Artist Activism as Arts Entrepreneurship

Artists Disrupting Social Structures and Changing the Future

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ABSTRACT: The conceptual framing of artist activists as arts entrepreneurs is pivotal to this study's analysis of artists' political organizing during the overlapping moments of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Trump presidential era. However, artist activism as a form of arts entrepreneurship is underexplored in the arts entrepreneurship literature. To address this gap, I conduct a side-by-side comparison of key principles in the arts entrepreneurship and social movement literatures to establish a transdisciplinary theoretical baseline that supports my argument that artist activism is a vital form of arts entrepreneurship. I then analyze interviews with twenty-seven artist activists who cultivated and exercised actions for "changing the future" (Koppl & Minniti, 2008a, 17) during this period and apply my findings to further expand the taxonomy of arts entrepreneurship first developed by Chang and Wyszomirski (2015) beyond management process to vehicle for institutional change. In addition to connecting arts entrepreneurship to the social movement literature and conceptualizing artist activism as a form of arts entrepreneurship, I identify strategies and tactics employed by US artist activists in their creation of both economic and social value in the 2020-2022 period. **KEYWORDS:** artist activism, arts entrepreneurship, activist art, portfolio careers, social movements. **DOI:** doi.org/10.34053/artivate.11.3.194

Introduction

In the U.S., the contentious period of 2020-2022 was a pivotal moment for artist-led responses to traumatic events and their subsequent questioning of and challenge to established social structures and normative belief systems. From Black liberation to immigration reform to reproductive rights to climate change and other social issues, progressive social justice artists acted to fight systems of oppression in a variety of ways across multiple institutions. This study, grounded in a U.S. context and focused solely on

artists fighting to change the future (Koppl and Minniti, 2008a), analyzes interviews with twenty-seven artist activists who economically, logistically, and emotionally managed their careers during this period to serve public good through the disruption of social structures. It makes an empirical case for the conceptualization of artist activists as arts entrepreneurs by expanding the arts entrepreneurship field's understanding of the role of dissent (Callander & Cummings, 2021) at the intersection of art and non-market entrepreneurship (Shockley, Frank and Stough 2008; Koppl & Minniti, 2008b), thus extending arts entrepreneurship beyond "management process" (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015, 25) to means for structural transformation (McMullen, Brownell and Adams, 2021). Further, it explores strategies and tactics employed by artist activists during this period to build understanding of how they sustained themselves and their work to contribute to public good.

Background and Motivation

Artists' interpretations of their own lived experience provide researchers key biographical evidence for the analysis of social troubles across history. Thus, this study seeks to establish a link between artist activism and arts entrepreneurship grounded in a Millsian understanding of the interplay of biography and history: "No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey" (2000, 6). In support of this approach and in keeping with the methods of *intimate insider research* (Morrison, 2021; Taylor, 2011), I start first with my own story as an artist activist and entrepreneur.

The founders of the Center for Artistic Activism, Steve Duncombe and Steve Lambert, define artist activism as a "hybrid practice that marries the creative force of art to the concrete results of activism" (2021, 5). Similarly, in *The Art of Protest*, T.V. Reed defines activist art as "art that has been created inside or very close to social protest movements" (Reed, 2019, xi). Over the past six years, my artistic practice has largely served social movements and social justice causes. Previously a labor and environmental organizer, I began painting as a political outlet following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. I went on to graduate school to study sociology, specifically the role of artists in producing positive social change. My graduate studies provided me with the freedom, flexibility, and skills to study artists' roles in social movements, and it also provided me the economic security to continue my work as a social movement artist. I knew from my production and consumption of art that artists working in a range of mediums participated in social movements and served a vital role within them. Seeking avenues of support for my research and art practice beyond the limited academic setting, I sought out training opportunities, mentorship, community partnerships, and funding that would provide me with the knowledge and resources to continue and strengthen my artist activism. I worked as an arts, culture, and equitable development intern; a graphic designer; a muralist; and

a producer for various social movement organizations, non-profits, and for-profits serving social justice missions. I applied my doctoral training to skill-build, network, and pay my bills and health insurance. In fall of 2020, after an emotionally heavy summer of police killings of unarmed Black people backdropped by a deadly, unpredictable, global pandemic, I was asked to be one of the artists to lead the painting of a 350 foot-long Black Lives Matter street mural in the downtown area of my city. Around this same time, with funding from an art policy institution, I founded an artist activist collective to create art to aid a participatory people's budget effort.

My artist activism journey has been a balancing act of responding to context, managing risks, innovating new ways of doing, protecting my morals and ethics, working in harmonious and contentious collaborations, and acting strategically to push my own social justice agendas in a variety of venues while sustaining my economic survival and mental health. Interested in how other artist activists do their work *and persist at it*, I looked to engage in rigorous social scientific and theoretical work to answer this question. In the process, I found that artist activism is a vital form of arts entrepreneurship.

The Present Study

In this study, I analyze interviews with 27 artist activists to make the case that their activism should also be understood as a vital form of arts entrepreneurship. I begin by defining and operationalizing arts entrepreneurship and artist activism. I then expand the taxonomy of arts entrepreneurship (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015) to draw throughlines from the arts entrepreneurship literature to key concepts in the social movement literature. As relatively little research has been conducted on artist activism in either of these two literatures, I address the gap by highlighting connections between art, entrepreneurship, and activism across both fields. I apply these connections in my analysis of the artist activist interviews I conducted to discern how artist activists, as arts entrepreneurs, manage their careers to both sustain themselves and contribute to public good. I conclude with thoughts on future research opportunities for bridging social movement research with arts entrepreneurship research.

