Introduction

This paper proposes, and empirically demonstrates, a novel conception of entrepreneurial identity. Informed by a critical realist ontology (Bhaskar, 2008), we conceive of entrepreneurial identity as an agential causal power that exerts influence on action independently of its narrative expression by entrepreneurs, or its conceptualisation by researchers. Central to our conception of entrepreneurial identity are the underlying personal *concerns* that motivate venture creation rather than the narrative *practices* that such concerns may generate. Personal concerns are what matters to people (Archer, 2000; Sayer, 2011). This makes our conception of entrepreneurial identity very different to constructionist approaches that define it in terms of narrative practice (Díaz García and Welter, 2013; Down, 2006). Constructionist approaches, we argue, have reached an impasse in terms of their ability to explain why entrepreneurs self-narrate as they do. This is a major gap in our understanding and theorising of entrepreneurial identity.

The conceptual framework presented permits deeper explanations of 'who is' and 'how one becomes' an entrepreneur. As a causal power (Bhaskar, 2008), entrepreneurial identity is a potentiality, rather than a fixed personality trait determining entrepreneurial behaviour (Chen et al., 1998), or a dynamic and fluid process enacted through narrative and discursive practices (Anderson and Warren, 2011; Gherardi, 2015; Leitch and

Harrison, 2016). Personal concerns that motivate venture creation are, of course, distinct from the power to act *effectively* on those concerns. Although most people have the power to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, realise that potential because of countervailing powers that constrain, or discourage, venture creation.

Utilising a stratified, emergent ontology of personhood and identity (Archer, 2000; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010), our conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity has three further elements that distinguish it from social constructionist approaches. First, we contextualise entrepreneurial identity in relation to three analytical orders of reality: natural, practical and social. Identity formation involves more than just social relations. Second, we distinguish personal identity, the set of concerns in the three orders that makes each of us a unique person, from social identity, the roles in which we can invest ourselves and be committed to in the social order, including an entrepreneurial role. Third, personal concerns are necessarily embodied. People have properties, such as long-term impairments and health conditions, that motivate them to attend to particular concerns, to perform particular practices and commit to particular social roles. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, we argue that the underlying concerns that motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role cannot be reduced to social interaction alone.

Entrepreneurial identity can only be assumed in the social order, in our relations with other people within a market economy (Down and Reveley, 2004; Essers et al., 2010; Watson, 2008, 2009). Personal identity, however, is much broader than any of the social roles we take up and regulates our relations with *all* three orders (Archer, 2000). To survive and thrive, each person must attend to their concerns with physical well-being in the natural order (for instance, resting when tired), with performative achievement in the practical order (for example, learning how to drive a car) and with self-worth in the social order (for example, working to support a family) (Archer, 2000). It is how we prioritise and balance various concerns in the three orders that makes each of us a unique person and, for those who start new ventures, a particular kind of entrepreneur.

We use this novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity to analyse interview data from three entrepreneurs. These people have created new ventures following the onset of impairment or a long-term health condition (henceforth, impairment) in adulthood. Our focus is to illustrate how concerns with physical well-being, performative achievement and self-worth have motivated venture creation. We employ Archer's (2000) concept of *internal conversation,* or self-talk, to theorise the linkages between entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour. We illustrate that the onset of impairment shapes personal concerns and fuels internal conversation. This has implications for the individual motivation to pursue, and the capacity to commit to, venture creation.

We start with a review of the entrepreneurial identity literature. Then, we present our theoretical framework, describe our methodological approach, and discuss findings. The paper concludes with a summary of our theoretical contributions and implications for future research.

Prior research: entrepreneurial identity constructed in society

Most entrepreneurial identity studies reject the notion of a lone entrepreneur, isolated from context. Indeed, studies highlight the role of the social environment in entrepreneurial identity formation (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Alsos et al., 2016; Anderson and Warren, 2011; Down and Reveley, 2004; Essers et al., 2010; Giazitzoglu and Down, 2015; Reveley and Down, 2009; Warren, 2004; Watson, 2009). Within what we term 'constructionist approaches', two related streams of literature are dominant with varying emphases on agents and social contexts. The first focuses on how agents narratively construct entrepreneurial identity by interacting with others (Bjursell and Melin, 2011; Boje and Smith, 2010; Díaz García and Welter, 2013; Down, 2006; Down and Warren, 2008; Downing, 2005; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Hytti, 2005; Hytti et al., 2017; Johansson, 2004; Jones et al., 2008; Phillips et al., 2013; Warren, 2004). The second stream highlights how dominant enterprise discourses and stereotypes in society empower some to become an entrepreneur, while excluding others (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; Boje and Smith, 2010; Cohen and Musson,

2000; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Gill and Larson, 2014; Larson and Pearson, 2012; Mallett and Wapshott, 2015; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005).

