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## Up in Smoke? Towards a Theory of Community Identity Work

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Up in Smoke? Towards A Theory of Community Identity Work

A Dissertation Presented

by

MATTHEW CB LYLE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Isenberg School of Management

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## DEDICATION

To all those who have made it easier for me to complete this degree

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A thank you to my advisors, colleagues and mentors that have endowed me with the tacit knowledge necessary to have a long and fulfilling career in academia. You have shown me a network of people with whom I hope to work closely for the remainder of my days and made clear that family and happiness need not be sacrificed in pursuit of inclusion within it. My best to all of you in your own journeys.

ABSTRACT

UP IN SMOKEE? TOWARDS A THEORY OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY WORK

SEPTEMBER 2020

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Scholars have developed rich theories explaining how entrepreneurship spurs changes to the central and distinctive features, or identities, of geographic communities. However, less attention has been paid to the means by which entrepreneurship variably affects these identities, or why members of some communities perceive widespread changes following entrepreneurial action while others remain relatively unchanged. Through a multiple case study, which included two communities in Massachusetts that played host to entrepreneurs seeking to found legal cannabis dispensaries, I develop a theory of community identity work, defined as the process through which a community's central and distinctive features are maintained or altered following exogenous shocks. Qualitative analyses of various data sources, including interviews, community meetings, observations and archival materials revealed how communities with identities rooted in history are more resistant to change than those with more tenuous ties, and that these differences will affect entrepreneurs' strategies, regional complementing and, ultimately, the degree to which new ventures become central to how members understand their communities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### COMMUNITY IDENTITY WORK?

#### A. Introduction

Truro is a small town on the east coast of Massachusetts. Its seasonal restaurants, beachside condos, and renowned winery have all contributed to its residents historically describing it as “a summer vacation community just shy of the tip of Cape Cod” (truro-ma.gov). However, in February of 2018, five Truro farmers attempted to capitalize on the recent statewide legalization of marijuana, banding together to persuade the local government to allow them to cultivate the crop on their land. This action sparked a public debate, as residents questioned whether marijuana cultivation was something consistent with their understanding of Truro as a vacation community. In response, civic leaders argued that marijuana cultivation “will help a lot of struggling farms not convert to condo complexes” (Bernard, 2018). Following a series of public statements and town hall meetings, during which various stakeholders framed the cultivation of marijuana as an attempt to save the town’s farming industry, residents and business owners began to define Truro not only as a vacation community, but as a “vibrant farming community” (Bragg, 2018), thus incorporating Truro’s agricultural heritage into their conceptualizations of its identity. Such efforts reflect efforts to reshape how stakeholders understand the central and distinctive features of a geographic entity.

However, the town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts provides a much different story. Fairhaven had long pitched itself as “a small town with a big history - When people think of the historical character of Fairhaven, they're not thinking of something that’s typical of a little town

on the coast of New England” (Fairhaven Tours, 2016), as residents focused primarily on the town’s maritime history as a central and distinctive element of its character. Entrepreneurs seeking to establish a recreational cannabis dispensary in Fairhaven were met with stark opposition, with one such individual reporting that “it was a nightmare. We had all these old maritime guys telling us that this wasn’t what Fairhaven was all about” (2019). Unlike Truro, whose members began to change how they characterized their community in the weeks and months following the stated intentions of entrepreneurs, Fairhaven appeared to continue focusing on its history as its central attribute, epitomized in one community website’s claim that “Fairhaven has a rich history dating back to the days of the Pilgrims. The first naval battle of the American Revolution was fought by Fairhaven militiamen...The town’s most remarkable features are the magnificent European-style public buildings built between 1885 and 1906.” (Fairhaven Tours, 2019). This evidence suggests that entrepreneurial action is not guaranteed to shift community identities, and that a community’s unique characteristics, including its ties to history and social fabric, will significantly impact the nature of community identity work, defined as attempts by community stakeholders to revise, maintain, or strengthen its socially constructed, central and distinctive features.

Prior research suggests that entrepreneurs tend to be primarily responsible for spurring identity related shifts in the communities surrounding their new ventures and tends to afford them a high degree of influence over identity shifts. For example, entrepreneurs have long been recognized as powerful drivers of the geographic communities they operate within (Aldrich, 1999; Chiles et al., 2004). Through their actions, entrepreneurs can draw similar organizations to the area (Buenstorf & Klepper, 2009; Klepper, 2007), spur the local economy (Marquis, Glynn & Davis, 2007), and provide tangible reference points that outsiders use to understand the

community (Marquis & Davis, 2009; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005). Each of these outcomes illustrates how entrepreneurs are often the driving force behind a community's central and distinctive features, or identity, as their work influences the way civic leaders, business owners, residents and other community members view their surroundings (Do, Lyle & Walsh, 2019; Marquis & Davis, 2009; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005). Scholarship in this area has therefore provided evidence that entrepreneurial action can shape community identities (Klepper, 2002; Lamin & Ramos, 2016; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007), but the mechanisms by which these shifts occur – and the full cast of characters required to see them through (i.e., residents, government officials, local business owners, etc.) – remain unexplored.

Furthermore, it is likely that the impact of entrepreneurial actions on community identities will be more variable than previously conceptualized. As a stroll down the main roads of most major cities can attest to, geographic communities often have deeply embedded identities that influence the nature of their member organizations. Communities are not simply potential sites for entrepreneurial activity but are populated by diverse individuals and have rich histories that are often publicly displayed and discussed among members (Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 2001; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Lowenthal, 1985). For instance, scholarship on communities has suggested that a geographic region's collective history is likely to influence a deeply embedded collective identity (Greve & Rao, 2012; Ocasio, Mauskapf & Steele, 2016; Rao & Greve, 2018; Suddaby, Foster & Quinn-Trank, 2016), one that may influence how entrepreneurs attempt to gain the support of local stakeholders (e.g., Freeman & Audia, 2011) and thus shape the extent to which the community's identity shifts. For example, Truro's winery and beaches influenced collective perceptions that the town was a popular tourist destination, which led farmers to invoke the town's current agricultural ties in their attempts to establish their

businesses there. These actions ultimately led to a shift in Truro's identity. However, Fairhaven's ties to maritime history forced entrepreneurs to find ways into a community in which "cannabis" had never had, and as of this writing continues not to have, a central role. In communities in which a collective identity is steeped in history and widely supported (cf., Cole & Bruch, 2006), entrepreneurs – especially those representing industries that are not already established in those communities – will likely be forced to engage in actions designed to convince community members that they belong there that will have variable effects on the identities of those communities.

### **B. Assumptions in The Literature**

By not attending to the means by which community identity work occurs in the wake of entrepreneurial action the extant literature puts forth two tacit assumptions. First, by focusing on the effects rather than the precursors of entrepreneurial activity on geographic communities (cf. Walsh & Bartunek, 2011), scholarship in this area assumes that entrepreneurs enter geographic communities with relative ease (e.g., Marquis & Davis, 2009). However, entrepreneurs who start businesses that bear some stigma, or mark of shame endowed by external parties (e.g., Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Helms & Patterson, 2014) - are unlikely to establish roots in communities as readily as more socially accepted ones, such as a theater (e.g., Chiles et al., 2004) or a manufacturing plant (e.g., Klepper, 2007). For example, Hitt, Sine and Tolbert (2009) examined the influence of the United States' temperance movement on alcohol producers in the years preceding prohibition (1870-1920), finding that their actions led to stigmatization of the industry and, soon thereafter, closures. Applying these insights to individual geographic communities, entrepreneurs looking to open a brewery during this time would have likely faced barriers to

entry should they have attempted to operate in a community in which the temperance movement had a strong presence. It is thus likely that new ventures will encounter some degree of resistance from communities whose identities stand at odds with the goals of those organizations.

Furthermore, the broader literature on social movement organizations (e.g., Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Sine & Lee, 2009) and institutional entrepreneurship (Hardy & Maguire, 2016) suggests that entrepreneurs from industries that do not already have wide social acceptance must establish their legitimacy, but attends less often to the ways in which entrepreneurs win the favor of community stakeholders. For example, Hiatt and colleagues (2009: 637) noted that social movement organizations engage in “constructing and propagating shared beliefs that make some structures and behaviors acceptable ...persuading public figures to endorse and promote these structures and behaviors [and] advocating for the passage of laws and regulations that promote new values.” Scholarship on institutional entrepreneurship similarly argues that entrepreneurs whose businesses lack legitimacy, such as those founding HIV / AIDS advocacy movements (Maguire et al., 2004), will leverage their resources to create new institutional arrangements, and thus legitimize their fields, at the institutional level (see Hardy & Maguire, 2016 for a review). What is less clear, however, is the degree to which entrepreneurs from these industries will engage in these tactics when attempting to win over community stakeholders. Given the importance of strong relationships between entrepreneurs and the communities in which they operate (Powell & Baker, 2014), it is perhaps more likely that entrepreneurs will ingratiate themselves to community stakeholders rather than argue for the importance of new community-wide arrangements. Thus, entrepreneurs may face resistance from communities who oppose the core purpose of their new venture for various reasons (cf., Haveman, Rao, and Paruchuri, 2007; McAdam & Scott, 2005; Rojas, 2006; Suchman, 1995), will likely have to do more than promise

economic benefits to the community (e.g., Powell & Baker, 2014) to be allowed to operate there, but will not present themselves as interested in reshaping the social order of those communities. In this manner, a community's central and distinctive features can act as a barrier for new entrants, implying that entrepreneurs may have to strategically navigate a community's identity to rationalize their place within it.

Second, scholars have tended to treat the formation of a new venture as sufficient grounds for a community's identity to evolve (Chiles et al., 2004; Cruz et al., 2018; Glynn, 2008; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007). For example, Klepper (2001; 2002; 2007) focused his work on organizational agglomeration (i.e., when multiple organizations from the same industry exist in a particular geographic area) and examined how the presence of a small number of organizations from one industry attracted others. Klepper thus focused his work on explaining how the presence of relatively few organizations signalled others to join. Glynn (2008) examined how the relational and symbolic systems of Atlanta, Georgia – alongside other cities that have hosted the Olympic games – changed through the actions of civic leaders and other prominent community members after they discovered that they had been chosen to host the games. Glynn (2008) thus explained how members shifted the defining elements of their community after the announcement that they would host the games, but without the active involvement of Olympic committee members. Therefore, while these studies have together illustrated how entrepreneurial action might act as a catalyst for community identity change, they have left unsaid how a more complete cast of characters, including entrepreneurs, residents, civic leaders and local business owners will act sequentially or in concert to shift or retain their community's identity. This lack of integration is problematic, as research on identity work (i.e., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Pratt, Rockmann & Kauffmann, 2006) would suggest that collective

identities require the engagement of multiple parties, such as entrepreneurs and existing community members, to remain unchanged or shift (e.g., Ybema, 2014). Furthermore, the cases of Truro and Fairhaven provide anecdotal evidence that entrepreneurs may need to engage in community identity work to gain public support and acceptance of their organizations, and that the reactions of community members to these efforts will in some way influence whether their new ventures become more central or peripheral in the community's identity. It is therefore likely that prior scholarship has undervalued the processes through which various entrepreneurs act and community members collectively react to strengthen or revise a community's identity.

In light of the deeply embedded nature of community identities (Connerton, 2010), the need for entrepreneurs to garner the approval of communities to found new ventures (York, O'Neil & Sarasvathy, 2016) and important differences in the histories and social fabric of geographic communities, it is important to understand how entrepreneurial action influences the nature of the identities of the communities in which they seek to operate. I therefore asked: *How does entrepreneurial action variably influence the identities of the geographic communities in which they strive to operate?* I develop a theory of community identity work that unpacks the mechanisms through which key stakeholders, including potential entrepreneurs, residents, civic leaders and local business owners influence community identities after entrepreneurs' intentions become known. I use a multiple (2) case study design, conducting interviews with entrepreneurs in the recreational cannabis industry, including owners of recreational dispensaries, farms and paraphernalia shops. I also spoke with representatives of the communities these entrepreneurs attempted to enter, including residents, business owners and civic leaders. I also made frequent, recorded visits to these sites, attending town hall meetings during which entrepreneurs were required to field questions from community members and taking photographs of and notes on the

communities, and collected additional archival data on town meetings, public debates, and news coverage of the foundings included in my sample. I started following this process prior to the legalization of the cannabis industry and continued to do so until a time up to two years afterwards to develop a processual understanding of how community identity work unfolds, and impacts communities and their members, over time. Iteratively analyzing this data, following the conventions of process-oriented research (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013; Walsh & Bartunek, 2011), allowed me to develop a theory of community identity work spurred by entrepreneurs that explains both how entrepreneurs actively attempt to shift or strengthen a community's identity and how those efforts influence community-level outcomes over time.

### **C. Theoretical Contributions**

I believe that this theory of community identity work provides four meaningful contributions to organizational scholarship. First, prior scholarship on entrepreneurs has considered how their actions are driven by the needs of several “communities,” including financial, academic, and businesses communities (Fisher, Kotha & Lahiri, 2016; Shepherd, Williams, & Patzelt, 2015) during the pre-founding experience. However, these researchers have yet to fully consider how geographic communities influence entrepreneurial actions. Geographic communities differ from other types of communities in that the relational (i.e., how actors are connected) and symbolic (i.e., how actors interpret meaning in objects and actions) systems used are situated in physical spaces, and thus often reflect heterogeneous populations with deep historical roots (Connerton, 1989; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Marquis & Davis, 2009; Tonnies, 1957). While convincing arguments exist that promises of community-level economic improvement alone are sufficient to win over some community members (Powell & Baker,

2014), both organizational and sociological scholarship suggests that many of these members pay more attention to the degree to which a given organization reflects the defining features of their community when deciding whether to support it (i.e., Do et al., 2019; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Marquis & Davis, 2009). These concerns are likely amplified for entrepreneurs looking to establish organizations from industries marked with some form of stigma (e.g., Akemu, Whiteman & Kennedy, 2016; Hiatt et al., 2009; Sine & Lee, 2009) given the added difficulty they likely face in convincing a broad range of individuals in close proximity to their proposed base of operations that their new business belongs there. Thus, while monetary concerns might drive community leaders (i.e., civic leaders) to grant entrepreneurs entry into a community, they will have to “win over” a broader range of community members to gain the support of local business and consumer networks critical to their survival (Shepherd et al., 2015).