Definitions of Arts Entrepreneurship and Artist Activism

In their pivotal work attempting to bring consensus to the definition of 'arts entrepreneurship', Chang and Wyszomirski (2015: 24) define it as "a management process through which cultural workers seek to support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value." Following this work, Essig (2015) defines the process of arts entrepreneurship as "not a managerial one, but a creative one" (241-242) in which arts entrepreneurs create mediating structures, recognize as well as create opportunities, network to gain contacts,

mobilize resources, and seek professional development as a means to the end of connecting their work to an audience (Essig 2015; 2022). A few studies examine the disruptive nature of arts entrepreneurs challenging status quos. For instance, White's (2019) concept of "organizational attack" highlights arts entrepreneurs' coordinated attacks on social structures and normative aesthetic beliefs. Similarly, newer definitions and treatments of arts entrepreneurship highlight innovation as grounded in disruption, or a "disturbance of behavior" (Essig, 2022: 78). Others have extended this vein of thought with categories of arts entrepreneurship like "meaning-making," highlighting its symbolic value, and "re-making," bringing to the fore its power to reform existing institutions and organizations (Callander & Cummings, 2021: 746).

So then, who are arts entrepreneurs? Just as 'artists' are not defined by a particular job, credential, or location (Novak-Leonard & Skaggs, 2017; Menger, 1999), neither are arts entrepreneurs. Who counts as an arts entrepreneur is a matter of one's artistic and entrepreneurial practices within as well as beyond one's occupation. As a process of innovation (Shumpeter 1947), entrepreneurship in the arts is pursued in an amalgam of ways via various artistic practices and organizational forms to then be shared to an intended audience (Scherdin & Zander, 2011). This is important feature to acknowledge given the precarity and fluctuation artists experience within their careers. In a growingly economically precarious time (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2021; Childers, 2022; Gould, 2022; Click & Stockburger, 2022), artists who are not privileged with full-time employment in one creative job and who seek to sustain their creative careers via the self-management of a portfolio of jobs in the arts (Wyszomirski & Chang, 2017; Woronkowicz and Noonan, 2019) might be considered entrepreneurial. Portfolio careers can be described as gigging, freelancing, moonlighting, public grants acquisition, and so forth (Strandvad, 2022; Wyszomirski & Chang, 2017; Feder & Woronkowicz, 2022; Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). An artist might develop a portfolio career for economic reasons, greater independence, time flexibility, or a lack of choices (Feder & Woronkowicz, 2022; Munnelly, 2022), but there are other drivers of this form of entrepreneurial action. While arts entrepreneurship as a form of entrepreneurship not directly tied to capital accumulation or wealth creation (Scherdin & Zander, 2011) can be motivated by a sense of self-fulfillment when exercising an organizational mission (Preece, 2011: 108), a key driver is the act of changemaking: a "universal form of human action" in which entrepreneurs' actions are oriented towards "changing the future" (Koppl & Minniti, 2008a: 17). Koppl and Minniti (2008a) composed this treatment of entrepreneurship from Kirzner's (1982) concept of 'impactful actions'.

In their extensive review of entrepreneurship journals and art journals, Callander and Cummings (2021: 748-749) found that both literatures illustrate artists as functioning on the periphery out of necessity but also as a strategy to resist power structures and status quos. Even further, their research highlights the need for an intentional focus on disruption and dissent in the arts entrepreneurship field. Research on artist activism

could fill the gap Callander and Cummings (2021) point to by explicitly analyzing artists challenging social structures for the purpose of social good. Artist activism is defined as artistic practice married directly to results-driven activism (Duncombe & Lambert, 2021: 5; Duncombe 2023). Similarly, activist art is art created within or alongside social movements (Reed, 2019, xi). Artist activists are individuals who take on the role of creating art for a social movement for either internal- or external-facing usage. Various studies in the social movement literature attempt to examine artists as activists (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Cornfield, 2015; Isaac, 2009, 2012, 2014; Redmond, 2013). There are three general lines of thought in the small but growing artist activism literature: studies that examine the content or aesthetics that artists produce (Isaac, 2009, 2012, 2014); studies that analyze artists as activists strictly within their occupational communities (Cornfield, 2015); and studies that examine distribution and audience impact (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Danaher, 2010; Danaher & Roscigno, 2004). No studies I have found analyze all three types of artist activism. Nevertheless, how and where artist activists operate and the extent of their impact are interrelated concerns.

While relatively little research has been executed on artist activism in either the social movement or the arts entrepreneurship literatures, comparing these literatures, as I do below, illuminates connections between activism and entrepreneurship in the arts. This comparison also enables both fields to build understandings of how artists creatively manage their careers economically, logistically, and emotionally to contribute, beyond the creation of economic value, to the creation of social value and to public good. Further, it has the potential to expand our understanding of artists' roles in public and civic life (Novak-Leonard & Skaggs, 2017) and of collective action in arts and cultural work (Skaggs & Aparicio, 2023), as well as the policy implications these expanded understandings carry (Cornfield, Skaggs, Barna, Jordan, Robinson, 2018; Redaelli, 2019).