We agree that entrepreneurial identity is formed through social interaction. But what is missing from constructionist accounts are entrepreneurs' relations with the wider natural and practical contexts within which they operate as embodied agents. Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity solely as a narrative or discursive practice has serious limitations for researchers' ability to theorise the material realities of disabled entrepreneurs' lives, including: (1) the causal powers of the natural and practical orders *as well as* the social, in enabling and constraining entrepreneurial motivation and action; *and* (2) the specific effects of embodied properties, such as ill-health or impairment, on personal concerns and the motivation to pursue venture creation. We discuss the consequences for constructionist studies of entrepreneurial identity in more detail.

Under-theorised powers of nature and material culture

Studies of entrepreneurial identity typically under-theorise the influence of nature and material culture of artefacts on entrepreneurs' capacities, concerns and motivations. Yet, the natural and practical orders constitute a crucial and unavoidable part of the context of entrepreneurial action. Natural powers, such as climate and environmental disasters, can cause business closures (Zhang et al., 2013) as well as incentivise business creation (Brück et al., 2011; Monllor and Murphy, 2017). Artefacts designed with able-bodied

people foremost in mind can constrain other users, but they can also stimulate novel product ideas and further development of the material culture. Technologies are not only symbolic markers of self-identification with, or differentiation from, others as Down and Reveley (2004) show, but are also artefacts that extend our bodily powers (for example, hearing aids), or equally, constrain us from achieving our goals (for example, inaccessible buildings).

Larson and Pearson (2012) note that the material/physical aspects of place, such as mountains, afford or limit symbolic activities and meanings. They argue that such places are "…understood and experienced through discourse." (2012, p. 245). Gill and Larson (2014) examine how a particular place shapes and constrains the possibilities for constructing an 'ideal entrepreneurial self'. Yet, in emphasising entrepreneurs' constructed 'meanings' as opposed to actual embodied 'doings', the authors under-play the material effects of place on the capacity to form sought-after social identities, such as becoming an entrepreneur.

For Gill and Larson, "…place is not a fixed, bounded dimension of identity, but a discourse that can be challenged, fragmented and (re)appropriated." (2014, p. 539). This conflates the material properties of places with agents' discursive practices about them. Places are materially configured spaces incorporating the natural world and human-made artefacts; they are not just ways of talking. Places possess properties that are more

often than not fixed, at least in the short-term. Inaccessible public transport, for instance, excludes people from places, from meeting potential clients, and from performing entrepreneurial roles. Entrepreneurs cannot, for example, make inaccessible buildings accessible simply by re-describing them.

Under-theorised personal embodied powers

Constructionist studies rightly reject biological determinism associated with personality traits theories (Down and Warren, 2008; Reveley and Down, 2009) that attribute fixed qualities, such as risk-taking propensity, to entrepreneurial agents (Brockhaus, 1980). However, strong constructionists also reduce entrepreneurial identity to linguistic practices and under-theorise the effects of embodied properties, such as particular impairments, on entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014). In contrast, our stratified view of entrepreneurial identity, as an emergent causal power, highlights that human embodiment shapes but does not determine, personal concerns, motivations and behaviours. Equally, impairment effects can impact entrepreneurial motivation regardless of whether entrepreneurs narratively express their concerns to a researcher. All entrepreneurs are enabled and constrained, in different ways, by their embodied properties. Although constructionist studies avoid earlier forms of biological determinism, their descriptive accounts of narrative identity lack explanatory power to elucidate the entrepreneurial motivation-behaviour connection.

Where the connection between motivation and behaviour is theorised, identity studies highlight that entrepreneurs' behaviours are shaped primarily by how they perceive themselves in relation to others (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Gruber and MacMillan, 2017). Although these particular studies assume an agent motivated to pursue venture creation, entrepreneurial motivation arises exclusively through social relations. In other words, non-social sources of motivation are not recognised. We extend this theorising by framing entrepreneurial identity as a causal power, emergent from our embodied interaction with nature and material culture as well as society. We develop our argument by defining personal identity and entrepreneurial identity as two distinctive identity strata. The distinction enables us to examine: first, human relations with *all* three orders, and not just the social context, as influences on entrepreneurial motivation; and, second, the linkages between personal concerns, the consideration of venture creation, and the commitment to an entrepreneurial role as distinct phases of the internal conversation that drives the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to behaviour.