Second, most studies that have addressed the relationships between entrepreneurs and geographic communities have defined communities according to the organizations currently operating within them (i.e. Chiles et al., 2004, Cruz et al., 2018; Klepper, 2007). However, as mentioned above, community identities often have deep historical roots (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Connerton, 2010), and therefore may be both 1) influenced by organizations that previously operated there (e.g., Do et al., 2019) and 2) more resistant to change than organizational scholars have previously thought. As Connerton (1989) noted, a community’s collective past acts to “produce and provide shape for a communal desire- a wish to repeat the past consciously, to find significance in celebrated recurrence” (63). When communities have a strong desire to connect with their shared past, which may include historical events (Olick & Robbins, 1997; Schwartz, 1982; Wagner-Pacifi & Schwartz, 1991), prominent figures (Johnson, 2007; Schwartz, 1991), or rites and ceremonies (Connerton, 1989; Do et al., 2019; Hobsbawm &

Ranger, 1983) associated with the community, entrepreneurs may have to appeal to more than a community's member organizations to gain acceptance. By attending to the ways in which entrepreneurs invoke a community's history, I will answer recent calls to deepen scholarly appreciation of the theoretical importance of collective history during processes of identity work (Shepherd, Wennberg, Suddaby & Wiklund, 2019) and show how collective ties to community history influence the degree to which new ventures become central to community members understanding of their homes.

Third, processual theories of community identity change tend to focus on explaining the means by which the emergence of new organizations influences later organizational foundings (i.e., more businesses from related industries – see Chiles et al., 2004; Klepper, 2002; Klepper & Sleeper, 2005) without addressing how their emergence influences existing businesses. Whether community identity changes are brought about through the actions of a handful of entrepreneurs (Chiles et al., 2004; Klepper & Simons, 2000), the addition of a major organization or institution (Glynn, 2008), or by broader societal factors (Connerton, 1989), these changes are likely to influence the organizations that already exist within that community. For example, a walk through the shops in Northampton, Massachusetts, one of the two geographic communities included in this study, reveals book shops, curiosity shops, and even grocery stores – all of which existed in the community before their first dispensary opened – beginning to advertise products such as cannabis cookbooks, pipes and oils that were not available before the announced opening of its dispensary. Without examining how shifts in community identities influence member organizations, scholars have not yet developed an understanding of the broad range of tangible, organization-level outcomes that those shifts entail. By examining the outcomes of community

identity work, this study affords a greater appreciation of how community identity shifts influence both new and more established organizations alike.

Fourth, research on entrepreneurship has a tendency to discount the entrepreneurial efforts of small business founders (Welter, Baker, Audretsch & Gartner, 2017). Despite evidence that those who found such ventures, colloquially referred to as “everyday entrepreneurs,” account for the majority of organizational foundings (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Carter & Ram, 2003; Van Stel & Storey, 2004), entrepreneurship scholars tend to focus their analyses on the behaviors of individuals or groups who found organizations with corporate support or large amounts of venture capital while ignoring “the cows and horses of entrepreneurship” (Welter et al., 2017: 312). Given that upwards of 44% of businesses employ less than fifty individuals (Small Business Advocacy, 2015), it is likely that the majority of new ventures founded in geographic communities are led by such everyday entrepreneurs, and thus that community identities are influenced more frequently by their actions than those of large corporate entities. By attending to the behaviors of everyday entrepreneurs in geographic communities, I will create a more accurate understanding of the ways in which community identity work unfolds.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows. First, I will explain the construct of identity and identity work at both the individual and collective level of analysis. Second, I will consider how identity manifests at the community level and explore the definition and mechanisms underlying changes in community identities. Third, I will examine the entrepreneurship literature to gain a better understanding of how entrepreneurs might involve themselves in – and even spur – processes of community identity work in ways similar to organizational leaders. After expanding upon the two geographic communities included in my analyses, alongside the methods used to conduct these analyses, I will explain the ways in which

processes of community identity work differentially unfolded in these communities and the implications of my resultant theory for organizational scholarship.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY WORK

#### A. Identity

Identity refers to the elements that an individual or collective deems to be self-defining (Mead, 1934). Psychological scholarship on identity - focused at the individual level of analysis - posits that individuals will often seek to establish an identity that both describes their central features (i.e., “who am I?”) and creates maximum distinctiveness from others (i.e., “why am I different from them?”) (Hogg, 2003). As the basic units of the societies to which they belong, people constantly compare themselves to norms of their surroundings (James, 1893; Mead, 1934; Silvia & Duval, 2001; Silvia & Phillips, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to achieve a sense of who they are and why they are different from others. For example, individuals might compare themselves to others in their surrounding work environment or in other organizations with which they are affiliated (Iriana, Buttle & Ang, 2013), spurring processes that greatly impact the features that comprise their sense of self. The preponderance of research on individual identity has continuously confirmed that reflections on self and others act as a precursor to the development of an identity (Brickson, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), influencing individual processes such as maintaining self-esteem (Dunning 2003; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), regulating behavior (Carver, 2004) and choosing a presentational style (Schlenker, 2003).

At the collective level, socially constructed identities (“who are we as a collective?”) develop in organizations through the shared experiences, interactions and goals of their members (Ashforth et al., 2011), as well as their interactions with, and perceptions of, those in the external environment (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). For example, Dutton and Dukerich (1991) detailed

actions taken by members of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to construct a new identity following the deterioration of their public image in the 1980's. This maligned image resulted in many years of discussions and policy changes, after which members began to define their organization using a "technically expert, high-quality, ethical, and fixer-doer identity" (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991: 549).

The identity concept, however, is not perfectly isomorphic across levels. For example, it is possible for members to hold individual identities that are discrete from the organization (Ashforth et al., 2008). Additionally, certain individuals, groups, and events can exert a disproportionately large influence on the development, maintenance, and modification of an organization's identity (Kreiner et al., 2015). As a result, organizational identity represents a collective-level construct that is influenced by, but also separate from, individual identities.

### **B. Identity Work**

However, scholarship from multiple fields including psychology, management, and sociology suggests that individuals and organizations do not simply create an identity, but rather continually update them in response to external events. I will attend first to exploring individual identity work before discussing organizational identity work to see whether insights from either literature can inform our understanding of community identities and identity work.

In the management literature, scholars have paid a wealth of conceptual and empirical attention to the modification of professional identity, defined as identification with the norms of a given profession (Reid, 2015; Roberts, 2005). Scholars studying professionals have focused their work on both the construction and maintenance of these self-concepts (Clarke, Brown & Hailey, 2009; Cohen-Scali, 2003). Work on zookeepers, for example, found that seeing

professional work first as a calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) preceded the development of a professional identity. The professional identity customization work of Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufman (2006) examined the identity work medical residents undertook in order to enrich, complete (patch) or protect (splint) their emerging sense of professionalism. These findings led the authors to conclude that professionals would experience similar identity threats during work role transitions, especially when the individual viewed their new role as incompatible with their professional identity (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). While all work role identities provide individuals with a set of behavioral norms (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth, et al., 2000; Callero, 1985), a professional identity goes further to categorize the roots of those behavioral norms across work contexts (Ibarra, 1999), showing how a wide range of professional groups including teachers (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Sachs, 2001), journalists (Deuze, 2005; Slay & Smith, 2011), doctors (Doolin, 2002) and nurses (Fagermoen, 1997; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) define themselves.

This research points to the difficulties individuals experience during transitions between seemingly unrelated or segmented roles (Nicholson, 1984; Niessen, Binnewies & Rank, 2010), which present greater identity threats than those between complementary or integrative ones (Ashforth et al., 2000) and highlights the continual nature of identity work at the individual level. For example, individuals entering administrative positions, especially those who had formerly enacted roles without administrative duties (Hoff, 2000; Chase, 1994), tend to view those transitions as presenting a threat to their occupational identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). When such transitions occur, researchers view the subsequent redefinition of professional identity as the most likely result (Ibarra, 1999; McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerlad, & Waring, 2015). Croft, Currie, & Lockett (2014), for example, found that nurses transitioning into

administrative positions would redefine their professional identity, eventually viewing administrative tasks as part of their professional obligation.

In sum, the vast literature on individual identity work tells us that people form identities through comparative processes (Pratt et al., 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and update their identities following transitional periods (Ibarra, 1999). While this literature provides a wealth of insights into how individuals view themselves, however, its insights remain bounded to the individual level. Thus, in order to understand how the construct of identity emerges and is updated at higher levels of analyses, I turned to the literature on organizational identity work.

Scholarship on organizational identity work points to the myriad ways through which members may try to influence shared perceptions of the central and distinctive features of their organization, highlighting important similarities and differences in how collective identities are constructed, and suggesting that organization members can “create, present, sustain, share, and/or adapt organizational identity” (Kreiner et al., 2015, p. 11). This research contends that organizational identities are socially constructed, and thus are in constant states of flux with brief periods of stasis during which a manifested identity might be articulated (e.g., Fiol, 2002; Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Kreiner et al., 2015). Thus, organizational identities bear some semblance to individual identities in that they are constantly updated, but require social, rather than individual, cognition to manifest and change (cf., Bandura, 2001).

A wealth of scholarship on organizational identity work has explored how members respond to exogenous threats to that identity (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Petriglieri, 2015). Many of these studies have embraced theoretical insights from Hatch and Schultz (2002) and Gioia and colleagues (2000), who argued that changes to an organization’s construed external image, defined as how members believe external stakeholders

view their organization, would result in members reconstructing their shared identity. For example, Cannon and Kreutzer (2018) found that “mission success” – defined as the collective perception among members that an organization has achieved the purpose for which it was founded (i.e., curing a disease or passing a law) – within a non-profit organization in Ireland spurred organizational identity work through which members renegotiated their organization’s identity. Studies of organizational identity work (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Ravasi, Rindova & Stigliani, 2019) thus jointly suggest that organization members can “work” on changing an organization’s identity.

Members might also resist changes to their organization’s identity, especially in organizations marked by an identity that is strongly held and widely shared (Cole & Bruch, 2006). For example, Tracey and Phillips (2016) found that members of a social enterprise continued to focus on aiding migrant populations following criticism from external parties, an action theorized to reflect strong support for their identity as an organization promoting social justice. Nag, Corley and Gioia (2007), studying an organization attempting a strategic change, found that members refused to adopt new knowledge that they saw as fundamentally shifting their existing identity as a high-technology research and development organization.

Important to scholarly understanding of how organizational leaders might drive changes to a community identity, however, is the notion that those in organizational leadership positions often spur or resist changes to the identities of their own organizations. Much of this work has focused on how prominent organizational members utilize the organization’s history to prevent changes to an identity. For example, Anteby and Molnar (2012) showed how editors at a French aeronautical firm omitted artifacts that contradicted the identity they wished to project, thereby projecting a consistent identity to stakeholders over time. Other work has highlighted the effect

of such actions on shared perceptions of an organization's identity within the organization's boundaries as well. Ybema (2014) explored how editors at a prominent newspaper created transitional periods in the organization's history to fend off identity changes, while Hatch & Schultz (2017) studied leaders at the Carlsberg Group intentionally drawing upon artifacts from the organization's past to establish continuity between past and current strategic objectives. Thus, this work suggests that an organization's history can be strategically used to frame its identity as enduring and convince members to continue supporting that identity irrespective of the external threats it may face (see also Martins, 2005). Given the increasing permeability of organizational boundaries, through which the actions of organizational leaders may have lasting effects on those outside the organization as well (Do et al., 2019; Hatch & Schultz, 2002), it appeared (at this stage in my review of the literature) that leaders' actions might have a tangible effect on the identities of the geographic communities that surrounded them.

In sum, the literature on identity work shows how shifts to collective identities, unlike shifts to individual identities, require the actions of multiple individuals and can often be opposed in situations in which members perceive a collective identity to be widely shared and supported by its history. Importantly, organizational leaders often take prominent positions in enabling or constraining shifts in organizational identities (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Ybema, 2014). Since organizations often act as cornerstones of the geographic communities they inhabit (Marquis & Davis, 2009; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005), it might then be expected that these leaders also possess the power to shift the identities of those communities. However, despite some evidence from the organizational identity work literature that leader-driven changes to organizational identities can shift community identities as well (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), there has been seemingly little attention given to how organizational leaders shift community

identities with intention. I thus turned to the literature on community identity to better understand the content and change process associated with those identities.

### **C. Community Identities and Community Identity Work**

While identity work has been examined at multiple levels, the identity literature also provides evidence that communities have identities that are capable of developing over time. Though individuals may belong to many different types of communities, including virtual ones (Fisher, Kotha & Lahiri, 2016; Shepherd, Williams, & Patzett, 2015), I focus here on explaining the identity work that occurs within geographic communities. While scholars traditionally defined geographic communities by identifiable city limits (e.g., Weber, 1921; Stauro & Sorenson, 2003), they have recently begun to view this partitioning of geographic communities as an oversimplification. Rather, recent scholarship on geographic communities has defined them not by physical characteristics (i.e., maximum surface area or number of residents – Aldrich, 1999; Marquis & Battilana, 2009), but by their collective endorsement of relational and symbolic systems in a physical space (e.g., Glynn, 2008). I first define community identity before exploring how members work with those identities.

