**‘Hybrids, identity and knowledge boundaries: Creative artists between academic and practitioner communities’**

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**Abstract**

Hybrid people can be riven by identity conflicts and yet be profoundly disruptive of social boundaries. How can we understand these two facets of hybridity? This study examines how internal identity conflict resolution is related to external boundary disruption by focusing on the identity work of individuals who cross professional knowledge boundaries. It looks at artist-academic hybrids who operate at the interface between the academic and art worlds. The analysis shows the dynamic interplay between their hybrid identity work and knowledge boundary work. It distinguishes three categories of hybrids (‘Janusian’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘asymmetric’) whose varied identity work strategies (‘integrative’, ‘multiplex’ and ‘buffering’) disrupt knowledge boundaries in different ways (‘blurring’, ‘transgressing’ and ‘brokering). The study sheds light on the varied nature of hybrids and the mutually constitutive nature of their internal and external identity work. It advances our understanding of identity work as an agentic activity and reveals the identity processes underlying the disruption of knowledge boundaries.

**Keywords**

Academic-practitioners, artist-academics, boundary-crossing, boundary work, creative artists, hybridity, hybrids, identity work, identity construction, knowledge boundaries, knowledge workers

**Introduction**

Hybrids are people who straddle the boundaries between social categories and combine resources from both in their identities. Identity scholars have paid particular attention to the ways in which such people construct their hybrid identities to mitigate tension and cope with inconsistent demands. The concept of ‘identity work’, referring to the practices and tactics by which individuals actively negotiate and construct their identities ([Brown, 2015](#_ENREF_12); [Snow and Anderson, 1987](#_ENREF_61); [Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003](#_ENREF_63); [Watson, 2008](#_ENREF_68)), has been widely used to explain identity processes. Several studies examine the identity work of professional employees who cross work roles ([Iedema et al., 2004](#_ENREF_39)), organizational ([Ellis and Ybema, 2010](#_ENREF_26)) and career boundaries ([Lindgren and Wåhlin, 2001](#_ENREF_43)). Others explore the hybridity of those who negotiate cultural, ethnic, gender and religious boundaries ([Van Laer and Janssens, 2014](#_ENREF_65); [Essers and Benschop, 2007](#_ENREF_29); [Essers and Benschop, 2009](#_ENREF_30); [Purchase et al., 2018](#_ENREF_53)). This literature provides valuable insight into the micro-level processes of hybrid identity construction. However, the analytical focus is predominately on individuals’ self-positioning and sensemaking, and it treats the construction of hybrid identity primarily as a means of resolving conflict at this level. Less consideration has been given to its wider consequences albeitwith the exception of McGivern et al ([2015](#_ENREF_48)) and Lok ([2010](#_ENREF_44)) who explore the influence of hybrid identity work on institutional practices.

In contrast, a separate strand of literature, notably in cultural studies and, more recently, in creativity and knowledge brokerage emphasizes the disruptive potential of hybrids, and their role in challenging and eroding social boundaries. Cultural studies of hybrids are preoccupied with how new transcultural forms emerge as a result of ethnic, linguistic and political intermixing ([Bhabha, 1994](#_ENREF_8); [Marotta, 2008](#_ENREF_47)). For cultural theorists, hybrids are profoundly disruptive because they challenge established hierarchies and polarities. Likewise, an emerging literature on knowledge brokerage and creativity highlights the boundary disruptive effects of hybrids from their propensity to recombine knowledge across domains. For example, research on professional hybrids points to their engagement in brokering knowledge across occupational boundaries ([Currie et al., 2015](#_ENREF_20); [Burgess and Currie, 2013](#_ENREF_14)). Creativity studies show that dual-identity individuals resolve identity conflict by integrating inconsistent cognitions, and so facilitate the recombination of divergent knowledge resources from separated domains ([Cheng et al., 2008](#_ENREF_17); [Dokko et al., 2014](#_ENREF_22); [Gocłowska and Crisp, 2014](#_ENREF_37)). This strand of work suggests a possible connection between the identity dynamics of boundary-crossing individuals and disruption of social/knowledge boundaries. However, the question of why these people seek to dismantle boundaries and how their hybrid identities motivate it remains unexplored.

This study argues that our understanding of hybrids and the consequences of their identity dynamics can be greatly enhanced by building on both strands of literature. Despite their different analytical focus, both recognize the agentic potential of hybrids. Whereas the identity literature focuses on how they resolve tensions by means of ‘identity work’; cultural studies and creativity/brokerage research direct attention to how such ‘work’ reconfigures social boundaries. This study examines the relationship between hybrids and boundaries by focussing on the identity work of boundary-crossing individuals. It postulates a mutually reinforcing relationship between the two facets of hybridity: internal identity conflict resolution and external boundary disruption. By viewing hybridity as a means of resolving identity conflict, this study explores the identity tactics and energizing motives of individuals to mobilize resources from the associated domains for negotiating and constructing their hybrid identities. And, by highlighting the boundary disruptiveness of hybrids, it aims to reveal the broader consequences of hybrid identity work beyond the individuals involved. The concept of ‘identity work’, consisting of an ‘inward’ cognitive process of identity creation and preservation, and an ‘outward’ relational process of identity negotiation and social validation ([Watson, 2008](#_ENREF_68)), provides a bridge between the two perspectives. It denotes agentic activity arising from self-dynamics which, as Emirbayer and Mische ([1998: 974](#_ENREF_28)) argue, is ‘the point of origin’ of human agency. By investigating the interplay between the inward and outward aspects of hybrid identity work, the study seeks to advance our understanding of the agentic possibilities of hybrids.

The study focuses on individuals who cross professional knowledge boundaries. It looks at a group of hybrid knowledge workers, artist-academics, whose careers straddle creative arts and academia. These people illustrate particularly well the personal and social identity challenges of boundary-crossing. Knowledge boundaries constitute one type of social boundary but have special features that make boundary-crossing particularly challenging for the enactment of identities. They are deeply rooted in cognitive frames, work practices and professional hierarchies ([Carlile, 2002](#_ENREF_15); [2004](#_ENREF_16)) and thus can vividly reveal the dynamic interplay between the inward cognitive and outward relational aspects of identity work. Crossing knowledge boundaries can be especially difficult for professional knowledge workers who are delineated by their unique sets of work knowledge and derive their personal identities from their activities ([Fischer et al., 2016](#_ENREF_32))[[1]](#endnote-1). For artist-academics, the identity challenge can be exacerbated because they work at the interface between two distinct occupational communities characterized by contrasted knowledge logics. In academia, analytical/ abstract knowledge enjoys a privileged status and is usually articulated in texts ([Niedderer and Reilly, 2010](#_ENREF_50)). In contrast, artistic knowledge is strongly experiential, commonly expressed in non-textual forms or special visual language ([Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007](#_ENREF_31)). The study examines how artist-academics negotiate their hybridity to reconcile identity tensions and overcome knowledge boundaries.

The empirical investigation is based on interviews with 32 artist-academics. It reveals the dynamic interplay between their hybrid identity work and the disruption of knowledge boundaries. It distinguishes three categories of hybrids (‘Janusian’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘asymmetric’) who pursue different identity work strategies (‘integrative’, ‘multiplex’ and ‘buffering’) to construct their hybrid identity positions, which in turn, disrupt knowledge boundaries in different ways (‘blurring’, ‘transgressing’ and ‘brokering’). While previous research has examined the identity of individuals who cross boundaries of various kinds, none has explicitly considered knowledge boundaries. This study turns the spotlight on these to illuminate the mutually constitutive relationship between ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ identity work. It shows how hybrid identity work is intertwined with knowledge boundary work. It advances our understanding of the identity dynamics of hybrids and identity work as an agentic activity. It also reveals the identity processes underlying the disruption of knowledge boundaries.

