

Identity work of a researcher in entrepreneurial university backyard research

Kirsi Peura, Anna Elkina, Kaisu Paasio and Ulla Hytti

INTRODUCTION

As theories of entrepreneurship become more complex, the need to elicit meaningful qualitative data and experiment with methodology emerges (Johannisson, 2018; Steyaert, 2011; Steyaert & Dey, 2010). In particular, qualitative interpretive research approaches, which are grounded in how people understand and give meaning to themselves, have gained ground with the hope of generating new knowledge and understanding in entrepreneurship (Leitch et al., 2010; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007). The discussion of the role of the researcher is an inseparable part of interpretivist perspectives and needs to be an integral part of entrepreneurship researchers. To this end, we are a group of researchers who all work at the same university but hold diverse academic positions and research history within academia. Our interests intersect with the common goal of studying how individuals and groups in our own university experience entrepreneurship. Hence, we are all insider researchers (Hodkinson, 2005; Patton, 2002) conducting research in our own *backyard* (Zulfikar, 2014). Being so close to the researched, we are interested in understanding and analysing the particularities and ambiguities inherent in our academic positions and roles with our research participants.

Our starting point is that as insider academics, we are undeniably in a special relationship and interaction with our academic research participants. Consequently, we suggest that studying academic entrepreneurship is fruitful through an analysis of this interaction. Accordingly, in this methodological chapter, we focus on the identity work of ourselves as researchers (Cassell, 2005; Down et al., 2006; Norton & Early, 2011) in co-creating research material about entrepreneurship at our university. In particular, we focus on analysing the ways in which we engage in creating ourselves and the researched in our respective studies (Down et al., 2006). We discuss four different cases that are connected with our goal of enhancing the knowledge and understanding of the development of an entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 2014). By analysing the identity work in each case, we reveal some complexities and nuances involved in our insider positions and roles within and between two social worlds: the world of the researcher and the world of the researched (Down et al., 2006). We

demonstrate this in the context of different qualitative approaches used in our cases, including autoethnography, video diaries, group discussions and ethnography.

Our study shows that different kinds of identities are enacted across the four cases. In doing so, the study makes visible the different ways the insider researcher's identity influences and plays a role in research (Norton & Early, 2011). Within this book, we contribute to the discussion of tensions concerning academic entrepreneurship, not in view of our *subjects out there* but of ourselves as researchers immersing in the field. We need to continually engage in identity work in order to negotiate our social positions with our academic study participants and generate knowledge from the entrepreneurial university when within the entrepreneurial university. The insider identity contributes to establishing close, even familial, relations with the participants and the sense of being there together, enabling open and authentic interactions to generate rich data. The researcher identity, on the other hand, helps to navigate the emotional encounters in the field and enables distancing from the academic study participants. The main contribution is our suggestion that analysing our identity work helps to understand and make sense of our data. This is true for all interpretivist research, but it is particularly heightened in cases of insider research, which is usually the case in any research on entrepreneurial university or any other. However, being an insider is not a fixed but rather a dynamic position related to the study context. We demonstrate how other identities intersect with those of the researcher or insider.

IDENTITY WORK OF AN INSIDER RESEARCHER

Our chapter engages in analysing and reflecting on researchers' insider positions in the research field (Davies, 2008) through the theoretical lenses of identity work. In this study, identity is considered a dynamic process of social construction in which identity meanings and structure can change (Brown, 2017). According to Cunliffe, 'identity is not categorised [as] a noun but [as] a way of being-in-relation-to-others as we contest and negotiate who we are in responsive ways' (2001, p. 361). This suggests the need for identity work to articulate and give meaning to individuals and their actions in which identity is continuously developed and maintained (Alvesson & Robertson, 2016; Brown, 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). Identity work ensues in response to the tensions experienced by individuals in their personal, social and role identities. In these situations, identity work enables the individual to maintain or adjust their identity meanings and structures in order to resolve the tensions (Brown, 2017; Kreiner et al., 2006).

The identity work of the researcher involves being close and distancing themselves in order to manage being in the two different social worlds: the world of the researcher and the world of

the researched. The dissonance caused by this position varies according to the structural expectations of the roles of the researcher and the research participants (Down et al., 2006). Insider research, also referred to as backyard research or endogenous research (Hodkinson, 2005; Patton, 2002; Zulfikar, 2014), is a particularly interesting context for analysing identity work. It involves research in which the researcher occupies several kinds of roles—or even positions different from those of a researcher—in the research context and/or holds established relationships with the study participants, such as colleagues or students in the university context (Hodkinson, 2005; Zulfikar, 2014). In this case involving boundary-crossing individuals, there is a heightened need for reflexivity about themselves (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013; Karhunen et al., 2017).