Relational systems refer to the networks connecting various actors, as geographic communities tend to involve rules, albeit often informal ones, regarding how people and institutions interact. For example, Aldrich (1999) argued that any system of relations could be thought of as a community, whether among individuals, institutions, or organizations (see also Greve & Rao 2012; Greve & Rao 2014). Within a geographic community, relational systems might dictate a wide range of behaviors including what businesses members visit when they need certain goods and which council members they contact to register complaints.

Symbolic systems help define the ways in which members of a collective interpret uncertainty, thus providing collective frames of reference for those within a community. These symbolic systems might change over time, but their collective endorsement – or work towards collective endorsement – is central to our understanding of communities (Glynn, 2008). For instance, since the closure of its Studebaker factory in 1963, members of the geographic community of South Bend, Indiana interpreted Studebaker’s remnants (i.e., cars, signs, empty buildings) first as shameful reminders of the past before beginning to see them as opportunities for future economic development (Do et al., 2019). While the frameworks through which members interpreted these remnants shifted over time, the community as a collective produced those frames, thus making them central to defining South Bend as a geographic community.

Finally, geographic communities situate these relational and symbolic systems in a defined, physical space. For instance, while the “medical community” consists of different professionals working in organizations that endorse similar relational and symbolic systems (e.g., Kyratsis, Atun, Phillips, Tracey & George, 2017; McDonald, Waring & Harrison, 2006; Pratt et al., 2006), it would not be considered a geographic community since membership in the community does not involve co-location. As my reading of the literature suggested that scholars do not place limits on the size and scope of this area (Connerton, 1989; Connerton, 2010), geographic communities can be thought of as cities (Baltzell, 1958, Warner & Lundt, 1941), regions (Semlinger, 1995), or even clusters of towns (Greenwood, Diaz, Li & Lorente, 2010) so long as they share relational and symbolic systems. While little scholarly agreement appears to exist regarding what constitutes a geographic community, the three components of shared relational systems, shared symbolic systems and physical co-location seem to be endorsed by

scholars claiming to study geographic communities (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005).

Furthermore, members of geographic communities often produce socially constructed identities, similar to those of organizations, that can be understood as those features that community members deem self-defining (Marquis & Davis, 2009; Marquis, Glynn & Davis, 2007). For example, Silicon Valley's identity as an area for creative thought and the production of high-technology products (e.g., Phillips, 2005; Saxenien, 1994) resulted both from the work of many prominent, co-located organizations and the agreement among multiple parties in the area – both individuals and organizations – that these features were indeed self-defining (Greenwood et al., 2010). The case of South Bend, Indiana shows evidence of an evolving community identity, as members reflected on both their history and desired future in framing their community as a manufacturing hub, college town, and center for innovation over the years (Do et al., 2019). Baden-Wurttemberg, a geographic region in Germany, has constructed an identity as a community in which organizations cooperate rather than compete, a reflection of the support their local government officials and businesses have provided to entrepreneurs (Semlinger, 1995). These examples highlight how geographic communities, much like individuals, construct identities that reflect those features they deem central and distinctive (Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Marx, Strumsky & Fleming, 2009; Stuart & Sorenson, 2003).

Furthermore, this line of scholarship suggested that members of geographic communities, much like those of organizations, work with their identities (e.g., Do et al., 2019). While the majority of management scholarship on identity work has focused on either the individual or organizational level (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2015; Pratt et al., 2006), prominent scholarship over the past 25 years has allowed us to piece together an understanding of how identity work might

unfold at the community level. This work has chiefly pointed to the role of organizations – not entrepreneurs or community members – in spurring changes to community identities. Since organizations often take positions as central and distinctive features of the geographic communities they inhabit (Aldrich, 1999; Glynn, 2008), scholars studying the evolution of community identities have typically afforded organizations a prominent role in spurring this process. For example, Chiles and colleagues (2004) showed how the identity of Branson, Missouri was altered by a handful of musical theaters in the 1950's. By using complexity theory to explain the agglomeration of musical theaters in Branson, the authors reveal how key events such as changing transportation technology - and a popular book written by travelling minister - influenced perceptions that Branson was a prime tourist destination. This perception then led to an agglomeration of musical theatres in Branson. Both preceding and following this study was the work of Klepper, who, in his research on organizational agglomeration (2001; 2002; with Buenstorf, 2009), showed how organizations can shape the chief industries in geographic communities such as Detroit, Michigan, and Akron, Ohio. In each case, early movers, or initial entrants in a given market to the community in question (see Lieberman & Montgomery, 1988) achieved a level of economic success that made them reference points for understanding the identities of these cities, eventually resulting in more organizations from related markets flooding those communities. The identities of these communities (as automotive and tire production hubs, respectively) thus resulted from the presence of organizations that eventually become reference points for understanding what made Detroit and Akron unique and different from other cities (cf., Stuart & Sorenson, 2003).

Other scholars have focused their work on explaining how one organization in particular may become a touchstone for how members and outsiders alike construe a community. For

instance, Glynn (2008) studied how the Olympic games shift both relational (i.e., networks that connect different industries or actors) and symbolic (i.e., the manner in which an entity represents itself) systems within their host cities. For instance, Glynn (2008) shows how civic leaders in Athens, Greece created interdependencies between industries such as transportation and housing while “crafting an image as a mainstream European country” (p. 1126), simultaneously shifting both the relational and symbolic systems within the community in anticipation of hosting the games in 2004. Do and colleagues (2019) explained how the Studebaker Corporation continued to act as an important reference point in conceptualizations of the community’s identity over 50 years after its demise. Taken together, this work suggests that geographic communities, and their identities, can be immeasurably shaped by organizations deemed to be legitimate reference points by the members of those communities.

While studies of community identity change have added to our understanding of the connections between organizational action and community-level outcomes (e.g., Marquis & Battilana, 2009; Rao & Greve, 2018), they have tended to avoid discussing how the actions of particular organization members – namely entrepreneurs – influence reconceptualization’s of a community’s identity themselves. Lack of attention to this issue, however, likely represents not an oversight on the part of these scholars, but rather an inattention from the broader scholarly community to the actions necessitated by entrepreneurs, specifically representing industries that are likely opposed by community members. For example, as suggested earlier, the organizations analyzed in these studies do not generally represent stigmatized or social movement organizations that are likely to require additional action to become members of communities populated by individuals who are more likely to oppose their presence. For instance, Chiles and colleagues (2004) and Klepper (2007) focused their analyses on explaining the conditions

necessary for foundings to influence future, related foundings. Glynn (2008) and Do et al. (2019) examined the discussions that took place amongst community members in the absence of organization members, providing an analysis of how community-level discourse - albeit in the absence of organization members - drives changes in a community's identity.

The actions taken by entrepreneurs that shift or strengthen a community's identity remain largely unstudied. I thus turned my attention to the growing literature on entrepreneurs and communities to gain insight into how those entrepreneurs might spur, or otherwise involve themselves in, processes of community identity work.

#### **D. Entrepreneurs and Communities**

Scholars who have studied how entrepreneurs found new ventures have addressed how entrepreneurs establish and maintain relationships with several types of communities (Nambisan, 2017). Recognizing that nascent organizations depend upon the support of numerous groups during the founding period, these scholars have shown how communities of potential customers (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011), fellow professionals, business associates (Fisher et al., 2016), and economic supporters (Shepherd et al., 2015) influence entrepreneurial decision-making during this early stage. While some of these communities provide assistance primarily through monetary support (Shepherd et al., 2015), others, such as professional networks (Fischer et al., 2016), can legitimate a newly formed organization through the vocal support of industry peers. These scholars show us that, since entrepreneurs face both monetary and institutional pressures during their founding period (Carroll & Hannan, 2004; Sine, Mitsuhashi & Kirsch, 2006), they will seek out relationships with a wide range of communities for support.

A handful of scholars have extended this logic to geographic communities, showing how entrepreneurs consider their relationship with their surrounding community during the founding period (e.g., Cruz et al., 2018). Most notably, Powell & Baker (2014) theorized that entrepreneurs might adopt a “community patron” role, wherein they concern themselves primarily with stressing the tangible economic benefits they can provide for their local communities. While this work shows how entrepreneurs might adopt servant relationships with their local communities (York et al., 2016), it stops short of explaining how their attempts to ingratiate themselves to the community can spur the shifting or retention of its identity. Furthermore, no additional scholarship appeared to consider how entrepreneurs attempt to enter geographic communities in which community members are to some degree opposed to their presence, and thus how these conditions might affect the nature of community identity work.

Our reading of this literature therefore informed us that entrepreneurs stress the economic benefits of their new ventures when meeting with members of local communities but provided limited insight into how community identities change through the formation of those relationships. Furthermore, despite the empirical attention paid to entrepreneurial action, we lack an understanding of how entrepreneurs involve themselves in processes of community identity work. Therefore, unlike scholarship on organizational identity work – which focuses on the actions of prominent insiders in shifting collective identities (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Maitlis, 2005), scholarship on entrepreneurs and communities says little of the interrelationships among prominent individuals – namely entrepreneurs and influential community members – in driving changes to a community identity. Rather, scholarship on community identities has focused on how organizations act as reference points that the broader collective uses when reconceptualizing their identity (Do et al., 2019), while scholarship of entrepreneurs has yet to address how those

individuals spur changes to the social-psychological elements of a geographic community, such as its identity.

### **E. Theoretical Puzzle**

Extant scholarship therefore provided me with various pieces of a theoretical puzzle, all of which led me to develop my research question. First, extant scholarship on identity and identity work informed me that identity work occurs at multiple levels of analysis (individual, organization, community). Individual identity work often occurs when individuals face some type of identity threat, often in the form of a transition from one role to another (Hogg, 2003). Individuals also compare themselves to other individuals and groups when constructing those features that are central to their self-definition that provide them with maximal distinctiveness from others (Pratt et al., 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Community identity changes bear many similarities to their individual counterparts with the exception of their characterization as social processes that requires input and agreement from multiple parties in order to occur (Glynn, 2008). Extant scholarship on community identity change, however, tends to explain the after-effects of new organizations joining the community, thus focusing more on individual components of the process, such as the sensemaking of community members or the agglomeration of similar organizations to the area (Chiles et al., 2004; Klepper, 2002; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005) rather than the process beginning with entrepreneurial actions and ending with community identity change or retention. Organizational identity work similarly occurs when an organization faces some type of threat, namely a change in their construed external image (Gioia et al., 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Nag et al., 2007). Importantly, extant scholarship suggests that organizational leaders play prominent roles in processes of organizational identity

work (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Ybema, 2014), though scholars operating in this area have yet to consider how leaders intentionally shift community identities as well.

Work on entrepreneurs shows how these individuals pay attention to the needs of various communities when forming new ventures, sometimes even adopting community patron roles through which they stress the tangible, economic benefits their organization will have on the community in order to win over community members (York et al., 2016). Thus, given that prominent organization members can drive organizational identity work, and that organizations can cause members of geographic communities to socially reconstruct their identities, it is likely that the entrepreneurs who found these new organizations can involve themselves in, and even drive, processes of community identity work alongside other prominent community stakeholders. Therefore, while culling insights from these disparate literatures provided me with various “pieces” that likely acted as component parts of community identity work, it did not satisfactorily explain the complex processes through which entrepreneurs influence community-level identity change or stasis. I therefore turned my attention towards uncovering the interpretive dynamics of community identity work and set about identifying satisfactory contexts in which to study these dynamics.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

In order to investigate community identity work, I needed to design a study that met certain requirements. First, I needed to identify a context in which the phenomenon of interest was easily observable, or what Eisenhardt (1989) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) refer to as an extreme case. Relatedly, given the idiosyncratic nature of many sites used in qualitative research, I sought to design a multiple case study (Yin, 2015) that would allow me to observe this phenomenon of interest (i.e., community identity work) in different geographic communities, thus giving some insight into the transferability of the insights gained from studying one community to the next. Second, I had to find appropriate data with which to build a theory of community identity work across these multiple cases. Importantly, I wanted to collect many different types of data in order to capture the experiences of each of the parties most prominently involved in the process and triangulate my findings to ensure that my conclusions were not based solely on one data source (Creswell, 2013; Jick, 1979; Kreiner et al., 2015). Third, I needed to identify an appropriate manner in which to analyze these various data sources to ensure that my resultant theory was both 1) grounded in the data I collected and 2) built with reference to prior theoretical insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

#### **A. Research Sites**

In 2016, Massachusetts voters approved a ballot initiative making the possession and private use of cannabis legal according to state law. What followed was a flurry of activity at the state and local levels, including the foundation of the Massachusetts Cannabis Control

Commission to oversee the opening of legalized shops, a host of community meetings during which towns and cities voted on whether they would allow shops to open within their geographic boundaries, and entrepreneurs filing applications to open their own dispensaries in these communities. A timeline of the major events leading to the opening of these shops was provided by the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission and is included as Figure 1.

Figure 1: Major events in the emergence of the Massachusetts recreational cannabis industry



<https://mass-cannabis-control.com/>

For the purposes of this research I focused on understanding how entrepreneurial action spurred community identity work in two geographic communities – Salem and Northampton, Massachusetts. These two communities are similar in many regards. For example, members of both communities voted to allow entrepreneurs to open dispensaries. They are also similar in that members of these communities, according to early interviews, tended to view themselves as more progressive both politically and ideologically than communities in the surrounding areas, which they perceive to be more conservative in nature. However, both communities also

contained a significant conservative population, implying that my findings would not simply reflect communities that were wholly receptive to the presence of the new ventures. Both communities contain a host of restaurants and high-end shops alongside more traditional establishments (i.e., bars, clothing stores, etc.) and both have a four-year college (one public, one private). The two communities were also comparable in size and constituted two of the first three communities in Massachusetts in which a recreational cannabis dispensary opened. Table 1 provides an overview of the two sites.