The next section presents the main concepts and framework, followed by the research methods and data. The article then examines the identity work tactics of the three categories of hybrids and shows how they disrupt knowledge boundaries. It concludes by discussing the study’s theoretical and practical significance.

**Concepts and framework**

*Identity work: internal and external aspects*

The concept of identity work provides a useful starting point. It emphasises ‘the experience of agency’ ([Gecas, 1986: 140](#_ENREF_35)) and offers the opportunity to investigate how micro-processes influence macro-consequences ([Brown, 2017](#_ENREF_13)). Of the various definitions, the most influential is probably Snow and Anderson’s ([1987: 1348](#_ENREF_61)) conception of it as ‘the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept’. Seveningston and Alvession ([2003: 1165](#_ENREF_63)) further suggest that ‘identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness’. Common to both is their emphasis on the ‘internal’ aspects of identity work. Drawing attention also to its ‘external’ aspects, Watson ([2008: 129](#_ENREF_68)) argues that ‘identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to inﬂuence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieus in which they live their lives’.

Watson’s conception of identity work as including an ‘inward’ cognitive process of identity preservation and an ‘outward’ relational process of identity negotiation is particularly relevant. First, unlike much of the literature which emphasizes the internally focused motives of self-continuity and self-coherence, it accords equal importance to internal and external identity motives. In particular, it highlights the quest for social validation that drives individuals to engage in identity negotiation and influence their social context. Accordingly, Ashforth and Schinoff ([2016: 117](#_ENREF_2)) urge scholars ‘to be cognizant of the interplay – and potential conflicts –between internally and externally focused identity motives’. Recognizing their interactive dynamics illuminates the complex identity work of individuals who straddle social domains and find the coherence and validity of their identities come under challenge ([Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010](#_ENREF_38)) . The desire for internal self-consistency may conflict with the need for external legitimacy, and impels individuals to influence identity meanings and its pertaining social context.

Second, and more crucially, Waston’s conception captures the dialectic between a self-reflective, internal sense of identity and an outward facing external development of social identities (Brown 2017). It suggests a reciprocal relationship between the cognitive/sensemaking and behavioural/relational aspects of identity work. This echoes Weick et al’s ([2005: 409](#_ENREF_69)) argument that sensemaking is the locus of how ‘meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity into action’. It resonates with the findings of an emerging literature on the influence of identity work on a range of collective processes and outcomes. For example, Lok (2010) shows that the social construction of an identity based on a particular institutional logic inherently involves the conditioning of practice and vice versa. Similarly, research on identity work of stigmatized individuals demonstrates how negotiation of identity meanings can subvert relative symbolic power differences between social groups and influence their understanding of both the stigmatized and dominant identities at the group level ([Creed et al., 2010](#_ENREF_18); [Lyons et al., 2017](#_ENREF_45)). What these studies show is that the particular ways in which individuals see themselves and attach meanings to their identities influences how they act on external relationships and negotiate collective social identities. This implies that identity work, as an agentic activity, involves not only actors’ interpretive agency in sensemaking but also their concomitant effort to shape the social context in which they are enmeshed ([Emirbayer and Mische, 1998](#_ENREF_28)).

*Hybrid identity work and boundary work*

According to identity theory, constructing identity involves drawing distinctions and erecting discursive boundaries between self and other ([Czarniawska, 1997](#_ENREF_21)). Thus, identity work is closely tied to ‘boundary work’ ([Gieryn, 1983](#_ENREF_36)). Some scholars regard identity work as the ‘boundary work that people do to react to processes of inclusion and exclusion’ ([Essers and Benschop, 2009](#_ENREF_30)). Others treat boundary work as ‘the discursive practices’ that boundary-spanning individuals use to ‘erect boundaries’ and construct an understanding of self ([Ellis and Ybema, 2010](#_ENREF_26)). These restrictive conceptions, which focus on boundary drawing and building mental fences, do not do justice to the more complex socio-political nature of boundary work associated with the construction of hybrid identities.

Hybridization denotes a recombination process that breaks down domain boundaries. Hybrid identity work involves the mixing and crossing-over of two different identities so that elements of both are encapsulated within one’s self-space ([Marotta, 2008](#_ENREF_47); [Purchase et al., 2018](#_ENREF_53)). It denotes the cognitive and behavioural tactics undertaken by individuals to negotiate their hybrid selves by selectively recombining identity resources of the associated social domains. Internally, the desire for self-consistency may prompt individuals to activate the cognitive resources of both domains in sensemaking. For example, meanings of objects and representations in one domain can be reinterpreted by using the cognitive frames of another through ‘dialogical self-encounters’ ([Raggatt, 2010](#_ENREF_54)) and ‘perspective taking’ ([Boland and Tenkasi, 1995](#_ENREF_10)). The experiences of the past self can be reconstructed by using the viewpoints of the present self as individuals strive to maintain temporal continuity ([Schultz and Hernes, 2013](#_ENREF_58)). In doing so, cognitive boundaries between domains are blurred and connections between them forged. Externally, the need for social validation induces individuals to engage in boundary practices in order to generate the necessary relational resources for negotiating identity meanings and dual legitimacy. Gal et al. ([2005: 3](#_ENREF_33)) refer to this as ‘a process that unfolds through the engagement of social groups in mutual boundary practices’.

Accordingly, this study adopts a broader meaning of ‘boundary work’ to include actors’ efforts to connect and dismantle boundaries. It draws on the seminal work of Gieryn (1983) and research on professional/occupational and knowledge boundaries which have identified a wide variety of boundary work strategies associated with maintaining, connecting, breaching and dismantling of boundaries ([Bechky, 2003](#_ENREF_4); [Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010](#_ENREF_72); [Lifshitz-Assaf, 201](#_ENREF_42)8). Whereas the identity literature focuses on the discursive practices of individuals’ boundary work in identity construction; boundary work studies examine also their strategic practical actions in changing social systems. Adopting a broader conception of boundary work in an identity context opens an avenue for exploring the dynamic interplay between internal and external identity work, and how the reconciliation of identity conflict can disrupt social boundaries.

*Knowledge boundaries and identity*

Knowledge boundaries constitute one type of social boundary that is deeply rooted in interpretive frames, work practices and status hierarchies ([Carlile, 2002](#_ENREF_15); [2004](#_ENREF_16)). Their centrality to the formation of professional identities clearly reveals the identity work and boundary work that individuals undertake when crossing such boundaries. In general, knowledge (or knowing) itself is intimately connected to identity because it provides individuals with cognitive resources for thinking and sensemaking ([Gecas, 1982](#_ENREF_34); [Markus, 1977](#_ENREF_46)). It is also a key dimension used for regulating individual-group relationships ([Wenger, 1998](#_ENREF_70)). For professional knowledge workers*,* the relationship between knowledge (knowing) and identity (being) is particularly intimate. These people work with knowledge and its creation and articulation are their core activities.Claiming and securing professional identities involve not only learning the knowledge but, more crucially, developing an active relationship with practice and ways of knowing ([Fischer et al., 2016](#_ENREF_32)). The content of knowledge, ways of knowing and modes of knowledge articulation are all resources for professional identity construction. For example, Elsbach ([2009](#_ENREF_27)) illustrates how creative workers in design claim their professional identities and assert the value of their artistic knowledge by ‘showing’ their work in galleries. Visscher et al ([2018](#_ENREF_66)) examine how consultants construct their ‘elite’ bricolaged identities by emphasizing their ‘craftsmanship’ in combining diverse knowledge sources, and by distancing themselves from what is perceived as low-status technical/engineering problem-solving.