As mentioned above, generally missing from the arts entrepreneurship literature is a framework for interpreting arts entrepreneurship as artist activism. While the social movement literature underexamines the interconnectedness of how and where artist activists operate and the extent of their impact—a nexus that the arts entrepreneurship literature and its attention to 'means and ends' (Essig, 2015) might help to elucidate—this study directs its focus to the social movement literature for the purpose of assisting the arts entrepreneurship literature in expanding its understanding of arts entrepreneurs' 'means and ends' to include efforts to 'change the future' (Koppl & Minniti, 2008a), i.e., artists' challenge to the social structures and institutions they inhabit. This focus does not preclude a consideration of the ways that artist activists intricately balance their social justice goals with entrepreneurial methods that also serve their own economic survival. Rather, it sets the stage for my findings below: that artist activists are arts entrepreneurs who strategically balance portfolio careers to create both economic and social value as they contribute to public good.

Expanding the Arts Entrepreneurship Taxonomy

Chang and Wyszomirski (2015) provide clear conceptual categories for defining arts entrepreneurship action: strategies, tactics, competencies/skills, mindset, and context. In this section, in **Table 1**, I first detail components of this taxonomy alongside complementary key concepts from the social movement literature to draw throughlines between analyses of arts entrepreneurs and social movement actors. Directly following **Table 1**, I explicitly explain the components, concepts, and throughlines.

Table 1. Comparison of arts entrepreneurship components and social movement key concepts.

Components[1]	Arts Entrepreneurship Literature	Social Movement Literature (Key Concepts)
Strategies	Definition: strategies are the 'ends' of value creation and innovative vision	Definition: "overall plan for action, the blueprint of activities with regard to the mobilization of resources and the series of collective actions that movements designate as necessary for bringing about desired social changes" (Jenkins, 1981:135).
	E.g., Creation of micro enterprises, promotion of policy change via policy entrepreneurship	E.g., Emergence of new social movement groups (Blee, 2012; Coley, 2018).
	Self-management of career transitions/career portfolios, Change Management, Intrapreneurship	Activist Biographical Pathways (Isaac, Coley, Cornfield, & Dickerson, 2020, 2016; Coley, 2018)
	Community or heritage enterprise, new cultural products or services	Cultural Production (Peterson & Anand, 2004; Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Danaher, 2010; Danaher & Roscigno, 2004; Isaac, 2009)
Tactics	Definition: means of "implementing the strategic vision" (Chang et al, 2015, 26)	Definition: "the specific means of implementing strategy, the forms of collective action taken by movement actors" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012:11-12)
	Use of digital technology to market/promote, reach new audiences in new ways	Collective Identity Formation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) and Digital Organizing (Carty, 2018)
	Networking, managing partnerships	Coalitions (Mayer, 2011; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010)
	Crowdsourcing to fundraise	Resource Mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; McAdam 1982 [1999]) and Mutual Aid (Spade, 2020)
Competencies/ Skills	Definition: an entrepreneurial leader's ability to "carry out the vision and to	The social movement literature does not have a succinct term or definition

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[1] Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015.

	use implementation tactics" (2015, 26)	for activists' competencies and skills. Instead, social movement scholars examine training programs and formal and informal career-biographical pathways where activists professionally develop competencies and skills.
	Opportunity Spotting, Business Skills Acquisition, Professional development via education or training	Movement Schools & Preparation Pathways (Isaac, Coley, Cornfield, Dickerson 2016, 2020)
Mindset	Definition: Individual character qualities or ways of thinking believed to be associated with entrepreneurial behavior (2015, 26)	Social movement scholarship has a variety of concepts that encompass activist's mindsets, including but not limited to high-risk activism, activist commitment, emotion work, and utopian ideals/movements.
	Risk-taking	High-Risk Activism (Goodwin 1997; Goodwin & Pfaff 2001; McAdam 1986)
	Perseverance, tolerance for failure	Activist Commitment (Passy & Giugni 2000; Carlsen, Ralund, & Toubol 2020; Nepstad 2004); Emotion work of managing failure (Nepstad 2004; Barker 2001; Goodwin & Pfaff 2001)
	Open-mindedness	Imagination & Creativity (Kelley 2002; Davidson 2022); Real Utopias (Wright 2010)
Context	Definition: "external environment and conditions that the entrepreneur contends with" (2015, 26)	For social movement scholars, context is better known as opportunity structure (as introduced by Eisinger, 1973), defined as the context and circumstances that affect the shape, size, success, and failure of social movements (Wahlstrom and Peterson, 2006: 364; McCammon, Campbell, Granberg, & Mowery, 2001)
	Organization, Individual Artist or Small Business,	Opportunity Structure (Eisinger 1973; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; McCammon et al 2001)
	Artistic Field, Local/Regional Locale	Venue, where claims are pressed (Meyer & Staggenborg 2012)

Strategies. Strategy is an iterative process of balancing resources, context, opportunities, relationships, timing, targets, and dilemmas and is composed of collective action demands, arenas, and tactics (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012: 7). Chang and

