happening with some of our founders as they began to describe themselves as “green” or “social” entrepreneurs in Phase 3. However, as a “master” identity (Burke and Stets, 2009), personal identities are trans-situational and can influence which groups and roles ‘feel’ right (Hitlin, 2003); the effects of personal identities are therefore likely to be enduring.

5.2 Authenticity and Founder Authenticity Work

We revealed that sustainable entrepreneurs’ efforts to be and be seen as authentic – founder authenticity work – plays an important role in explaining their founder identity evolution. The authenticity work we witnessed highlights that founder identity should be viewed not as something that is achieved by simply taking on a founder role, but as an ongoing project (Brown, 2015) that is worked at (Watson, 2007) and reflected upon over time. Two contributions emerge from our theorizing on founder authenticity work.

First, we offer a broader conceptualization of authenticity for entrepreneurship that accommodates its internally facing personal function as well as its external strategic business

function. Our conceptualization of authenticity goes beyond its function as a business “asset” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011) to its role in “the inner subjective experience of authenticity with personal values” (Weber et al., 2008, p. 544). We saw that the inability to enact their personal values at work drove our participants to entrepreneurship in the hope that they could enact these values in their new ventures. This finding illustrates how individuals experience discomfort when their behaviors are not aligned with their values and beliefs (Hmieleski, Cole, and Baron, 2012) which we found stems from not being able to verify one’s personal identity in their work (Burke, 1991; Burke and Stets, 2009). In the absence of verification, individuals may seek out situations that provide it (Burke, 2006); in our case our participants entered entrepreneurship to facilitate their personal identity verification and experience authenticity. When one is able to perform activities that reflect the true self and associated values, this evokes the eudaimonia quality of authenticity (Kernis and Goldman, 2006, see also Ryff, 2019 in the context of entrepreneurship). Recognizing this internally facing personal function of authenticity has important implications in relation to the well-being of entrepreneurs (Shepherd and Haynie, 2009; Wiklund et al., 2019).

Second, by explicating the founder authenticity work process, we expand current conceptualizations of authenticity by illuminating the negotiated and evolving nature of authenticity for founders. While the founder authenticity work we observed was initially guided by a desire to verify personal identity and feel authentic to the self, over time, founder authenticity work expanded to include efforts to be seen as authentic by others. In our study, the participants’ early interactions with other sustainable entrepreneurs, as well as broader stakeholders, helped them figure out role expectations⁴ as well as role or social identities they wanted to adopt, individualize, and possibly abandon.

⁴ This is in line with Hoang and Gimeno’s (2010) assertion that individuals’ evolving conceptions of role or social identities can be based on access to role sets and group members (e.g., founders, investors and mentors), and the nature of relationships with those members.

In professional settings, interactions with others often involve “granting” or validating identities (Lepisto et al., 2015). However, our study shows that in entrepreneurial settings, like-minded audiences may play a pivotal supportive role in helping founders understand, and then individualize, their founder identity. For our sustainable entrepreneurs, this process involved the self-verification practice of selective affiliation (Swann, 1983)—that is, choosing the “right people” (in our context, like-minded sustainable entrepreneurs) who would provide socioemotional support (Burke and Reitzes, 1991) and contribute to feeling “authentic”. This mirrors Caza et al., (2018) who showed that a sense of authenticity is shaped by individuals engaging with people who “got them”, fostering a safe space to try to be themselves. In our case, like-minded founders appeared to help one another understand how to best reflect their personal identities in their evolving, authentic founder identities. Such connections can be particularly helpful in reducing anxiety and other associated emotions when ready-made identities are not available for adoption (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

While some interactions and associated feedback might be identity verifying, supporting a founder’s own view of self, other feedback may be challenging. Over time, we started to see that exposure to wider audiences beyond like-minded others and the growth of “greenwashing” competitors had the potential to cause others to doubt the founders’ authenticity by questioning the authenticity of their ventures (e.g. is this a truly environmentally sustainable business?) This led to expanding authenticity awareness (at Phase 3) as the founders came to realize the importance of being authentic to their personal identity while also being seen as authentic by others. Further, their authenticity concerns started to not only include themselves as founders but also their ventures, such that they became increasingly concerned about their ventures needing to be seen as an extension of their authentic selves.