Crossing knowledge boundaries, therefore, poses significant challenges to the (re)construction of identities. Carlile ([2004](#_ENREF_16)) elucidates three progressively complex knowledge boundaries between professional communities: syntactic (language), semantic (meaning/interpretation) and pragmatic (political). Syntactic boundaries are created by divergent symbols, labels and languages. Here boundary-crossing requires the creation of a common lexicon or mode of knowledge representation. Semantic boundaries arise from differences in accepted interpretations and meanings among actors, such that knowledge needs to be translated through ‘perspective-taking’ (Boland and Tenkasi, 1995). Pragmatic boundaries relate to the differences in interests and assumptions about what counts as valuable and legitimate knowledge in given contexts. Overcoming these boundaries requires actors to challenge and re-negotiate established hierarchical knowledge differences.

Individuals who cross these multifaceted knowledge boundaries face considerable challenges to both the internal and external aspects of their identities. Internally, differences in languages/symbols and meanings can undermine their own cognitive and perceptual consistency. Social psychologists have long emphasized the overriding need for individuals to strive towards perceptual consistency ([Markus, 1977](#_ENREF_46)). Individuals at the interface between knowledge domains may draw on an expanded set of cognitive resources (e.g. linguistic and discourse forms) and reconstitute them for constructing more complex self-concepts that incorporate contrasted identities ([Roccas and Brewer, 2002](#_ENREF_57)). Externally, crossing boundaries may threaten the validity and legitimacy of the knowledge accumulated over the course of an individual’s career. Failed validation or devaluation of prior knowledge is often a major source of identity threat in professional role transitions ([Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010](#_ENREF_38)). Individuals may respond by altering their identities and knowledge to adapt to new work roles, or they may assert the imprint of their old identities and knowledge on their new roles by means of job crafting ([Nicholson, 1984](#_ENREF_49); [Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001](#_ENREF_71)). Beyer and Hannah ([2002](#_ENREF_7)) show that veteran workers who move from one professional domain to another often draw on their past knowledge for identity construction. Lifshitz-Assaf (2018) find that R&D professionals who refocused their identities from ‘problem solvers’ to ‘solution seekers’ opened up their knowledge work boundaries to incorporate external knowledge in open innovation. All these are acts of professional identity work aimed at negotiating identity meanings and legitimacy in response to knowledge boundary-crossing. These studies give a first hint that the identity work undertaken to accommodate change and reconcile tensions not only serves as a coping mechanism but can also make knowledge boundaries more permeable.

**The Empirical Study**

*Creative artists in academic-practitioner communities: the ‘artist-academics’*

In many creative disciplines, people move between the academic and practitioner communities. This reflects the practice-based nature of artistic research ([Niedderer and Reilly, 2010](#_ENREF_50)). Historically, professional artists have worked as university ‘visitors’ or regular faculty members, owing to the practice of learning-by-doing ([Adler, 1976](#_ENREF_1)). This creates a large population of artist-academics who straddle both professional worlds.

These people serve as an ‘extreme case’([Eisenhardt, 1989](#_ENREF_25)) for the purpose of this study. First, they bring into sharper relief the connection between identity construction and knowledge boundaries. Knowledge creation is their core activity and their professional identities are rooted in complex knowledge domains which makes identity transition in role boundary-crossing particularly challenging. Second, they work at the interface of two contradistinctive knowledge communities and their experience reveals the identity work undertaken to reconcile the tensions. Despite the mobility between the two communities, the relationship between professional arts and academia has been uneasy because the two communities value different types of knowledge. Academic knowledge is generally conceptual and is usually expressed in texts. In contrast, artistic knowledge is derived from aesthetic/embodied experience and is commonly expressed in performative or visual modes ([Elsbach, 2009](#_ENREF_27); [Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007](#_ENREF_31)). Within academia, conceptual, text-based knowledge is given higher status than experiential knowledge. This is so even in the practice-based disciplines such as creative arts where the status of non-textual knowledge is ambiguous and academics are under pressure to comply with traditional academic knowledge practices ([Niedderer and Reilly, 2010](#_ENREF_86)). The difficulties of translating aesthetic/embodied knowledge into academic knowledge create enduring legitimacy problems for artists working in academia ([Blom et al., 2011](#_ENREF_9)).

What identity work strategies do artist-academics undertake to reconcile the tensions arising from the knowledge differences? How do they construct their hybridity and how might this influence the knowledge boundaries between the two communities?

*Data collection and sample*

The analysis is based on interviews with 32 artist-academics in drama, music, media arts and design from three research universities in the London area.[[2]](#endnote-2) The majority were identified by examining closely the CVs of individuals on their departmental webpages and some additional names were obtained by snowballing. Additional biographical data were obtained through other online sources such as LinkedIn and personal webpages. Some artist-academics had both ‘professional artist’ and academic webpages. These facilitated purposive selection of individuals whose careers straddle academia and professional arts. The sample comprises those engaged in academic research and creative arts in parallel throughout their careers (11 cases), and those who had moved from the art world to academia (21 cases). The former held dual work roles and thus experienced recurrent role transitions; whereas the latter experienced sequential role boundary-crossing. The majority of the interviewees were in their mid- or late-careers and held senior academic positions. They had joined academia at different stages of their careers and had varied length of work experience in the academic and practitioner worlds (see Table 1). This sample composition allows comparison across the groups and provides a time dimension by virtue of their different transitional experiences.

The interviews used a semi-structured protocol which was revised as the research progressed to take advantage of emerging themes. To allow for meaningful comparisons across interviews, there were four sets of common questions dealing with: a) the individuals’ work histories and work role transition experience; b) their self-defined professional identities; c) their knowledge creation/dissemination activities, perception of the value of different types of knowledge and how they reconciled the knowledge differences between the two domains; and d) their boundary-spanning activities. The respondents were encouraged to develop their own themes through an open, conversational style of interviewing. Interviews lasted about 60-75 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed.

In addition, other relevant information obtained via web searches, such as CVs, also provided valuable data. For example, several interviewees spoke about their activities in promoting audio-visual modes of knowledge creation in academia. The author conducted web searches and found documentary evidence that supported their claims.

*Data analysis*

The analysis followed an abductive approach ([Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011](#_ENREF_59)), iterating between the data and literature in three stages.First, each case was coded organically to identify patterns and themes. Early on, significant differences emerged between the role transition experience and self-conceptionsof those simultaneously engaged in academic and practitioner roles, and those who had made career transitions from practitioners to academics. The former described how they alternated between the two roles and saw themselves as‘both’ academics and practitioners; whereas the latter reported initial identity tension, and their self-definitions appeared ambivalent and changeful. This was most apparent among those who entered academia mid-career and aspired to become academic researchers. To distinguish these two groups, the former is labelled as ‘academic-practitioners’ and the latter, ‘pracademics’. It was also notable that some veteran practitioners, especially those who joined academia late in their careers, saw themselves primarily as ‘practitioners’: they are labelled as ‘practitioners-in-academia’. The career background of these categories is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

In the second stage, the three categories were compared more systematically, focusing on the patterns of hybridity displayed. The literature on multiple/hybrid identities suggests that pairs of identities can relate to each other in different ways: a) the nature of interaction (integration vs. differentiation); and b) their relative dominance within the self-conception ([Ramarajan, 2014](#_ENREF_55); [Purchase et al., 2018](#_ENREF_53))*.*  Building on this and constant comparison of the interviewees’ identity narratives, three distinct patterns of hybrid self-conceptions were identified: ‘Janusian’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘asymmetric’, each corresponding to a category of hybrid. The ‘academic-practitioners’ are ‘Janusian’ hybrids: they switch between the two identities and consider them equal and compatible. The ‘pracademics’ are ‘ambivalent’ hybrids: they oscillate between their past practitioner and present academic selves. The ‘practitioners-in-academia’ are called ‘asymmetric’ hybrids: their practitioner identity remains dominant but has expanded over time to incorporate aspects of academic roles.