Wyszomirski (2015) define arts entrepreneurship strategies as the ends of "value creation" and "innovative vision" (26). Arts entrepreneurship strategies include the creation of microenterprises and the self-management of career transitions. If we take the authors' conceptualization of arts entrepreneur strategies and apply this to artists whose practices are social justice oriented—artist activists—the sociological social movement literature's definition of strategies is quite similar. For social movement scholars, strategy is the "blueprint of activities" actors use to perform their actions to bring about their "desired social changes" (Jenkins, 1981:135). Even further, actors must inventory their resources in reference to their overall goals and available opportunities to "maximize their influence" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012: 6). This acknowledgement of the importance of context and available opportunities is very much in line with Koppl and Minniti's (2008a: 11) general theory of entrepreneurial behavior, specifically entrepreneurs' "opportunity recognition" and "innovation." Both arts entrepreneurship and social movement definitions of strategy define it as a variety of activities and uses of resources individuals use to implement their desired social change. The creation of microenterprises can be viewed as also the creation of social movement organizations (see Blee (2012) for more on social movement organizations). Likewise, the creation of new products or services occurs in social movements as well—for social movements are sites of cultural production (Peterson & Anand, 2004; Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Danaher, 2010; Danaher & Roscigno, 2004; Isaac, 2009). Just as arts entrepreneurs self-manage their career transitions, artist activists self-manage their social movement involvement across venues in their career portfolios. Just as arts entrepreneurs manage change to create social value, so do artist activists.

Tactics. The second component of Chang and Wyszomirski's taxonomy is "tactics," defined as the means of "implementing the strategic vision" (26). Similarly, the social movement literature defines tactics as "the specific means of implementing strategy, the forms of collective action taken by movement actors" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012:11-12). The tactics activists select deeply depend upon the venue where they are seeking to create change. Tactics are the intentional efforts to create change (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004) and can be directed at targets in contestations as well as directed towards the development of a collective identity within a social group or audience (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004). Similar to arts entrepreneurs, social movement actors also utilize fundraising and crowdsourcing, run online communication channels, manage coalitions, and tactically employ their social networks to gain resources and support for their causes. Mutual aid is a perfect example of social movement crowdsourcing tactics. Mutual aid is crowdsourcing of a collective in order to meet each other's survival needs (e.g., food, clean water, housing, health products) and is grounded in an understanding that the structural systems we have in place will not meet our needs (Spade, 2020:7-9). Arguably, mutual aid—a key tactic of social movements—relies on networking and managing partnerships, a tactic of arts entrepreneurship. All in all, tactics are integral components of arts entrepreneurial and

social movement action.

Competencies/Skills & Mindset. The components "competencies/skills" and "mindset" work together to produce outcomes. The personal traits linked to mindset—"risk-taking," "perseverance," "tolerance for failure," and "open-mindedness"—support the personal capacities associated with arts entrepreneurial competencies and skills, specifically "opportunity spotting," "business skills acquisition," and "professional development via education or training" (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015, 25). Together, competencies/skills and mindset support arts entrepreneurs' ability to carry out tactics (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015). In social movements, activists gain their competencies from movement schools (Isaac, Coley, Cornfield, & Dickerson, 2016), mentorship, and other organizer professional development training programs. Risk-taking maps onto the skill of emotional management required for "high-risk activism" (McAdam, 1986; Goodwin, 1997; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001)—activism that has high costs of participation attached to it, like those of life and freedom. Perseverance can be understood as emotional work rather than a personality trait. Social movement actors actively manage their emotions to justify their commitment and overcome failure (Passy & Giugni, 2000; Carlsen, Ralund, & Toubol, 2020; Nepstad, 2004). Likewise, open-mindedness is required for utopian movements—movements that lean into imagining new societies and new ways of life. Imagination and creativity, associated with arts entrepreneurship (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015, 25-26), are also essential features of social movements (Kelley, 2002; Wright, 2010). Activists must imagine the change and solutions they seek.

Context. Sensitivity to context, or environment, is the fifth component of the arts entrepreneurship taxonomy. Arts entrepreneurs are constantly responding to external factors in their environment; Koppl and Minniti (2008a: 15) call this "improvisation." Environment could be their cultural industry, their community, or a geographic/spatial location (2015: 26-27). Similarly, activism responds to context. The social movement field often employs the terms 'venue' and 'opportunity structure' to describe the environment activists are tasked with responding to. A 'venue' is *where* activists "press their claims" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012: 9-10). Venues have different "targets and audiences" and "come with distinct rules that affect the way activists can pursue their goals" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2012: 9-10). Similarly, opportunity structures, specifically political opportunity structures (as introduced by Eisinger, 1973), are the context and circumstances that affect the shape, size, success, and failure of social movements (Wahlstrom and Peterson, 2006: 364; McCammon, Campbell, Granberg, & Mowery, 2001). Thus, both arts entrepreneurs and artist activists respond to environmental factors to successfully achieve their social visions. Context is the umbrella under which all entrepreneurial action occurs. Arguably, through a social movement lens, we can view opportunity spotting (Chang et al., 2015) or opportunity recognition (Koppl & Minniti, 2008a: 11) as artist activists' ability to maneuver and take advantage of open and closed opportunity structures (Eisinger, 1973)—i.e., receptive environments or repressive

environments. Opportunity spotting can essentially be understood as actors' responses to a given 'context' or opportunity structure. Their environments or venues could be their workplace, their local government, or even federal level government policy. Even further, one's 'mindset' is also shaped by the context to which one is responding. Activists perform emotional work to manage failure (Nepstad, 2004), justify risk (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Goodwin, 1997; McAdam, 1986), and maintain commitment (Nepstad, 2004; Passy & Giugni, 2000), i.e., perseverance in their work.

