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Abstract

The extent of the divide between management research and practice is now widely accepted but debate persists about the desirability and feasibility of attempting to bridge the divide. This paper introduces an individual level perspective to this literature by asking: how is a management academic's identity affected by sustained engagement with management practitioners? Using autoethnographic methods, I identify the intense identity conflict that an academic can experience as they seek to cross the research-practice divide. I develop an identity narrative to explain how I experienced and ultimately reconciled my conflicting work identities. I identify the factors which can create and exacerbate identity conflict, examine the experience of identity conflict, and suggest tactics for resolving identity conflict. I consider the broader implications of this autoethnography for our understanding of the research-practice divide and offer some final reflections to encourage management scholars who seek to cross this divide.

Key words: Research-practice divide, Identity conflict, Autoethnography.

> "Infidelity…is a violation of norms regulating the level of emotional or physical intimacy with people outside the relationship." (Drigotas & Barta, 2001, p. 177)

> "Any academic trying to 'speak to practitioners' and receiving recognition from them may carry the risk of stain or stigma and potential disdain and removal from the in-group of serious academics." (Vermeulen, 2007, p. 758)

Introduction

Gulati (2007) has argued that, in order to establish the intellectual legitimacy of management research, many management academics have attempted to marginalize their colleagues who maintain close links with the world of practice. In the process, management academics have separated themselves into "two tribes on either side of a chasm"; the result is "brutal identity warfare" within academia (p. 777). But what happens when this brutal identity warfare is internalized *within an academic* who engages with practitioners? In this paper I seek to contribute to the extensive management literature on the research-practice divide by exploring a previously neglected topic: the identity conflict at the heart of that divide.

Previous studies of the research-practice divide have tended to remain at the institutionalized level but I focus on the causes and consequences of the divide at the individual level. I identify the intense identity conflict that an academic can experience as he or she seeks to cross the research-practice divide and I do this by introducing non-traditional autoethnographic methods to this literature. Using the metaphor of an affair, I develop an identity narrative to explain how my identity as an academic was affected by sustained engagement with practitioners. In the process I

contribute to the nascent literature on the process of identity work by examining how an individual professional can experience and ultimately reconcile their conflicting work identities. The central question underlying my study is:

(1) How is a management academic's identity affected by sustained engagement with management practitioners?

This broad question is broken down into three distinct questions:

(2) What factors create and exacerbate identity conflict in this context?

(3) How is this identity conflict experienced?

(4) What identity tactics can an academic deploy to resolve this conflict?

I begin by briefly summarizing relevant aspects of the literature on the research-practice divide, together with key studies concerning the process of identity work and the causes and consequences of identity conflict. I explain the autoethnographic methods employed in this study and present the framework developed to address the questions outlined above. I then describe my "research journey" and present and analyze my "identity journey" in detail, explicating the metaphor of infidelity in this context. Interwoven with this autoethnographic analysis I discuss the more generalizable implications of my experience, identifying factors which can create and exacerbate identity conflict, the experience of identity conflict, and tactics for resolving identity conflict. I conclude by examining the broader implications of this autoethnography for our understanding of the research-practice divide and by offering encouragement to management scholars who seek to cross this divide.

Research-practice divide

As Susman and Evered argued more than 30 years ago, "As our research methods and techniques have become more sophisticated, they have also become

increasingly less useful for solving the practical problems that members of organizations face" (1978, p. 582). Hambrick (2007) attributes our "theory fetish" to the management discipline's relatively late entry into the field of social sciences; "Like insecure adolescents who are deathly afraid of not looking the part, we daren't let up on our showy devotion to theory" (p. 1347). The outcome, as Bochner states, is that "Our work is under-read…graduate students say our scholarship is dry and inaccessible…and the public hardly know we exist" (1997, p. 433).

Over the past fifteen years several Presidents of the Academy of Management have begun their term of office by expressing concern about this research-practice divide (for example Hambrick, 1994; Huff, 2000; and Bartunek, 2003). "Creating Actionable Knowledge" was the theme of the Academy's Meeting in 2004. More recently leading management journals have devoted substantial coverage to this topic: notable examples of special issues and point-counterpoint discussions include the *Academy of Management Journal* (Rynes, 2007), *Organization Studies* (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, & Scherer, 2010), and the *Journal of Management Studies* (Fincham & Clark, 2009). After more than three decades of debate, however, Jarzabkowski et al. (2010) conclude, "We do not know how we can make academic work more relevant for practice or even whether this would be desirable" (p. 1189).

The reasons for the divide, the significance of the divide, and feasibility and desirability of bridging this divide are complex and highly contested. In brief, the research-practice divide has been conceptualized as both a knowledge transfer problem and a knowledge production problem or, as Shapiro, Kirkman, Courtney (2007) describe it, a "lost in translation" and a "lost before translation" problem.

These problems reflect fundamental differences between researchers and practitioners. As Beyer and Trice (1982) state "the most persistent observation in the literature…is that researchers and users belong to separate communities with very different values and ideologies, and these differences impede utilization" (p. 608). Academics seek to create generalizable theory of lasting impact; by contrast practitioners seek immediate solutions to practical problems (Hambrick, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Pfeffer, 2007). Academics may spend many years crafting an elegant theoretical or empirical study; practitioners have limited understanding of (or interest in) academic rules of evidence and research methods (Gulati, 2007; Lorsch, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2007). So, in addition to having fundamentally different views about the nature and purpose of management knowledge (Beyer & Trice, 1982; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001), management academics and practitioners also differ in terms of their self-definitions, goals, values, and abilities.

Scholars who are concerned about the research-practice divide advocate a range of institutional strategies to encourage research that is both relevant and rigorous (Lorsch, 2009; Pfeffer, 2007; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006; Rynes, 2007; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2009; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2007). These scholars focus on those institutional agents who, they argue, have greatest impact on how we frame, conduct, and articulate our research: our professional associations (e.g. the Academy of Management), top tier journals (or more specifically their journal editors), research funding bodies, and our universities themselves.

Researchers' engagement with practitioners

Regardless of the institutional context in which we operate, bridging the research-practice divide must ultimately occur at the individual level. As Shapiro et al. (2007) argue "Any solution must start with the premise that academics and practitioners should spend more time together, appreciating and understanding each others' work better" (p. 262). Closer contact between researchers and practitioners creates opportunities, not simply for more effective knowledge transfer, but for the co-creation of knowledge (Mohrman, Gibson, & Mohrman, 2001). Some scholars, therefore, suggest that researchers should collaborate directly with practitioners in framing their research questions and conducting their analysis (Bartunek, 2007; Rynes et al., 2001; Van de Ven, 2007). In other words, they suggest augmenting our traditional disciplinary based Mode 1 method of knowledge production with a Mode 2 method of knowledge production, which recognizes the value of boundary-spanning collaboration between multiple societal groups (Gibbons et al., 1994). This cross-fertilization, it is argued, will lead to richer and more detailed understandings of organizations (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Rynes et al., 2001). Other scholars are more sceptical about the effectiveness and indeed the legitimacy of this approach and argue that it may be neither feasible nor desirable to bridge the gap between research and practice (Earley, 1999; Garland, 1999; Keiser & Leiner, 2009). For example, Keiser and Leiner (2009) state that, since researchers and practitioners occupy fundamentally different social systems, they "cannot collaboratively produce research, they can only irritate each other" (p. 516).

While the merits and feasibility of *collaboration* remain highly contested, the merits of closer *communication* between researchers and practitioners are more widely accepted. As Rynes et al. (2001) suggest, "in the absence of effective intergroup

socialization, the independent identities of academics and practitioners are likely to solidify, with accompanying increases in in-group/out-group thinking, reducing the motivation for each side to learn from each other" (p. 348). However, those who advocate closer researcher-practitioner interaction have not explored the impact that these interactions can have on the individuals themselves. Vermeulen (2007) touches on the issue when he cautions, "it takes courage to step onto the thorny road to relevance and it takes cheerfulness to truly enjoy and sustain the journey and laborious interaction with the real world of organizations." (p. 760).

As discussed below, social identity research has demonstrated that our interactions with other social groups can have a profound impact on our social identity. This paper contends, therefore, that management academics who seek to cross the research-practice divide may find themselves drawn into sustained and challenging identity work.