Insider research is considered a legitimate alternative to the creation of academic knowledge in business research. It is especially suitable in research projects that aim at understanding multiple voices and subjectivities and those that are concerned with interpreting the meanings held by members of a social group (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Insider research assumes a wide range of researcher involvement in the research site (Adler & Adler, 1987). Being an insider can provide the researcher with easy access to the research site, facilitating trust and productive interactions with the study participants (Hodkinson, 2005). Hodkinson (2005) underlines that compared with outsiders, insiders can acquire a better understanding of the values, meanings and worldviews held by the research participants. However, the potential biases and vested interests towards the research site can potentially compromise the standards of intellectual rigour (Alvesson, 2003; Anderson & Herr, 1999). Multiple roles may also be perceived to be incompatible with one another so that insider research loses its advantage and becomes a self-serving project (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Consequently, insider researchers need to subjectively immerse themselves in a role and then analytically distance themselves from it in order to engage in epistemic reflexivity (Hodkinson, 2005; Johnson & Duberley, 2003).

Insider researchers may hold different social identities that can come into play in different parts of the research process when in interaction with the research participants (Carter, 2004). Analysing identity work in the context of insider research enables us to tease out methodological observations related to this interaction in our respective research projects. It makes visible the different identity positions that the researcher assumes and the ways in which researcher identity influences the research and the data creation process jointly with the participants (Norton & Early, 2011). It directs attention to the investment and influence of the researcher in the research setting, as well as to the ways in which the researcher either

naturally or involuntarily tries, for example, to reduce the power differentials between themselves and the researched (Norton & Early, 2011).

INTRODUCTION TO OUR CASES

Our cases are all connected by our aim to enhance knowledge and understanding of the development of an entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 2014), which is something that our university endorses. This forms the context for our research, where we generate new knowledge via the interactions between the various study participants and ourselves. In this chapter, we refer to ‘we’ as a way to denote the group of researchers that contributed to this endeavour. Given that the four cases are from our mainly individual research projects, we use ‘I’ to position each individual in the writing of each case.

Case 1 is written by Anna, a doctoral researcher in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship. Anna is interested in becoming an entrepreneur and participates in courses and coaching sessions about and for entrepreneurship. She applies autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011) to study the entrepreneurial process through her own experiences, thus fully integrating the researcher and the researched.

Cases 2 and 4 are written by Kirsi, who holds a dual position at the university. She is a senior advisor in an administrative capacity, in which her role is to coordinate and implement the entrepreneurial university strategy. This responsibility includes, for example, organising and developing entrepreneurship education. Additionally, she is a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship. In case 2, Kirsi utilises video diaries (Bates, 2013) produced by students to study the construction of agency in a bachelor-level entrepreneurship course. In this case, Kirsi distances herself from the research participants. In case 4, on the other hand, she utilises the non-participant observer technique (Liu & Maitlis, 2010) to generate video material in an entrepreneurship camp organised for faculty members. Case 3 is written by Kaisu, who is currently on research leave from her position as a senior project manager related to coordinating various entrepreneurship development activities. Kaisu is also a doctoral researcher in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship. In her research project, she utilises group discussions (Wilkinson, 2004) as a method to study how faculty members make sense of entrepreneurship. In the discussions, Kaisu appears both as a colleague and a researcher.

Case 1: The Researcher Identity in Autoethnographic Enactive Research

In autoethnography, conducting research through the self requires and allows ‘a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience’ (Ellis, 2007, p. 14). The

researcher themselves is the study subject (Ellis et al., 2011). They infiltrate the mind and look at the world around with the eyes of a person who is being researched. Oftentimes, the research site is familiar to an autoethnographer because autoethnographic inquiry requires a deep understanding of the context.

I am a doctoral student, and in my autoethnographic research, I focus on changes in my identity during the process of becoming an entrepreneur. I learn and research entrepreneurship *through entrepreneurship* (Heinonen & Hytti, 2010) and through *going* (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013) and *doing*. In entrepreneurship studies, this approach is known as *enactive research*, which implies that the researcher also acts as an entrepreneur (Johannisson, 2018). Thus, I need to fluctuate between being a researcher and being an entrepreneur (the researched).