The throughlines I draw here between conceptualizations of arts entrepreneurship (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015) and key themes and characteristics of activism derived from the social movement literature make the case that artist activism should be framed as a form of arts entrepreneurship with the goal of changing the future (Koppl & Minniti, 2008b) and contributing to public good. Against this backdrop, I next examine closely how artist activists, as arts entrepreneurs, manage their careers to sustain their creation of social value.

Research Methods

This study examines 27 interviews with artist activists conducted between March 2020 and March 2022 to discover how artist activists, as arts entrepreneurs, do their work and persist at it. In this section, I address my own positionality and the study's context, sample, and analytic strategy.

Intimate Insider Research. I have worked as a volunteer, and at times a paid employee, for more than thirteen movement groups. My work spanned various roles like researcher, artist, community organizer, graphic designer, union steward, etc. These experiences fueled and guided my interviews. The content of my observations as a movement worker will not be shared as part of my findings, but my experiences in the field were vital to my understanding of artist activist work disclosed in the interviews and for building trust and rapport with my respondents. Due to my extensive experience in various social movement fields, some might term this research "intimate insider research" (Morrison, 2021; Taylor, 2011) because of my personal connections and experiences to the work and some of the individuals I studied. Though my personal experience is extensive, I do not claim to possess or represent *the* insider opinion. I rely on my sample of 27 diverse artist activists from various movement fields to glean their insider experiences as artist activists enacting and embodying arts entrepreneurship in their activism.

Context. As detailed in the previous section, activism responds to context, as does entrepreneurship. In their work, artists, as activists and entrepreneurs, are constantly responding to the opportunity structure presented to them. The context and period of this study (2020-2022) was a particularly trying time in the United States. Unemployment rates were up. Covid-19 was rampant; vaccines were not yet accessible or widespread for half of the data collection period. The final year of the Trump presidency created much

unease, disgust, and distrust of the government (James, 2021). The murders of unarmed Black people, specifically Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, were the tipping point for civil unrest, awaking many to the long-voiced war cries of the Black liberation movement. Economic inequality widened considerably, and billionaires' wealth reached new heights while poverty also soared (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2020). Mass waves of worker strikes and walkouts occurred (Payday Report, 2020). Mental health and burnout crises boiled over (Mayo Clinic, 2021; Threlkeld, 2021); some attribute this to the Great Resignation (Society of Human Resource Management, 2022). Activists of the 2020-2022 period were operating under conditions of mass fear, normlessness, uncertainty, stress, and unease.

Sample. Artist activists, artists who create "inside or very close to social protest movements" (Reed, 2019), are the population of focus in this study. U.S.-based artist activists from an amalgam of social movements and causes were selected through snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009) and from responses to flyer and social media advertisement of the study. Trusted comrades and social movement organizations (SMOs) reposted the flyer, casting a wider net beyond my immediate network. Due to my intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1990; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) to social movement research, I sought to recruit a diverse sample across race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender expression, age, citizenship status, nativity, ability, and geography.

The sample for this study is a subset from a larger project from which this work is drawn. For the larger project, I sampled beyond artist activists to include non-artist activists who work in and beyond the arts. For this article, my selection criteria included only *self-identified* artists and cultural workers who presently also *self-identify* as activists or as being involved in social justice-oriented work. Interview questions like 'do you identify as an activist?', 'what social causes do you work in?', or 'what kind of work do you do?' served the sampling strategy for this study.

The sample population consists of 27 artist activists from a broad range of occupations, demographic characteristics, and geographies. Within the sample, 10 respondents were visual artists, 4 respondents were performance artists, 8 identify as cultural workers, 3 were technology/communications designers, and 2 were literary artists. Participants held various professions such as teacher, organizer, muralist, sculptor, writer, waiter, theater practitioner, CEO, poet, nanny, student, urban planner, curator, comedian, puppeteer, and diversity and equity consultant. Reflecting broader trends in artistic careers (e.g., Throsby & Zednik, 2011; Menger, 1999; Lingo & Tepper, 2013) and activist careers, several individuals held multiple jobs or no job at all.

The sample gender composition is 11 womxn, 13 men, and 2 nonbinary/gender nonconforming people. Racially, the sample includes 7 Black/African/Mixed-Black respondents, 11 White respondents, 3 Latinx respondents, and 5 Asian or Southwest Asian North African (SWANA) respondents. Of the sample, 3 respondents were unemployed, and 12 respondents were considering shifting or maneuvering shifts in their careers—these

career categories are not mutually exclusive. The sample of respondents collectively worked in service to residents in 9 states in the U.S. (as well as the District of Columbia) and 4 countries. Causes and movements of the respondents included the labor movement, Black liberation, immigrant and refugee rights, reproductive justice, workers' rights, sexual assault survivors, housing justice, racial equity, broad equity, disability rights, the environmental movement, and broad human rights.

Analytic Strategy. I intentionally gathered respondents from a broad range of movements, occupations, and locations because prototypical single movement studies often focus deeply on one particular organization, occupation, or group, entirely missing locations and occupations where activism takes place outside of the organizational context—in non-prototypical settings such as for-profit spaces, cultural institutions, small businesses, and in microinteractions at the interpersonal, neighborhood, and consumer level.