Theoretical framework: identity emergent in nature, material culture and society

Entrepreneurial identity, from our critical realist-informed standpoint (Archer, 2000; Bhaskar, 2005, 2008; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010), is a causal power rather than a narrative or discursive practice. As a causal power, entrepreneurial identity

is a potentiality that may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised or realised unperceived (Bhaskar, 2008). Although most people have the power to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, realise that potential. Other countervailing powers can constrain, or discourage, an individual's pursuit of an entrepreneurial role. While constructionist studies treat entrepreneurial identity as a process of becoming (Bjursell and Melin, 2011; Down and Warren, 2008; Gherardi, 2015; Leitch and Harrison, 2016), we highlight the underlying causal powers – personal, material and social – that generate becoming. Such causal powers, for example the capacity to reflect on personal concerns (Archer, 2000), not only contribute to the production of variable events, including entrepreneurs' narrative performances, but are themselves in a process of becoming.

Entrepreneurial identity, we argue, is a particular kind of causal power – the personal power to create a new venture. Entrepreneurial identity therefore presupposes an agent possessing particular embodied properties that shape their motivation to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation. Our conception of entrepreneurial identity highlights personal *concerns* that motivate action, rather than narrative and discursive *practices*, as central to identity formation. Identity formation is the process of maintaining and transforming one's sense of self, as a unique person, in relation to the wider context, incorporating but extending beyond social relations (Archer, 2000; Smith, 2010). This differs from 'identity work' – a concept that seeks to bridge the self with socially

available discourses and identities (Watson, 2008). Agents can re-work their social identities, but only up to a point given their particular embodied properties (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014).

Identity formation depends on our interaction with three analytical orders of reality: natural, practical and social (Archer, 2000). Who we are as persons cannot be reduced to social relations alone. Each person possesses embodied properties that shape identity formation and action (Archer, 2000; Smith, 2010). Embodied properties can be both powers and liabilities; they can be exercised or suffered by people (Sayer, 1992). Causal powers are capacities to behave in certain ways, while liabilities refer to specific susceptibilities to certain kinds of change (Sayer, 2000). Particular impairments, for example, can be *both* powers and liabilities, depending on the powers of nature, material culture and society influencing our action. People with mobility difficulties, for instance, may be constrained from entering inaccessible buildings, but can also be encouraged by such material constraints to create accessibility consultancy businesses. Personal embodied powers and liabilities shape, but do not determine, identity formation and behaviour.

Identity is emergent and stratified; Archer (2000) distinguishes three strata or levels of identity – the self, personal identity and social identity. *The self* is a continuous sense of being the same embodied human being over a life-time, distinct from other humans and

material objects. *Personal identity* is the unique constellation of concerns all human beings have in relation to the natural, practical and social orders; it is what makes each of us a particular person. *Social identity* refers to the relationships and roles that each person involuntarily occupies from birth (for example, daughter-mother) *and* to those people voluntarily choose to commit to (for example, becoming an entrepreneur). Of course, social roles – defined as the cultural norms and expectations of appropriate behaviour and appearance attached to particular social positions – do not determine behaviour and personal identity. People personify roles to accommodate their concerns within the limits set by the expectations of important others.

Although a social identity can only be assumed in society, personal identity is much broader and regulates our relations with *all* three orders (Archer, 2000). Concerns with physical well-being in the natural order (such as, coping with injury) can affect performative achievement in the practical order (for example, using a computer keyboard) and, necessarily, concerns with self-worth in the social order (for example, performing an entrepreneurial role successfully). While we must attend to our various concerns in each order simultaneously, the three sets of concerns are not of equal standing. Through *internal conversation*, or self-talk, we reflect on and evaluate our personal concerns, prioritising some while subordinating others (Archer, 2000; 2003). This balancing act affects the way we invest ourselves in, and commit to, particular

social roles and relationships. Hence, personal identity shapes individual motivation to pursue an entrepreneurial role.