For the purposes of my study, at the initial stage of the *becoming-an-entrepreneur-path*, I planned to participate in the Accelerator programme for nascent entrepreneurs, which was organised by a student-led entrepreneurship society. However, after a three-day Pre-Accelerator programme, which was aimed at preparing participants for the Accelerator, my teammates and I decided not to join the programme. Instead, we decided to continue developing our project on our own. The idea for my subsequent research arose from this experience and drove me to ask the following question: ‘Why didn’t we apply for the Accelerator?’ (Elkina, this volume). As the decision not to participate in the Accelerator was collective, a few weeks after the Pre-Accelerator, I organised a recorded informal discussion around that question with my teammates. Thus, the data creation process included my participation in the Pre-Accelerator and the group discussion (Wilkinson, 2004) with teammates that I organised.

At the Pre-Accelerator programme, I was trying to immerse myself deeply into what was going on and to experience the process from the participants’ perspective. I was in the position of a learner whose role was to mentally and emotionally be involved in the business ideation and validation processes. Emotional involvement became a useful instrument for understanding the process I was participating in, revealing particularly challenging moments of the programme for me as a participant.

When discussing the idea of a *reflective practitioner*, Czarniawska (2016) claims that it is not possible to act and reflect on acting simultaneously; however, it is possible to alternate between the two. This was also true in my case. I did not produce research material, for example, by reflecting or writing observational notes during the coaching sessions, as it would have distracted me from the process itself. In the evenings, after the coaching sessions,

I wrote my reflective diaries. In other words, I purposefully separated applying two different identities (the *actual me* vs. a researcher as a professional role).

However, upon analysing some of the uneasy situations during the Pre-Accelerator, I noticed that I used in some sense the researcher's power (Etherington, 2007) to reduce the feeling of anxiety and a sense of self-dissatisfaction. Hence, at the Pre-Accelerator programme, I was hiding my unsuccessful business learner's identity behind the researcher identity. For example, at some point, when I felt particularly uncomfortable, I soothed myself by saying, 'I should not be too upset about not fitting in into this community; after all, I am a researcher.' In another situation, when talking to the organiser and realising that we are not really complying with the core values of the Accelerator, I explained to him, 'We are not so much profit oriented, and we are doing something different; actually, I am a PhD student at the university researching entrepreneurship, and that is why I am here.'

The construction of the researcher identity represented personal protective reactions and attempts to boost self-confidence. At the same time, when I appealed to the researcher's identity, I was distancing myself from what was going on in the field, as if telling myself, 'Do not worry; you are just an observer here.' Therefore, in these situations, I explained to others and to myself that the actual me is a researcher and that a nascent entrepreneur is just something I play for the sake of the research.

During the group discussion with my teammates, I experienced being both a researcher, who asks questions and leads the discussion, and being one of the teammates, who participates in the Pre-Accelerator and is genuinely engaged in the discussion of my experience with peers. On the one hand, I believe that the discussion would not have happened and continued for an hour and a half without me being a facilitator. I kept the discussion on track in relation to our topics, which were interesting for my research. I also asked my teammates to repeat some ideas, which were not clear to me. On the other hand, when I listened to the recordings after our meeting, I realised that I was emotionally involved in the conversation, interrupting my teammates or nervously giggling. I kept re-living some moments of the Pre-Accelerator over again when I discussed and reflected on what I had experienced with my teammates. This act of retrospection gave me more of an understanding of what was going on within me.

As a researcher, I could have asked more compelling questions during the group discussion and went more in depth into what my teammates thought and felt about the Pre-Accelerator. At the same time, the discussion was not aimed at producing a common story, that is, collaborative and/or multi-voiced autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017). Rather, I focused on collaborative recalling with teammates to produce my individual

autoethnographic story. In some sense, therefore, during that discussion, I integrated the researcher's and Pre-Accelerator participant's identities into one without the feeling of playing a role for others.

Autoethnography encourages the researcher to immerse emotionally in the field and obtain an embodied experience and understanding of processes which are otherwise hidden. In autoethnography, emotional dissonance, such as fear, discomfort and embarrassment, helps a researcher and not only distracts, as is often seen in the literature (Down et al., 2006).