In-depth semi-structured interviews served as an appropriate methodological tool for deep listening and engaging artist activists. Interview participants were asked to describe their work and tell stories about how they maneuvered their careers to achieve certain missions for their intended audiences. Interview questions prompting stories were often phrased "tell me about a time . . ." Interviewees were asked to reflect on their responses to positive and negative events in their work as well as organizational challenges and changes. The average interview lasted 60 minutes. Some individuals gave follow-up interviews if we did not cover all key topics of interest. All interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. For transcription, I used Otter.ai software. For coding, I used Altas.ti and employed flexible coding (Deterding and Waters 2021) by first index coding by interview questions, then thematically coding pertinent themes as highlighted as vital factors within the arts entrepreneurship literature and the sociological social movements literature. Themes relevant to this article included strategies, tactics, personal capacity, risk-taking, tolerance for failure, and locations/settings of activism. As part of the larger study, interviews were coded for a variety of other themes pertaining to workplace stressors, economic strain, burnout, coping strategies, and racial dynamics, which will not be analyzed or discussed in the present study.

Findings: Patterns and Profiles

In this section, I first give an overview of patterns of entrepreneurial qualities found across the sample. I then dive into specific findings on opportunity spotting as background for framing interviewees' responses to their particular contexts. I follow this with profiles of five interviewees who provide illustrative cases of the five components of arts entrepreneurship action per Chang and Wyszomirski (2015). While all artist activists in the sample demonstrate varying degrees of arts entrepreneurial strategies, tactics,

competencies/skills, mindset, and (response to) context, the five interviewees profiled below provide concise instances for closer examination of these components. In the discussion section that follows, I relate these findings back to the broader sample and theoretical argument and also address the study's limitations.

Overview of Patterns. Artist activists across the overall sample worked in a variety of organizational structures and institutions from nonprofits to for-profits to social movement organizations to independent small businesses to volunteer groups. 19 of the 27 interviewees had issues with the social structure/institution their primary work was located within. These individuals used various strategies and tactics to manage as well as challenge their institutions. 17 of the 27 interviewees took part in the creation of mediating structures to practice their activist work in alternative spaces to the organizations they sought to change. These mediating structures were means to the end of connecting with their audiences. All interviewees mobilized resources in some way to achieve social impact. More than one third of the sample sought professional development opportunities to achieve social impact, and more than half worked outside of traditional institutions to accomplish their change-making work.

Opportunity Spotting: Responding to Context. The artist activists in this sample worked across an amalgam of institutional spaces and responded to the challenges and trials of this period by opportunity spotting avenues to do their activist work. Due to Covid-19, folks could not gather or create in the same ways, so various individuals in the sample joined and led online communities. When death and dread were rampant at the height of the pandemic, several artists, like Hunter, responded by making art to heal their communities. Facing layoff due to pandemic cuts, Betty creatively constructed a portfolio career and leaned into hours and hours of unpaid labor for her social justice causes. Many artist activists utilized their networks to crowdsource money and gather supplies for mutual aid to provide for their audience's basic human needs during a time of resource scarcity. Many individuals in this sample took this time to reprioritize their principles, and many shifted careers during this period. Often their motivations were justice, equity, and visions of greater acknowledgement of humanity, as well as their own survival. This sample of artist activists faced challenges of workplace culture, censorship, problematic funders, mental health concerns, and health precautions induced by the pandemic.

These artist activists served movements in a variety of ways from helping form the collective identity of a social cause group to mobilizing and growing a movement's membership base to advertising the sentiments—social justice frames—of their cause to wider audiences to designing actions and implementing tactics to gain their desired outcome to mobilizing resources and networks to expand influence. The respondents took on a variety of roles in their social movements, each requiring varying entrepreneurial skills.

Profile 1: Betty. Betty is a White woman and a performance artist who started an activist group of mostly White individuals with the hopes of educating White artists to use

their platforms to raise awareness and support of the Black Lives Matter movement shortly following the murder of George Floyd. In the first few months of 2020 and the Covid 19 pandemic, Betty was unemployed like many people living in the U.S. but putting in "at least probably 60 hours a week" as a volunteer and activist across several issues. Betty, new to leading, had spent countless hours observing her "veteran organizer friends" for years prior and one day decided to lead her own effort organizing White people of a particular artistic practice in her city to dismantle White supremacy in concordance with the Black Lives Matter movement. Betty's goal for this group was to produce transformational identity shifts in White activists, encouraging them to unlearn internalized White supremacy inherent to our culture. Like many activists of this time, Betty spent much of her time online via Zoom in training calls and organizer meetups for various social justice causes. Digital organizing via text apps and video chatting software played a pivotal role in her work.

Profile 2: Aaron. Aaron is a White man who works as a union organizer and illustrator. He used a variety of tactics via his social networks and social media to develop a collective identity within his workplace. Following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, Aaron sought to organize a social action for his union to take part in as support for Black Lives Matter. Aaron's union sits within a coalition of unions. Within this coalition exist factions of workers divided by occupation as well as culture. A more conservative faction of the coalition disagreed with taking a racial justice stance like their fellow unionists and fought for the union at large to not be formally affiliated with the activity. Even further, they argued that Aaron should not be allowed to express his racial justice sentiments and support of Black Lives Matter on his personal social media because of his position in the union. Aaron recalls the following in our interview:

> And the next day I get a call from the president of this large union. And basically, he chews me out for posting something on my personal Facebook page. And he's like, basically his thing was like, 'well you, you can't have an opinion because you represent the [conglomerate]', and there was a direct quote of him saying that 'you know once you work for an organization, you don't have an opinion anymore'.