Having consolidated the three conceptual categories, the author returned to the data, focussing on the ‘how’ questions: How did they construct their respective identity positions and in what ways did knowledge serve as a discursive and social resource? How did they perceive, evaluate and reconcile the knowledge differences? The analysis focused on the inward ‘cognitive’ and outward ‘relational’ dimensions. The cognitive aspect concerned how the individuals ‘worked’ their hybrid identities in identity talks and around their particular situated knowledge practices. The relational aspect included interactive or boundary activities concerning image presentation, identity validation and negotiation. During coding, it became apparent that the temporal element of identity work ([Schultz and Hernes, 2013](#_ENREF_58); [Sillince and Simpson, 2010](#_ENREF_60)) featured strongly among the former practitioners who frequently mentioned their ‘past’ (‘practitioner’) selves and experiences while talking about their current work. The subsequent analysis therefore systematically extracted exemplary quotes pertaining to temporality.

Through constant comparison and grounded theoretical reflection, it emerged that each category of hybrids used a distinct identity work strategy to mobilize knowledge as a resource to construct their hybridity which, in turn, disrupted knowledge boundaries. The Janusian hybrids used an ‘integrative’ identity work strategy that blurred the knowledge boundaries. The ambivalent hybrids adopted a ‘multiplex’ strategy which led them to transgress knowledge boundaries. And finally, the asymmetric hybrids employed a ‘buffering’ strategy by engaging in knowledge brokering to gain legitimacy. In the final stage, by revisiting the literature and writing draft versions, the author refined her understanding of the mutually reinforcing relationships between hybrid identity work and knowledge boundary work. Figure 1 shows the identity work and knowledge boundary work associated with each type of hybrid.

Figure 1 about here

**Hybrid Identity Work and Knowledge Boundary Work**

Considering each category of hybrid in turn, this section presents evidence of the individuals’ self-conceptions and patterns of hybridity displayed. Then, it examines how their internal and external hybrid identity work relates to their knowledge boundary work.

*Academic-practitioners as ‘Janusian’ hybrids: ‘Integrative’ identity work and ‘blurring’ knowledge boundaries*

Academic-practitioners are most prevalent in the strongly practice-based disciplines such as drama and music where there are ample opportunities for dual careers. Although their primary employment was in academia, all had been actively engaged as practitioners alongside their academic work.

*The ‘Janusian’ hybrids.* These people experienced recurrent role transitions and were able to switch between the two identities smoothly according to situational/role demands. One professor in Drama (AP2), working also as a theatre director, saw himself as ‘both’ an academic and a practitioner in response to the question about his professional self-conception. In reinforcing this sentiment, he said, ‘I feel like I flip between the two*’* and stated that he worked ‘as a lecturer and also as a practitioner’ in his teaching*.* Likewise, another described how she moved between the two identities ‘as appropriate or necessary and driven by the need of a particular project’ (AP3). Others replied that they were ‘somewhere between’ the two polar positions (AP5 and AP9) and not wanting to ‘jump over too much over to one camp’ (AP8).

These narratives indicate their ‘Janusian’ hybrid self-conception and the desire to maintain balance between the two professional selves. Many considered the two identities ‘equal’ and ‘complementary’ and stressed the synergistic benefits. For example, the drama professor quoted above said: ‘I do think of them as being equal... It’s not that one is primary and one is secondary. I can’t imagine not doing both’ (AP2). One in Music considered himself as being ‘in a fortunate position’ for being able to ‘cross the boundary between ethnomusicologist and art music which is very useful because otherwise people tend to get into separate camps’ (AP8). Another described himself as having ‘a profile’ in two different strands of work - performance and academic research - and stated that ‘there is kind of confluence of the two’ (AP5).

These people construct their hybrid selves in everyday work and appear to have found a way of balancing the two deeply intertwined identities. They are ‘Janusian’ hybrids who have developed dual identities: their ongoing challenge is to maintain internal coherence and externally, to sustain legitimacy in both work domains.

*Identity and frame switching: knowledge integration.* They maintained self-coherence by engaging in constant identity switching and using the cognitive frames of both an academic and artist in talking about themselves and making sense of their work in the two domains. For example, throughout the interview, the drama professor-cum- theatre director (AP2) alternated between his two identities in discussing his work and ways of knowing. He spoke about the ‘pleasures of forming rigorous thoughts and arguments’ for being an academic researcher. Later on in the interview, he adopted the identity of a theatre person, saying ‘we… in the rehearsal room’, in contrasting the ‘scientific’ (‘academic’) and ‘aesthetic’ (artistic) ways of knowing. Identity switching not only served as a constant reminder that they were members of both groups but also enabled them to activate the two different sets of cognitive frames to negotiate and redefine meanings and boundaries. Hybridity is thus constructed through identity and frame switching which facilitates ‘dialogical self-encounter’ ([Raggatt, 2010](#_ENREF_54)). The excerpt below vividly illustrates how one such academic-practitioner reflected on his researching and performing experiences in a club. There, the ‘hybrid self’ emerged from a dialogical encounter between the ‘researcher self’ and ‘performing self’:

I am very committed to and interested in performing in clubs … working in clubs is driven very much by research imperatives, so I’ll perform in a club because it fits very neatly with the kinds of research I want to do, and then you’ll make changes in the work to accommodate the limitations that are imposed by the space, so when you do a performance in a club you will get changed in a toilet or you’ll get ready behind a speaker, which I find really exciting actually and interesting, and there are also other limitations... **s**o you know, there would be an assumption which is clubs are these spaces of absolute freedom, you know, carnivalesque in liberation of, you know, desire and of the body, but actually the limitations are quite striking. (AP5)

It is apparent that there were three ‘I’s in the narrative: the hybrid ‘I’ (the third person as the narrator, talking to the interviewer) who was positioned between the ‘researcher I’ and the ‘performing I’ and made connections between their work. By focusing on the common site – the club – where both activities occurred in parallel and by engaging in boundary-crossing sensemaking, he was not only constructing his integrated hybrid self but also broke down the cognitive boundaries between the two worlds. In other words, the hybrid self became the ‘knower’ who translated and integrated the knowing of the academic and practitioner selves.

While recognizing that there was a ‘theory vs. practice’ knowledge divide between the two worlds in general, the academic-practitioners played down the differences and stressed the similarities/synergistic relationships between the two domains when talking about their own work. The following replies to the question about potential conflicts in their dual roles are illustrative:

I don’t think there’s particular conflict, they are very different activities but I think it’s very easy to exaggerate how different the activities are. My brother is a builder and a plumber and whenever I’m thinking ‘gosh, I do such extraordinary [work]… I’m renaissance man’ and then I think ‘well actually, what I do is probably they’re very close to each other in the spectrum of human activities’. (AP2)

I see it [performance] as integral to what I do basically and I sort of think in a way if you’re doing, working in music it sort of ought to be really. (AP8)

By deemphasizing the differences and making connections between their activities in the two domains, the academic-practitioners sought to resolve identity tensions and developed a more coherent integrated self. It also induced them actively to engage in knowledge translation so as to find, in their words, ‘common grounds’ between the two domains. For example, one stated that he was ‘very keen to try and find ways of bringing the discourse back to the point where there is more a meeting point’ between theory and practice. He achieved this by using artist talks to disseminate his research and writing academic articles about the work of practitioners ‘in a form legible by everybody’ (AP2). Their internal identity work for attaining self-coherence also drove them to overcome the semantic and syntactic knowledge boundaries by means of knowledge translation and integration.