Accepting and observing emotional states help to understand the self and build close relationships with other participants. However, it is still necessary to distance from the field and look at what is happening through the eyes of a researcher. The interesting thing is that this practice of alternating between two identities works both ways. For research purposes, we may need to embrace the emotional self, but in everyday situations in the field, when one feels unsafe and emotionally unstable, the researcher's identity may come to the fore, representing the distanced, observing self.

Case 2: The Absent Insider Researcher in Video Diary Research

Although the potential of visual analysis has been noted in entrepreneurship research (Steyaert, 2011; Steyaert & Dey, 2010), the use of visual research methods and materials, such as videos, is still rare (see, however, Aromaa et al., 2020; Berglund & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2012; Boje & Smith, 2010; Smith, 2015). Videos are easy to produce, and they enable the creation of both researcher- and participant-generated data in fields that attend to the bodily experience and ethnographic presentations of everyday life, body and identity (Bates, 2013; Cherrington & Watson, 2010; Gibson, 2005; Rich & Patashnick, 2002). Video diaries and vlogs (Bates, 2013) are forms of participant-generated data that provide study participants with a way to self-report their own thoughts and actions (Rich & Patashnick, 2002). I am a researcher interested in studying agency (Baum et al., 2014) as a lived experience amongst undergraduate students in our university through using vlogs. When starting this research project, I did not have direct access to students because I did not teach. I negotiated access to a 14-week-long bachelor-level venture creation course. It was agreed with the course facilitators that vlogging was an option for the students to be exempted from the final reflection report of the course. For the students, I also introduced vlogging as an opportunity for them to freely and confidentially reflect on their experiences in front of the camera. The vlogs were private and not shared outside the research project.

I presented myself to the students as a researcher, who has a secondary role in comparison with the course facilitators. I was available for help regarding the vlogs but not the course content. Consequently, I provided very little information about myself. I wanted to be perceived as friendly but mainly as an *absent* researcher, as I had agreed with the course organisers that the research would not interfere with the course. Furthermore, it was up to the students to decide on the degree and content of communication to take place between us. I did not directly contact any of the students after they agreed to create vlogs, but I attended joint meetings to quickly ask if they had any questions for me.

When analysing the interaction between myself and the researched, I made note that only a few students approached me during the course via any medium except the vlogs. When writing emails to me, they kept their messages short. One student addressed me formally. Although this is considered polite, it is not customary in Finland in this context. It indicates a distance and difference in social status between people, which activated identity work in my part as a response. I kept all my replies short and used spoken language. Through this, I consciously constructed the identity of an approachable researcher because I anticipated this would encourage the students to continue producing vlogs.

For my research, vlogs were intended to provide access to the students' self-interpretation, goals and judgements and to help detect the potential tensions they were experiencing throughout the course. Vlogs are well suited for this, although they pose a variety of challenges with regard to access and power from the perspective of the researched. On the one hand, videos can be seen as a potential response to the 'crisis of representation' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 203), offering the opportunity to capture lived experience directly. Videos are real in the sense that there exists a visual trace of what the vloggers have said and what has happened. However, 'fundamentally, all images ... are socially and technically constructed' (Harper, 1998, p. 29). Consequently, although the use of vlogs is expected to decrease the role of the interviewer effect (Dijkstra, 1983), it can be claimed that the researcher is always present in participant-generated material (Gibson, 2005).

When submitting their vlogs to me, the vloggers seemed to formulate their storytelling based on the imagined evaluations of other people, including the absent researcher (Burkitt, 2012; Cassell et al., 2020; Gibson, 2005)—me. This was indicated via addressing me directly using 'you' or with hand gestures pointing towards the camera. One of the vloggers was Hannah (pseudonym). She did not have a business idea, but she thought she had potential because her family had a business. In her first vlogs, Hannah had a positive attitude towards the course, her own performance and her team. She gave herself credit for solving course assignments.

As the course progressed, however, her stance shifted when her team was unable to progress in developing their initial business idea. Hannah started to identify with ‘fellow sufferers’, who were not progressing according to the course syllabus. In one vlog, she implied that success and linear progress are also expected from my part, as she said, ‘We must be a really bad team to produce you these videos.’ As the course progressed, social comparison decreased Hannah’s motivation, and she began to see herself as a victim.