These two contributions extend recent work suggesting the importance of authenticity in entrepreneurial processes. For example, Conger et al. (2018) found that engaging in B Corp

certification challenged the identity assumptions held by some firm founders and subsequently led to changes in the goals firms pursued. Our model extends this finding by showing how verification from stakeholders (such as certification in Conger et al. 2018) can trigger a process of authenticity work through which founders evolve not only their goals, but their identity. Our focus on personal identity might help explain Conger et al.'s finding that seemingly similar entrepreneurs reacted in totally different ways to feedback; we suggest this may be due to the personal identity these founders held. As the process Conger et al. examined (certification) would occur during Phase 2 - identity authenticating - in our model, we offer a broader model suggesting the precursors and outcomes of their observations.

In sum, this study contributes to knowledge at the intersection of authenticity and founder identity by showing the negotiated nature of authenticity work. Our process model highlights how founder authenticity work starts by attempts to address “internal strivings” for authenticity and then expands to involve efforts to accommodate “external prescriptions” (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 301). Although scholars have tended to examine authenticity as two distinct constructs: 1) authenticity as consistency and 2) authenticity as conformity, (Lehman et al., 2019) our work shows the interplay of both in the evolution of authentic founder identities.

6. Future Research and Limitations

Our findings, from the context of sustainable entrepreneurship, suggest multiple avenues for future research. First, while we emphasized personal identity, there is much potential in further exploring the relationship between personal, role, and social identities over time. We encourage scholars to explore in more detail how founders start identifying themselves as members of a group of entrepreneurs who perform similar roles and share similar beliefs and values. Future work should investigate if and how a founder's personal identity (“me”) becomes a social identity (“we”) (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). There is potential for a

more integrated theory of founder identity evolution, showing how multiple, concurrent identities become “seamlessly intertwined” (Powell and Baker, 2014).

Second, in our setting, verifying oneself as authentic was largely about being true to environmental values. In other settings, authenticity may well be underpinned by different values which could have implications for the nature of authenticity work in different entrepreneurship settings. For example, authenticity in the creative industries may be more about artistic integrity (Grimes, 2018); in female entrepreneurship, gender authenticity may be most salient (Lewis, 2013); and in academic entrepreneurship, authenticity may relate to being true to scientific and academic traditions (Jain et al., 2009). Indeed, there is much scope for more theory-building around founder authenticity work and how authenticating one’s personal identity intersects with specific role or social identities. Further, values, and thus personal identity, may matter differently or to a different degree in different contexts, under different conditions, or over time⁵. Therefore, we would like to see researchers entering new contexts to consider how and when founders engage in authenticity work along their journeys.

Third, our participants all undertook similar patterns of behavior and reflection over time as their founder identities evolved. There were no counterfactual cases in our study that abandoned their effort to become authentic as a founder. Yet, there are likely tipping points when founders can no longer achieve feelings of authenticity in their venture such as when they face venture performance challenges. Our participants experienced similar, but minimal, growth in their ventures. Feelings of inauthenticity could likely be triggered by changes in size, the introduction of investors, or new board members. What are the consequences of such feelings? How do challenges stemming from a loss of authenticity have an impact on founders and their venture?

⁵ We thank our anonymous reviewers for this.

In extreme cases, feelings of inauthenticity could trigger exit from entrepreneurship. Alternatively, a new cycle of founder authenticity work may be triggered, or founders may focus on certain roles while disengaging from others (Mathias and Williams, 2018). Understanding the “upkeep” (Crosina, 2018) or maintenance of founder identities and authenticity (see also Cha et al., 2019) represents a promising avenue for future research. We believe there is value in identifying critical incidents or experiences related to external others (e.g., an opportunity to enter a new market or work with a new investor) that trigger identity dissonance and associated responses. Additional research is warranted to explore which audiences have the greatest influence on founder identity evolution.