*Sustaining dual legitimacy: bi-lingual knowledge representation.* Knowledge translation and integration also formed an integral part of their interface with members of both communities. Underlying this was their external identity work for validating their hybridity and securing dual legitimacy in both worlds. In the interviews, they frequently stressed the need to engage with both sets of audiences. One said, ‘it’s very important for me that my work speaks to different readerships... you know a lot of the work I’ve done has been about transferring that kind of [academic] material into the public domain’ (AP3)*.* The academic-practitioners’ expressed desire to engage not only with their academic peers but also the ‘public’ audiences, whose responses affirm their artist identity ([Svejenova, 2005](#_ENREF_62)), is indicative of their hybrid identity work strategy. By doing so, they sought to gain legitimacy in their valued roles as both academics and artists.

Evidence from their interviews and CVs shows that they disseminated their work by using a variety of knowledge representation practices, combining relational artistic activities (e.g. artist talks and events) with conventional academic writing. They often reframed and re-represented the same materials or ideas in different ways. For example, publishing a ‘practitioner’ version of an academic book, or using a combination of visual methods (e.g. videos and exhibitions) as well as documenting it in scholarly text. One professor, who was also a curator in arts agencies, explained that he chose to work across different institutions in order ‘to find contexts for things where there are different kinds of audience’ (AP7). Another spoke about how he ‘made’ the work (i.e. performance) and used ‘the right kind of language to pitch it to a festival audience’, in addition to ‘writing about it’ and ‘translating the work back into an academic context’ (AP5). These examples show the switching between different communicative tools and knowledge representation practices. This ‘code-switching’ ([Auer, 2005](#_ENREF_3)) is emblematic of the academic-practitioners’ ‘bilingualism’ and hybridity. It constitutes external identity work through which they use knowledge representation as a relational resource to claim dual memberships and build cross-domain legitimacy.

The academic-practitioners are ‘Janusian’ hybrids who maintain internal coherence by engaging in constant identity switching and situated knowledge translation. Externally, they use bi-lingual knowledge representation to sustain dual legitimacy. Their ‘integrative’ identity work ‘blurs’ the knowledge boundaries between the two domains.

*Pracademics as ‘ambivalent’ hybrids: ‘Multiplex’ identity work and ‘transgressing’ knowledge boundaries*

The pracademics experienced more radical role transitions that involved a change in employment affiliations. Many were independent professional artists who became full-time academics in their mid-careers. In comparison with the academic-practitioners, their boundary-crossing experience was less smooth.

*The ‘ambivalent’ hybrids.* Many reported their initial work-identity integrity violation ([Pratt et al., 2006](#_ENREF_52)) and devaluation of their prior knowledge. A former actress was ‘frustrated’ that her previous professional experience was not recognized (PA2). Another ‘felt humiliated’ because of her inability to ‘speak the same language’ as her academic colleagues (PA6). They talked about their desire to be recognized as ‘proper academics’ and the need to learn academic modes of knowledge articulation. For example, the former actress spoke about her effort to ‘demonstrate those theoretical [ideas] in written accounts’ because ‘they are about evaluating your work as a serious academic’ (PA2). One in design, who initially sought to maintain ‘an exhibition project CV’, came to realize that she had to ‘give priority to written work because it gets the most points’ (PA13).

Work-related and identity-related learning are mutually reinforcing ([Pratt et al., 2006](#_ENREF_52)). Among those who had been in academia for some time, their academic identities appeared to become more prominent. Some proclaimed themselves as ‘academics’ in terms of their job; others declared that they were ‘not practitioners anymore’. A professional musician who had been in academia for over 15 years said: ‘I am not really a practitioner. I was. I did that for a large part of my life and I don’t do it at the moment’ (PA12).

However, their apparent dis-identification with the ‘practitioner’ past was not always accompanied by unambiguous identification with the ‘academic’ present. Probing deeper into the narratives reveals a more ambivalent picture of simultaneous identification and dis-identification, and frequent oscillation between their past and present selves. For example, the aforementioned music professor (PA12) described his self-conception as an ‘amorphous kind of self-construct’ that ‘exhibit[s] different aspects of the identity types’. A former film-maker saw himself asbeing ‘perpetually being somewhere in between the two worlds’, but stated that this had allowed him to negotiate his slow entry into academia in a ‘pain free’ way (PA8). This is indicative of an ambiguous condition of ‘liminality’ that allows individuals to ‘float’ between identity positions and have the freedom to renegotiate their identities ([Beech, 2011](#_ENREF_5)).

The apparent shift in the pracademics’ identities involved superimposing an academic identity onto their practitioner identity in a ‘nested duality ‘, characterized by a changeful relationship ([Brewer, 1999](#_ENREF_11)). The relative salience of either depended on the identity motives activated. The ‘academic self’ became prominent when the need for inclusion or validating their group membership was activated. However, the ‘practitioner self’ became influential when they sought to assert their self-distinctiveness. Their cynicism about the academic language games is indicative. For example, one former broadcaster described the academic style of writing as ‘obscurantist’. He recalled his early attempt to adopt this style in his writing by working ‘all the politics of obfuscation’, but decided that he could not bring himself do it. It was clear that writing in abstract academic style felt non-syntonic to his ‘broadcaster’ identity. Cynical distancing oneself from measures of role expectations constitutes an identity differentiation strategy, preventing the self from being too inclusive to a given social identity ([Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006](#_ENREF_40)).

The pracademics are ‘ambivalent’ hybrids who negotiate affinity and reconcile differences between the two identities linked to two previously separated domains. As will be shown below, their identity work is ‘multiplex’, involving both integration and differentiation – an ambivalent identity positioning described by Brewer (1991) as‘being the same and different’ simultaneously.

*Temporal oscillation and**interpretive recollection: knowledge transformation.* Internally, the pracademics sought to maintain self-continuity by holding onto aspects of their past in constructing their academic selves in the present. When talking about their work in academia, although not being primed to do so, they frequently referred to their past selves and the events/experiences associated with their past practitioner work. This was most notable among those who were mid-way in their transition to become academics. These people used temporal oscillation in their identity talk discursively to position themselves between the past and the present. At the same time, they adopted the cognitive lens of their academic selves to reinterpret the meaning of past events/experiences so as to gain a sense of continuity. As Sillince and Simpson ([2010: 120](#_ENREF_60)) argue, identity work represents ‘retrospective reformulation of meanings ascribed to past events’ that may be integrated in the present so that individuals are able to maintain a sense of ontological security. An example here is a former TV producer who ascribed new ‘academic’ meaning to an old ‘practitioner’ tool – the camera. Whereas in the past it was just an instrument for making films, it now triggered theoretical thoughts and research questions:

A camera used to be something that you held up to your eye and looked at, and now it’s something that you hold like that and you (laughs), you know you look at, so what does that mean when the work is always framed. For example, how is it changing the way in which films are being made which theoreticians have explored. (PA4)

Re-seeing and re-interpreting the past enabled the pracademics to use their prior experiences as resources for current work. A telling example is a former actor who developed her research on ‘embodied memory’ by reflecting on her own acting experience as a child:

I was interested in thinking about how our bodies, how did I as a 12 year old know what a sweet spot was on stage. I knew I knew it, but I don’t know how I knew it... and I wanted to find out a little bit more on what other kind of performance skills we might have in, I mean some have discussed it in terms of muscle memory. (PA2)

By drawing on their past as a resource for current academic work, the pracademics were able to embrace their past selves in constructing their academic selves in the present. In doing so, they also transformed knowledge by reconstituting its meaning and relevance across contexts ([Bechky, 2003](#_ENREF_4)). As shown in these two cases, using the precepts and language of academia to articulate the embodied experience of the past is an act of hybrid identity work as well as knowledge boundary work that dismantles spatio-temporal boundaries. Even among those who appeared to have made full career transitions, many continued to write about their past practitioner experience in their academic publications. For example, a former musician, now a professor, described his recent book on the saxophone - an instrument he used to play in the past - as something that was deeply ‘infused by that practical experience’ (PA12). Retelling the past and redeployingit as a resource for the present are internal identity work tactics for instilling a sense of continuity and security in hybrid identity construction. This also allows ‘old’ knowledge to be reinterpreted and transformed for ‘new’ use.