The realisation of power imbalance between the researcher and the researched can result in change and the enactment of multiple identities (Norton & Early, 2011). In my case, after watching some initial vlogs, I felt compelled to think yet again about my *absence*. As a result, I adopted the identity of a motherly figure. I did my best to portray myself in the joint meetings as an accepting person—a warm person who does not judge or raise an accusing finger towards them—in order to reduce the distance between me and the students. In the vlogs, the students talked about being tired, worried and confused about their studies and trying to stay positive amidst all that was happening in their lives. I was their confession chair, and I happily accepted it, hoping that these students would be still doing well in the course.

Whilst vlogs can be considered inclusive and I strongly encouraged this, they can also exclude potential and already recruited study participants (Cherrington & Watson, 2010; Pink, 2007). For example, three students who had initially committed to vlogging withdrew because it was not ‘natural’ for them to talk to the camera and they had ‘so little to say’. Additionally, one student produced vlogs but withheld submitting them because she ‘wanted first to edit them’. Interestingly, a few of those who submitted their videos edited them to include headers, graphical elements and a script like an introduction.

This reinforces the idea that vlogging is a site for the vloggers to position themselves with the perceived audience and to make meaning and construct a reality. This prompts me to think of the presentation of ourselves in social media, where we are used to editing ourselves. It was surprising that the students felt compelled to do so in the private vlogs even for one audience member only—me. These students’ reactions, together with how Hannah addressed me, reflect normative pressures that the students experience in presenting themselves (Cassell et al., 2020). For Hannah, pressures were related to perceived expectations of starting a business; her talk focused on the successes and failures that marked the way she self-identified, and how she talked to me was constructed in her vlogs. Those who refused to submit their material also found the imagined audience to be evaluative and judgmental and thus found a need to edit or prove themselves worthy of being listened to.

The research project made me wonder whether it would have made any difference had I presented myself in a different way to the students or been part of the facilitator group, for example. In any case, it became clear that as much as the students seemed to worry about how they were perceived, I, as a researcher, was forced to actively consider the same. This shows that being a researcher is not fixed, as a researcher actively adjusts themselves in relation to the researched in order to produce or aid in producing the research material. Furthermore, for researchers involved in research in their own backyard (Zulfikar, 2014), maintaining productive relationships with the researched is not only important for the sake of the research itself but also in maintaining relations with other members of the same university. In my case, it was important not to step onto the toes of the facilitators and conduct the research in a way that would support the course. Interestingly, my study not only brought forth the existence of the invisible audience (Burkitt, 2012; Cassell et al., 2020) but also highlighted that in vlogging or in any longitudinal data creation process, the relationship with the key co-producers can change, hence affecting the content and nature of the qualitative data.

Case 3: The Researcher as a Peer and One of the Insiders in Group Discussions

Group discussions are found to be a suitable method for generating research material in research projects that are focused on grasping the terminology, idioms and vocabulary that research participants typically use (Wilkinson, 2004). I find group discussions suitable for my research project, which is focused on generating an understanding of how university faculty make sense (Weick, 1995) of entrepreneurship at the university. For the purpose of my research project, I am looking for rich and multi-voiced research material. To achieve this, I have organised group discussions for staff members at the university involving an interview that resembled an informal everyday conversation.

In this setting, I am conducting research amongst my colleagues, which has given me two insider roles (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009)—that of a peer sharing subjective ideas about entrepreneurship and that of a researcher interested in (objectively) understanding entrepreneurship. I realise that such composition affects the research process when interacting with the study participants. First, as I am familiar with them, it influences how they perceive me and interact with me and from which perspective they share their thoughts about the subject matter with me. Second, my familiarity with the study participants has an influence on my preferences and interpretation; I am attentive to certain issues and possibly ignorant of others. Identity work appears when I, considering the above-explained social worlds (Cassell,

2005; Down et al., 2006), reflect on my insider position by transitioning between being a peer and a researcher.

Martha, Alex and Timothy (pseudonyms) participated in one of the group discussions. They are senior academics committed to businesses of their own whilst working at the university. We knew one another prior to the group discussions. Alex and Timothy are my former colleagues, I have met Martha during one project and all three are acquaintances at the university; hence, they know about one another's business commitments. Because of our common familiarity, we did not officially introduce ourselves. Instead, our positions unravelled over the course of the discussion, also ensuing the identity work from my part as an interviewer (Cassell, 2005) and a peer.