How we prioritise our various concerns in the three orders depends on how we feel about them, or how much we care (Archer, 2000). Some concerns are more important than others. Emotions act as commentaries on our concerns elicited through our embodied relations with each order, pertaining to: (1) environmental threat or benefit to the body in the natural order; (2) task ease or difficulty in the practical order; and (3) judgments of approval or disapproval rooted in social norms in the social order. In nature, emotions can be elicited by significant events that modify relations between the body and its environment. Fear, for instance, can manifest itself in each order. However, the emergence of fear in nature (for instance, fear of thunder) may not depend on our interaction with the other two orders. Emotions emergent from our relations with nature can, in turn, affect our actions in the practical order (for example, performative incompetence in using machinery) and in the social order (for example, failure to meet customer expectations). How we prioritise our various concerns, and feel about them, has implications for the emergence of entrepreneurial identity.

Strong emotions, such as pain or frustration, elicited by the onset of impairment in the natural order can motivate venture creation. Archer (2000) distinguishes ‘first-order’ emotions, triggered by our interaction with the three orders, from ‘second-order’

emotions which are the outcome of internal conversation and *emotional elaboration* – the process through which people evaluate how they feel about their various concerns and prioritise emotions. Three moments or stages of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – precede second-order prioritisation of emotions. *Discernment* refers to the preliminary review of our concerns or 'what we care about'. *Deliberation* is the moment of questioning, considering the worth of our various concerns or 'how much do we care'. *Dedication* is when a strict personal identity, with a unique pattern of commitments, is formed (Archer, 2000). It is at this stage that a person motivated to pursue venture creation commits to an entrepreneurial role and acts on their concerns to become a particular kind of entrepreneur.

A traumatic event, like a bodily injury, can significantly impact on the sense of self when a person's identity is closely linked to a career discontinued by injury (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011). Such events can generate strong emotions, for instance helplessness, and shatter one's assumptions about personal competence and self-worth. People adopt different coping strategies that influence how well they transition into a new career. Haynie and Shepherd looked at career transitions of soldiers disabled by war-time injuries who took part in an entrepreneurship retraining programme. Those who transitioned well changed their approach over time from 'emotion-focused coping' aimed at alleviating distress (for example, by drinking excessively), towards 'problem-focused coping' aimed at addressing the underlying problem causing distress (for

example, reflecting on the obstacles or talking to family). Adding to our understanding of emotional elaboration, Haynie and Shepherd show that people experience significant emotional change during a career transition triggered by the onset of impairment.

When people disabled by injury, ill-health or impairment come to face their 'new' sense of embodied self, they must reflect on their personal concerns and circumstances, and re-evaluate their "set of internalized and closely held beliefs and assumptions" (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011, p. 520) before they can commit to social roles and relationships that they can live with (Archer, 2000). Reflecting on personal *concerns* in the three orders, *considering* venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others, and *committing* to an entrepreneurial role are theorised as distinct stages of internal conversation, explaining the linkages between entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour. The outcome is the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. What we care about is of course dynamic; our concerns and commitments may change over time as we continually re-evaluate our circumstances.

Methodology

Selection of entrepreneurs

The paper utilises qualitative data from three entrepreneurs – Sarah, Garry and David (anonymised) (Table 1). Using a theoretical sampling approach (Coyne, 1997), these

entrepreneurs were selected for several reasons. First, each acquired impairment during adulthood and started a business following the onset of impairment. Only Sarah had previous experience of self-employment before setting up her current business. Second, all three entrepreneurs had an impairment that affects mobility. Garry's activities are also limited by hearing loss. All three had severe impairments exerting significant effects on day-to-day and working practices. Third, disability was an important influence on the type of business started: each entrepreneur created a venture that offers a disability-related product or service. Finally, the entrepreneurs provided rich commentaries on their internal conversations over time, supporting our theoretical assumptions. Sarah, Garry and David are White British and were aged 55, 53 and 44 respectively at the time of data collection.

Table 1. Entrepreneurs' personal and business characteristics

Pseudonym	***Sarah***	***Garry***	***David***
Impairment(s)[1]	Degenerative spinal condition	Kidney failure Right leg amputation Hearing impairment	Chronic polyneuropathy Chronic fatigue syndrome
Activity limitation(s)[2]	Mobility (walking, moving, sitting, standing)	Mobility (walking, moving, standing) Communication (receiving spoken messages)	Mobility (walking, moving, standing)
Product/service	Specialist recruitment agency for disabled candidates	Specialist fitness training company for injured and disabled	Disability artist / creativity workshop organiser
Year business started	2011	2006	2010
Employment size	4	14	1

Note:

[1]Impairments are problems in body function or alterations in body structure – for example, paralysis or blindness (WHO/WB 2011).
[2]Activity limitations are difficulties in executing activities – for example, walking or communicating messages (WHO/WB 2011).