Finally, future research might explore personal identity as a “moving baseline” (Hitlin, 2003; Markus and Wurf, 1987) and authenticity as socially constructed (Brown, 2015; Lewis, 2013). Our data show how founders can be vulnerable to audiences’ judgments (Navis and Glynn, 2011) and we recognize that these audiences are important “arbiters of authenticity” (Peterson, 2005, p. 1090). Future research could generate and strengthen insights into the diverse role played by arbiters of authenticity by drawing on perspectives of those who do not have a vested interest in the founder / venture. Might different audiences authenticate different loci of authenticity within the founder’s set of identities? By Phase 3, we saw our participants’ experience the threat of “greenwashing” posed by new entrants who were seen as potentially eroding the authentic founder identities our participants had established. Prior studies have shown how pioneering founders such as those behind early fair trade (Davies and Doherty, 2019) or in the field of microfinance ventures (e.g. Wry and Zhao, 2018) have been affected by “window dressing” competitors. This raises some interesting questions that emerge where our data end. Studies could explore how founders go on to serve as an authentic representative

for their venture, and what strategies and behaviours they develop beyond the early stages⁶. While beyond the scope of our study, others' "hijacking" a domain such as sustainable entrepreneurship might trigger a new cycle of authenticity work. We encourage exploration of such ongoing authenticity work and the related strategies founders might deploy.

7. Conclusion

Our study in the setting of sustainable entrepreneurship revealed the importance of personal identity and authenticity for the evolution of founder identities. Over three years, we saw first-time founders move from significant uncertainty surrounding their founder identities to realizing their own individualized authentic founder identity. The founder authenticity work underpinning this process reveals how sustainable entrepreneurs can achieve, at least for a while, a sense of authenticity at work that is crucial for their well-being and their ventures. In so doing, we contribute to the founder identity literature by highlighting the value of considering personal identity alongside the more popular role and social identities. We argue that personal identity can be viewed as a foundational base in founder identity evolution and as such, it serves as a guidepost for first-time entrepreneurs. Further, through our elaboration of the concept of founder authenticity work, we contribute by offering a broader conceptualization of authenticity than previously provided in our field.

⁶ We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this interesting future research question. This question raises links to work on optimal distinctive and identity such as that by Shepherd and Haynie (2009) and Navis and Glynn (2011).

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Table 1: Cases

Founder	Business Type	Age*	Case Interviews	Additional Data Sources
Annie	Green hosting, ethical web design	1 year	7	Founder's blog, brochures, environmental policy, ethical policy, website
Elsie	Online catalogue of ethical suppliers	9 months	5	Website, founder's blog, press coverage
Grace	Recycled gift packaging	1 year	5	Website, television appearance, founder's blog
Herbie	Social enterprise network and education organization	18 months	7	Website, press coverage, founder's blog
Imogen	Environmentally- friendly cleaning products	6 months	4	Brochure, website, press coverage
Leo	Bespoke jewelry, ethically sourced gemstones and metals	1 year	7	Website, press coverage, brochure
Lucy and Henry	Branding, digital media and web design	3 months	7	Brochure, client testimonials, website
Matilda	Retail store and consultant for refillable goods	9 months	7	Environmental impact report, press coverage, website
Monty	Design and manufacture of energy-saving products	18 months	2	Press coverage, website, archived pages
Tamsin	Electrically-assisted pedal bikes and mopeds	9 months	1	Website, press coverage
Teddy	Environmental transportation service	1 year	8	CSR report, training manual, press releases, press coverage, website
Zane	Communications specialist for ethical and charity sector	18 months	1	Book, press coverage, blog