I was familiar with the three participants' personal experience of combining research and business. My expectation was to gain extensive exposure to entrepreneurship in academia. Consequently, I positioned them as those most active in entrepreneurship amongst the study participants. At the beginning of the discussion, I presented my research to Martha, Alex and Timothy and told them that I was pleased to have diverse and polymorphous research material, thus indicating that I assumed the material heretofore to be different from what they were to produce. This may have stimulated their discussion, and they constructed the entrepreneurial university from being in the frontline perspective; that is, their experience in entrepreneurship was seen to be above average compared with that of many others in the university. For example, Martha asked whether I also had a group representing *the other extreme*, which was referring to university personnel who had looser connections or less interest towards entrepreneurship in the university context. Their understanding of entrepreneurship in the university context, mostly as academic entrepreneurs, further strengthened such positioning; as they are active in such an area, they saw themselves as more entrepreneurial than many others in academia.

When facilitating the group discussion, most of the time, I followed the logic of an unstructured interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) and allowed the discussion to flow, as it needed to. Martha, Alex and Timothy were talkative and reflected on their experiences of entrepreneurship and academia in their discussion. Sometimes, I felt I should be challenging them or digging deeper, but mostly, I participated with complementary questions. Although I have experience in and opinions about entrepreneurship at the university, I tried not to express them because I preferred a neutral researcher position. My assumption was that without my active interference, the study participants could freely express their ideas and

views. I also anticipated a less directed discussion to bring forth issues that I might have not even thought of (Silverman, 2010).

During the conversation, it became clear that the group considered me an equal; though they saw me as a researcher conducting a study, I was also a peer sharing the experience of working in the same university. For instance, the group used vocabulary familiar to academics; they joked about some traditions in academia and referred casually to people, issues and events within our university. All these indicated to me that I was an acknowledged insider. I accepted the invitation and gave my share of academic jargon, jokes and stories in the discussion, further strengthening the initial idea that they seemed to have of me. I did this because I felt that such closeness between the study participants and myself encouraged them to talk more openly.

Although I did not share a similar experience of combining academic and entrepreneurial careers, I seemed not to be part of the others, or ‘the majority’, in the eyes of Martha, Alex and Timothy. According to them, this part of the university personnel was less involved in entrepreneurship, and they were referred to as ‘the median’. Instead, the group perceived me as an entrepreneurial colleague who valued entrepreneurship the same way they did. Perhaps, because of their interpretation of me as an entrepreneurship scholar, they assigned me a pro-entrepreneurship position. Accordingly, their assumptions of my interests and preferences included, for example, an interpretation of having an opinion similar to theirs about the ways to perceive and advance entrepreneurship in the university context. Sometimes, this resulted in non-specific and indefinite expressions. For example, a somewhat vague expression, ‘TUTLI process’, often appeared in the discussion, referring to participation in a university-coordinated research commercialisation programme. Neither did the group members use the correct name of the programme, nor did they clearly explain what the TUTLI process was about. Obviously, the content—having experience of the research commercialisation process—was the essential part of the conversation, but the way it was discussed revealed that the study participants assumed me to understand them easily, without further elaboration, and to relate to the matter as they do. These interpretations and expectations led to anxiety, and I felt a conflict with their interpretations of my position(s). As an interviewer, I should stay as neutral as possible. Although I tried to do so, I felt that I did not succeed.

As the above addresses, the identity construction of a researcher is active, continuous and collaborative (Cassell, 2005). In the beginning and early stages of the group discussion, I was pleased to accept the group’s interpretations of me as a colleague in the entrepreneurial university, but later, their interpretations of my preferences regarding entrepreneurship

caused ambiguity and concern. As a result, I was reflexive and moved within my insider position between a peer and a researcher. Accordingly, at times, I was close to Martha, Alex and Timothy, whereas at other times, I distanced myself from them. The group setting provides an additional complexity to the identity construction. During the group discussion, I was influenced by Martha, Alex and Timothy not only as a relatively homogeneous group of entrepreneurial academics but also by each of them individually, which stimulated my reflexivity further along the way.

Case 4: A Non-Participant Observer Negotiating Multiple Identities

Previous entrepreneurship research has used ethnographic research methods, such as participant observation (e.g. Shi et al., 2012) and non-participant observation, to investigate entrepreneurship education (Ilonen et al., 2018; Komulainen et al., 2020). Observation is well suited in aiding our understanding of complex situations as they happen in situ. Observation can, however, also pose challenges related to selectivity and objectivity arising from the observer–researcher (Liu & Maitlis, 2010).