Table 1: Overview of cases.

	Salem	Northampton
Description (From City Website)	“Salem is known for its rich maritime history, as being the birthplace of the National Guard and for [its] infamous Witchcraft Trials. Salem is also a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly City where its residents, and over a million tourists annually, can easily visit historic architecture, unique attractions, world-famous museums, and an eclectic mix of shops and dining options.”	“Northampton offers a lifestyle rich in cultural, artistic, academic, and business resources. Our downtown center is one of the most vibrant in the region. The superb quality of life in Northampton contributes to a strong and diversified economic base. Northampton is unique in the number of independently owned businesses that make up our business community”
Key Historical Reference Points (From City Website)	Witch Trials, Colonial-era Sea Trade, Pirates	Silk Trade, Christian Awakening, Abolitionist Movement
Year Incorporated	1629	1883
Population	Approximately 45,000	Approximately 30,000
Vote Breakdown on Question 4	Yes (60.1%)	Yes (68.9%)
Schools	6 Elementary / Middle Schools, 1 High School, 1 Four-Year College	4 Elementary Schools, 1 Middle School, 1 High School, 1 Four-Year College
Prominent Political Party	Democratic (Approximately 40%)	Democratic (Approximately 50%)
Demography of Residents	82% White, 5% Black, 3% Asian	87 % White, 4% Asian, 3% Black
Median Household Income	Approximately \$44,000	Approximately \$57,000

### **B. Data Collection**

I collected various sources of data to help answer my research question regarding how entrepreneurial actions variably influence their surrounding communities. First, I attended and transcribed various meetings held within the communities relating to the recreational cannabis industry. According to Massachusetts State Law, the entrepreneurs looking to establish

recreational dispensaries must hold a public meeting to present their proposals and answer any and all questions from community members. I thus attended or obtained video of each of these meetings that occurred in both Salem and Northampton. I also attended or gained public access copies of other meetings such as planning board meetings, city council meetings, and various outreach meetings hosted by local governments on the subject of the cannabis industry. This data spans from January 2017 until December 2018 and provided insights into both the discursive processes through which entrepreneurs attempt to gain the favor of community members and the thoughts of community members related to the industry before and after these discussions. In total, I collected and analyzed 26 such meetings, 15 from Northampton and 11 from Salem. Given that these meetings have been video recorded by local news stations in both Northampton and Salem, I was able to watch, transcribe, and analyze each meeting related to the cannabis industry that occurred during this timeframe, thus bolstering the validity of the claims I am able to make since I drew upon a complete set of meetings (cf., Maxwell, 1992).

The second type of data I collected were archival materials, including newspaper articles, videos of news coverage, and historical records available at community schools and libraries. Regarding historical records, I spent time at libraries in both Salem and Northampton to gain insight into the history of the cities, including the circumstances of their foundings, once and current prominent industries, and well-known historical figures. Regarding newspaper articles and news coverage, I searched each week on electronic search engines including Google News, YouTube and the UMass Databases “Boston Globe” and “Western Massachusetts Newspapers” for the keywords “Marijuana / Cannabis / Pot Salem” and “Marijuana / Cannabis / Pot Northampton.” All articles and videos, which totaled 436 over the period ranging from June 2016 until December 2019, were downloaded and archived in a Dropbox folder. This data served

two purposes. First, it provided insights into the central and distinctive features of the communities for a period of time before the passing of Ballot Initiative 4 and the community meetings with entrepreneurs, which thus gave me a surface-level understanding of the community-level changes occurring following these entrepreneurial efforts. Secondly, this data granted me access to the opinions of various community members that I would not otherwise be able to reach for interviews, giving me a larger pool of respondents to help me understand how entrepreneurial action variably influences community identities.

Third, as alluded to above, I conducted interviews with both entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry and members of the two communities. The interviews with entrepreneurs allowed me to gain insight into how they approach community meetings, what they consider when planning for them, and how they planned to convince community members that their venture had a place in that community. Interviews with other members, who included government officials, business owners and entrepreneurs from other industries, employees, and long-time residents provided information regarding how the community members themselves perceived changes to their communities following the entrepreneurial action taking place there. While many studies of communities take into consideration the thoughts of prominent community members when characterizing their collective identity (e.g., Glynn, 2008; Rao & Greve, 2018), I casted a wide net in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how a broad range of community members viewed their community and the effect of changes to it on its identity. In total, I conducted 84 interviews between the two communities (40 in Northampton, 44 in Salem). Given the nature of the cannabis industry – namely its roots in a social movement (cf., Hiatt et al., 2009) – I interviewed individuals who both supported and opposed ballot question 4 so as not to produce a theoretical understanding biased by the political

views of the respondents. The interview protocols, both for community members and entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry, can be found in the Appendix.

Finally, I attended various events held for and attended by entrepreneurs working in the recreational cannabis industry, including conventions, concerts, and networking meetings. Given that those entering the recreational cannabis industry are part of a social movement, either directly or indirectly, it was important to consider the resources provided by nation-wide interest and industry groups, such as the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), a group that, since its inception in 1970, has sought the decriminalization and legalization of recreational cannabis use. I paid particular attention during these events to the conversations between entrepreneurs and how they claimed to approach issues with the communities they sought to enter, and spoke with as many industry insiders as possible to determine whether the entrepreneur's actions were in some way influenced by the suggestions of these groups (i.e., do these groups provide entrepreneurs with strategies for allaying the fears of local communities?). Examples of these gatherings included entrepreneurial networking events (such as two events held in a restaurant in Salem in 2019, both of which I attended), HempFest, a local marijuana festival that I attended in 2018 and 2019, and two iterations of the New England Cannabis Convention (NECANN), an industry meeting held in May of 2019 in Springfield, Massachusetts and again virtually in March of 2020. Attending these meetings allowed me to understand the professional network of entrepreneurs in this industry, and establish whether (and if so, to what extent) this network influenced the choices they made when engaging in discourse with community members. I attended 10 such events, during which I recorded and transcribed 34 speeches and presentations and recorded field observations.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I initially planned to continue collecting archival data from each of the two communities until the point at which myself and my dissertation committee felt I reached theoretical saturation, defined as the point at which the continued search for articles failed to produce novel insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2013). However, given the processual nature of my research question, I chose not to cease the process of collecting new data until May 2020, as I did not want to miss any novel theoretical insights offered by this continual process that I might otherwise miss.

### **C. Analytic Procedures**

My analysis of the data was guided by two established techniques for analysis qualitative data. First, I followed the conventions of case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003) to develop an understanding of the history of Salem and Northampton. This analysis included reference to the archival materials and newspaper articles referenced earlier, which I used to develop a timeline of important events in the community dating back to a period before the cannabis industry began operating there. I also consulted various experts in local history during this process, including librarians (4) and members of the historical societies associated with both communities (3). I engaged in both between-source (across all data sources) and within-source (across interviews, newspaper articles, or promotional materials) triangulation to corroborate the timing and sequencing of important events throughout the histories of the two communities. I developed this timeline by creating a case study database (Yin, 2003), delineating the data by both its type and year of creation. In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cases, I created a spreadsheet to ensure that I had sufficient data of various types spanning from at least 10 years before the Massachusetts Ballot Initiative to

legalize recreational cannabis was passed. For example, for the Salem case, I referenced a host of articles and videos from local, state, and national media news outlets to help me understand what various community members deem, and previously deemed, to be self-defining about the community.

Arranging the data in this way helped me understand the history of these two communities, including how their identities have or have not shifted previously to, and over the course of, the introduction of recreational dispensaries in the area. For example, I found that Salem's ties to the witch trials only became widely endorsed as central to community members' understandings of Salem in the 1970s as references to witches, including a prominent statue and shops selling occult products, became visible. I also developed a deeper understanding of Northampton's past, including its association with the underground railroad and the textile industry. I also uncovered similarities between these two communities regarding their attitudes towards cannabis before the passing of Question 4 in 2016. For instance, both communities included a business that was primarily associated with selling cannabis paraphernalia and both had raised concerns over the legalization of cannabis owing to a perceived rise in the use of opioids in the years preceding the legislation. Developing the Salem and Northampton cases in this manner allowed me to take two important steps towards understanding how entrepreneurial activity variably influenced their identities. First, it afforded me a deeper understanding of the nature of the communities surrounding the recreational dispensaries before they opened. Secondly, it shed light on – albeit at a relatively higher level – what changes (if any) had occurred within the community following the introduction of the new industry.

Once I had developed these cases, I turned my attention towards the conventions of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), undertaking an inductive approach to analyzing the

various data I had collected. Though I possessed a cursory familiarity with various literatures before data collection occurs, including scholarship on entrepreneurship (i.e., Fauchart & Gruber, 2011), collective identity (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), and geographic communities (e.g., Glynn, 2008; Marquis & Davis, 2009; Wagner-Pacifi & Schwartz, 1991) I made every attempt not to allow it to constrain my analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, while analyzing the data, I engaged in conversations with scholars both on and outside my dissertation committee to ensure that I attended to a wide range of potentially relevant literatures and did not over-rely on my pre-existing knowledge of any particular one.

The primary way in which I approached my data analysis was by using a constant comparative approach (e.g., Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), one that began with a first-order coding process in the NVivo software focused on the words and actions embodied in the data. I attempted to remain close to the data during this coding process before undertaking a more theoretical analysis. For example, a journalist commenting on town hall meetings in Northampton wrote, “A focus of the Thursday meeting was edibles, with some board members worrying about the potency of marijuana-infused pastries and candy and whether retailers were obligated to educate consumers about dosage levels” (January 2018). I applied the code “discussing safety concerns” to this and other data that described conversations among community members centered around various threats that the introduction of dispensaries could pose to safety of the community. I undertook a similar process in analyzing transcripts from community meetings and visual data collected at both trade shows and other community outreach meetings (Saldana, 2015), taking notes on the features of different illustrations, photographs, and other promotional materials and coding these notes in the same manner as I did the written archival material and field notes. For instance, I coded a photograph that I look

during a site visit to Northampton of a host of cannabis-related books in the storefront of a bookshop as “centralizing complementary product offerings.” I continued to collect new data as I embarked on this first-order coding process, applying codes that I already developed to the new data as well as creating new codes when the new data provided me with novel insights. When I reached a point at which the coding of data failed to produce novel, first-order codes, I compared and consolidated those codes to focus my analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, I recognized similarities between the data coded as “discussing safety concerns” and “discussing health concerns,” and thus merged them into the same code. I also set aside codes that did not seem to relate to my emerging understanding of community identity work, such as “discussing time spent abroad,” though I periodically reconsidered their inclusion in the data set. For this reason, I did not discard first-order codes but rather kept them stored in the NVivo file. This process produced 25 unique codes that appeared relevant to the community identity work process.

Once I produced this list of first-order codes, I turned my attention to the literature in a cycle of deductive analysis to uncover existing frameworks that might explain my emergent findings. I attempted at this time to keep the literatures I reference intentionally broad, maintaining constant contact with members of my dissertation committee as well as colleagues and mentors from outside the committee to ensure that I referenced appropriate scholarship to help explain these findings. For example, attempts by entrepreneurs to stress the tangible, economic benefits that their new ventures would have on the community appeared to reflect an existing construct in the entrepreneurship literature referred to as a community patron role (Powell & Baker, 2014). Conversely, first-order codes that collectively described entrepreneurs’ attempts to convince community members that they were interested in becoming, or had already become, members of the community itself suggested an alternative role not represented in the

extant literature. I thus aggregated these codes into a second-order code entitled “community identifier.” Aggregating codes in this manner ensured that my second-order codes were constructed with constant reference to extant literature and thus did not relabel existing constructs (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013). This process produced 10 second-order codes.

In the third stage, I further aggregated these second-order codes into theoretical dimensions by re-examining the second-order codes and the available literature, having discussions regarding the integration of existing knowledge into my analysis and the novelty of my findings (Gioia et al., 2013). This process often occurred alongside the second-order coding process. For instance, once I had established that entrepreneurs presented themselves primarily as either *community patrons* or *community identifiers*, I came to see these constructs as representing different roles they could adopt when speaking with community members. I thus aggregated these two, second-order constructs into an aggregate dimension entitled *entrepreneurial role rhetoric*. Examining the data in this manner produced a total of five theoretically distinct aggregate dimensions. Table 2 presents a chain of evidence table to visualize the relationships among lower- and higher-level codes (Yin, 2003).