Identity work at work

Our individual identity is an expression of the meaning that each of us attaches to ourselves and a reflection of the meaning that others attach to us (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Gecas, 1982; Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1982). It incorporates our personal and social identities. Our personal identity derives from our unique set of attributes and experiences and enables us to understand ourselves as distinct from others (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Turner, 1982). By contrast our social identity, derived from our affiliation with referent groups, reflects the extent to which we experience those groups' core attributes, values, goals, and abilities as congruent with our own. It enables us to understand ourselves as similar to others and to identify with our

chosen referent groups (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

Our work identities, which are subsets of our social identities, are shaped by multiple sources of potential identification such as our profession/occupation, our organization, and our work group (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Dutton et al., 2010). While organizational and professional identity have been studied in considerable depth, scholars have tended to focus on individual and organizational level *outcomes,* i.e. levels of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008). To date there has been relatively little research on *processes,* specifically *how* an individual negotiates their identity in a work context (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Pratt, Rockman, & Kaufman, 2006)

Whereas our personal identity is relatively stable over time, our work identity is more fluid as it is affected by the referent groups with which we come into contact. We are therefore engaged in an ongoing struggle to create a coherent sense of self within this shifting context as we construct, repair, maintain, and review our identities (Ibarra, 1999; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The concept of identity work describes the process by which we negotiate the "who I am" question amidst social "this is who we are" messages (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Over the course of our career we can experience intense identity episodes which can serve to challenge, solidify, or transform our identities (Ashforth et al., 2008). As Alvesson and Willmott state, "Specific events, encounters, transitions…as well as more constant strains, serve to heighten awareness of the constructed quality of self-identity and compel more concentrated identity work" (2002, p. 626). As we

negotiate our identities in response to these identity episodes, we construct a retrospective identity narrative - a story which integrates “who I am now” with “who I have been” while suggesting “who I might become” (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) have argued that, in seeking to create organizational identification amongst organizational members, organizations intervene directly in individuals’ identity work by engaging in identity regulation. Ashforth et al. (2008) go further to suggest that organizations engage in parallel processes of sensebreaking and sensegiving. Sensebreaking refers to the organization’s deliberate stripping away of a new member’s identity by highlighting his or her identity deficits; sensegiving refers to the organization’s attempt to reconstruct a new member’s identity according to an organizationally-sanctioned ideal.

Our sense of self-esteem is strongly influenced by the subjective evaluations of our chosen referent groups (Dutton et al., 2010). Consequently, as we are made aware of our identity deficits (the discrepancy between our actual and “ideal” identities – Higgins, 1987), we are prepared to adopt organizationally sanctioned solutions to those identity deficits (Ashforth et al., 2008). When our sense of self is challenged within our organizational context, a “meaning void” is created which must be filled (Pratt et al., 2006). We therefore engage in sensemaking in our attempt to establish a greater degree of congruence between our key identity attributes and those of our organization (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). Some individuals may find the incongruence too great, resulting in disidentification or ambivalent identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Equally, organizations may respond by repelling “deviants” who represent a

threat to the group identity. If the degree of incongruence is great and the drive for identification is strong, an individual may engage in “identicide”, choosing to suppress an identity that impedes other valued identities (Ashforth et al., 2008).

A small but growing body of studies has examined the process of identity work among professionals and the interaction of professional and organizationally-sanctioned forms of socialization in this context. Identity scholars’ interest in professionals may in part reflect early work by Gouldner (1958) on the distinction between “cosmopolitans” and “locals” in a professional context - those professionals who identify predominantly with their profession in contrast to those who identify predominantly with their organization. For example Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson (1998) and Pratt et al. (2006) have examined the process of identity formulation of young accountants and physicians respectively. Both studies emphasize the importance of early stage socialization through professional training and the problems that may arise if a professional’s experience of work differs substantially from the expectations created by their training (i.e. an “identity violation” - Pratt et al., 2006). Focussing on professionals’ identity work at a slightly later stage in their career, Ibarra (1999) finds that recently promoted consultants and investment bankers engage in three distinct phases of identity work during this process of transition. First the individual identifies and observes relevant role models. Then they seek to emulate these role models by “experimenting with provisional selves”. Finally they evaluate these experiments by assessing the authenticity of the experience and the response of external referent groups.

Beyer and Hannah (2002) have looked beyond professionals in the early stages of their careers to examine the identity work of experienced engineers as they move between organizations. They find that experienced professionals adapt their identities more easily if they have already experienced a broad variety of different working environments. Their study focuses on recent recruits whose previous work experience is relevant and attractive to the new employers. As yet, however, we know little about the experience of identity conflict when a previous work identity is incongruent with the identity demands of the new employer.

Identity conflict

As Brewer (1991) emphasizes, our identity work is driven by two conflicting forces: our need for validation, by establishing our similarity to others, and our need for individuation, by establishing our uniqueness. Identity conflicts arise when there is an inconsistency between the content of two or more identities (Ashforth et al., 2008). Our personal identity is less fluid than our social identity and therefore represents a potential source of conflict with our employer's identity demands (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that individuals will always strive for a sense of coherence between their multiple identities, but individuals can learn to switch between multiple and potentially incongruent identities by developing "transition scripts", i.e. psychological routines for "rapidly switching cognitive gears" (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Ultimately individuals may have to content themselves with ambivalent identification, when an individual simultaneously identifies and disidentifies with *different* aspects of their organization (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). Kreiner and

Ashforth (2004) go further to speculate that an individual may be capable of simultaneously identifying and disidentifying with the *same* aspects of the organization.

Conflicts between multiple aspects of our identities are, therefore, an inherent feature of our identity work and can give rise to discomforting levels of dissonance if they become consistently manifested and non trivial in scope (Ashforth et al., 2008). While the prevalence of identity conflict has been discussed, to date there has been very little research on *how individuals experience* identity conflict in a work context. Research has tended to focus on the positive consequences of identity congruence from an individual and organizational perspective (Dutton et al., 2010) rather than the negative consequences of identity conflict. However, previous studies have suggested that identity conflict can be emotionally draining as individuals struggle to reconcile their conflicted selves. This can lead to stress and a sense of isolation (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006).

So what tactics are available for resolving identity conflicts? Research conducted at the organizational level by Fiol, Pratt, and O'Connor (2009) emphasizes that it is possible to accommodate dual identities within a work group without incurring severe cognitive dissonance. They recommend promoting mindfulness within the group, by recognizing the impact of potential interaction, as well as promoting in-group distinctiveness, by enabling the conflicting groups to be secure in their separate identities. They argue that there is value in accommodating dual identities and in seeking opportunities for work that accommodates and exploits this duality. Whereas Fiol et al. (2009) focus on identity conflict *among individuals* within organizations,

Kreiner et al. (2006) have studied the process of resolving identity conflict *within individuals*. Their study of Anglican priests (another in the strand of studies of professionals' identity work) identifies various tactics which individuals can utilise to resolve tensions between their professional and personal identities. They include: 1) creating an identity hierarchy, 2) consciously separating one's role from one's identity, 3) setting limits on identity demands, and 4) consciously switching between identities.

We therefore have some insight into tactics for resolving conflicting work identities *among individuals* within organizations, and for resolving conflicting personal and work identities *within* individuals. *But what happens when an individual is required to incorporate multiple work identities?* As yet, this topic has received little attention from identity scholars. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) argue that more insight is needed into the process by which people construct, alter, and revise their work identities and the tactics they employ to achieve this. They emphasize the need for insight into the identity work of individuals who deviate from socially scripted or highly institutionalized trajectories. According to Gulati (2007), Hambrick (2007), and Vermeulen (2007), researchers who engage directly with practitioners are deviating from just such a highly institutionalized academic identity trajectory.

When academics write about the research-practice divide they are essentially examining themselves. However, they typically adopt an abstract, third-person language and focus on the phenomenon at an institutional rather than individual level. Rather than analyzing the work of academics in general, I am writing about one academic in particular – me. I have developed a personal narrative of my own

identity journey in order to address the central question guiding this study: *How is a management academic's identity affected by sustained engagement with management practitioners?* In the process I have identified factors creating identity conflict in this context, how identity conflict is experienced, and the tactics for resolving identity conflict, thus contributing to an emerging body of literature exploring the process of identity work amongst professionals.

Nontraditional methods

Auto-ethnographies are highly personalized revealing texts in which academics tell stories about their own lived experiences, engaging in high levels of reflexivity about the research process (Bochner, 2001; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kreiger, 1991; Hayano, 1979; Reed-Danahay, 2001; Richardson, 1997). I have adopted a specialized form of autoethnography, the personal narrative (Freeman, 1998), where the subject of the research becomes the academic themselves. This personal narrative method of research is predicated on the assumption that our personal experience has a direct impact on our work as academics: what we observe, how we interpret our results, what questions we ask and what answers we expect (Dewey, 1980). Our research reflects how we are constructing the story of our own life (Bochner, 2001). Whether we are conscious of this or not, our research and identity narratives are densely intertwined.

I employ the metaphor of an "affair" as a sensemaking device. Within the social sciences the vocabulary of metaphor is used to express, conceptualize and understand complex and abstract phenomenon (Cornelissen, 2005). As Tsoukas states, "Through metaphors I can say what cannot be said in literal language, thus

expressing an emotional reality lying beyond even conscious awareness" (1991, p. 571). I began to dwell on the affair metaphor during a sustained consulting engagement in a law firm as I sought to make sense of my confusing combination of experiences. Inherent in the concept of infidelity is a moral judgement - an individual is disloyal to his or her legitimate partner and engages in what is deemed to be illegitimate behaviour with another. By applying the metaphor of an affair as a sensemaking devise to my experience of interaction with practitioners I have been able to examine and understand why I experienced an intense and sustained identity conflict. This analysis has been retrospective - at the time I was too deeply immersed in the experience to understand it as an identity conflict (i.e. I was too busy "doing" identity work to be able to analyze it).