* *At time of first interview*

Table 2: Phase 1 Exemplary Quotations

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations
Authenticity Awareness	Authenticity Concerns: Internal	<p>I went to Barcelona...to think about who, which other corporate I was going to go and work for. And I remember standing at the top of Parc Güell, overlooking Barcelona one morning and I remember just thinking, you know, I don't want to do this anymore. I know exactly what my life is going to look like over the next 5, 10, maybe 20 years. I know the kind of person I'm going to be when I'm 50 and everything about that. And I just thought, you know, we only do this once and I want to do something different. And that was probably, if there was an inspirational moment, it was just deciding to leave corporate life. (Herbie)</p> <p>I became a solicitor on the basis that I would then go into human rights law. But about 2 months into my training contract, my money started running out and I got offered this check for £5,000 and a job at the end of it, so I ended up qualifying as a solicitor in the City of London. [But] it <i>really</i> wasn't what I wanted to be doing. (Teddy)</p> <p>We were disillusioned with the concept of design as it was. For me personally, it was the idea that it was just making landfill. (Monty)</p>
	Authenticity Goals: Consistency	<p>My house back home flooded, I lost all my childhood memories and photos. I felt so shattered and I thought it is time that I do something about it. And Henry started to say, "This is what you can do environmentally." In due course, I started to look into what we could do more seriously, entrepreneurially. (Lucy)</p> <p>Is it going to make a difference in some social way? I was not interested in doing a business for money, purely for money, or some other material benefit. So, primarily I asked myself, "Is it something I will really enjoy and feel passionate about?" (Herbie)</p> <p>Through my business, I wanted to help people spend money where it can make a difference. (Elsie)</p>
Identity Position	Founder Identity Uncertainty	<p>I would never say "Hi, I'm an entrepreneur" [holding out hand with a grin]...I don't think I am an entrepreneur. (Matilda)</p> <p>I wouldn't describe myself as an entrepreneur. (Imogen)</p> <p>Whenever you hear people refer to themselves as entrepreneurs, it always sounds slightly overblown... I can't remember who the right-wing economist is who referred to the entrepreneurs as the hero of free market systems. I certainly don't think I'm that! (Leo)</p> <p>We didn't come from the idea of traditional entrepreneurs... we hadn't been to business school or anything like that. (Monty)</p>