My research project used observation, and it was set up to theorise about entrepreneurial identity construction amongst university teachers in the context of a 24-hour business idea development camp. The camp enabled the development of new perspectives on the development and dynamics of the entrepreneurial university movement *from the inside* (Evered & Louis, 1981). It touched upon the new relationships and roles within the university and the ways in which the participants interacted with the entrepreneurial university; key concept questions, such as ‘who am I?’, became relevant. Consequently, the camp also activated this question on my own part as a researcher–administrator at the university.

The camp was part of the university faculty training programme on entrepreneurship education that I was and continue to be responsible for in the university. As the main organiser of the camp, I was tasked to ensure the creation of a fruitful learning environment for the participants. The camp learning sessions were facilitated by non-academic mentors who came from different entrepreneurship support organisations. Furthermore, I was a researcher whose role was to generate ethnographic research material from the camp by producing videotaped camp sessions and insider notes from the camp (Van Maanen, 2011). In order to achieve this, I engaged in non-participant observation (Liu & Maitlis, 2010) to make the participants feel comfortable having me around with a camcorder.

In the camp, the teachers carried out collaborative actions by doing exercises that guided them through different stages of idea generation. After they had got to know one another and were organised in self-selected multidisciplinary teams, they were invited to discuss their

strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, they made sense of entrepreneurship and academic work, as well as of their own abilities in entrepreneurship, in joint discussions. They discussed and negotiated whether academic abilities are strengths or weaknesses from the perspective of entrepreneurship. Sensemaking was built on not only negotiation between the facilitators and the teachers about entrepreneurship but also on the ways in which the teachers made sense of their activities by drawing from their work practices in academia. In the discussions, the facilitators lacking experience or knowledge of academic work produced rather normative views of entrepreneurship and *othering* (Bruni et al., 2004; Schwalbe et al., 2000) it from academic work and the lived experience of the teachers. For example, one of the facilitators suggested that storytelling is important for entrepreneurship, but academic achievements do not count in the entrepreneurial arena, as they are considered 'too obvious' and 'do not make good stories'. Consequently, the teachers struggled to find connections between academic life and entrepreneurship, which I noticed created very interesting discussions for research material.

However, although the social interaction proved academically highly interesting, I felt at that point that the events could potentially be counterproductive in terms of reaching the camp's learning objectives. In particular, suggestions regarding the little consequence or value of academic achievements concerned me as a person whose role is to encourage academic staff to build businesses based on their strong academic research. The result was that I became anxious and tried to figure out what to do with my emotions and what steps to take next. This resulted in my part of negotiating multiple identities in the research site (Norton & Early, 2011).

The emotional reactions and the management of emotions in the research site via identity work are a form of emotional labour of the researcher (Down et al., 2006). Namely, as a researcher, I used my objectivity to manage the emotions that emerged in challenging situations. In doing so, I dissipated the emotions and stopped myself from reacting and intervening, which I could have done as an education provider. Hence, in order to remain in the intended researcher identity, I had to resist assuming certain identities so that I could distance myself from authority and power in the research site (Norton & Early, 2011). Down et al. (2006) have rightly pointed out that 'our role as academics is predicated on us being able to produce useful knowledge' (p. 110). This was the main reason why I hid my feelings and eventually decided not to intervene. Had I intervened, I would have compromised or hindered the creation of interesting data; the discussions were fuelled by the seemingly

inherent dichotomy between the world of academia and the world *out there* that the facilitators presented.

After the camp, the participants were invited to write reflective essays and were given an article by Wood and McKinley (2010) to offer conceptual tools for making sense of the events and idea development process that took place during the camp. The essays gave the teachers an opportunity to continue drawing not only differences but also parallels between entrepreneurship and academic work, thus also enabling the *construction of sameness*. This generated more multifaceted ideas about academic entrepreneurship and facilitated the construction of the academic and entrepreneurial worlds.

My experiences showed me that trying to sustain several roles simultaneously can result not only in role conflicts and identification dilemmas in situ (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) but also uncomfortable emotions (Down et al., 2006). Moreover, what the researcher feels and how they are committed to fulfilling the expectations in their different roles in the university are not inconsequential. For example, the management of emotions in connection with identity work can force the researcher to make moral decisions that have consequences of different kinds. These included, in my case, decisions affecting not only the learning process, which forms the research context, but also the ethnographic research material (Van Maanen, 2011).