Writing and evaluating autoethnography - Auto-ethnographies can risk becoming exercises in self-indulgence (Coffey, 1999) and navel gazing (Holt, 2003). As Spry (2001, p. 713) argues, "a good ethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal, it is a provocative weave of story and theory". In writing this paper I was therefore mindful of the criteria that Holt (2003) and Richardson (2000) define for evaluating personal narrative autoethnographies. 1) Substantive contribution – does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? 2) Aesthetic merit – is the text artistically shaped and satisfyingly complete? 3) Reflexivity – has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? 4) Impactfullness – does this affect me as a reader emotionally and/or intellectually? And 5) Realism – does this text embody a fleshed-out sense of lived experience? According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), when writing autoethnography:

> "I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use…sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life." (p. 737)

This is the approach I adopted in the current study.

Data sources and analysis - The data from which I developed my personal narrative was drawn from three main sources: my research records, my personal diary, and my recollections. In the context of personal narrative-based studies, recollections are a valid source of data (Bochner, 2001). I do not suggest that my diary or my recollections represent an objectively "true" or complete record of events. The selectiveness of my contemporaneous observations and recollected interpretations is what is important as this reflects those identity episodes which have contributed most directly to the construction of my identity narrative (Bochner, 1997).

Writing this paper was inevitably a highly iterative sensemaking process, interweaving analysis of contemporaneous data with intensive periods of introspection and recollection. Overall, however, my analysis progressed through several distinct phases. I was primarily concerned with exploring the research-practice divide, so I began by constructing a detailed description and process map of the conceptual evolution of my research and my associated interactions with practitioners over a fifteen year period. I then re-read my diaries and coded text which was relevant to the broad themes of the paper (i.e. my experience of engaging with practitioners, the impact this had on me as a management academic, and how this affected my relationships with academia in general and other management

academics in particular). With the metaphor of infidelity in mind I then focused more specifically on coding diary entries which addressed experiences identified in Cole's (1999) study of infidelity such as: *excitement* and *escapism*, *affirmation* and *affection*, *sensual pleasure, guilt* and *deception*, and *confusion*. The theme of identity conflict emerged as I recognized that many of my most painful episodes, recorded contemporaneously and recalled retrospectively, represented experiences of sensebreaking and sensegiving. Indeed I realized that many of my diary entries represented attempts at sensemaking in response to these episodes. I therefore formalized my ad hoc contemporaneous sensemaking by writing a detailed retrospective narrative of my identity work

Having constructed this detailed narrative I further refined it, guided by Ashforth et al.s' (2008) expanded formulation of identity. I coded identity-defining episodes which highlighted *core attributes* of my identity, such as *self-definition, priorities,* and *emotional responses*, together with attributes relating to the *content* of my identity, such as *values, goals, beliefs, traits,* and *abilities*, and the *behaviours* associated with these attributes. To develop a deeper understanding of how I experienced identity conflict, I then reviewed my identity narrative, focusing specifically on how I had described my experiences. I identified three broad categories of experience *(positive, negative*, and *ambivalent)* and ten distinct experiences within those categories. Table 1 illustrates how these categories were derived from my diary entries and other elements of the identity narrative.

As summarised in Table 1 and discussed in detail in the empirical sections of this paper, my positive experiences of working with my consulting client reflected

emotions such as *excitement* (primarily intellectual) and *enjoyment* (the fun of doing something well that was worthwhile). I also experienced a sense of *escapism* by disengaging from my life at the business school and *affirmation* from being appreciated by practitioners. My negative experiences were associated with my academic institutional environment. They included emotional responses such as institutionalised *depression* (Bochmer) and *anxiety* as I struggled to cope with the demands of my academic work. I also experienced *isolation* as I began to feel alienated from academia more generally and *exhaustion* as I struggled to reconcile my academic and consultant identities. Cycling between these positive and negative experiences also gave rise to ambivalent feelings of *guilt* and *confusion* as I struggled to make sense of my intense and complex set of experiences.

TABLE 1
EXPERIENCE OF IDENTITY CONFLICT

CATEGORY	EXPERIENCE	EXCERPTS FROM IDENTITY NARRATIVE
Positive	**Excitement**	"My work with L.A.W... was always interesting." "I was energized and inspired by working with this group of lawyers." "I revelled in the sensual pleasure."
	Enjoyment	"I love doing it." "It is fun. It is important." "I felt good to know that I was making a difference."
	Escapism	"My work with L.A.W. was a welcome distraction." "I needed to appear wise and insightful about their problems and that encouraged me to stop thinking about my own." "I longed to be free of my university administration and teaching responsibilities."
	Affirmation	"I will be indebted to you forever for having helped me." (Client comment) "You're worth it." (Client comment) "Our professional relationship developed into a close personal friendship."
Ambivalent	**Guilt**	"I was not always as honest as I would have liked." "I felt as though I was living a double life." "I must be shallow to care so much about such things."

	Confusion	"I am actually wondering if I am doing the right job." "You have to choose what kind of an academic you want to be." (Colleague comment) "It feels as though I am at some kind of ill-defined cross roads."
Negative	**Depression**	"Saddened and deflated I returned to my hotel room." "I was still very unhappy in organizational terms." "A lot of the time I was fairly miserable."
	Isolation	"My emotional withdrawal from university life weakened my identification with academia more generally." "I realized how little I feel connected to academia at the moment." "This is not my world."
	Exhaustion	"Am I burnt out?" "I struggled constantly to make time to think about research." "I learnt to manage on four to six hours sleep a night."
	Anxiety	"This causes me to feel even more stressed." "I am exhausted and scared." "I don't think I can cope."

Model of identity work

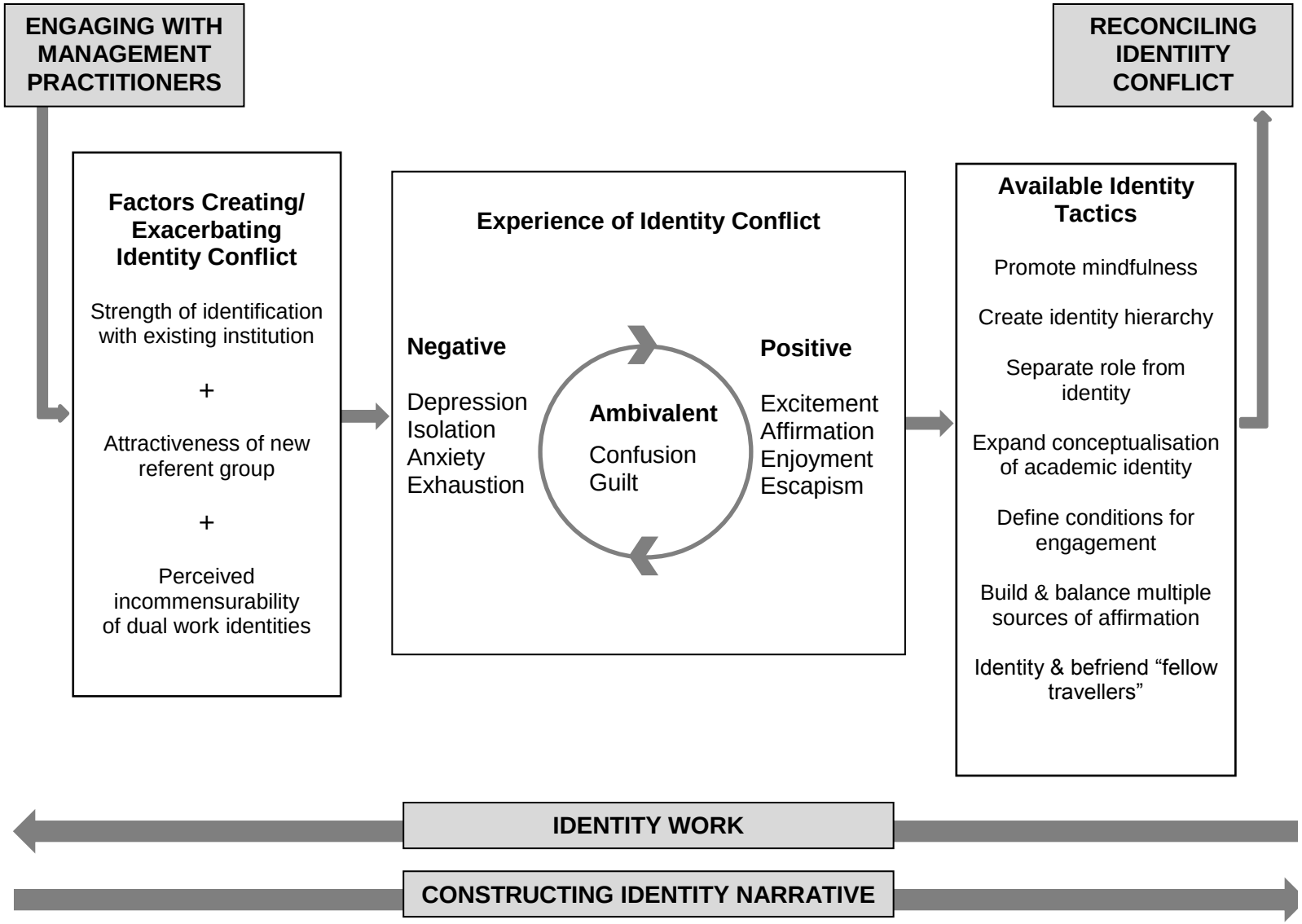
Following Kreiner et al.'s (2006) study I created a model which, while anchored in my own specific experience of identity conflict, illustrates key aspects of identity work in broader array of contexts (see Figure 1). I abstracted from my identity work narrative to address the central question underlying the study: *How is a management academic's identity affected by sustained engagement with management practitioners?* (i.e. Question 1). As explained at the start of this paper, this broad question was then broken down into three distinct questions. To answer Questions 2, about the *factors creating and exacerbating identity conflict,* I returned to the literatures on the research-practice divide and identity work. I highlighted relevant factors previously identified in the literature and then refined and augmented them in the light of my own experience. For Question 3, about *the experience of identity conflict*, I returned to the analysis I had previously conducted (as illustrated in Table 1). For Question 4, about *tactics for resolving identity conflict*, I followed the same