The sample is drawn from a larger doctoral study of disabled entrepreneurs by the lead author; however, we focus here on the three entrepreneurs to allow an in-depth analysis of the process of identity formation, particularly the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to behaviour. This involves participants moving from (1) having specific concerns in the three orders; to (2) considering venture creation; to (3) committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role. The three entrepreneurs were approached either directly, utilising a competition website where they self-identified as disabled entrepreneurs, or through an intermediary organisation for disabled professionals.

Data collection

Researching entrepreneurial identity as a personal power, emergent from a set of concerns that motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role, entails more than an interview or discourse analysis. Data collection was explicitly theory-driven (Smith and Elger, 2014) as we applied our conceptual framework to investigate entrepreneurs' capacities, concerns and emotions. We asked specific questions about the effects of impairment on working and business practices, ease or difficulty in performing tasks, the effects of disability on the motivation to create a new venture, and the role of

human-made artefacts, such as buildings and assistive technologies, in constraining or enabling activities.

The lead author conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with the three entrepreneurs between August 2014 and September 2015. Each interview, lasting 1-2 hours, consisted of open-ended questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and each was transcribed verbatim and anonymised. Data include both retrospective reflections on events, concerns and emotions during the pre-start-up and start-up period, as well as real-time reflections post-start-up. While there are limits to autobiographical memory in self-reported retrospective accounts (Schwarz, 2007), retrospective reporting is a common and viable methodology in management and organisation studies (Miller et al., 1997).

Entrepreneurs' descriptions of identity formation over time relied upon episodic memory which can provide comprehensive accounts of events (Tulving, 2002). These include jobs started, the onset of impairment, jobs left, when and where, and how they felt at the time. Episodic memory is tied to our embodied experiences of the world, tends to be a long-term memory and, therefore, its recall has the quality of 'reliving' visual, kinesthetic and spatial impressions (Wilson, 2002). Participants' accounts of the lived experience of disability and the transition into new venture creation generated

trustworthy data, although all accounts are potentially fallible and open to reinterpretation (Danermark et al., 2002, Sayer, 1992, 2000).

Data analysis

We employed retroductive inference (Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 1992) to analyse the data. This involved a process of moving from concrete, observable events to the structures that generate them. We interpreted and re-contextualised entrepreneurs' reported experiences of disability, the barriers faced in prior employment, and the motivation for venture creation using our theoretical framework. This enabled us to theorise the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity, for example, conceptualising concerns that motivate venture creation, rather than simply presenting entrepreneurs' narratives, and asking what makes entrepreneurial identity a possible object of study. We theorised that entrepreneurial identity presupposes a number of lower-level personal powers that must be exercised. One such power, and the focus of this paper, is *the capacity to commit to venture creation* by acting on personal concerns and emotions.

Our specific focus is on how personal concerns in the three orders – natural, practical and social – shape the motivation to commit to venture creation. The conceptual framework facilitates our analysis in terms of interpreting three dimensions: first, participants' concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth;

second, emotions that generated particular commentaries on participants' concerns and motivated venture creation; and third, emotional elaborations over time that prompted participants' transitions from initial consideration of venture creation to entrepreneurial commitment. For example, we interpreted negative employment experiences as concerns with self-worth that motivated career change. Experiences of pain or fatigue were interpreted as concerns with well-being.

Our approach helps overcome some of the weaknesses in constructionist analyses of entrepreneurial identity. By emphasising narrative accounts, constructionist researchers risk reducing the study of entrepreneurial identity to descriptions of entrepreneurs' talk. Analyses of enterprise discourses, similarly, risk reducing entrepreneurial identity to the stereotypical ways entrepreneurs are represented in popular media and policy and academic debates. In contrast, our conception of identity as emergent and stratified encourages researchers to examine how the underlying causes, such as feelings of pain, or frustration in using artefacts, shape entrepreneurial motivation and action. It encourages multi-level analyses that can explain the effects of the body, the self, personal identity and social identity as distinct causal powers.