*Negotiating co-legitimacy: contesting knowledge practices and hierarchy.* The multiplex hybrid identity work of the pracademics also manifested itself externally in the ways they managed identity threat and negotiate legitimacy in the host academic environment. They used both resonant and oppositional identity claims ([Lyons et al., 2017](#_ENREF_45)) to reconcile knowledge differences and contest the academic knowledge hierarchy that privileged theoretical/textual knowledge. Resonant claims minimize their identity’s differential value and oppositional claims project their differences in a positive light so as to influence negotiations ([Roberts, 2005](#_ENREF_56)). These appeared to be driven by the desire to create a more favourable work environment for their hybridity. For example, many pracademics recognized that becoming a ‘proper academic’ involved ‘doing research’ (PA6) and ‘doing more writing’ (PA3), and stated that was what they were doing. At the same time, they sought to renegotiate identity meanings and gain acceptance as ‘a different kind’ of academic. For many, being an academic did not necessarily entail becoming a ‘theoretician’ or adhering to academic ways of knowing. The following quote captures the personal legitimating account of a former film maker in redefining the meaning of being an academic:

I’m actually somebody who is employed by a university. I’m an academic, that’s what my identity is. I am, at the same time, a sort of slightly weird marginal academic because I know I’m not a kind of theoretician and that’s not my trade and my trade exists in this sort of practice research community within academia which is kind of growing. (PA6)

Similarly, another asserted that he was doing serious theoretical work just like his academic colleagues albeit based on practice:

The theory came out of my practice as a filmmaker and how I actually feel about the music and the experience of the music. Okay… the type of theory that I’m trying to develop is one which is based on embodiment, so now other people have other theories and they’d say it was based on semiotics or whatever, but mine isn’t. And so basically what I’m trying to theorise is practice and so thinking about practical ways of knowing. (PA7)

These personal legitimating accounts were not only avenues for addressing identity tensions, but they also prompted the pracademics to negotiate knowledge practices and boundaries. Seeing themselves as ‘a different kind of academic’ gave them a degree of psychological freedom to violate the rules and practices of academia. For example, many refused to play the academic language game in their writing. Some actively engaged in ‘code-mixing’ ([Auer, 2005](#_ENREF_3)) by developing ‘hybrid languages’ in their work. One in drama created what she referred to as a ‘meta-language’ at an academic-practitioner event by mixing ‘music, dance and text’ in order to engage with both groups (PA2). Another brought together a group of actors, costume designers, musicians and academics to publish what she described as a ‘half practitioner and half academic’ book - one that was ‘both theoretical and practical’ and integrated visual images and analytical texts (PA1). Both the meta-language and the hybrid book were ‘boundary objects’ ([Gal et al., 2005](#_ENREF_33)) through which the pracademics negotiated and validated their hybridity by engaging their academic and practitioner colleagues in mutual boundary practices and discourses.

Some of the pracademics also actively used oppositional identity claims to influence identity negotiations towards valuing their ‘difference’ and treating it as a source of legitimacy. They did so by explicitly challenging the established knowledge hierarchy in academia. This was most visible in their collective effort to raise the status of non-textual modes of knowledge in the host context. Despite increased acceptance of practice work in the creative disciplines, theoretical and textual forms of knowledge still enjoy higher status (Niedderer and Reilly, 2010). Some, who felt this was undermining, decided to contest it. One example is the establishment of a ‘Practice Committee’, in one of the Media Arts departments, to seek academic recognition for non-textual outputs. The chair of the committee, a pracademic, emphasized that non-textual ways of knowing such as ‘thinking and working through sound’ were ways of ‘understanding things in a deeper level’ (PA7). This oppositional claim was endorsed by another who had successfully instituted an audio-visual PhD programme in his department (and elsewhere), following several years of campaigning. He believed that what they did was ‘to bring into question the academic discourse conducted in verbal language and text’ (PA8). These examples reveal the politics of the pracademics’ hybrid identity work, leading them to translate identity vision into strategic action in order to negotiate co-legitimacy and influence the definition of valuable knowledge.

In sum, the pracademics are ‘ambivalent’ hybrids whose identity work strategies are ‘multiplex’. Internally, they maintain self-continuity by engaging in temporal oscillation and interpretive recollection which transforms past knowledge across spatial-temporal contexts. Externally, they use resonant and oppositional identity claims to negotiate and contest what counts as legitimate knowledge in the host context. The ongoing negotiation of hybridity is woven into their ‘transgressive’ knowledge boundary work.

*Practitioners-in-academia as ‘asymmetric’ hybrids: ‘Buffering’ identity work and ‘brokering’ across knowledge boundaries*

The practitioners-in-academia were mostly veteran practitioners who had joined academia in their late-careers. Unlike the pracademics*,* few aspired to become fully-fledged academics. The majority sought to establish themselves by using a combination of teaching and quasi-academic (managerial) roles, without subjecting themselves to the full demands of academic membership to include research. People’s desires for further career development usually level off in their late careers. Moreover, experienced workers often seek to maintain aspects of their identities that reflect their past success (Beyer and Hannah 2002).

*The ‘asymmetric’ hybrids.* Their dominant practitioner identities served as anchors in their adaptation to academic roles. Although they also experienced initial identity threat, they did not seek to restructure their ‘threatened’ identities to fit new role demands. Instead, they sought to protect their practitioner selves by clearly differentiating themselves from the academics. In the interviews, they stressed the marked differences between themselves as ‘practice people’ and the academics as ‘theory people’, and frequently used inter-group comparisons to affirm their practitioner selves.

Although their practitioner identities remained dominant, the interviews show evidence of identity expansion over time. A former TV producer, who had been in academia for over ten years, said: ‘I see myself as a producer, first and foremost, a practitioner who happens to be working in a subject highly relevant to my practice’. She added: ‘I see myself as someone who has tried to pass on knowledge in my teaching’ (P1). Whilst holding firmly onto her producer/practitioner identity, she also appeared to have broadened it to include knowledge dissemination roles in academia. Identity expansion is a type of hybridization whereby the core elements of the identity remain the same but the meaning of this identity changes to reflect role development ([Dutton et al., 2010](#_ENREF_24)). It is also revealed in the way some included the word ‘academic’ to define themselves, albeitwith a hint of self-deprecation. One said he was ‘not a real, pure academic’ (P5), and another described himself as being ‘less academic as a [real] managerial academic’ (P6). These narratives indicate their self-conceptions as less than full members of academia.

The practitioners-in-academia are ‘asymmetric’ hybrids whose core practitioner selves have expanded to encapsulate their nascent academic identities. They are not on a trajectory to become full members of the academic community and their ‘participation’ may continue to be shaped by their ‘non-participation’ – what Wenger (1998) refers to as ‘peripherality’. Their main challenge is to retain their core practitioner selves while securing legitimacy so that ‘peripherality’ does not pose ongoing identity threat.