process as for Question 2, this time focusing on tactics for resolving rather than factors creating identity conflict.

The autoethnographic excerpts below are interspersed with three discussion sections where I seek to generalize from my experience to directly address Questions 2, 3, and 4. I begin by describing my research journey which provides the context for the subsequent analysis of my identity journey. In so doing I am mindful of Humphreys' (2005) reflections on his own experience of writing autoethnography.

> "Wearing masks of certainty and clear direction, we intimidate those around us…This story removes the masks from the only academic I have the right to

Figure 1: How a Management Academic's Identity is Affected by Sustained Engagement with Management Practitioners (RQ1)



expose as unsure of himself, doubtful of his own ability and 'engaged in a dual quest for self-identity and empathy.'" (p. 851)

My research journey

Over a fifteen year period I received three prestigious awards from the Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain (ESRC) to fund three distinct, but related, studies of professional service firms. As explained below, each of these studies involved me in a high degree of interaction with practitioners and therefore, unbeknownst to me, created the pre-conditions for challenging identity work.

In 1993 I embarked on a doctorate to study the merger process in professional service firms. This was a direct consequence of my first hand experience of a merger while working as a strategy consultant. As part of my doctoral research I conducted 200 interviews with professionals in six accounting and consulting firms. The dynamics I observed challenged established theory about professional service firm governance but I could not examine them in detail in the context of my PhD. On taking up my first faculty post, I embarked on a follow-up study of professional service firm governance. Together with a colleague, I conducted 215 interviews with professionals in four law, accounting and consulting firms between 2003 and 2005. We presented our initial findings to senior executives and partners in these firms and sought their feedback throughout the process.

In May 2005 I met the Managing Partner of "L.A.W."[1] (a major European law firm) who invited me to present my research at his firm's forthcoming partner conference.

[1] I have anonymized the firm for reasons of commercial sensitivity and client confidentiality.

My presentation and the ensuing discussion highlighted a number of governance-related conflicts among L.A.W.'s partners. They asked me to work with them to explore the issues in detail. During the period 2005- 2007 I engaged in 56 days of billable work (mostly at L.A.W.'s offices). While working with L.A.W. I identified a pattern of leadership dynamics which I realized in retrospect had been present in several of the firms I had studied.

To examine this phenomenon further, I applied for and received my third award from the ESRC and began a study of leadership dynamics in professional service firms in 2010.

This very brief summary of the intellectual evolution of my research and my interaction with practitioners over a fifteen year period inevitably presents a simplistic overview of a protracted and problematic process. It demonstrates how I repeatedly crossed the research-practice divide, initially through my research field work and then through a consulting engagement. My interaction with practitioners provided not just data for my research but inspired new research. My research journey was densely intertwined with my identity journey throughout this period, as narrated below.

Constructing the "other"

Before I began my affair with the "other", I had been the "other". Prior to becoming an academic I had been an investment banker for five years, had completed a two year MBA at London Business School, and then worked as a strategy consultant for a further two years.

In my work as a strategy consultant, the distinction between academia and practice was deliberately blurred. The consulting firm I joined was established by a group of Harvard Business School Professors and maintained close relationships with faculty in leading business schools. In organizational identity terms the partners had created a firm which deliberately mimicked many of the goals, values, traits, and behaviours associated with an academic identity. For example, great emphasis was placed on analytical rigour and intellectual originality – to fail at either could lead to dismissal. I found the work challenging and fascinating and developed great affection and respect for many of my colleagues. In Ashforth et al.'s (2008) terms, my values, priorities, and beliefs were congruent with my organization's and I came to identify strongly with its members. As the firm embarked on a merger, I observed the mismanagement of the integration process with an increasing sense of confusion and anger. To try to make sense of what I had observed, and to give me a chance to reflect on what I wanted to do next, I returned to London Business School to undertake a PhD on the merger process in professional service firms. I funded this move by selling my apartment in one of the most expensive areas of London and moving in to my boyfriend's house in one of the most deprived areas (a geographical transition from Hampstead to Peckham which embodied the identity transition I was about to experience).

Given my previous experience as an MBA student at London Business School and my socialization into a consulting firm closely affiliated with academia, I was entirely unprepared for the different face of academia I encountered on the doctoral programme. I experienced a form of identity violation (Pratt et al., 2006). In identity terms I was proud to define myself as an MBA graduate of London Business School

but soon discovered that this qualification was deemed worthless in the context of its PhD programme. In a sensebreaking episode one of the faculty explained that I was at a considerable disadvantage to the PhD students with research-based masters degrees – he told me that, because of my MBA and my consulting background, I would struggle to learn to think theoretically. The faculty teaching on the PhD programme expressed disappointment that so many of their graduates had gone on to careers in consulting, an activity which they viewed as inferior to research. They encouraged the best students to aim "higher" by pursuing research careers. In Alvesson and Willmott's terms (2002) they were providing a vocabulary of motives. Whether consciously or not, they were utilizing sensebreaking and sensegiving techniques to strip away my old identity as a consultant and to establish my new identity as doctoral student.

The sensebreaking process was painful on occasion. The first time I presented my research plans to my fellow PhD students, one of them commented: "This is just a consulting study. You are just a consultant." In another episode of identity regulation a PhD student re-emphasized my identity deficit by drawing upon the symbolism of organizational dress as an identity marker (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). She explained that the way I dressed was "all wrong", that I looked "too professional", that my whole style of presenting myself and my ideas was "too consultanty". Perhaps reflecting my unresolved identity transition, I struggled to find an appropriate style of dressing, feeling too old at the age of 30 to dress like a student, but understanding that I had not yet earned the right to dress like a faculty member. Far from developing a transition script, in Ibarra and Barbulescu's terms (2010), I had not even managed to develop a transition outfit.

Although no one talked to me explicitly about my identity deficit, I understood that I did not belong. I asked a good friend (a fourth year PhD student in his mid 40s with a similarly eclectic career to my own) for advice about "how to survive this experience." In a chilling example of identicide (Ashforth et al., 2008) he replied: "Never forget, whatever you learnt before you came here is worth nothing." He advised me that in faculty research meetings I should only refer to things I had read in journals rather than my experiences of working in organizations – otherwise faculty would think I was "dumb" for not understanding the difference between data and anecdotes. In other words, I should conceal my knowledge of the practitioner world, which represented an integral part of my identity.

At the end of my first year on the PhD programme I was headhunted for a senior strategy role at the London Stock Exchange. The job represented a fascinating challenge and would pay twice what I had previously earned as a strategy consultant. But I knew that I wanted time to reflect, to develop a clearer sense of my values, goals, and abilities (in other words, to conduct identity work). As I was still passionately interested in my research topic, I decided to persist with my PhD.

Once I started field work, I knew I had made the right decision. Some days I could play at being a professional, wearing one of my old "consultanty" suits to my research sites in the West End of London. Other days were spent at home in Peckham in jeans, immersed in reading, reflecting, and writing. In Kreiner et al.'s (2006) terms I was engaging in identity segmentation, switching between my previous identity of a "successful professional" and my new identity of "impoverished student". When I grew restless for stimulus, I could immerse myself in the practitioner world (i.e. return

happily to the world that had once defined me). When I needed time for reflection I could withdraw into the world of the doctoral student.

On completing my PhD, I joined the faculty at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School. After five years I was awarded tenure. This contractual landmark represented my "marriage" to academia, but it was not a particularly happy marriage; I was therefore vulnerable to the temptation of an "affair".