Table 2: Chains of evidence

<b>First-Order Codes</b>	<b>Second-Order Codes</b>	<b>Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions</b>
Discussing safety concerns	Logistical Threat Evaluation	Venture Threat Evaluation
Discussing traffic concerns		
Discussing entrepreneurs' inconsistencies with community identity	Identity Threat Evaluation	
Discussing fears of perceptual changes		
Focusing on importance of collective history	Community Stability Rhetoric	Community Impact Rhetoric
Framing the community identity as established		
Focusing on importance of community growth	Community Revival Rhetoric	
Framing the community identity as evolving		
Positioning self as a community member	Community Identifier Rhetoric	Entrepreneurial Role Rhetoric
Framing organization as reflecting community identity		
Framing organization as reflecting community history		
Offering economic benefits	Community Patron Rhetoric	
Offering security benefits		
Offering volunteer services		
Planning complementary products	Decisive Complementing	Complementor Strategies
Centralizing complementary product offerings		
Advocating for complementary products		
Focusing on existing products	Tentative Complementing	
Peripheralizing complementary product offerings		
Shaming new and existing complementors		
Perceptions that new industry adds a new feature to the community	Centralization Narratives	Incorporation of Venture into Community Identity
Perceptions that new industry uncovers a previously unacknowledged feature of the community		
Establishment of mnemonic traces dedicated to new industry		
Perceptions that new industry reflects features of established identity	Peripheralization Narratives	
Continued establishment of mnemonic traces dedicated to community history		

While engaging in this process helped me understand the component parts of community identity work, these dimensions alone did not explain the means by which the process emerged and unfolded. To develop a processual understanding of community identity work, I then re-examined these codes at the level of the aggregate dimensions to explore “the dynamic relationships among the emergent concepts that describe or explain the phenomenon of interest” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 22), reinvestigating the data to theorize the processual relationships between various codes (Langley, 1999). For example, the two second-order codes subsumed by each aggregate dimensions appeared to primarily categorize the events that occurred in one of the two communities, such as how entrepreneurs in Northampton tended to espouse community patron roles while rarely espousing community identifier ones. I then returned to the timeline I had used to develop these two cases to see if, and how, particular codes depended upon each other (c.f., Langley, 1999). For instance, community patron rhetoric from entrepreneurs in Northampton seemed to occur following an agglomeration of logistical concerns aired by community members as an attempt to ameliorate those concerns out of financial interest. Public attestations of these roles, in tandem with rhetoric from civic leaders regarding the impact of the new ventures, appeared to influence local business owners to begin complementing these new ventures. The two cases thus served as different activity sets that allowed me to contrast how this process unfolded in various contexts (e.g., Hatch & Schultz, 2017) while comprising the process at the higher level of the aggregate dimensions, thus allowing me to develop a more generalizable theory as opposed to a set of descriptive case studies.

Having developed a processual understanding of community identity work across these two cases, I began to develop and evaluate alternative explanations that could explain my findings (Yin, 2015). Many of these potential explanations were couched in existing theories, such as

theories of communal memory work (Do et al., 2019) which hold that an organization's centrality to a community's identity is preceded by a proliferation of mnemonic traces that evoke memories of that organization. According to this theory, cannabis dispensaries would become more central to the identity of a community with more, pre-existing cannabis-related artifacts than one with relatively fewer. However, while community members in Northampton did establish more artifacts (i.e., complementary products, websites, etc.) that evoked memories of cannabis near the end of the community identity work process, the amount of traces dedicated to these dispensaries before they opened in both Northampton and Salem appeared relatively equal. I thus came to see my findings as extending, rather than replicating, this extant theory.

Some of these alternative explanations were more granular in nature, such as the possibility that the opioid crisis had led to higher mortality rates in Salem than in Northampton and thus made members of the Salem community inherently more resistant to the establishment of a cannabis dispensary. However, while reference to Massachusetts databases did reveal a higher mortality rate from opioid use in Salem as opposed to Northampton in the years surrounding the legalization of cannabis, a re-reading of interview transcripts and archival materials contained few references to the crisis in either community. I thus concluded that the widespread endorsement of a community's historically-rooted identity provided a better underlying explanation for resistance to entrepreneurs from the cannabis industry.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

I now present the findings of my analyses, which broadly explain the process of community identity work while also, at the level of the second-order codes, explain how and why entrepreneurial action has differential effects on the identities of different geographic communities. Given the multiple case study nature of my project, I will examine each case in turn, beginning with Northampton. While the linear representation of the various codes may understate the complexity of each case, for the sake of clarity, I present them in the order in which they appeared to emerge based on my analysis (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Langley, 1999; Walsh & Bartunek, 2011).

#### **A. Theoretical Model of Community Identity Work**

Figure 2 summarizes the theoretical model that I derived from my analysis. At the level of the aggregate theoretical dimensions, community identity work begins when entrepreneurs' intentions become known by community stakeholders. This awareness can arise through advertising, local news sources, or discussions with community members with more advanced knowledge of the local business landscape. Awareness of these forthcoming new ventures leads community members to discuss what threat, if any, the new ventures pose to the community (*venture threat evaluation*). Awareness of these threats leads civic leaders and entrepreneurs – both of whom have a financial stake in the success of these ventures – to allay community members' fears. Civic leaders do this by talking about the impact the ventures will have on the community in ways that minimize the threat posed by them (*community impact rhetoric*), while

entrepreneurs espouse roles that paint themselves as acquiescent to the needs of the community (*entrepreneurial role rhetoric*). Owners and employees of local businesses, owing to their desire to tailor products and services to the desires of community members, take note of these stories and decide upon the extent to which they should complement these proposed new ventures (i.e., offer related products or services). The nature of these *complementor strategies* either retains or changes the artifacts that community members see in local shops and storefronts, thus leading them to discuss the relative centrality of these new ventures in their conceptualizations of the community's identity (*incorporation of new ventures into community identity*). An exploration of the more specific findings at the level of the second order codes follows.

## **B. Northampton**

### **1. Venture Threat Evaluation – Logistical Threat Evaluation**

Unlike prior work on the intersection of entrepreneurs and communities, which has tended to characterize the interactions between entrepreneurs and community members as the beginning of the relationship between the two parties (e.g., Facuhart & Gruber, 2011), the data suggested that these relationships began when community members became aware of the entrepreneurs' intentions to found new ventures in their communities. For example, the entrepreneurs behind a dispensary in Northampton advertised the dispensary using a billboard more than a year before they planned to open (Boston Globe, 2017), while news of entrepreneurs scouting vacant buildings for potential dispensary sites became publicized in local papers across western Massachusetts (Valley Advocate, 2017). Thus, while only one dispensary opened during my investigation, many more (8 in total) had been proposed and advertised in local newspapers.

The news that entrepreneurs intended to found these new ventures in Northampton led many community members, at first in isolation but soon thereafter in groups, to consider what type of threat, if any, these new ventures posed to the community. In Northampton, these opinions and discussions tended to focus on logistical threats, such as how these new ventures would impact safety and daily operations in the community. For example, the Northampton Director of Public Health made known his concerns regarding the regulation of cannabis sales:

*“In terms of health and safety, health officials want to make sure sales associates and customer service representatives are properly trained and educated. Also, not included in draft regulations were mobile sales of marijuana. Prohibiting mobile sales of marijuana should probably come from the city council as an ordinance. We don’t want to see ‘Ding Dong’ carts selling marijuana at the Three County Fair. Health officials require that tobacco dealers have permanent, brick and mortar structures to become tobacco sellers, and she thinks the same should be required for retailers of marijuana” (March 2018)*

Other community members voiced similar logistical concerns, as did one reporter who stated, “Northampton resoundingly supported the idea of retail marijuana. However, they know there are going to be real impacts, such as more people driving impaired by marijuana once it is allowed to be sold legally” (Nash, 2018), or a city councilperson who related to residents the following questions that she asked of the entrepreneurs: “I asked them, ‘what are you going to do for Ward 6 and for the city of Northampton, what kind of money are you going to bring in?’ We need money just like other cities. They want to work very carefully with [this ward] and they don't want to have more traffic” (March 2018). These logistical concerns were often raised during state-mandated community host meetings. Community members who attended these meetings in Northampton tended to focus their questions on logistical concerns, as did one

resident who asked, “I’ve done my research in the Netherlands and in California. Have you ever heard of a history of any kind of an industrial hazard generated by this type of business?” (May 2018). These concerns, which community members raised in opinion pieces, interviews and meetings, suggested that those in Northampton focused primarily on the threat entrepreneurs posed to the logistical operation of the area, but not to its central and defining features.

## **2. Community Impact Rhetoric – Community Revival Rhetoric**

The community-wide focus on logistical threats led to two distinct outcomes. First, these concerns impelled civic leaders – owing to their financial interest in having the dispensaries operate in their community - to ameliorate the concerns put before them to enable the founding of these businesses, thus inspiring more broad discussions amongst community members that these logistical concerns could be easily addressed, and thus that Northampton, with the inclusion of them, would change for the better. For instance, a local paper reported how “Northampton BOH member Cynthia Suopis...thanked the city council and subcommittee members for taking the very first step as Northampton moves toward implementation of the new laws...She thinks Northampton has the opportunity to distinguish itself in the Commonwealth by building a series of policies and practice that reflect not only progressiveness but also its focus on health and safety” (February 2018). For instance, the minutes on a planning board meeting captured the opposition of one councilperson to capping the number of licenses made available to entrepreneurs – “Their impulse [to cap the number of licenses] is predicated on excess caution. ‘If it’s to send a message to youth, that’s a terrible reason to do it,’ he added. He acknowledged that there will be cultural effects but said he didn’t think they should create a law to moderate or

ameliorate that cultural shift” (May 2018). In this manner, influential members of Northampton appeared unconcerned with potential changes in their community.

This focus on addressing logistical concerns rather than preventing cultural changes led to a series of future-oriented discourses in which community members discussed Northampton’s revival. In other words, once civic leaders alleviated community members fears of logistical threats, they began discussing the city’s identity in the future tense. For instance, one business owner focused on positive, generational changes that these entrepreneurs could bring to the community, saying, “Northampton was lacking some of its cool factor in the last five or ten years, but I think that there's sort of a change, new blood and new ideas coming in, folks literally half my age. I'm in my forties and I don't fit in, and I think that's kind of an interesting change” (December 2018), while another expressed a similarly positive attitude about the new entrepreneurs – “We're in flux right now. It's changing over. Yes, there are things closing, but there are also other things opening. That's great, because then you're leaving room then for new cannabis businesses to come in and for new entrepreneurs to come in and make their way” (November 2018). One city councilperson more directly stated his support for changes brought about by the addition of more entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry in his own vocal opposition to a cap on the number of dispensaries allowed to operate in Northampton, saying, “if this ordinance is designed to maintain a culture or sense of place that corresponds to what some people think Northampton is, this is always a tough discussion. Northampton has not been the same - it has changed in its retail economy over the generations it has existed” (February 2018).

This general openness to change manifested in other community members focusing more broadly on the future of Northampton. For example, the Northampton Chamber of Commerce released a strategic plan entitled “A New Century, a New Day,” in which they stated, “we

celebrate this milestone by stepping boldly into the next century with a strategic plan that lays the foundation for the future success of our organization and our community. We explored and reimagined what a 21st century Chamber should be for Northampton...Our renewed and expanded focus on entrepreneurship and innovation will help build a thriving and inclusive community” (2019). A member of the Downtown Northampton Association advertised a similar focus on the future of Northampton, writing, “‘The only constant is change’ might have been penned centuries ago, but aptly describes downtown Northampton in 2019, with retail and restaurant owners responding to changes in the retail business and a shifting economy in innovative and exciting ways that reflect Northampton's look to a vibrant future” (March 2019). In sum, alleviating logistical concerns, which the data suggested were the primary concerns related to the opening of dispensaries in Northampton, allowed community members to envision what types of positive changes these and other entrepreneurs could bring to the city.

### **3. Entrepreneurial Role Rhetoric – Community Patron Rhetoric**

The focus on logistical concerns also led entrepreneurs, often during the aforementioned community host meetings, to espouse a specific entrepreneurial role, defined as a self-definition to help guide their relationship with the community (e.g., Powell & Baker, 2014). In the Northampton case, entrepreneurs espoused community patron roles whereby they focused on vocalizing the services they and their new venture would provide to alleviate concerns that their new venture posed a threat to the health, safety and infrastructure of the community. Regarding health and safety, many entrepreneurs detailed plans to educate the community about the safe use of cannabis. For example, one entrepreneur detailed how his proposed facility, at which his

venture would both grow and sell cannabis, did not pose an environmental threat during a host meeting:

*“We have not [heard about waste issues at similar facilities], because again this is, at its most fundamental level, this is growing a plant in an indoor environment, right? And I'm not trying to be, you know, flippant about it, but we have to remember fundamentally it's growing plants, right? In other words, this is not a pharmaceutical product where we're dealing with many hazardous chemicals, so the risk associated with it is quite low. But odor? Don't worry, it's been on the top of our minds” (May 2018)*

This entrepreneur, like many others seeking to establish businesses in Northampton, attempted to educate community members about the relative safety of his operation while assuring them that the facility would not have a negative impact, in this case regarding the odor of the facility, on the surrounding community. Other entrepreneurs painted themselves as community patrons by outlining the security of their proposed facilities to offset concerns regarding increased crime and underage usage of their product. This approach was best exemplified by the CEO of Northampton's first proposed retail dispensary, who was described in an interview with civic leaders in the following manner:

*“As medical marijuana regulations were promulgated, she was responsible for crafting a set of comprehensive policies and procedures for making sure [the facility] remains in compliance with state regulations. The core of regulation is about the safety and security of patients, staff and the general public, which are of utmost importance to [the facility]. They don't spare any expense when it comes to safety and security. Security includes on-site security staff and extensive surveillance coverage” (February 2018)*

Another potential employee of the proposed facility went even further in describing the security of the site, saying, “there is a lot of security in this building, it’s even a little bit over the top. Some of the areas actually require a biometric entrance. All products leave in childproof packaging, and it’s the work of families and parents to make sure it remains in childproof packaging. We want to educate the community to make sure that happens” (NH-E1).