NVivo 11 was used to organise, code and analyse interview transcripts. Data was initially coded into nodes that reflect specific concepts within our theoretical framework, including personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement and

self-worth. Although each person must attend to the three sets of concerns, each will attach different meanings to them and prioritise them in unique ways. We subsequently generated new codes, informed by themes emergent from the data. For example, the node 'concerns with self-worth' had several sub-nodes, including 'family', 'attitudes to disability', 'having purpose in life', 'making a difference' and 'helping others' that the three entrepreneurs reported as important to them. We turn next to presenting our findings.

Commitment to venture creation and the emergence of entrepreneurial identity

Entrepreneurial identity presupposes an agent motivated to pursue venture creation and committed to doing so. The *capacity to commit* to venture creation is not the only causal power that makes entrepreneurial identity possible – agents must also be able to conceive of a novel product idea and to acquire legitimacy with important stakeholders. However, commitment *is* necessary for entrepreneurial identity to emerge. Without commitment, the power to create a new venture cannot be realised. This section elaborates how entrepreneurs' consideration of, and commitment to, venture creation was shaped by their concerns in relation to *all* three orders – natural, practical and social. We focus on the onset of impairment as an event generating internal conversation, although of course disability was not the only influence on participants' identity formation.

Concerns in the three orders and consideration to pursue venture creation

Embodied properties, such as particular impairments, *both* enable and constrain human capacities to act in the world, with consequences for personal concerns in *all* three orders. This section elucidates how participants' concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth have shaped consideration of venture creation.

Concerns with physical well-being. Personal concerns with well-being can encourage consideration of an entrepreneurial role. Mobility difficulties, for instance, may prompt people to re-evaluate whether to stay in employment or to pursue alternative work. Interview data illustrate how impairment-related constraints encouraged respondents to consider career change and venture creation. Each respondent reported specific concerns with physical well-being, such as coping with pain, fatigue, mobility difficulties and the unpredictable effects of impairment. Sarah's degenerative condition forced her to close her previous training business; Garry had to abandon his football career, and later a job in the army, due to ill-health; and David left his management position in the education sector following the onset of impairment.

> "[I am][1] unable to sit for more than a few minutes, walking is very difficult, I tend to spend 22 hours a day laying flat. … And so I couldn't continue with that career anymore." [Sarah]

> "The problem I've got really is the [kidney] transplant failing because if I go back on dialysis, I'm going to be very ill again…I've been ill for most of my life. …I was in hospital all of my twenties, all of my thirties. But the upside is this, [the business] has come out of it all." [Garry]

> "The worst thing is the fatigue, I mean the morphine makes me tired, and the pain. If those things were out of the way, that would be great really. … So, I think there was a real sort of issue, and then I made a decision that I really couldn't do that any more. I literally couldn't work like that." [David]

The onset of impairment not only influenced participants' day-to-day and working practices but also encouraged reflection on their concerns with well-being in relation to other concerns in the practical and social orders. Consideration of new venture creation arose as each respondent discontinued their career. Although our specific focus is on the onset of impairment, concerns with physical well-being extend beyond problems to body function or structure. All entrepreneurs, for instance, must avoid bodily harm by eating a nutritious diet, taking sufficient rest and sleep, and protecting themselves from natural elements, such as fire, to maintain well-being.

[1] Text in square brackets added to retain the sense of the quotation.

Concerns with performative achievement. Personal concerns with performative achievement, pertaining to task ease or difficulty, can influence the consideration to create a new venture. Entrepreneurs use various human-made artefacts in conducting their businesses, including cars, information and communications devices and office spaces that facilitate day-to-day activities. The material culture of artefacts can enable as well as constrain venture creation, depending on circumstances. Participants faced specific challenges in relation to material culture. Sarah's spinal condition restricts her from sitting for long periods of time. Many workplaces are, therefore, unsuitable in terms of her capacity to perform tasks others take for granted, such as sitting at a desk. Sarah, however, could overcome some of these material challenges by creating an online business with the help of assistive and digital technologies. Garry's mobility and hearing impairments have consequences for his ability to move around and to use a telephone to communicate effectively with business stakeholders. This was remedied, to a degree, by employing a support worker. David highlighted how new technologies, such as the iPad, enable him to be an artist despite the physical limitations that prevent him painting in a traditional way.