Ambivalent identification

Our identification is solidified and reinforced by success. By objective measures, therefore, my identity as an academic should have been well-established by the time I gained tenure at Oxford. I was proud of my research publications and I had successful co-authoring relationships with two distinguished scholars in North America and Scandinavia. In addition I had created an annual international conference which brought together academics in the field of professional service firm research. This international community gave me some sense of belonging to academia (i.e. I had created my own external referent group with whom I could identify). However my identification with academia remained ambivalent. While I identified strongly with certain aspects of academia, I actively disidentified with my academic institution. My work identity was very much that of a cosmopolitan rather than a local (Gouldner, 1958).

I felt isolated from many of my colleagues at the business school. Although they understandably enjoyed being associated with such a prestigious university I found Oxford's anachronistic traditions and institutionalized self-absorption to be a

perpetual source of irritation and frustration. I felt that the real world was happening somewhere else and that I, like Alice, had wandered “Through the Looking Glass” (Lewis Carroll, like me, was an Oxford don). I experienced the atmosphere at the business school as simultaneously arrogant and insecure. I was particularly troubled by the extremely uncollegial behaviour of certain colleagues and by the fact that (as is common in academic institutions) this behaviour remained unchallenged by other faculty members, who chose instead to shoulder the burden of their colleagues’ uncollegial behaviour. In a rather vehement assertion of group identity boundaries and identity regulation, one colleague advised me: “There are two kinds of people here - the shits and the suckers. Don’t be a sucker.” I did not want to be either, but was unsure who I *could* be in this working environment.

Once again, my identity struggle was symbolized by my attempts to find an appropriate way of dressing. When a male colleague told me I was the “best dressed woman at the business school”, he was pointing out how I differed from the norm and I interpreted his comment as a statement of my identity deficit. In an attempt to look less “well-dressed” I bought a short brown tweed skirt and beige sweater. I was aspiring to a retro-style “sexy librarian” look. My desire for validation was strong, so I wanted to fit in, but my need for individuation was also strong. As I walked into the common room I realized that I had only managed to look like an old-fashioned librarian and was feeling plain and slightly foolish. A female colleague smiled welcomingly and said: “At last you look like one of us.” She was simultaneously acknowledging my previous identity deficit, whilst offering me affirmation for conforming to the group’s identity norms as expressed through dress.

In retrospect I can see that my experiment with tweeds (representing a provisional self in Ibarra and Barbulescu's terms, 2010) reflected my insecurity during the run-up to my tenure review. I was keen to assert my academic identity – to prove to myself and others that I was a "serious academic" (Vermeulen, 2007). At around this time, in a significant identity defining episode, I declined a request by the Managing and Senior Partners of a law firm to advise them on a forthcoming merger. In explaining why I needed to focus on my research I asserted: "I am not a consultant. I am an academic". From the lawyers' startled expressions I realized that I had proclaimed my academic identity rather too emphatically. I left their offices wondering why I had responded so defensively to their offer of work - particularly as I was ideally qualified to conduct this fascinating piece of consulting work and I very much needed the additional income.

Receiving tenure helped me to feel more secure in professional terms but I was still very unhappy in organizational terms. A lot of the time I was fairly miserable. After a supportive phone call from a good friend, I reflected in my diary as follows.

> "For the first time in a while I am actually wondering if I am doing the right job…On the phone, Christine said that the business school was harming me. It takes an outsider to point out the obvious. Am I like the frog in that experiment who hasn't realized he is gradually being boiled to death?" (Diary note, March 8, 2005)

Fulfilling my overarching goal of achieving tenure gave me the breathing space to realize that I was not fulfilled more generally in my work.

> "There is something unfed in me. I am no longer exhausted in the way I have been…so now of course I am chomping at the bit to get on, but I am very unclear about what to get on with…Am I burnt out? I feel the need to reach out but I am not sure to what." (Diary note, July 24, 2005)

I realize in retrospect that I was suffering from what Bochner has called institutional depression, "a pattern of anxiety, hopelessness, demoralisation, isolation, and disharmony that circulates through university life" (1997, p. 431). This was the context in which I began the "affair" with L.A.W. which gave rise to my intense and sustained identity conflict.

Discussion: Factors creating and exacerbating identity conflict

While sustained engagement with practitioners may create the *pre-conditions* for identity conflict, my analysis suggests that other factors *create and exacerbate* identity conflict. These include*: 1) strength of identification with existing institution*, 2) *attractiveness of new referent group,* and 3) *perceived incommensurability of dual work identities.* Applying the metaphor of an affair, the first two factors are consistent with Drigotas and Barta's (2001) research on infidelity which has identified factors which determine an individual's propensity to conduct an affair such as: 1) satisfaction, i.e. how happy is the individual with their existing relationship, and 2) alternative quality, i.e. the potential satisfaction provided outside the relationship. The third factor identified in my study (perceived incommensurability of dual work identities) counteracts Ashforth and Johnson's (2001) and Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) arguments that individuals can reconcile multiple incongruent identities and reflects the perceived moral illegitimacy of an affair, as discussed below. These

three factors which create and exacerbate identity conflict are discussed in detail below in order to establish the context in which I began my "affair."

1) Strength of identification with existing institution - I had never learnt to identify fully with my academic institution, partly because of problems inherent in the institution and partly because of the strength of my previous work identity as a consultant. Ashforth et al. (2008) have suggested that, "the more idiosyncratic ones' career, the more it resembles a personal identity rather than a social identity" (p. 352). Certainly the nature and variety of my previous work experiences made me "different" from my academic referent group on the doctoral programme at London Business School and on the faculty at Oxford. Therefore, while my previous experience enabled me to switch between the two identities of researcher and practitioner when I engaged with practitioners (i.e. to develop transition scripts - Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), the insecure foundations of my academic identity meant that the act of switching was to generate high levels of confusion and anxiety.

2) Attractiveness of new referent group - The attractiveness of the practitioner referent group I was to encounter also contributed to my identity conflict. To some extent the practitioner world had always retained its appeal for me – specifically the world of senior professionals which I had made the subject of my research specialization. If I had felt very different from the lawyers I was to work with (if their values, goals, traits, and abilities had been incommensurable with my own, or if I had found them to be unintelligent, dull, unappreciative, or unreasonably demanding) then I might have responded by disidentifying strongly with them (Ashforth et al., 2008; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). If my incursions into the practitioner world had

been less enjoyable and my experiences at the business school more enjoyable, my journey across the research-practice divide might have served to reaffirm, rather than undermine, my academic identity.

3) Perceived incommensurability of dual work identities – The identity regulation I experienced during my socialization into academia taught me that my previous work identity as a consultant was incommensurable with my emerging academic identity. While academic socialization can be viewed in institutional terms (i.e. an appropriate or at least inevitable response to the research-practice divide) it can also be seen as an individual response. My identity narrative is replete with examples of peers who sought to regulate my identity. Perhaps they believed themselves to have my best interests at heart but, in some cases at least, their attempts at sensebreaking and sensegiving may have arisen from their discomfort at my representation of "the other". In other words perhaps they experienced me as a deviant who constituted a threat to the group identity and their own legitimacy within the group, and therefore sought to repel me.

Previous studies have assumed that identity regulation and sensebreaking and sensegiving are enacted at the *organizational* level (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashforth et al. 2008) but my experience suggests these studies present an overly reified image of the process. Many of the identity-defining episodes in my analysis were provoked by individual colleagues acting as *self-appointed identity regulators*, independent of any institutionally sanctioned initiatives.

While my experience was replete with self-appointed identity regulators, it is also notable for the absence of relevant positive role models, i.e. “serious academics” who had retained a commitment to practitioner engagement. There are only a limited number of academics who are lauded as “management gurus” by practitioners yet retain the respect of their academic colleagues. In the first year of my PhD studies, the Director of the doctoral programme at London Business School said he could see me as “a future Rosabeth Moss-Kanter” but I did not take his comment seriously. Our role models must possess qualities with which we can identify and reasonably aspire to emulate (Ibarra, 1999). Moss-Kanter was clearly an exceptionally talented individual and I did not believe myself to be exceptionally talented. In the absence of relevant positive role models I had no one to guide me in my identity journey, and my potential for identity conflict was further exacerbated.

My affair with the “other”

The “affair” brought into sharp relief an identity conflict which I had long managed to repress. Cole’s study of infidelity (1999) has identified a range of behaviours and emotional responses which individuals may exhibit when conducting an affair. The unfaithful individual is dissatisfied with their current situation (unhappy or perhaps simply bored) and longs to escape, if only temporarily. The individual is attracted by the potential for excitement which the other person offers, for the opportunity to indulge in unfamiliar, repressed or forgotten emotions and sensations. If the affair becomes more established, the individual experiences a strong affirmation; they feel special in some way, valued and desired, and may reciprocate with a growing sense of attachment. However, the individual may be troubled by the emotional and practical implications associated with deceiving their established partner and may

experience feelings of guilt. This may provoke intense confusion and internal conflict as the individual feels under pressure to choose whether to end the affair and remain with their established partner or to leave and begin a new life. During my three year consulting relationship with L.A.W. I underwent a similar set of experiences.