DISCUSSION

In this methodological chapter, we have focused on the identity work of ourselves as researchers (Down et al., 2006) in co-creating research material about academic entrepreneurship at our university. We have investigated our identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in navigating different identities, including those of an insider and a researcher (Hodkinson, 2005; Patton, 2002) in the university, and how it contributed to data creation via our four cases. In doing so, we contribute to methodological backyard research (Zulfikar, 2014) on the entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 2014).

We suggest that being an insider is not a fixed but rather a dynamic position related to the study context. Our findings confirm that identities may change (Brown, 2017). More importantly, we found that studying academic entrepreneurship as academics ourselves continuously prompts us to negotiate our identities in relation to our academic study participants. These identities may sometimes be closer to that of the research participants, whilst at other times, they make the researcher appear as an outsider. We claim that this is unique, particularly in research on academic entrepreneurship. We also found that in the case of boundary-spanning individuals (Karhunen et al., 2017), such as insider researchers, the need for identity work stems not only from a reaction to the tensions in the structural

expectation of the roles (Brown, 2017; Kreiner et al., 2006) but also from the need to manage the research context and process. This is demonstrated in our cases that are different from one another, hence allowing us to make visible the different identity positions of researchers (Norton & Early, 2011) and to tease out a variety of methodological observations. Through the cases, we recognised that understanding and analysing our dual or multiple identities are important for understanding our data and the way they are created together with the academic participants. Ultimately, we argue that the researcher needs to analyse their role in such data creation (Alvesson, 2003). In the following, we discuss the key conclusions based on our findings from the different cases.

First, the insider role and familiarity with the research context are presented in the literature as ways to enable access to data and the researcher's perspective and to provide the ability to acquire a better understanding of the research participants (Hammersley, 2000; Hodkinson, 2005). In the group discussions, our insider roles can be seen, as the participants relied on our insider knowledge, and they did not feel the need to explain in detail as they would to an external party. Hence, familiarity with the context may also impede data creation, limiting detailed explanations of entrepreneurial phenomena in academia. Even if we are entrepreneurship researchers and teachers, engaging in an entrepreneurial process can be akin to entering a totally new territory that is not known to us. Yet, abandoning the insider role completely in a group interview where it is assumed may also backfire. The revelation of the group that the researcher is not walking on familiar ground but is seeking to understand may be alienating in the group discussion. Thus, the researcher may wish to *play along* with the group in order to allow the casual chat and banter in the group to continue, as well as to adopt a partially *fake* insider identity in order to serve the means of the research. Alternatively, the researcher identity may be adopted to shield oneself from the emotions involved in aiming to adopt the practitioner identity.

Second, challenging the invisible, non-participant researcher who is only collecting data is important (Burkitt, 2012; Cassell et al., 2020). Even if we are not physically present in our data creation sessions, it is evident that in our case of students recording a vlog, they were compelled to directly talk to the researcher. This evokes the identity work of the researcher—adopting the identity of a motherly, caring figure who reassures the students to continue with their vlogging and, in essence, continue producing more data for the researcher. Therefore, this caring identity is not an altruistic figure but serves a methodological purpose. Similarly, even if we are not asking questions in a group interview, there is an assumed audience of which the researcher is an important part.

Third, the existing literature has discussed the subjectivity of the researcher and focused on reflexivity, which refers to the mutual influence between the researcher and the research field. Consequently, reflexivity has been recommended as a critical practice for researchers to explore how their social position influences the knowledge claims they make in their research (Davies, 2008; Lichterman, 2017). However, reflexivity has been presented mostly as an intellectual and procedural practice, whilst our findings suggest that it can also be perceived from the perspective of the researcher's emotional work (Down et al., 2006). As seen in the cases concerning autoethnography and participant observation, the emotional reactions of the researcher urge the researcher to move back and forth between experiencing and examining the self and their own identity in relation to the researched.

Finally, there are ethical considerations linked to the multiple roles of being a researcher on the inside. In the researcher role, we opted for observation to allow the participants' *authentic sensemaking* and accompanying processes to unfold. Yet this means that we kept quiet, silencing our own identities as insiders. Hence, the researcher identity is the salient and central identity that foregrounds the decisions. Ethical aspects and the power relations in insider research call for an additional focus (Etherington, 2007).

As we have shown in our cases, we adopt identities as a researcher, knowledgeable practitioner or caring figure motivated with our primary interest of generating rich, insightful and interesting research material, whilst our participants may expect us to be motivated in contributing to their entrepreneurial endeavours.

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