*Identity buffering: cognitive job crafting.* They actively used their quasi-academic roles as identity buffers to protect and enhance their practitioner selves. They engaged in cognitive job crafting ([Niessen et al., 2016](#_ENREF_51)) by emphasizing selective aspects of academic work and drawing parallels with their past practitioner experiences so as to maintain a sense of self-continuity and self-distinctiveness. The aforementioned TV producer (P1) saw becoming Head of Department as an opportunity to define her role and redeploy the knowledge/skills that she had previously acquired. In the interview, she stressed the striking similarities between her current academic-manager and previous producer roles:

Being a producer is being a manager… When I go to the head of department meeting, it reminds me of what it was like in the BBC when I first went there in the 1960s…I found the university strangely reminiscent…I always felt when I came here, I know this set up, I’ve been through this. And I never felt it was a strange environment.

She continued to see herself as a producer who used coordination skills to ‘make things happen’ by mobilizing the cooperative efforts of others. Similarly, a former film maker talked incessantly about how he actively used his ‘skills as a film producer’ in a wide array of quasi-academic activities: ‘I am leading initiatives, linking between departments… Yes, but all I’m bringing to it is my skills as a film producer’ (P3).

By focussing attention on aspects of academic work that were most in tune with their self-conceptions and leveraging their unique personal knowledge to craft their academic roles in ways they found meaningful, practitioners-in-academia were able to protect their practitioner selves in their partial transition to become academics. In doing so, they maintained their self-distinctiveness and neutralized the identity tension that emanated from being ‘not real academics’ (P5). Cognitive job crafting is an identity work tactic that helps individuals to maintain self-consistency and a positive self-image at work (Niessen et al 2016). It also breaks down cognitive job boundaries, allowing the knowledge developed in one domain to be redeployed in another.

*Enhancing self-esteem: knowledge brokering.* Some of the practitioners-in-academia enlarged their quasi-academic roles over time to incorporate knowledge brokering activities. Those who had been in academia for a considerable period and developed an integrative understanding of the academic context were able to mobilize the necessary resources for brokering. Their external identity work sought to increase self-esteem by engaging in visible activities that were valued by relevant others.

Two types of brokering activities are notable. The first involves initiating collaborative activities between their academic and practitioner colleagues.Typical examples include organizing joint workshops and promoting knowledge transfer partnerships to engage members of both communities. All these amount to what Dorado ([2005](#_ENREF_23)) describes as ‘convening’ - a coalition building strategy whereby actors exploit their access to valuable people and resources to foster a web of dependency relations in order to enhance their power and influence. The practitioners-in-academia recognized the increased importance of the ‘knowledge transfer’ agenda in academia and saw this as an opportunity to undertake an activity that was perceived as valuable so as to gain credibility. The aforementioned film producer (P3), for example, set up a ‘consulting unit’ to promote partnering between his academic colleagues and external media organizations. He described himself as a ‘broker’ and reckoned that ‘in a contemporary environment, they [academics] see me as an important member of the population’. The second type involves ‘advocacy’ whereby the broker advocates the interests of one side of the connecting parties, indicating an underlying relational affinity. The practitioners-in-academia remained psychologically close to their ‘practice colleagues’ and sought to act as their representatives in negotiating for support. One recounted how, in her role as Head of Department, she had ‘tried very, very hard’ to integrate the practice people. For example, she founded a practice-based academic journal aimed at ‘getting people who had made films to write about their films and theorize their practice’ (P1). Another spoke about how he used a research centre to create ‘a sympathetic space’ for practitioners (P5). All these indicate their strong affinity with the practitioner community and their attempts to elevate its collective self-esteem from which they derive theirs.

Enacting the brokering role constitutes the practitioners-in-academia’s external ‘buffering’ identity work strategy. It enables them to gain legitimacy without complying with the full knowledge demands of academia. One believed that his role in promoting knowledge exchange had ‘liberated’ him from the imperative of research: ‘I’m telling them [academics] stuff that contributes to their research…I’m not really one of them in the sense that you know, I don’t have to publish’ (P5). By shifting attention away from the source of identity threat (i.e. research) to focus on an alternative activity (i.e. contribution to others’ research) for eliciting recognition from the key constituents, the practitioners-in-academia were able to foster a positive sense of self. Brokeringalso enabled them to deploy their practitioner identity through advocacy to enhance the status of their practitioner peers. As Creed and Scully ([2000](#_ENREF_19)) argue, advocacy activities are both expressive and instrumental. They involve claiming and signalling one’s social identity while attempting to foster a positive value of that identity group by influencing others’ perceptions and effecting change in their favour.

Summing up, the practitioners-in-academia are ‘asymmetric’ hybrids whose ‘buffering’ identity work strategy protects their practitioner selves and transforms identity challenges into opportunities for positive identity construction. Their ‘brokering’ activities not only create a positive sense of self that resonates with others, but also help to permeate knowledge boundaries.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This study has shown the dynamic interplay between hybrid identity work and knowledge boundary work. The three categories of hybrids illustrate how individuals mobilize resources from the associated domains to construct their respective identity positions, which in turn, disrupt the boundaries between them. Pivotal to this reciprocal process are the individuals’ identity-driven motives to sustain self-consistency and gain cross-domain legitimacy. Their varied identity work strategies reflect their divergent boundary-crossing experiences which trigger identity work in the first place. While boundary-crossing facilitates access to resources from the two associated domains, it is ultimately individuals’ identity work that determines how these resources are mobilized in identity construction. Figure 2 summarises and generalizes the main findings.

Figure 2 about here

The study contributes to the identity literature in three ways. First, it advances our understanding of the relationships between hybrids and boundaries by showing how resolving internal identity conflict influences external boundary disruption. In contrast to the extant literature which has tended to treat hybrid identity construction as a personal coping mechanism, this study broadens the analysis to examine how it can disrupt knowledge boundaries. It shows that identity work triggered by problematic situations can have wider positive outcomes beyond reconciling conflicting identities. This finding is in line with an emerging literature on the influence of identity work on various social processes and outcomes ([McGivern et al., 2015](#_ENREF_48); [Lok, 2010](#_ENREF_44); [Creed et al., 2010](#_ENREF_18); [Lifshitz-Assaf, 201](#_ENREF_42)8).

Second, it sheds light on the varied nature of hybrids and reveals a link between the intensity of identity conflict experienced and disruptiveness of their identity work. The ambivalent hybrids, who experienced most severe identity threat also undertook the most disruptive boundary work: they contested the established knowledge practices and hierarchies and promoted alternative ways of knowing. By contrast, the Janusian hybrids, who experienced lesser identity threat, seemed much less disruptive: they blurred the knowledge boundaries but did not explicitly challenge them. The different disruptive effects of hybrids have also been discussed in cultural studies (Marotta 2008) and research on professional hybrids (McGivern et al 2015). While the former attributes the variation to the degree of ‘reflexivity’; the latter explains it in terms of identity work. Taken with the evidence presented in this study, one might argue that the intensity of identity conflict experienced by the individuals affects the intentionality of their identity work and agentic capacity. As the analysis has shown, the identity work of the ambivalent hybrids was more deliberative; whereas that of the Janusian hybrids appeared habitual.