Entrepreneurs adopting community patron roles did not only focus on the safety and security of their buildings, however, and often went on to describe the economic benefits of their dispensaries. One such entrepreneur described choosing Northampton as a potential site precisely because of the opportunity to provide jobs, saying, “we’re anticipating 15 to 25 highly skilled technical jobs that we plan on [providing]. We plan to train everyone, so we do not necessarily anticipate them needing experience. We intentionally chose Northampton because of the pool of employees we will hire as operators” (May 2018). Another entrepreneur, who operated a medical dispensary that planned to transition into a retail dispensary, described the broader economic benefits of the dispensary for the surrounding area in an interview:

*“We are looking to try to hire people from Northampton. We now have 58 new employees, and parking is always an issue in Northampton. So the hotel, which is right across from [us], we pay for parking there. We also pay for parking at the [local newspaper]. Our neighbors and I make a special pact. There’s a pest control place close to one of our neighbors, and we had an ant problem. It wasn’t like I called someone from [a nearby town], a neighbor came in. So it’s economic development, clearly.” (NH-E2)*

#### **4. Complementor Strategies – Decisive Complementing**

It is at this point in the process that local business owners became an integral part of the

community identity work process. One particularly important characteristic of Northampton, which became evident over the course of my interviews with and observations of owners and operators of local businesses, was the close-knit nature of the relationships both among business owners and between owners and community members. Many of the businesses in Northampton were small businesses, and various formal and informal networks ensured that businesses owners were in constant contact with each other regarding issues from upcoming events and cross-business charity endeavors (NH-BO5) to shifting trends and potential ideas to increase foot traffic and revenue (NH-BO9). Perhaps owing in part to these close relationships, business owners took note of both the desire amongst community members to embrace these new ventures and relatively friendly, community patron roles adopted by potential entrepreneurs. Regarding community revival rhetoric, the owner of a local clothing store detailed a recent experience where a local vendor made him a bowtie featuring cannabis leaves to help capitalize on the publicity of cannabis, saying:

*“One of my vendors made a versatile bow tie with pot leaves. It had pot leaves on one side and green and black stripes on the other. It was a two-face material so you can flip around the bow tie to whichever side you want. And I showed it to a lot of people who were like, ‘Oh, do you, what do you have that’s green or what do you have that’s plaid?’ We’ll pull it out and they’ll go ‘oh, that’s funny,’ or, ‘I’ll think about it.’” (NH-BO12)*

Regarding the relatively friendly nature of the entrepreneurs who had positioned themselves as community patrons, many local business owners reached out to the group behind Northampton’s first dispensary before they opened to try and capitalize on the expected crowds to advertise their own businesses. For instance, the owner of a local grocery store described the owners of the first dispensary as “a good partner to the city...I walked down there on the first

day handing out coupons for munchies at [my store]” (NH-BO14), while local papers reported on how “these enterprising folks from a nearby tattoo laser removal shop are out on ‘munchie patrol,’ trying to drum up business by handing out brownies” (September 2018). These community patron roles adopted by entrepreneurs, in this case manifesting in their willingness to work with local business owners, in tandem with the community’s general openness to change, led many business owners in Northampton to begin what I refer to as *decisive complementing*, or the prominently advertised and / or displayed sale of products or services complementary to another industry or business, in this case the industry represented by the entrepreneurs seeking and gaining entry into the city, in order to benefit financially.

Some business owners began complementing the cannabis industry by tailoring their existing product lines to it. For instance, an operator of a local bookstore described how, “we started to stock more books on cannabis before [the dispensary] went recreational. We even had an event with a local author about the medicinal use of cannabis last fall. I’m really proud of the selection and quality of books that we carry on the topic of marijuana, both recreational and medicinal. With titles ranging from ‘The Stoners’ Coloring Book’ to ‘Cannabis Consulting,’ we have a little something for everyone” (NH-BO8), while two other bookstores in the area began dedicating entire shelves to books on how to grow, consume, and advocate for cannabis (NH-O3, NH-O6). Importantly, these books were not present in these stores before the intentions of entrepreneurs first became known. Other business owners, such as the previously mentioned grocer, planned to alter his product line to “focus on smaller, tasty munchie type things. Personally, I would probably contract with someone and offer a huge selection of CBD, to get a license and have a commercial kitchen here so I would be able to infuse chocolate [with cannabis]. I’d like to do those things, maybe find a nice way to dip into the market” (NH-BO14).

In fact, only a few weeks after our conversation I located a “Munchie Bar” in the entranceway to the store with a wide array of snacks and CBD products, including oils and creams (NH-O54).

Some business owners took a different tack in their approach to decisive complementing by altering their existing product lines to carry complementary products. For instance, a local novelty shop owner discussed her intention to begin selling glass pipes while also predicting a rise in local business owners complementing the new industry, saying:

*“If there was a way to do it kind of classy, not wanting to look like a headshop in any way but having a classy little area maybe in a watch case with some pipes, I would. It was very fun in the shop in December [2018], we started carrying ceramic pipes. There were a lot of potters who started making cool pipes, ceramic or glass. And it was very fun this December, once the recreational marijuana stores were open to be able to talk about the pipes and just and to talk openly with people instead of having to whisper. And people would say, ‘how do you clean this’ and ‘how do you like this one’ and be able to talk without feeling like you're hiding or going to get in trouble. It's probably just going to be more local artists, more craftspeople are going to add it to their repertoire” (NH-BO16).*

Photographs of this decisive complementing are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Photographic evidence of decisive complementing (i.e., Northampton)

**Existing businesses offering existing product lines reflecting new venture**



**Existing businesses offering new product lines reflecting new venture**



**5. Incorporation of Venture into Community Identity – Centralization Narratives**

Community members, as more local businesses began selling products complementary to the cannabis industry, began to characterize Northampton not just as a community with

dispensaries but rather as a community where cannabis played a central role in their collective identity. For instance, a graduate student at a local college noted how “the dispensary has come into the area and established themselves, and the people going there might also go to these other businesses and look for things that are similar, like side products. I think they'd be wise, and I think some of them are. There's lots of pipe stores and even weed leaf socks and shirts and stuff. I think places are doing that. Why not capitalize on something that's already bringing people to the area to make them come into your store?” (NH-CM21). A professor at the same school similarly noted a rise in cannabis products, saying, “I've shopped at the co-op, and in the health department they have like a whole counter that's just for CBD oil. That's different. And then I was driving the other day and there was some, I forget where it was, some new place that had products like bong and stuff like that. I can't even remember where it was, but it had a big marijuana leaf” (NH-CM5). Another business owner, who was personally opposed to cannabis, nevertheless noted a change in Northampton owing to the decisive complementing of local businesses:

*“There's another place in town that has put all the paraphernalia in the front window. They always had it, they just moved it up. Yeah. So there's some changes in where they're putting things. Also places that like never carried rolling papers, like bookstores, they've started carrying rolling papers. Right. Well lately a few of them are carrying rolling papers, you know, so they're adding things to try to pull in some of that population. And I have noticed just walking around in certain bookstores, they'll have like cookbooks on how to use it in food. I see it taking over. It's there” (NH-BO3)*

The wide visibility of these artifacts related to the cannabis industry, in tandem with a general acceptance that cannabis had become a defining feature of Northampton from

community members, appeared to lead civic leaders to also embrace and promote cannabis as a central and defining feature of the area. For instance, the Northampton city website dedicated a page to cannabis that read, “cannabis is open for business, baby, and it’s no longer for dark basements and clandestine hand-offs. It’s out in the open, (dare we say) en vogue, and finally legal for recreational use in Massachusetts,” adding below that “needless to say, we’re excited, and Hampshire County is welcoming this versatile plant with open arms” (June 2019). Other civic leaders also went on record advertising the centrality of cannabis to Northampton, as when a photo of Mayor David Narkewicz appeared in Rolling Stone magazine being the first person to purchase cannabis legally in the community (NH-CM11).

These perceptual changes were perhaps best summated in the words of another local student, who said the following regarding what he referred to as “cultural shifts” in Northampton: “if you think about the shifts in other communities, like Portland [Oregon], other places where it's not just the dispensary but starts to be ingrained in the culture, I think that there could be that kind of culture shift because you can put dispensaries there, but when people pick up on it, I think it'll change the culture more” (NH-CM24).

## **B. Salem**

### **1. Venture Threat Evaluation – Identity Threat Evaluation**

Similarly to Northampton, conversations surrounding the threat posed to Salem by the presence of entrepreneurs representing the cannabis industry began when those entrepreneurs’ intentions first became public. For instance, a 2017 piece in *The Salem News* read, “concerns swirl around the city about the recently passed recreational marijuana law, which city officials

are reviewing the implementation of. Concerns have focused on whether existing or coming dispensaries would flip their license to a retail store format” (July 2017). The Salem Mayor’s office released a statement early the next year confirming these rumors and outlining plans for the community host meetings and proposed locations and number of dispensaries allowed in the community (April 2018).

Some community members raised concerns that dispensaries would negatively impact safety, security and daily operations in the community (i.e., logistical concerns). For example, a community member spoke out during a host meeting for a proposed dispensary, saying, “marijuana is harmful to young people and I don’t see why we need an unlimited number of marijuana retail shops” (May 2018). Minutes from a city council meeting showed the Salem Police Chief voicing similar concerns, detailing how “the Police Chief, among others, is definitely in support of a cap of ten. He would rather be part of an effort to put a cap in place now and be told ‘I told you so,’ then not to have a cap and, in two or three years, face public health and safety impacts that were not anticipated” (March 2018).

While these expressions were common, many community members also evaluated how the dispensaries might shift the central and distinctive features of Salem, evaluations that I refer to as *identity threat evaluations*. For example, a long-time Salem resident and employee related how “I don't like [dispensaries in Salem]. This is eventually going to happen, where when I mention that I'm living in Salem they'll go 'oh you've got the pot there.' That will switch over right away. And I don't like it” (S-CM29). Another resident expressed his concerns that Salem would become known primarily for its cannabis dispensaries at a community host meeting:

*“My biggest problem with this, and for anybody moving into Salem, is that all cities around us opted out [of allowing dispensaries]. So we're going to be the drug dealer of the North*

*Shore. It is terrible. We are the dealers for Beverly, for Peabody, for all of the cities. Only Salem, and Salem is working on those [more dispensaries]. My concern is, again, legal or not legal has nothing to do with it. People are going to come, they're going to buy, they're going to get high" (April 2018)*

In this manner, while members of the Northampton community were almost exclusively concerned with these new ventures negatively impacting safety and security in the community, opposition in Salem often came in the form of concerns that perceptual elements of the community would shift. Others expressed these concerns by arguing that these ventures clashed with Salem's existing identity, as did a city councilperson during a different host meeting, adding, "just a quick note – Salem's known as a city with a rich history, you know, a long history with the shipping, etc., and I don't really know if this complements our city. The tax money isn't everything" (March 2018). As opposed to members of the Northampton community, who generally responded well to promises of tax revenue and jobs from entrepreneurs at community host meetings, those in Salem had additional concerns that did not appear answerable through promises of enhanced safety measures or revenue for the city. In the words of one city councilperson when asked about the state of the community during the time when these host meetings were most prominent, "we're at kind of like an identity crisis moment" (S-CP3).

## **2. Community Impact Rhetoric – Community Stability Rhetoric**

Similarly to Northampton, the concerns raised by community members in Salem impelled civic leaders to alleviate those concerns for financial reasons. Given the concerns that dispensaries would change Salem's identity, however, civic leaders began talking about the historical roots of Salem's identity – often directly to entrepreneurs in public settings – to

impress upon them and their constituents why their new ventures would need to reflect the city in its current form. For example, a city councilperson objected to the inclusion of a dispensary in his ward because of the entrepreneurs' perceived disrespect for Salem's past, saying "I will fight for these people. I've lived in this city my whole life. It's a rich city, I mean, right next door at the Custom House, Nathaniel Hawthorne worked there. It's the birthplace of the National Guard. The first telephone call by Edison from Salem to Boston. This [your dispensary] isn't what Salem is about, so you're going to get your shop somewhere in the city, but they're not going to be in my district, I can promise you that" (May 2018). Other civic leaders described how they were accustomed to using these strategies following many other proposed changes to the community as well. A city councilperson, when asked about Salem's openness to change, described it in the following way:

*"We hear that probably every single day about every single project. That's probably the core attention to any kind of project that's proposed in the city. I think that, being an almost 400-year-old city and having a lot of people who move here sometimes, it's important to engage with the historic preservation piece. They [community members] really want to protect the look and the history. And I love that stuff too, you know, but I think sometimes people let it overtake every other part of the decision-making process to a point where, in my opinion, it kind of hurts us where we are trying to do things. Just as a side example, this week and this month we're really digging in and paying attention to historic adaptive reuse of historic buildings coupled with affordable housing. We have a housing crisis in Salem and there's still a core of people who, even though we have this homeless population and long waiting lists for regular and affordable housing, and people are just trying to live here, are like, 'oh yeah, but you know, people are trying to come in and change who we*

*are.’ I think the tension and the struggle in Salem is that we are equally a backward- and forward-looking city. We're really steeped in our history, which is great and important. A lot of people love that, there's a lot of upside to that. But then the other side of that, it really colors a lot of our development processes and is crap for progress. It can hold us back at times.” (S-CP7)*

This community stability rhetoric began to influence how community members more broadly thought about the fit between the new ventures and the community’s identity, sometimes even coming to see the ventures as identity-consistent. For example, one resident responded to a comment that the cannabis industry did not belong in Salem by attempting to frame the industry as emblematic of the city’s identity:

*“I live about three minutes from here and I just wanted to address the idea of Salem's history and maintaining tradition. I think that Salem - there was a time when we were at the forefront of commerce. We were bigger than Boston, and we have a history of having amazing economic growth and I think that this [cannabis dispensary] fits right in. I'm excited to see my city tackle this and help set the standards for the state instead of addressing it from a point of fear. I think that we have an amazing opportunity to make sure that we're doing the absolute best we can” (March 2018)*

This rhetoric also appeared to influence how the local government, and their affiliated organizations, advertised Salem. For example, both the Salem Chamber of Commerce and Salem Main Streets, an organization designed to promote Salem businesses, re-drafted mission statements in early 2018 to reflect a focus on existing, rather than potential future, businesses. The Chamber of Commerce did this by focusing on “strengthening our existing businesses through the many programs and services that we offer” (March 2018) while Salem Main Streets

stated their purpose as “the continued revitalization of downtown Salem as a vibrant, year-round, retail, dining and cultural destination through business retention...advocating for the improvement, historic preservation and re-use of existing buildings and architecture. Design improvements include buildings, streets, sidewalks, signs, parking, and all other aspects of the physical environment” (April 2018). In sum, the widespread concerns over changes to Salem’s identity led community members to focus on stabilizing, rather than revitalizing, the business community and, more generally, the community as a whole.