Excitement and enjoyment - My work with L.A.W. generated intense and sustained intellectual excitement and enjoyment. It was exhausting, frustrating, and occasionally disturbing, but it was always interesting. I was working with some of the most respected and successful lawyers in their country. Whilst technically brilliant and highly experienced at practicing law they, like most lawyers, were relatively inexperienced when it came to management matters. They were confronting organizational dynamics which I had devoted the past few years of my life to researching and were looking to me for help. In terms of identity definition, they were reflective practitioners (Schön, 1991) and I was becoming their trusted adviser (Maister, 2002).

During this extended identity transition (Ibarra, 1999), of learning to understand myself as a trusted adviser, I was energized and inspired by working with this group of intellectually dynamic lawyers. They were interested in discussing my research at length and their forensic style of questioning (developed to drive out ambiguity in their legal work) helped me to refine my own thinking. In time my concepts and terminology became common parlance within their firm. I felt good to know that I was making a difference – that my ideas were having an impact on the "real world". This goal was an important aspect of my value system but I had learnt to repress it during my socialization into academia. In retrospect I realize this was what I was longing to

reach out to and probably one reason why I had remained ambivalent about my academic identity.

At L.A.W. I was changing the way the lawyers thought and talked about management problems; they, in turn, were challenging my own assumptions and opening up new areas of enquiry for me. By contrast, at the business school, I rarely discussed my research with colleagues as our conversations focused primarily on routine matters of teaching, administration, and internal politics. At the business school I struggled constantly to make time to think about research - at L.A.W. I was constantly intellectually challenged, inspired, and affirmed. My diary comments reflect the sustained intellectual excitement and sense of enjoyment I derived from my work with L.A.W. during this period.

> "The meeting with L.A.W. was fantastic. It helped me tremendously to articulate my ideas." (Diary note, November 3, 2005)
>
> "The work with L.A.W. is helping me to reconnect with what I am capable of doing…they are thinking deeply about questions that I have posed." (Diary note, January 25, 2006)
>
> "What I have gained from L.A.W. has been invaluable, the constant contact with the outside world…the experience of learning, the sense of validation and of friendship." (Diary note, August 4, 2006)

Escapism - My work with L.A.W. was a welcome distraction from my life at the business school. In terms of Kreiner et al.'s (2006) identity tactics, I was enacting an ephemeral role by "temporarily escaping (my) predetermined role set and stepping into an entirely different role" (p. 1045). My regular international flights to L.A.W's

offices were a physical manifestation of my flight from the reality of the business school. While I was with L.A.W's partners I needed to appear wise and insightful about their problems and that encouraged me to stop thinking about my own. This was to some extent inauthentic but not unpleasant. I was flipping the on-off switch (in Kreiner et al.'s terms), consciously switching between identities and deriving refreshment and renewal from the process.

> "When I am working with L.A.W. I do not feel anxiety in spite of the fact that it is the most high-stakes and challenging thing I am doing. In fact I love doing it. It is fun. It is important. It puts everything else in perspective. When I am flying back from a meeting with them, nothing at the business school seems to matter…I love the sense of being necessary to and valued by people I respect." (Diary note, May 25, 2006)

Affirmation - The money L.A.W. paid me was very significant in relation to my academic salary but the sense of affirmation they gave me went far beyond that, as expressed in the following letter I received from the Managing Partner.

> "I want to emphasize how important our work with you has been over the last three years. With your assistance I think we have changed the firm for the better forever and you have been a critical part of that process. I couldn't have done it without you and I will be indebted to you forever for having helped me in the way that you have. We still have very important work to do and I look forward immensely to that challenge. On a personal note, it has been great fun." (Managing Partner, L.A.W., January 10, 2008)

I became very fond of several of the partners at L.A.W. but there was no question of me identifying with them. The difference in our professional education and expertise meant that I would never be one of them, but they welcomed me into their organization. They initially presented themselves to me with their veneer of professionalism firmly in place. However, as we spent more time together, they talked passionately to me about their feelings for the firm, their personal backgrounds and private ambitions, their long-standing friendships with certain partners and long-standing resentments towards others. They trusted me and wanted my advice. I was flattered and wanted to help.

My relationship with the HR professional, with whom I was working most closely, was particularly important. In addition to her formal responsibilities, she had been informally adopted as a personal coach by several of the firm's most senior lawyers. Initially I was careful to present myself to her as expert and invulnerable (a necessary part of my professional identity) in order to build her confidence in our working relationship and in the project more generally. However, as we spent more time together, our professional relationship developed into a close personal friendship. I also found myself turning to her for coaching and, in the process, revealed my authentic self. She told me that I dressed "too much like an academic" and gave me accessories for Christmas and on my Birthdays to encourage me to look a more stylish. Once again the way I dressed became a symbolic representation of my identity work, and once again a colleague was keen to assist me with it.

Sensual pleasure - On becoming a PhD student I had relinquished the material comforts of my professional life. As a tenured academic at Oxford I was still being

paid less than I had been as a relatively junior strategy consultant more than fifteen years earlier. I thought I had come to terms with this transition, resigned myself to having relinquished material comforts as an inevitable part of being a "serious academic". However, this belief was challenged by spending time with the new referent group of senior lawyers. I was, in effect, seduced by the physical pleasures they offered me and which had been denied me in my academic life.

From the beginning, my relationship with L.A.W. was associated with sensual pleasure. I first met the Managing Partner of L.A.W. at the opening reception of the Legal Leaders' Forum in Venice. We were drinking champagne in the gardens of a luxurious palazzo hotel on a private island in the middle of the Venice Lagoon. The sun was setting as we listened to the bells of St Mark's Cathedral and watched gondolas glide past. My senses were assaulted by the glamour and sensuality of my environment but I was unable to fully appreciate the experience because I was concentrating on my conversation with a group of very senior lawyers and was nauseous with nerves about the work that I had to do the next day. I was acutely conscious that I had moved into another world, the world of the other, where such settings and situations were fairly commonplace.

The partners of L.A.W. were used to treating themselves well and took it for granted that I would expect them to provide me with the same level of luxury. Whilst working with them I became a regular at the best hotel in the city. I would return to my room exhausted at the end of the day, order room service from the Michelin-starred hotel restaurant, and eat dinner in front of the television, enveloped in a luxurious hotel bath robe. After dinner I would drink another glass of very good wine whilst soaking

in an aromatherapy bath and listening to classical music over the bathroom's stereo system. Having spent the night in best quality linen sheets I would be woken at 6:00am by a waiter bringing me breakfast in bed.

I worried that I must be shallow to care so much about such things, but revelled in the sensual pleasure they brought me. In identity terms I was supposed to be a "serious academic" so I worried what my love of luxury was saying about my intellectual legitimacy. When I demurred at L.A.W.'s extravagance, the Managing Partner simply said, "You're worth it", and gradually I started to believe that I was.

Guilt - During this period I felt as though I was living a double life (or enacting dual identities), needing to keep people at L.A.W. and the business school happy. In the early days I was not always as honest with the partners of L.A.W. as I would have liked. They seemed to take it for granted that I was a highly experienced consultant with extensive general knowledge of the legal sector, but most of my knowledge of law firms was derived from my research and was, therefore, highly specialized. In time I stopped feeling exposed and came to understand that, for them, my academic status gave me greater intellectual authority and moral legitimacy than if I had been a full-time professional consultant. In identity terms, from their perspective, I was the "other", and they valued me more highly as a result.

At the business school the situation was more complicated. We were contractually allowed to do 30 days consulting a year to supplement our income but such work was not openly discussed. As Von Glinow states, "consulting has always been a taboo topic for those of us reared in traditional research universities" (1996, p. 371).

A few of the faculty were rumoured to make substantial amounts of money from their consulting work. Colleagues noted who drove a better car or who seemed to take more expensive holidays than themselves and were quick to define the identities of their more prosperous colleagues in negative terms - mocking them for not being serious academics or condemning them for “prostituting” themselves.

I was determined that my consulting would not prevent me from carrying out my university work effectively. My solution was to remain scrupulously below the contractual limit for consulting work and to do both my consulting and university work to the best of my ability. In Kreiner et al.’s (2006) terms I was setting limits as a means of enacting dual identities, but this was far from easy. In order to lead this double life, I learnt to manage on four to six hours sleep a night and maintained a six to seven day working week over a sustained period. In one 20 week period, I made 21 separate trips abroad. In addition to teaching, running a research centre, and working with L.A.W., I was also editing a book, organizing an annual academic conference, and writing and presenting papers at conferences. I knew that this relentless work schedule was fairly routine for any senior lawyer in a top firm; over the years I had interviewed dozens of grey-faced lawyers and watched them lose the thread of their argument mid-sentence as they struggled to hold back the waves of exhaustion. The more I proved to myself that I could withstand a top lawyer’s work schedule, the more I felt that I was becoming the other. My identity boundaries were becoming increasingly confused as I mimicked aspects of the lawyers’ behaviour. In my exhausted state I could not “flip the on-off switch” (Kreiner et al., 2006). My dual identities had become too entangled to enable me to move easily between them.