Third, the study illuminates the mutually constitutive nature of the inward ‘cognitive’ and outward ‘relational’ processes of identity work. In so doing, it enhances our understanding of identity work as an agentic activity that encompasses the interpretive, resource mobilization and temporal dimensions. By focusing on knowledge boundaries which are multifaceted, the study vividly illustrates the agentic effort underlying the identity work of hybrid actors in overcoming these boundaries. It shows how self-reflectiveness and sensemaking in internal identity work equip them with expanded cognitive resources and multi-voicedness to negotiate and reconfigure knowledge boundaries in their external identity work. Validation of identity claims through acts of legitimation, in turn, reinforces their inner sense of self-coherence and self-continuity. What the analysis has shown is that actors’ interpretive agency arising from the inward cognitive process of identity preservation enables them to mobilize and reconstitute resources across contexts in their outward relational process of social validation. In other words, interpretive agency is translated into ‘strategic practical action’ in boundary work (Gieryn, 1983). The analysis also highlights the ‘temporal’ dimension of agency. This is best illustrated by those who are suspended between their remembered past and aspired (future) selves: the ambivalent hybrids. Their identity work involves re-interpretation of the past and re-deploying it as a resource for imaginative recombination with that of the present to negotiate their identities and re-shape their work contexts. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963) argue, ‘human agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past, but also oriented toward the future and toward the present’. Although all three aspects of agency have been discussed in the identity literature, authors from different intellectual traditions tend to emphasize one particular aspect. Post-structural scholars focus predominately on interpretive agency within micro-level self-dynamics ([Iedema et al., 2004](#_ENREF_39); [Toyoki and Brown, 2014](#_ENREF_64)); whereas institutional theorists highlight collective mobilization and view identity work as institutional work ([Creed and Scully, 2000](#_ENREF_19); [Creed et al., 2010](#_ENREF_18)). A valuable insight from this study is that bridging the ‘self’ and ‘collective’ levels of analysis is needed to capture the full complexity of agency in identity work as comprising all three constitutive elements. The concept of boundary work holds promise for this task.

The study also contributes to the knowledge literature by revealing the identity processes underlying the disruption of knowledge boundaries. It is often assumed that structural connectivity enables people to overcome knowledge boundaries by engaging in combinative activities ([Dokko et al., 2014](#_ENREF_22)). However, knowledge combination does not always occur as a result of structural opportunities: it needs motivated agents. As Fischer et al (2016) argue, deep personal engagement and identification with knowledge are pivotal. This study directs attention to the identity-driven motivations of boundary-spanning people. It argues that the identity work that they undertake to maintain internal self-consistency and negotiate external legitimacy are key energizing forces. In this way, the identity work perspective highlights the agentic issues overlooked in the knowledge literature.

Although this study has focused on a special group of hybrid knowledge workers in creative arts, the insights gained have wider relevance. In science and engineering, ‘academic-entrepreneurs’ who straddle academic research and commerce have been around for some time ([Lam, 2011](#_ENREF_41)). Elsewhere in the social sciences, ‘scholar-practitioners’ work to integrate theory and practice ([Wasserman and Kram, 2009](#_ENREF_67)). Debates about how academics can make their work more relevant to practitioners often highlight the hierarchical knowledge divide and communication barriers ([Beech et al., 2010](#_ENREF_6)). This study suggests that boundary-crossing work experiences can develop hybrids capable of overcoming these barriers.

The study is based on a sample of individuals who were successful in career boundary-crossing, and this may have exaggerated the positive aspects of their identity work. People who fail to develop meaningful hybridity may experience perpetual liminality and estrangement ([Van Laer and Janssens, 2014](#_ENREF_65)). One should also note that disciplinary and institutional contexts may influence the ease of boundary-crossing and hybrid identity work. It appears that Janusian hybrids are more common in performing arts, whereas ambivalent and asymmetric hybrids seem more prevalent in media arts. The former disciplines are more strongly practice-based than the latter, and hence individuals experience smoother transitions between the academic and practitioner worlds. However, broad generalizations cannot be made without systematic comparisons across larger samples. Furthermore, the study was conducted in organizations where individuals have high work autonomy and access to resources for identity work. Other environments may be less favourable and inhibit hybrid identity work and its boundary disruptive potential.

In conclusion, hybrid people can be riven by identity conflicts and yet be profoundly disruptive of social boundaries. This study has broadened the analytical scope of the identity literature by highlighting the interplay between these two facets of hybridity. It sheds new light on the nature of hybrids and shows how their varied identity work strategies disrupt boundaries in different ways. The study advances our understanding of identity work as an agentic activity and reveals the identity processes underlying boundary disruption.

**Table 1 Interviewee profile**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Case code/Discipline | Academic position  (at time of study) | Time in academia\*  (years) | Time in practice\*\*  (years) |
| *‘Academic- practitioners’* |  |  |  |
| AP1 Drama | Professor | 16-20 | 16-20 |
| AP2 Drama | Reader | 11-15 | 11-15 |
| AP3 Drama | Professor | 11-15 | 11-15 |
| AP4 Drama | Professor | 20+ | 20+ |
| AP5 Drama | Senior Lecturer | <5 | <5 |
| AP6 Drama | Senior Lecturer | <5 | <5 |
| AP7 Drama | Professor | 11-15 | 11-15 |
| AP8 Music | Reader | 11-15 | 11-15 |
| AP9 Music | Professor | 20+ | 20+ |
| AP10 Design | Professor | 16-20 | 16-20 |
| AP11 Design | Professor | 11-15 | 11-15 |
| *‘Pracademics’* |  |  |  |
| PA1 Drama | Senior Lecturer | 6-10 | NK |
| PA2 Drama | Senior Lecturer | 6-10 | 20+ |
| PA3 Drama | Lecturer | 6-10 (P/T) | 6-10 |
| PA4 Media | Lecturer | 6-10 | 11-15 |
| PA5 Media | Professor | 16-20 | NK |
| PA6 Media | Senior Lecturer | 11-15 | 20+ |
| PA7 Media | Reader | 6-10 | 6-10 |
| PA8 Media | Senior Lecturer | 11-15 | 20+ |
| PA9 Media | Reader | 11-15 | NK |
| PA10 Music | Reader | 16-20 | NK |
| PA11 Music | Professor | 16-20 | 6-10 |
| PA12 Music | Senior Lecturer | 6-10 | 11-15 |
| PA13 Design | Reader | 6-10 | NK |
| PA14 Design | Professor | 11-15 | 20+ |
| *‘Practitioners-in-academia’* |  |  |  |
| P1 Media | Senior Lecturer | 11-15 | 30+ |
| P2 Media | Professor | <5 | 30+ |
| P3 Media | Senior Lecturer | 11-15 | 30+ |
| P4 Media | Senior Lecturer | <5 | 30+ |
| P5 Media | Professor | 6-10 | 20+ |
| P6 Design | Professor | 11-15 | 20+ |
| P7 Design | Professor | 11-15 (P/T) | 16-20 |

Notes:

\* ‘Time in academia’: period of full-time appointment, with the exception of those who held part-time (P/T) positions (PA3 and P7).

\*\* ‘Time in practice’: for the ‘academic-practitioners’, it is the same as ‘time in academia’. For the other two categories, it refers to the time working as professional artists before full-time academic employment.

NK=not known

**Figure 1.**  **Three categories of hybrids: Hybrid identity work and knowledge boundary work**

Academic-Practitioner

Integrative

Blurring

Janusian

Multiplex

Transgressing

Ambivalent

Buffering

Brokering

Asymmetric

Hybrid identity work

Knowledge boundary work

Types of hybrid

Pracademic

Practitioner- in- Academia

**Figure 2. A dynamic model of hybrid identity work and knowledge boundary work**

Hybrid identity work

*Triggers*

Work role boundary-crossing

*Identity-based motives to connect*

*Resources for Identity construction*

*Facilitates*

Knowledge boundary work

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**Notes**

1. This article adopts a broad meaning of the term ‘professional’ to refer to those who possess specialist expertise and work in a knowledge-based occupation. Knowledge workers are those who experience knowledge as the main object of their work. Their knowledge base is not necessarily regulated by external professional bodies as in the case of classic professionals such as doctors or lawyers. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The data used in this study were collected as part of a larger project on academic-practitioner knowledge transfer. Earlier results focusing on career mobility and knowledge transfer were reported in Lam (2018).   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-2)