### **3. Entrepreneurial Role Rhetoric – Community Identifier Rhetoric**

This focus on the existing identity of Salem also led many entrepreneurs to espouse what I refer to as *community identifier rhetoric*, wherein they positioned themselves as members of the Salem community who shared common values with other community members to make clear to members their intention to not disrupt or alter the community’s identity. These roles became evident during community host meetings as community members began engaging in past-oriented identity discourses. For example, while an entrepreneur began one such meeting by focusing on preemptively alleviating potential logistical concerns (e.g., “in addition to just being another business in this community, we’re committing to local job creation. We want to hire residents from Salem. We want to prioritize Salem resumes. We’re obviously going to spend a lot of money and resources on enhancing security” (S-E4)), a community member later asked “what is ‘Salem’ about your business? How does your business fit into our city?” (March 2018). The entrepreneur’s business partner noted the prevalence of community identity-based concerns in his answer:

*“First and foremost, everyone's just talking about the rich history of Salem. I'm originally from Chicago, so to come up here and see the architecture, I'm seeing the cobblestone roads and I'm reading the history, and I'm seeing this sort of a progressive streak that I feel about here, a sense of independence that's also central. I feel that in this community and being part of this industry we're trailblazers. I'm thankful every day that I'm allowed to do something novel, something exciting. And I would hope that I can bring that excitement to my employees when I move out here. We're truly on the forefront of some things and I think we're going to change a lot of people's minds once this does happen and people, the city as a whole, realize that it's a great business. It's something that's not going to be detrimental to it. It fits into the core values of the community and we're making sure we're taking care of our home” (S-E5)*

In this manner, these and other expressions characteristic of a community identifier role were generally reactionary in nature, whereby entrepreneurs positioned themselves as community members only as others' concerns about the community's pre-existing identity became apparent. For instance, an entrepreneur in a different meeting responded to a similar question about the degree to which their new venture would fit into the existing community by explaining how “we've tried hard to preserve some of the character of the building. It's brick, beam, that turn of the century Salem industry. We've tried to keep some of that in the mix. Culturally I think there's a lot of overlap. We're cultural, diverse” (S-E11), alluding to both the history of the building and the overlap he perceived between the diversity of the venture's proposed staff and the city itself. Other entrepreneurs adopted community identifier roles by alluding to their, or their businesses partners', pre-existing relationships with the Salem community. For instance,

one entrepreneur drew attention to how “I bought a house in Salem three years ago. I've lived there and I love Salem” (S-E16) while another highlighted the locality of his business team:

*“My partners are a little modest about this, but we will pitch ourselves here while we have the floor to do so very briefly if you don't mind. [My partner] lives in Salem. He lives in [this ward] and everybody else is in Essex County with the exception of [my other partner] who lives in Billerica, which I thought was Essex County for the first month I was working here. So, this is a local team. It's a local team of successful entrepreneurs who are bringing their experience from other businesses to cannabis” (S-E12)*

Some entrepreneurs even spoke of their admiration for, and belongingness in, Salem simultaneously, as did one who stressed how Salem had always felt like her home:

*“I am not only a Salem resident, but I grew up in [this ward], which is where we're proposing to have this business. I left to get my master's degree after getting my undergraduate degree at Salem State University. When I was at Salem State I really was invested in educating people in the community as a whole. I felt like I could have more of an impact by educating not just school age children, but people within my community. I was an intern at the Salem Maritime National Historic Site where I designed education programs and field trips targeted towards getting kids out of the classroom and having experiential learning experiences in their own community. I came back to Salem to work at Essex Heritage, which is a local nonprofit. I was working mostly as a project coordinator on the Baker's Island Lake Station program, which was a wonderful project that I really enjoyed, not just because of the education but the history there. And it made me fall back in love with being in Salem. So, if it can take me away from the mountains and make me fall back in love with the ocean, I think it's done its job. I feel like this is the right place for*

*me to make the biggest impact on the community...So we are locally from Salem, including me personally” (S-E9)*

In sum, entrepreneurs at community host meetings, while they often opened their presentations by stressing the tangible, positive impact that their ventures would have on the community (e.g., job creation, community service, etc.), tended to espouse community identifier roles as a reactionary measure to community members’ concerns that their venture would change the identity of the community. In the words of one entrepreneur when discussing the look of his proposed site, “we’re going to obviously work with the zoning board to make sure that our proposed site, that the way our place looks at the end of the day, fits Salem” (S-E3).

#### **4. Complementor Strategies – Tentative Complementing**

While business owners and employees were made aware of entrepreneurs’ intentions to establish cannabis dispensaries in Salem, with many of them attending the aforementioned community host meetings, the strength and consistency of community stability rhetoric appeared moreso to influence their decisions to minimize their involvement with the cannabis industry through *tentative complementing*. These decisions were made due to the belief that complementing a venture that many saw as threatening the identity of the city was unwise from a financial perspective. These business owners tended to have more negative reactions when asked if they intended to sell complementary products, as when the owners of a novelty shop responded by saying “no, there are other people doing that and it doesn’t really go with who we are” (S-BO26) or another who said, “not really, we have some novelty peace pipes in the back but I wouldn’t recommend buying them – we’ve had them for a while. I’d like to get some just for my own personal use, but we wouldn’t sell anything cannabis-related in the store” (S-BO3).

When asked why they did not choose to complement this new industry, many business owners explained how doing so would go against their own, more community-congruent store identities. For instance, the owner of a jewelry store summated his disinterest in complementing by simply stating, “we’ve been here about 30 years, selling Halloween stuff (S-BO31), while an employee at a local witchcraft store, when asked whether they had considered selling CBD, said, “a big part of our business is knowing who we are, and CBD is more medicinal and we’re more of an herbal store, we’re more about healing, So it doesn’t fit with who we are and who we have been” (S-Emp4).

While some business owners in Salem did choose to complement the cannabis industry, whether through the sale of cannabis paraphernalia or CBD products, they often revealed a hesitancy towards doing so. For example, owners at a gift shop drew my attention to a device designed to smoke cannabis in the back of the store, describing it as “this little pipe that we advertise as a plant holder, but that’s it. We have some more books on cannabis at our shop in Beverly” (S-BO15), addressing how, while they carried complementary products at their shop in a nearby city, their Salem location avoided drawing attention to such products. This tentative approach to complementing could be seen in many store fronts as well, with novelty shops continuing to advertise shirts and other products with witches or maritime images up front while keeping products such as CBD oils in the backs of their respective stores (S-O34, S-O35, S-O36). A grocery store owner described his approach to complementing by explaining how “we now carry chocolate and drinks that contain CBD. We as a store are still trying to figure out if we should immerse ourselves into the marijuana world or just lightly kiss its forehead and allow other stores to benefit. We have already built our name and reputation with other products and so will probably keep our marijuana related products to a minimum” (S-E8).

This evidence is not to say that no businesses or individuals in Salem attempted to decisively complement the cannabis industry. However, those few individuals who did so often faced a backlash from community members that I did not observe in Northampton. For example, one business in particular had for many years been selling apparel with the phrase “I Got Stoned in Salem,” a historically inaccurate reference to the Salem Witch Trials. One journalist who closely covered Salem businesses answered a question about the extent of complementing he observed in Salem by describing that business in the following terms:

*“I’m trying to remember exactly what they’re called. They’re kind of a little trashy in terms of what they do. But they had this whole, ‘I Got Stoned in Salem’ thing that they started doing just because it’s the city of the witch trials. There was really never anybody that was stoned here, they either hanged or pressed them, but I have seen those shirts pop up in a couple of places. However, largely, the culture of the city has actually rejected the guy who was doing that kind of stuff” (S-Emp13)*

Much like the city councilperson who had earlier described community members’ insistence that new ventures and projects reflect Salem’s central and distinctive features, this reporter seemed to observe a community whose past-oriented identity discourses ensured that decisive attempts at complementing were met with resistance. As one salon owner who had attempted to sell CBD-based products described, “we tried one round of CBD, but people weren’t coming in for it or raving about it, so we stopped pretty early on” (S-BO9).

Photographs of this tentative complementing are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Photographic evidence of tentative complementing (i.e., Salem)

**Existing businesses retaining original product offerings**



**New businesses reflecting community history**



**Complementing restricted to businesses with pre-existent, overlapping products**



## 5. Incorporation of Venture into Community Identity – Peripheralization Narratives

The business community's focus on their existing product and service lines, with minimal and often de-emphasized attempts to complement the cannabis industry, retained the materiality of the community. This led to a proliferation of *peripheralization narratives* wherein community members characterized cannabis as an ancillary, rather than central, component of their community's identity. For instance, while the websites for the city of Northampton and its promotional groups contained multiple references to the community's receptiveness to these dispensaries, Salem's official website contained only a link to the rules and regulations surrounding the purchase and use of cannabis (September 2019). New businesses opening in Salem during the months preceding and following the opening of its first dispensary also followed this trend by appealing more to Salem's reputation as a hub for occult and alternative lifestyles than its designation as one of the first three communities in Massachusetts to host a dispensary. For instance, a new restaurant contained portraiture of Ouija boards (S-OB43) while businesses such as Die With Your Boots, "a store dedicated exclusively to gothic fashion, with products like Viking sword leggings, a Sylvia Plath-inspired typewriter necklace, and a varsity jacket that reads 'See You in Hell' on the back," and Vampfangs, which "sells colored contact lenses, ready-made teeth veneers with names like 'Night Walker,' 'True Breed,' and 'Cletus Deluxe,' and books like *Biting Back: A No-Nonsense, No-Garlic Guide to Facing the Personal Vampires in Your Life*" (S-CM41) found early success in the community.

While the absence of cannabis-related artifacts both online and within the community proved an interesting finding, it did not explain why cannabis had not become more central in community members' understandings of Salem. Interviews with community members, however, began to shed light on how community stability rhetoric, reinforced by a lack of decisive

complementing among local businesses, led them to view Salem as relatively unchanged. For instance, a local journalist described cannabis' influence on Salem in the following terms:

*“I think the culture is relatively unchanged here. There's so many crazy things going on in Salem that it's really hard to identify what Salem really is. But ‘Pot Capitol of Essex County, Massachusetts’ is certainly not one of them. It doesn't feel like there's been any level of culture shock. The people here feel as though it was much ado about nothing, where everybody was fearful of fire and brimstone and then the skies are clear” (S-CM2)*

This community member, like many others that I spoke to following the opening of the first dispensary, seemed to suggest that Salem's historically-rooted identity, though difficult to easily conceptualize, was not susceptible to change. A professor and resident at the local University further described how the lack of complementing among local businesses compounded her sense that Salem was not, and likely would not become, known for cannabis:

*“I think Salem has gone through a transition, but, for example, my favorite place to go downtown is this little shop, and they have this little Salem tea towel that's got a Witch's hat and stockings, so I think you find traces of that still in stores. I don't foresee Salem going to that extreme [cannabis becoming a central feature]. I don't see the shops getting super kitschy about it. I have a hard time imagining it. I think that people will come here for that, but I have a hard time imagining it becoming a cultural thing. We often tie things we're experiencing to our history, and the Witch Trials is such a unique moment. I think that our history is part of what makes our community so vibrant. The marijuana industry is just another cool thing about Salem” (S-CM26)*

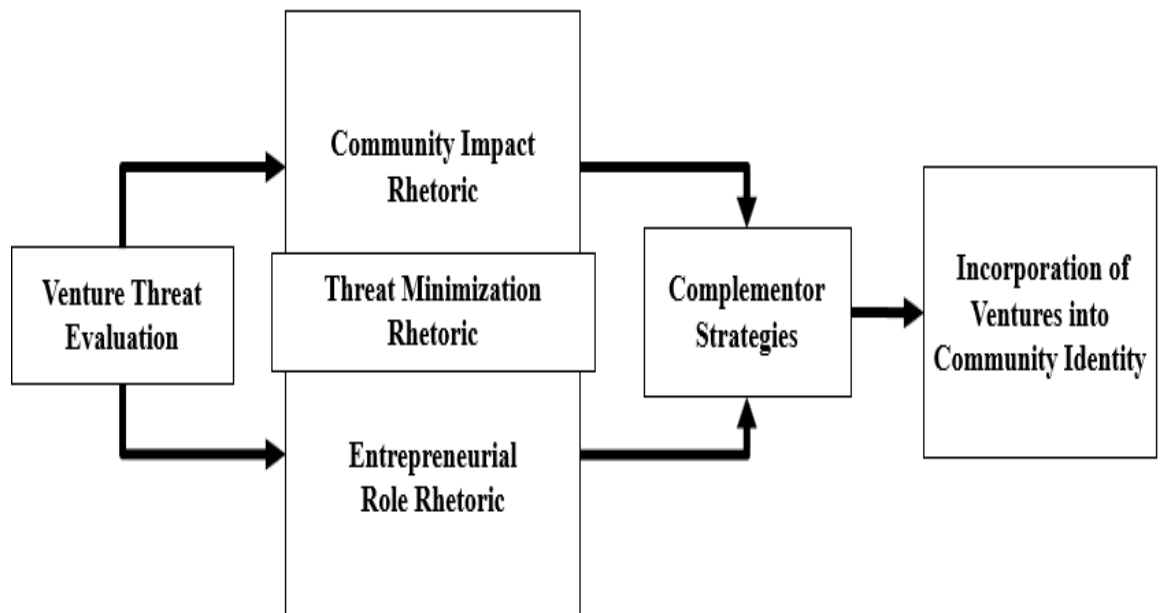
This sense that cannabis was present, but not central to Salem was shared in interviews with individuals of varying ages and political affiliations. For example, one business owner who

had opposed the legalization of cannabis explained how “[more] dispensaries will open and stretch further into the city, but what will draw more people to the city will not be the topic of marijuana but that of its personal history. We are drawn by character and personality” (S-BO), while a proponent of legalization who had lived most of his life in Salem explained:

*“As far as a dispensary fitting in Salem, I don’t really think it does. I don’t think it fits in Salem. But I’d say it adds kind of a neutral effect. It really fit in but isn’t a wild place to put it either. I think Salem is a younger area, so it’s kind of fits in with the idea that younger people are really open to it. It’s also a historical area, and I honestly don’t think people are going to come to Salem for a pot shop” (S-CM31)*

The words of both of these individuals mirrored the opinions of many other Salem residents, businesses owners and civic leaders in the wake of the dispensary opening who saw their community as relatively unchanged by the presence of these new ventures.