Table 3: Phase 2 Exemplary Quotations

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations
Identity Crafting	Personal Identity Guidepost	<p>We are three people that have come together specifically to form this. There is no possibility of it being a like a corporate exercise to promote their CSR...This is about as genuine as it could possibly get; people getting together to try and do something special, that they care about. (Monty)</p> <p>[Co-founder] is an eco-warrior—not quite wearing the hemp shirt, but really aware, and she would make ethical choices with whatever she bought. We saw a chance for our business to be guided by that. (Imogen)</p> <p>I’m one of these people that’s all or nothing and when I start something... the money doesn’t come into it. It’s the buzz of creating something. And knowing that my long-term goal is to help communities. (Grace)</p>
	Engaging Like-minded Others	<p>We started an ethical business group in [town] just getting together with other businesses...and it was really good. From green-cleaners to eco-decorators, we were all in one room getting inspired.” (Elsie)</p> <p>There’s loads of people who informally feed into us. So, we’ve got contacts at [global environmental organization] and [UK sustainable transport organization], who are inspiring us. I mean we’re so small at the minute, that it’s just not like there’s any kind of official partnership, because I come from the NGO world and I have a lot of friends who are in that world, so I get their advice, too. (Matilda)</p>
	Embedding Practices and Policies	<p>Everything goes out in recycled boxes, it would be hypocritical to buy in nice, new post boxes to send out recycled packaging... Every letter that goes out of the office is on recycled paper. (Grace)</p> <p>It’s a case of finding the right supplier for me so I don’t just blindly work with whoever...I’m still trying to find organic milk in glass bottles, which is proving really hard. (Matilda)</p> <p>One policy I have is that I won’t work for corporates...[due to my] ethical principles. I’ve turned down charities work as well, two different charities...Like most small entrepreneurial companies, it’s all about the founder. So in a purely selfish way, I think to myself, “Actually, I don’t quite fancy doing any work for...that company”. As a general rule, I would not touch a corporate... I would just sell my soul. (Zane)</p>
Identity Authenticating	Internal Authenticating	<p>I am representing what I believe in, I am able to communicate around what I am interested in through that. It has been a gradual change. There was a lot of naivety about it all when we started up... but yeah we are entrepreneurial, we keep spotting opportunities. We keep our eyes open and we are always thinking “oh that would be an opportunity”. (Lucy)</p> <p>One of the drivers for starting up the business... was that the business could represent who we were... I’m not entirely sure why I am interested in sustainability! But it is something that I’ve cared about since I was in my teens. So if I can find a way of doing that [sustainability] and making a living, then that will motivate me. Why I’m specifically interested in sustainability? It is just something that I care about deep down. (Henry)</p>
	External Authenticating	<p>Loads of people say fantastic brilliant. you know, great blah, blah, blah, but then some people come and say I can’t believe you are selling so much plastic and make us feel like we’re bad people...in this world it does seem to be a very holier-than-thou attitude and that you know, there is an element of being berated for what you are not doing rather than applauded for what you are doing. So that’s quite..., you know, I choose to not be demoralized by that but I do spend time thinking about it. (Imogen)</p> <p>I think that I have created a responsible company. In other words, and I can say that, not just through our actions but through what we teach, coming back to the whole project stuff and how other people see what we are all about. (Tamsin)</p>

Table 4: Phase 3 Exemplary Quotations

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations
Identity Position	Authentic Founder Identity	<p>I think well how people perceive me as an entrepreneur and how it is are totally different... I had one guy on the phone and I was dressed like this with trainers on and a pair of old jeans, I'd been working in the warehouse, and he said "Grace, how do you cope with the fame?" [she'd been on TV] and I just couldn't help it and I was winding him up, "oh you know it is very difficult"! (Grace)</p> <p>It is also not just about stating what your values are but actually living them... Matilda makes sure what she does have a community impact and [that] just shows she is concerned... and I think it really, really works because Matilda does it in her very straight-forward and logical way without any big sort of worthy-ness about it. (Matilda's customer)</p> <p>I coached Elsie for 6 sessions... [so we talked] about staying true to your values, the vision that you have for your organization and not to be side-tracked from it. And I think that is very, very important to have that single-minded focus. The thing I admire about Elsie is her dedication, she is very focused and believes passionately in what she is doing and I think she works incredibly hard and so I admire her. (Elsie's coach)</p>
Authenticity Awareness	Authenticity Concerns: Expanded to Venture	<p>To me it seems as though everyone's kind of sidling up near us, so that they think that some of the glow and halo effect of what we've achieved will rub off on them. So of course we have to work hard to counter that, we feel like we're the top of the tree and we've worked hard to get there and now people are trying to climb up. (Imogen)</p> <p>Something like 5 or 6% of all consumer purchases are supposed to be, loosely-speaking, ethical across different market segments. One thing I can tell you is that doesn't apply to the jewelry business. There is only a very small handful of companies like us who offer genuine ethical policies in the UK. (Leo)</p>
	Authenticity Goals: Expanded to Conformity	<p>I always talk about our experiences. You know, people want to know why we started it. So, obviously [how I talk about the business] it comes back to our reasons for feeling that way in the first place and how that led to [the business]. (Tasmin)</p> <p>I think the challenge for Herbie is when he presents to potential funders, for all different bids, they have a problem... [they are] asking are you a charity or are you a private business, etc., because for them, the division exists, and I've tried to help him get that clarity in where he sits in this space. (Herbie's mentor)</p>