Despite censorship and power dynamics in his workplace, Aaron used his social network and social media technology to tactically organize the event he and his fellow unionists sought to hold. Aaron justified his perseverance as being the change he wished to see in his field. For him this also meant being a present husband and father and straying away from the workaholism of his occupational field. He states:

> investing time in raising children and spending time with kids is like an investment in this larger social vision.

His union was fighting for better work-life balance as a social vision for their target

audience, but many of his fellow unionists did not embody this social vision within their own lives. Aaron saw his own embodiment of this social vision as a key part of his activism and encouraged his peers to do the same.

Profile 3: Kofi. Kofi, a first-generation African American man, is a writer, app designer, and language justice activist. Kofi sought to save the dying language of his African country by creating a translation app for younger generations to utilize. His product is intended to halt the loss of culture, as his country's language is expected to die off within the next generation. He joined business pitch programs and contests at his university to acquire funders, resources, and business skills for his language app.

In striving to create a new cultural product, Kofi actively struggles with the White supremacy of potential funders. When potential funders discounted the importance of his innovative product, Kofi sought out other professional development opportunities to equip himself with better language and business skills to drive home the importance of his cultural heritage product.

Profile 4: Fatima. Fatima, a SWANA woman, is a cultural worker with a passion for diversity and equity. Most of her work takes place in a museum space. Outside of her paid work, she is a writer. Fatima personally educated herself on social movement sentiments, strategies, and lessons by thoroughly reading historical and contemporary cultural theory of liberation and change-making. Following the murder of George Floyd, she describes her work as attempting to humanize policies in her workplace and informing her White colleagues of their problematic practices. Fatima went on to describes the self-management of her career in the following statement:

> I think, like, you kind of learn, like, where you can, you know, find ways to exercise your agency which is extremely important. Like, I mean like it shouldn't be that you have to finagle places to do that, but it tends to be the case. You understand the complexity of these things. I think it's really sad that you get disheartened too, like, you're just like, 'that's just how all of these places are'.

Fatima, like others in the sample, self-managed her career to find venues where she could authentically pursue her social vision.

Profile 5: Zackary. Zackary, a Black man, moonlights as a performance artist but also works full time as a public servant. Faced with severe racial discrimination and censorship at his job, Zackary emotionally managed his anger and fear of punishment for calling out White supremacy at his job with his love for Black people and his imaginative hope for a better workplace environment for Black people in the future. After making racial allegations against his workplace, Zackary was put on unpaid leave. Fortunately, he was able to economically survive by crowdsourcing resources, using his networks to control media coverage, and leaning into various forms of material, emotional, and technological support from the communities who supported his artistic career.

Discussion

Based on 27 in-depth semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of artist activists, I found that activists from across the sample overwhelmingly expressed and exhibited various characteristics of arts entrepreneurship. Arts entrepreneurship is not necessarily tied to economic value. It can also deliver social value by remaking and challenging social structures for the purpose of public good. Newer definitions of arts entrepreneurship have highlighted disruption and dissent as essential to this field. This research provides an intentional focus on artist activists as disruptive arts entrepreneurial change agents. My findings provide a range of examples of artist activists strategically employing and embodying arts entrepreneurial practices and traits to challenge power structures in a particularly traumatic yet creative historical moment.

During this period, respondents in my sample tapped into various entrepreneurial strategies to challenge power structures and status quos and share new ideas and ways of being with an intended audience. This finding is expected given that much social movement activity is largely centered around the development and implementation of a new idea or a new way of life—radically imagining new worlds and ways of being—in ways that *move* people.

All artist activists in this sample exhibited varying degrees of all five components of the arts entrepreneurship taxonomy (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015). In this discussion section, I will focus more extensively on strategies, tactics, competencies/skills, and mindset, since I address context in the methods section as the background and environment in which the artist activists are operating within. Artist activists from across my sample *responded to the contexts* they found themselves in by spotting opportunities for change or innovation and maneuvering various strategies and tactics such as the creation of microenterprises, policy change via policy entrepreneurship, use of technology, self-management of career transitions, the creation of new cultural products in their social movement work, and crowdsourcing resources.

Strategies. All individuals in this sample employed entrepreneurial strategies in their activist work. Individuals like Betty formed social movement organizations, which can be understood as a microenterprise for social justice causes. Other individuals in the sample, like Kofi, created businesses and new cultural products that relied on cultural heritage. Multiple individuals maintain the social justice work by self-managing career transitions and self-constructing career portfolios in order to find the time, resources, and space to 'finagle' their work environments to serve their social visions, like that of Fatima, Betty, and Zackary. Zackary in particular was able to apply pressure to his full-time workplace due to the resources and stability of his moonlit artistic career. Across the sample, individuals—like Betty and Aaron—also partook in the strategy of policy implementation via policy entrepreneurship through their embodiment of the change they sought and by joining and creating likeminded networks of individuals to implement social visions with them. They joined participatory democracy organizations following the killing of George

Floyd. Their goals we similar: to restructure policy, legal systems, and funding structures to be more humane and focused on community health and less carceral, punitive, and White supremacist. Thus, they utilized networks and resources of a collective to advocate for policy shifts. This is an act of policy entrepreneurship in that these various activists had a vision but acknowledged this vision could not be realized by their own actions alone.