Figure 2: Processual theory of community identity work



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Through this dissertation I have endeavored to understand how entrepreneurial activity differentially impacts perceptual elements of geographic communities. Through a multiple case investigation, I have developed a processual theory that explains both how and why entrepreneurial actions has such variable effects. When entrepreneurs' intentions to found new ventures in communities become public, members of those communities begin assessing which type of threat, if any, those new ventures will pose. When those discussions center chiefly around logistical concerns rather than concerns over potential changes to the culture, image or identity of the community, civic leaders offer community revival rhetoric surrounding what the community could become with the addition of these new ventures. Entrepreneurs, taking note of these logistical concerns, will present themselves as community patrons willing to ameliorate those concerns. Both of these strategies are undertaken out of financial interests, either for the financial benefit of the community (civic leaders) or the entrepreneurs themselves. When local businesses owners become aware of this rhetoric, they will begin decisively complementing the industry in which those entrepreneurs operate to capitalize on the community's receptivity to these new ventures. This process will ultimately lead to centralization narratives, as the prominence of these new ventures echoed by the complementary products sold in adjacent stores lead community members to believe that these new ventures have become a defining characteristic of the community in which they claim membership.

However, this process will unfold in a markedly different fashion when the nature of concerns raised by community members over the new ventures differs. When those concerns

center around potential changes to the culture, image or identity of the community that could result from the presence of new ventures, civic leaders will offer community stability rhetoric through which they discuss the historical roots of the community's identity to make both entrepreneurs and community members aware that these new ventures will not change their community. Entrepreneurs will also take note of these concerns, leading them to offer community identifier rhetoric that paints them not as servants to the community but members of it who understand the character and importance of its identity. Existing business owners will similarly observe the past-oriented discourses and attempts by entrepreneurs to ingratiate themselves to the community in its existing form, thus leading them to tentatively complement these new ventures for fear of losing existing business. The relative lack of change from the business community will ultimately inspire peripheralization narratives, through which community members will position the new ventures as less important to the community's identity than its existing characteristics.

### **A. Theoretical Implications**

This theory of community identity work, which I define as the process through which stakeholders shift or retain the central and distinctive features of geographic communities, offers theoretical contributions to the literature on entrepreneurship and scholarship focused on the intersection of communities and organizations. Perhaps most prominently, this theory showcases the need for scholars of entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial experience to attend more broadly to the means by which entrepreneurs gain entry into, and acceptance within, geographic communities. While some work has focused on the different roles entrepreneurs can adopt in order to win the favor of community members (Powell & Baker, 2014), this work, and

specifically the Salem case, suggests that extant scholarship has overlooked important elements of the relationship between entrepreneurs and communities characterized by widely shared, historically-rooted identities. For example, while entrepreneurs entering Northampton were generally able to appease community members by discussing the jobs their ventures would create and the public works projects to which they would contribute, those in Salem were faced with the far different challenge of convincing community members that their new venture did not betray Salem's identity. Many of the attempts to convince community members of this seemed reactionary in nature, as few entrepreneurs focused on the congruence between characteristics of their new venture and the community's identity before being asked to do so by community members. This finding suggests that the strategies entrepreneurs employ may be more emergent in nature than previously suggested (e.g., Shepherd et al., 2019), especially when they are confronted by a seemingly hostile community in which promises of economic gain prove insufficient. I have developed the construct of community identifier rhetoric to characterize how entrepreneurs will position themselves to such communities, but the challenges of existing within such communities are likely to continue well beyond the founding period. Future work is thus needed to meaningfully explore how community identifier roles shift over time.

Relatedly, my resultant theory sheds light on important, community-level characteristics that influence the extent to which a new venture, even one that represents a highly publicized industry, can impact perceptual elements of communities. While much prior work has shown how new ventures can inspire changes in how community members view their surroundings (e.g., Chiles et al., 2004; Do et al., 2019; Glynn, 2008), to my knowledge, scholars have yet to explain why many communities appear relatively unaffected by new venture formation. For instance, while research has shown how the foundation of prominent auto manufacturing plants

in Detroit, Michigan led to the city becoming known as the Motor City (Klepper, 2007), we have not yet developed explanations as to why, despite a flurry of entrepreneurial activity and the loss of many of its glass manufacturing plants, members of the Toledo, Ohio business community continue referring to it as the Glass City (Russell, 2012). My theory suggests that community stability rhetoric can act as a buffer to identity change as it reminds members of their community's rich history, a history that might be threatened by a new venture. For example, while each interviewee expressed knowledge of specific elements of Salem's history, most commonly its witch trials and maritime prominence, little agreement existed among Northampton community members as to the important elements of the community's past. I answer, and expand upon, a call from Shepherd and colleagues (2019) to examine how community-level features influence entrepreneurship by showing how deeply rooted and widely shared community histories shape how entrepreneurs present themselves and limit the impact that their venture will have on the community.

This insight – that rhetoric involving collective history buffers change – might partially explain resistance to change at other levels of analysis. For example, organizational change scholars have long noted the prevalence of individuals who oppose change initiatives (e.g., Coch & French Jr, 1948; Nord & Jermier, 1994) and the failure of many such initiatives as a result (e.g., Beer & Nohria, 2000; Mantere, Schildt & Sillince, 2012). However, my theory would suggest that individuals are more likely to resist change when it threatens a collective identity that is, or becomes through rhetoric, firmly rooted in the past. Prior scholarship would seem to support the assertion that concerns over identity shifts are often more difficult to ameliorate than logistical ones (cf., Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Mantere et al., 2012), and as such change agents that do not frame changes not as departures from, but rather continuations of, an organization's

history are likely to see those attempts fail at higher rates. This outcome is especially likely when change announcements inspire discourses surrounding not simply the organization's existing identity (e.g., Gioia et al., 2000), but the historical importance of that identity (e.g., stability rhetoric), and when change agents choose to focus on ameliorating logistical, rather than identity, threats. While interesting scholarship has explored how leaders "use" history to legitimate change attempts (Hassard & Rowlinson, 1993; Hatch & Schulz, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2018), the likelihood that collective interpretations of history could hinder them supports the need to include history as an important independent variable in understanding organizational change. As more scholars begin incorporating organizational history into their theories (e.g., Rowlinson & Clark, 2004; Suddaby et al., 2016), we are likely to develop better answers to questions surrounding why organizational changes, even those that appear to make logistical sense, fail.

The importance of discourse in my theory of community identity work suggests a need to look beyond artifacts to understand organizational history. For instance, the Northampton community includes numerous artifacts representative of its history, including statues of historical figures and murals dedicated to important events in the community's past. However, as mentioned above, few community members to whom I spoke expressed an understanding of the community's history beyond their knowledge that many buildings in the community appeared older than those in surrounding areas. While recent scholarship has urged a refocus on the materiality of history (i.e., how material artifacts shift how history is remembered – Do et al., 2019; Ravasi et al., 2019), it would appear that gaps often exist between what is shown and what is remembered. This finding suggests two important considerations for scholarship attending to history in organizational contexts. First, investigations of organizational history should attend both to mnemonic traces and collective interpretations of them to more fully understand the role

of history in a given organization. Second, interesting future work could explore the effect of disconnects between the intentions behind traces and their collective interpretations, as when a statue meant to honor a prior leader instead inspires hatred towards that leader (i.e., Joe Paterno - Van Natta Jr., 2012). The emergence of subgroups that variously oppose and support elements of an organization's history will likely negatively impact many organizational outcomes.

Third, we suggest that new ventures can influence community identity change not only by attracting similar organizations to the area (e.g., Klepper, 2007) or deliberately altering relational and symbolic systems (Glynn, 2008) but also through the efforts of existing businesses to complement that new venture. In this manner, potential identity changes can be signaled to community members not only through large scale processes such as rapid turnover to a new industry but through relatively smaller scale changes in the products advertised in storefronts. This work affirms scholarship on mnemonic traces (e.g., Do et al., 2019; Mena et al., 2016; Ravasi et al., 2019), since perceptual changes in new ventures' centrality to a community's identity appeared spurred by changes in the physical landscape. In other words, the primary mechanism through which ventures become central to community identities may be the consistency of its artifacts (i.e., complementary products) that line streets and shelves.

This finding also raises interesting questions for strategy scholars. For example, while investigations of complementors have more recently moved to platform contexts (e.g., Ziu & Liu, 2018), I suggest that strategy scholars in particular should attend to the outcomes associated with complementing regional businesses. While many of the businesses owners to whom I spoke owned relatively smaller businesses, it is possible that owners of larger businesses might achieve competitive advantages by attending to and complementing the more prominent industries of the regions into which they expand. These types of ingratiation tactics, especially in communities

characterized by historically rooted identities, are likely to produce advantages when patrons view them as authentic (cf., Hatch & Schultz, 2017). Large-scale studies would be useful in explaining when, and why, such complementing impacts organizational performance.

### **B. Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, this study suggests that entrepreneurs should pay close attention to the histories of the communities in which they seek to operate. Interviews with entrepreneurs, alongside numerous informal conversations and observations made at entrepreneurial conventions and networking events, suggests that entrepreneurs are often well versed in addressing logistical concerns. The information learned at such events might explain why many entrepreneurs opened meeting by focusing solely on logistical concerns, a strategy that led to resentment among crowds of community members in Salem. Knowing a community's history, and the level of importance community members place upon that history, could inform the strategies entrepreneurs use in gaining the favor of seemingly hostile communities. Knowledge of a community's history also appears vital for existing businesses owners who are considering complementing new ventures. While complementing may prove a financially viable strategy for those in communities more focused on what they may become, those in communities firmly grounded in past would be wise to approach attempts at complementing with caution.

I also suggest that civic leaders, specifically those who view new ventures as economic opportunities that come at the cost of community-level perceptual shifts, can use history (e.g., Wadhvani et al., 2018) to stifle those changes. While new ventures often become touchstones for understanding geographic communities (Do et al., 2019; Klepper, 2007), calling upon and widely discussing community history may well serve to prevent members from seeing a new

venture as such a definitional feature. By allowing new ventures to enter communities while focusing on history, not the new venture, as the defining feature of the area, civic leaders are likely to realize the economic advantages gained by allowing those new ventures to enter without permanently shifting the way its members feel about their home.

### **C. Limitations and Future Directions**

In addition to the future directions outlined above, some of the key limitations of this study present opportunities for important future work. Perhaps most importantly, the choice to focus on the emergent cannabis industry, while providing an extreme case useful for identifying key elements of the community identity work process, may influence the generalizability of these results. Communities are unlikely to be as aware of the introduction of other new ventures, such as coffee shops or traditional retail stores, as they are of cannabis dispensaries, which suggests that the observations made here are likely more muted in these cases. By altering defining characteristics of proposed ventures (e.g., size, societal acceptance, etc.), scholars may unpack alternative means of community identity work. Additionally, for the sake of comparison, I have chosen to focus on the theoretically important events surrounding the founding and operation of a community's first dispensary. However, as of this writing, Northampton and Salem have announced plans to allow more entrepreneurs to establish dispensaries in the area. It is therefore possible that the inclusion of more dispensaries in Salem would make "cannabis" a more central element of the community's identity. Research projects with longer time horizons would explain how community identity work unfolds over many years and reveal currently hidden mechanisms through which identities are revised or strengthened over time.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

As alluded to throughout this project, my analyses do not represent a complete set of the ways in which community identity work might occur. However, what I have hoped to achieve is draw attention to the theoretical possibility, and develop a theory of, the means by which community identities shift or retain their character following entrepreneurial action. I have further attempted to show the tangible effects of this process on entrepreneurs and organizations, lending further credence to the idea studying communities is not simply the domain of sociologists but rather an important way of understanding the entrepreneurs and organizations that call those communities home. Communities would indeed appear, in light of this project, to be more than simply sites for potential entrepreneurial activity. It would behoove future scholars to consider the actions and influences of multiple stakeholders in their analyses of communities and organizations as well as we continue to broaden our understandings of the way in which the organizations we study and the patches on earth on which they sit change or maintain each other over time.

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