Confusion - During term time, when there was little time for research, my work with L.A.W. became the primary outlet for my intellectual creativity. Like so many academics I longed to be free of my university administration and teaching responsibilities so I could focus on what I cared about most passionately – my research. It was the reason I had become an academic and the only reason I was willing to remain one. This is how I felt at the beginning of the 2005/06 academic year, *before* I started working with L.A.W.

> "There are so many things to be done this term - so many competing pressures – and I feel myself so easily getting sucked in. I am focusing on the smaller things I feel I ought to do, rather than the bigger things I want and need to do. I know that, running into the new term, this is a potentially risky way to be and this causes me to feel even more stressed…I am exhausted and scared…I don't think I can cope." (Diary note, September 23, 2005)

Half way through 2006, I was promoted to a Readership[2] at Oxford. I also received a prestigious "Outstanding" rating from the Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain at the conclusion of my governance research study. These two achievements should have been enough to convince me that I had shaken off whatever impediments my previous consulting identity had represented - that I had finally become a "serious" academic. Yet at around this time I also started to think seriously about leaving academia altogether.

> "No matter how I frame it, I simply can't make the business school situation seem positive…from now on I will try to live each day as though I have let go of

[2] A UK-specific academic title for a tenured academic, senior to an Associate Professor but below a Full Professor.

attachment to the place. It will still take up my time but it will not take up my emotional energy." (Diary note, June 29, 2006)

In identity terms I was experiencing the emotional discomfort, which Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) suggest "arises when people are unable to draw a continuous link between the old and the new selves" (p. 140). In Kreiner et al.'s terms (2006) I was attempting to separate my role from my identity.

My emotional withdrawal from university life weakened my identification with academia more generally. By abandoning my attempts to sustain my identity as a local I also undermined my identity as a cosmopolitan (Gouldner, 1958). In July 2006 I made the following note on arriving at the EGOS conference in Bergen.

"Looking along the check-in queue at Gatwick I realized how little I feel connected to academia at the moment. The academics in the line were easy to spot and seemed to have nothing to do with me…I know this is wrong but it is also symptomatic. The conference hotel is not good and I feel disgruntled about that too. I remembered to thank God for having shelter, to try to set my disappointment in perspective, but it shocks me to realize how much my perspective has changed over the last year." (Diary note, July 6, 2006)

At the Academy of Management Conference in Atlanta in August 2006 I told a well-published friend of mine from an American university about two projects I had just begun: a paper for a leading practitioner journal and a proposal for a special issue of an "A List" academic journal. In an implicit attempt at identity definition and regulation he said, "You can't do both. You have to choose what kind of an

academic you want to be." Saddened and deflated I returned to my hotel room and turned to my diary for one of my periodic exercises in sensemaking.

> "Things I know to be true - Reflections on/at The Academy: This is not my world (North American academia) but I can enjoy my periodic interactions with it. I am not playing their game, therefore I do not need to judge myself in relation to it – or to judge them. There are many UK academics here playing their own game. I can choose to play their game - or I can play my own game, tread my own path…It does not make sense to compare myself with others who are not following that path. So, to look at a 'big name' Professor at a top US university and judge myself in some way inadequate is as absurd as looking at a supermodel and judging myself to be fat. They have both lived their lives very differently from me and made different choices. They have been endowed with different gifts. My challenge is to understand and exploit *my* unique gifts…that is plenty to keep me occupied for now." (Diary note, August 14, 2006)

In social identity terms I had been searching hopefully for an appropriate referent group but I was gradually, and reluctantly, coming to the conclusion that I belonged to an out-group of one (i.e. me). My need for validation had ultimately been superseded by my need for individuation. Although I still did not understand my dilemma in identity terms, my values and goals were coming into sharp focus and I realized that I could not reconcile them with remaining at the business school.

> "It feels as though I am at some kind of ill-defined cross roads, but that is probably too dichotomous. I suspect that I can integrate these apparently contradictory perspectives – that they are alternatives not inconsistencies." (Diary note, June 23, 2006)

Discussion: Experience of identity conflict

As Ashforth et al. (2008) have explained, to date there has been very little research on *how individuals experience* identity conflict in a work context, though previous studies have identified the sense of sense of stress and isolation which individuals can experience (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006). As expressed in Figure 1, my experience of identity conflict can be understood as a complex intertwining of positive and negative experiences, bound together with ambivalent experiences which were exacerbated as I cycled repeatedly between these polarized positions.

The experiences associated with my interactions with practitioners were *positive* and powerful. In my narrative and diary comments the themes of *excitement* and *enjoyment* come through strongly. These positive experiences were typically associated with a strong sense of intellectual stimulation and validation as I found myself intellectually challenged and inspired by my interactions with L.A.W. and saw my research helping to bring about meaningful change. As well as intellectual validation I also experienced personal validation – the powerful sense of *affirmation* that came from being welcomed as a trusted advisor by an appealing referent group. Meanwhile my need for *escapism* was satisfied as I could step out of the "institutionalized depression" (Bochner, 1997) that I was experiencing at the business school into a practitioner world that, alongside intellectual stimulation and a sense of fulfilment, offered me money, glamour, and sensual pleasure.

By contrast my *negative* experiences arose from my academic institutional environment and my growing sense of the incommensurability of my dual work

identities. Long before my encounter with practitioners I was experiencing institutionalized *depression* as a result of my situation at the business school. The closer I got to the world of practitioners, the further I seemed to be moving away from academia in general, not just the business school in particular, and this increased my sense of *isolation*. As the competing demands of my dual work identities were exacerbated, my levels of *anxiety* increased, together with my levels of *exhaustion*.

As I cycled emotionally between these two extremes of *positive* and *negative* experiences, and physically between the worlds of research and practice, my identity conflict also gave rise to *ambivalent* experiences, feelings of *guilt* associated with leading a double life and *confusion* of not knowing how to resolve the conflict.

Integrating the "other": Resolving identity conflict

Within six months of noting that I was at some "ill-defined cross roads" I was approached by Cass Business School in the City of London and asked to join them as Professor in the Management of Professional Service Firms. In addition to creating a personal Chair for me, they asked me to establish my own research centre where I could focus my energies on researching and teaching about professional service firms. I would be in the heart of Europe's financial centre where I had begun my career, surrounded by the global headquarters of many of the world's largest professional service firms, and based at an institution that was deeply embedded in this community. My meetings with prospective colleagues convinced me that I had found a peer group with whom I could "be myself". I made the move to Cass and, in the process, was able to resolve my identity conflict.

The publication of my book, *Managing the Modern Law Firm* (2007), was symbolic of this resolution. In editing the book I had worked closely with academic contributors to help them translate their law firm management research for a practitioner audience. I also worked with practitioners to develop commentaries on the academic research. To my surprise and great delight the book was very well-received by academics as well as lawyers.

In 2008 I took a further step in bridging the research-practice divide by establishing the Cass Centre for Professional Service Firms. Among other things, this research centre brings together Cass academics with senior professionals to discuss and develop our research. Our academic research is refined and strengthened by being constantly challenged by reflective practitioners, who in turn gain insights into their work by being exposed to our different conceptual perspectives. These meetings resemble "joint interpretation meetings", as described by Mohrman et al. (2001), though we do not conduct collaborative research. In creating the Centre I have inadvertently created my own eclectic referent group to which I can belong. Finally (and belatedly) I have felt able to assert the following about my identity:

> "I don't have to prove to anyone that I am a serious academic anymore. I have made it on my own terms and have got to a place of great potential for fulfilment." (Diary note, April 13, 2008).

Straddling the research-practice divide and bringing together communities of academics and professionals is not easy but I understand now that this struggle is a part of who I am as an academic. I have rejected the advice of the academic colleague who said "You can't do both" but acted on his recommendation that "You

have to decide which kind of academic you want to be." As I asserted so vehemently to the lawyers several years ago "I *am* an academic" – but my own particular kind of one.

Rejecting my academic socialization, I now realize that my dual work identities of researcher and practitioner are *not* incommensurable but can coexist in dialectical tension. This tension cannot be resolved but it can be recognized, understood, and accommodated. In effect I have followed Fiol et al.'s (2009) recommendations for resolving intractable identity conflicts between groups - I have recognized there is value in accommodating dual identities and have sought out opportunities for work that accommodates and exploits these dual identities. In so doing, I have expanded my conceptualization of my academic identity to accommodate this dialectic which in effect forms a central theme of my identity narrative. However, my dual work identities of researcher and practitioner must be carefully managed to maintain the appropriate degree of tension. When my two worlds move out of balance, I risk falling back into the cycles of positive and negative experiences - excitement and depression, affirmation and isolation - associated with identity conflict in its extreme form.