Tactics. Artist activists employed a variety of tactics to work towards their social visions. Activists were operating under a global pandemic and were tasked with organizing audiences virtually to keep each other healthy and safe. Their use of technology was pivotal for their work. As Betty mentioned above, she spent roughly 60 hours a week as an activist and volunteer. Much of this time was spent online via Zoom in training calls and organizer meetups for various social justice causes. Betty was not alone. During the height of the pandemic, several activists in my sample utilized the internet, specifically Zoom, to organize and mobilize audiences, trainings, and resources locally, nationally, and internationally. Others also used apps like Instagram, GroupMe, Signal, and WhatsApp (the latter two for encrypted, private conversations) for digital organizing of their intended audience and networks.

Seeking out and utilizing funders and partnerships was a key tactic artist activists of the sample employed. Kofi, like others in the sample, actively sought out potential funders for his cultural product. Zackary used his artistic career, social media influence, and networks to crowdsource support during a precarious period. He, like others, utilized his partnerships for media coverage and other resources. Not mentioned in the profiles was mutual aid. Mutual aid was another key tactic activists use to crowdsource resources for the audiences' basic human needs.

Some individuals shifted their careers, using their workplaces as vehicles for their activism. While their paid work might not have been entrepreneurial, their activist work that was facilitated through the workplace is an entrepreneurial use of resources. Several activists, like Fatima, saw the opportunity to leverage their workplaces as instruments to exercise their social justice ideals and economically survive doing so. This leveraging should be understood as an entrepreneurial act of creativity and innovation activists enacted to curate their jobs (in either social justice or non-social justice spaces) to fit their personal activist goals.

When facing roadblocks in the workplace, artist activists exercise their agency by leaving their jobs—self-managing their careers in pursuit of more favorable, open venues. This was the case for Zackary and several others in the sample. For individuals in this study, this can look like shifting their full-time job entirely or taking on different types of gigs in their portfolio career. Artist activists' self-management of their careers is a strategy of creativity, economic survival, and refuge—finding safe spaces to do their work.

Competencies/Skills & Mindset. As mentioned above in the literature review, activists' competencies/skills and mindset work together to produce outcomes. Activists across the sample sought out skill-building opportunities to build their personal capacities for their

activism. This includes risk tolerance, tolerance of failure, and open-mindedness. As mentioned previously, opportunity spotting is a common feature of all activist work and is ubiquitous to this field. Activists like Betty and Kofi spotted and attended formal/informal mentorship and training opportunities to gain skills to better equip themselves with skills as well as mindsets for changemaking work. Others took to books for social movement education, like Zackary and Fatima, to learn from the past so that they can imagine new futures.

Often, artist activists in my sample experienced varying degrees of censorship and repression in their workplaces. To combat repression and persevere at their activist work, activists do emotional management work and orient mindsets to overcome barriers and continue their path towards their social visions. Coping with failure and balancing risk-taking as a steady feature of the work can be understood as emotional work. Activists in my sample emotionally managed a variety of risks: risk of reputation being associated with social causes (Aaron & Rebecca), risk of job loss or censorship (Madeline, Zackary, Jane, Paulette), risk of deportation (Rodrigo), as well as risk to freedom and life when facing off with the police at demonstrations (Billy & Matisse). Activists actively manage their emotions to cope with risk-taking, cope with failure, and persevere in their activism.

Limitations There are several limitations within this study. First, this study is not quantifiably generalizable across social movements, but it is theoretically generalizable in that theories and findings of artist activism can be applied across other social movements and artistic mediums. Naturally, qualitative research often just provides an in-depth look at the lived experiences of respondents to help build deeper understandings of understudied phenomena. Another limitation is most of my sample is college educated and middle class or comfortably working class. Some participants were unemployed or held multiple part-time jobs, but most of the sample was privileged with education and full-time employment. Even with this slant towards more privileged respondents, much knowledge can still be gained from their stories. It is also worth noting that the activists of most social movement scholarship are generally more economically privileged than the general population. My sample is consistent with this research but does not shed light on the experiences of poor and working-class activists. Future research could focus on more economically precarious individuals to gain understanding of how this work may look different for them.

Conclusion

The present study expands the arts entrepreneurship taxonomy developed by Chang and Wyszomirski's (2015) by drawing throughlines to key concepts in the social movements literature. This expansion positions arts entrepreneurship beyond management process as a vehicle for institutional change and supports my argument that artist activism is a vital form of arts entrepreneurship principled in innovation, creating social value,

challenging social structures, and contributing to public good. Artist activists are arts entrepreneurs situated within sociopolitical landscapes, seeking institutional change by implementing an amalgam of entrepreneurial actions. To learn more about the role of disruption or dissent in arts entrepreneurship, arts entrepreneurship scholars could utilize artist activists as vital population of study in future research. Artist activists possess and implement combinations of entrepreneurial strategies, tactics, skills, and mindsets to achieve their social visions and respond to the contexts they are situated within. Studying this population could generate insights for the field about the struggles of innovation arts entrepreneurs face within the broader socioeconomic and political landscape. Social movements are all around us; entrepreneurs are actors within them, innovating and sharing new ideas to intended audiences.

My hope is for these findings to be applied to advocate for pay equity for artists in social justice and public-good-oriented spaces and build credible arguments to legitimize and destigmatize the work and occupations of artist activists. This would enable artist activists to advocate for, create, and organize funding structures to better fund their social visions.

In future research, scholars could conduct more in-depth analyses of the throughlines between arts entrepreneurship components and social movement concepts I contribute in Table 1 to glean additional insights on these connections and gain deeper understandings of artist activists as a type of arts entrepreneur.

Acknowledgement

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