Discussion: Tactics for resolving identity conflict

The tactics identified below are inspired by Fiol et al.'s (2009) recommendations for resolving intractable identity conflicts between work groups and by Kreiner et al.'s (2006) insights into mechanisms for resolving tensions between the personal and professional identities of priests. I have adapted these for the academic work context in the light of my own experience. They are not necessarily tactics I employed at the

time (as I did not explicitly frame my struggle as an identity conflict while I was experiencing it) but ones I have articulated subsequently as I have developed an increased understanding of my identity work.

1. Promote mindfulness - As explained earlier, the theme of identity has been largely neglected in previous studies of the research-practice divide. The first tactic is, therefore, perhaps the simplest. Reflecting Fiol et al.'s (2009) study, we need first to recognize the potential for conflict. Only once we recognise that sustained engagement with practitioners can provoke challenging identity work can we consciously mobilize the other identity tactics identified below.

2. & 3. Separate role from identity and create an identity hierarchy - Kreiner et al. (2006) suggest it is possible to undertake work without incorporating it into ones work identity. This tactic can, for example, apply to an academic who identifies him or herself exclusively as a researcher but who does a bit of consulting "on the side" to supplement their income. Kreiner et al. also highlight the value of creating an identity hierarchy. This tactic could apply to an academic who defines themselves as a researcher first and foremost but seeks to engage with practitioners on an ongoing basis. Rather than adopt either of these tactics I deployed another, as described below.

4. Expand conceptualization of identity - My study suggests that, in an academic context, it is possible to expand one's conceptualization of academic identity to incorporate a serious commitment to engagement with practice rather than keeping it separate from, or relegating it to, a subordinate level in one's identity hierarchy. This

approach resembles methods advocated by Fiol et al. (2009) for reconciling identity conflicts between work groups, such as recognizing dual identity strengths. By recognizing that my commitment to the worlds of research and practice was a defining feature of my academic identity, and by reconciling myself to the dialectical tension inherent in my dual work identities, I ultimately expanded my conceptualization of academic identity.

5. Define conditions for engagement - Kreiner et al. (2006) talk about setting limits to maintain strict boundaries between work and personal identities. In the context of dual work identities an academic can set limits on, and conditions for, engagement with practice. I was exhausted by the two kinds of work I was doing but this was as much an emotional as a physical exhaustion associated with my identity conflict. My study demonstrates the value of limiting the number of consulting days we do a year, selecting consulting projects which inform rather than distract from our research, and working with reflective practitioners who can challenge and contribute to own idea development.

6. Build and balance multiple sources of affirmation - My study has suggested that, if we have critical colleagues and appreciative clients, the temptation to favour the world of practice can be strong. The same could apply to individuals receiving a spate of negative peer reviews on journal submissions, for example. By building and maintaining strong links with our network of academic peers around the world, we can ensure that we are receiving intellectual validation and inspiration from fellow academics, to balance the fulfilment and affirmation we may receive from practitioners.

7. Identify and befriend "fellow travellers" - Humphreys (2005), quoted earlier, has emphasized the problems that can arise when academics maintain a mask of certainty. I contend that established academics who are committed to crossing the research-practice divide have a responsibility to help younger academics in their quest for relevance. As well as encouraging our colleagues who share our values and goals, we can seek out reflective practitioners who are intellectually frustrated in their work roles and who are eager to engage with academics who share their desire for intellectual exploration. My study has demonstrated that by creating a referent group of like-minded individuals (both practitioner and researcher) we can do much to refine and affirm our identities as academics as we seek to journey back and forth across the research-practice divide.

Conclusions

This paper set out to answer the question: how is a management academic's identity affected by sustained engagement with management practitioners? In order to address this question it first identified factors which can exacerbate and create identity conflict in this context. These were specifically: the strength of identification with existing institution, the attractiveness of new referent group, and the perceived incommensurability of dual work identities. Second, it explored the experience of identity conflict. It highlighted multiple positive and negative experiences, which can occur alongside the ambivalent experiences associated with a repeated cycling between these two extremes. And finally, the paper identified identity tactics which an individual can deploy in seeking to resolve identity conflict. These ranged from promoting mindfulness of the potential for identity conflict, to expanding our conceptualisation of our academic identity. Each of these themes concerning the

factors causing, the *experiences ensuing*, and the *tactics for resolving* identity conflict have been examined in detail in the three discussion sections which followed passages of autoethnographic analysis.

By examining these identity-related themes, the study contributes to the nascent literature on the process of identity work at work. In particular it responds to Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) who emphasise the need for research about how individuals conduct identity work when they deviate from socially scripted or highly institutionalized trajectories. Whereas previous studies of identity regulation have focused on the process of sensebreaking and sensegiving at the organizational level (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashforth et al., 2008), the current study has highlighted the significant role played by "self-appointed" identity regulators. In so doing it has emphasised the extent to which socialisation occurs as much through an individual's interactions with specific colleagues as it does through his or her encounters with the institution's socially scripted norms.

The autoethnography contributes more broadly to the extensive literature on the research-practice divide. Previous studies have focused on the causes and consequences of the research-practice divide at an institutional level and have suggested institutional level responses to bridging that divide. In contrast the current study has focused on the causes and consequences at an individual level. In so doing it has identified individual level identity conflict as a previously neglected but potentially significant consequence of that divide. It has done so by introducing a novel methodological approach to the literature on the research-practice divide: the autoethnography. Clearly every academic who seeks to cross the research-practice

divide will have their own unique story to tell. This paper lays the foundations for other autoethnographies which can explore further how our academic socialisation helps to construct the research-practice divide and how our research journeys are densely intertwined with our identity journeys.

The study emphasises that academics who follow Rynes et al.'s (2001) injunctions to engage in effective inter-group socialisation with practitioners may find themselves drawn into intense identity work. The potential for conflict occurs not simply *between* "two tribes on either side of a chasm" as Gulati (2007) suggests, but *within* an individual management academic who seeks to build a bridge across that chasm. As described earlier, previous studies of the research-practice divide have presented the worlds of research and practice as dichotomous and potentially irreconcilable (e.g. Keiser and Leiner, 2011). Bartunek (2007) has challenged this perspective arguing that we should reframe the dichotomies of rigor vs relevance as tensions and dualities to be overcome through mutual appreciation. My study goes further than this. It emphasizes that academics who seek to cross the research-practice divide *may not be able to resolve* the ensuing identity conflict but *can instead attempt to reconcile* it, by accepting that the dialectical tension between their dual work identities of researcher and practitioner represents a central theme in their identity narrative.

It is worth emphasising that the current study has not specifically made the case for collaborative research between researchers and practitioners, as Bartunek (2007), Mohrman et al. (2007), Rynes et al. (2001), and Van de Ven (2007) advocate. My experience was not a formal partnership between researchers and practitioners, but

a lone journey by one individual between the worlds or research and practice. My interactions with practitioners inspired, informed, and strengthened my research. It also offered me ample opportunities to apply my research. But throughout it remained *my* research.

Finally, this study has highlighted the central role of academic socialisation in constructing the practitioner world as "other" and in sustaining the research-practice divide. Every time we emphasize the importance of publishing in "A" list journals rather than practitioner journals (to our doctoral students, at recruitment time, during tenure reviews, and appraisal meetings), we reinforce the research-practice divide through the process of academic socialisation. The study acknowledges the potential for institutionally-prescribed change, as described by scholars such as Lorsch (2009), Pfeffer (2007), Rynes et al. (2001), Starkey et al. (2009), Tushman & O'Reilly (2007) and Van de Ven & Johnson (2006). However, it is sympathetic to Shapiro et al. (2007) who emphasise that "the perceived causes and solutions involve us as well as our institutions" (p. 263). We are ultimately agents of our institutions and each of us must choose whether to conform to institutionally-prescribed norms or seek to subvert them. As Starkey et al (2009) argue, a "durable bridge between academics and practitioners will not be constructed unless it has powerful champions and sufficient numbers" (p. 552).

Final reflections - Previous studies have suggested that the apparently incommensurable social identities of practitioners and academics represent a fundamental impediment to creating and utilizing academic knowledge through interaction with the world of practice. I would qualify this assertion. The identities of

academics and practitioners as we currently construct them are potentially incommensurable, but that need not represent a fundamental impediment to effective engagement with practice. We learn from each other through interaction yet it is precisely this close engagement with "the other" which may challenge our sense of self. In the process of interaction with practice, we academics may be forced to address uncomfortable or unresolved questions about our own identities. But if we are open to the personal learning that can emerge from the experience, rather than simply looking for opportunities to teach the world of practice or to gather data from it, we may ultimately find that we do better quality and more personally fulfilling research. Even more importantly, our personal learning may help us to fulfill our broader purpose at a societal level. In the process we may become not just better researchers or consultants but better teachers also, as we find our authentic voices and role-model this authenticity to our students. As an MBA student recently wrote to me.

> "A very Happy Christmas to one whose teaching has made me redefine and rediscover myself."

The insights we gain and the mindfulness we develop in the course of our identity journey will enable us to support many others as they engage in theirs.

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