> "With the rise of technology, there is so much more that you can do now online and [with] social media and Skype. I couldn't have done this job 10 years ago because the technology wouldn't have existed." [Sarah]

> "The daily biggest issue I have is my hearing. The telephone is a nightmare. My deaf assistant, support worker, she drives me, she takes me to meetings, and she's always there to interpret." [Garry]

> "Using an iPad was suited for me because, obviously, I couldn't work anywhere…I'm always painting, but the great thing is, I can rest when I want. I feel very tired so I have longevity of being able to keep going for longer periods." [David]

Use of artefacts can both facilitate and inhibit working practices and generate consideration of venture creation. The realisation of entrepreneurial identity may have been impossible for the three entrepreneurs without the help of artefacts and technologies. Access to particular artefacts enabled them not only to transition into a more suitable work role, but also to become a *particular* kind of entrepreneur: for instance, one who runs an online business or who creates art using digital technologies.

Concerns with self-worth. Personal concerns with self-worth can crucially influence individual consideration to pursue venture creation. Judgements of social approval or disapproval are linked to one's sense of worth as a person valuable to others. Social relations are central to the constructionist notion of entrepreneurial identity, yet studies confine their analyses to narrative practices rather than the concerns that generate such practices. The three entrepreneurs sought to create a new venture as a way of realising

their concerns related to their social standing. Sarah's prior experience in diversity training has encouraged her to create a social enterprise that supports disabled people in finding work. Garry's experience of severe ill-health prompted him to create a specialised fitness training service that helps people with injuries and impairments. David re-evaluated his managerial role to become an artist working with young people in schools.

> "I need a purpose. I need to feel as though I'm doing something worthwhile…So [the business] is giving me the flexibility to run it from my bed." [Sarah]

> "My life's got to be worthwhile. I've got to help people around the world, and I can with this [business]...So I had my transplant and that was when I broke free. So I started my own business." [Garry]

> "What I'm trying to do is to create the business environment that has a conscience whilst looking after myself…I'm a great believer that you can kind of give something back." [David]

This section has illustrated the relationship between embodied properties, personal concerns and pursuit of an entrepreneurial role. Participants' concerns with physical well-being necessarily shaped their consideration of venture creation as a way of accommodating working life around specific impairments. Concerns with performative achievement influenced the pursuit of entrepreneurial roles that, they believed, could be

performed within the constraints and affordances of the material culture of artefacts. Finally, concerns with self-worth shaped participants' consideration of venture creation as a vehicle for realising what matters to them most in relation to others.

Internal conversation, emotional elaboration and commitment to venture creation

The onset of impairment can generate internal conversation by eliciting strong first-order emotions, such as anger, frustration or self-pity. Fuelled by these emotions, agents subsequently undergo emotional elaboration resulting in the second-order prioritisation of emotions that leads to a commitment to act. Emotional elaboration drives internal conversations and helps us to prioritise our concerns and commit to particular social roles. Sarah, Garry and David have all undergone internal conversations before arriving at a decision to commit to venture creation. We explicate their emotional elaborations over time utilising Archer's (2000) three moments of internal conversation: discernment, deliberation and dedication. These three moments define three stages of the entrepreneurial motivation-behaviour continuum. We conceptualise these stages as *concerns* (discernment) or what we care about, *consideration* of venture creation (deliberation) as a way of prioritising some concerns over others, and *commitment* (dedication) to venture creation.

Discernment. At the preliminary stage of internal conversation, we review what we care about (Archer, 2000). The onset of impairment has had a significant impact on

participants' well-being, eliciting strong first-order emotions. Entrepreneurs reflected primarily on how disability powerfully disrupted their activities and relationships. Their commentaries are reminiscent of Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) emotion-focused coping strategy aimed at alleviating distress. Sarah, Garry and David each reviewed their concerns with well-being in order to come to terms with a 'newly' embodied sense of self.

> "All I could think about was, 'I can't do this, I can't sit at a desk, I can't go and see clients, I can't go to networking events', and my whole brain seemed to be taken up with all of the things that I can't do now that I used to do before." [Sarah]

> "The way I was on dialysis, I was very, very ill. I was married with children. My marriage fell apart. Everything fell apart. My life, it was a nightmare for 12 years. When you have everything stripped away, it doesn't matter you've got attitudes and everything when you're ill. It doesn't matter that you rage against it. You're ill. And that's it. You're not going anywhere. There's nothing you can do about it. Your body fails." [Garry]

> "I was very ill at the time and literally spent a lot of time in bed, feeling quite sorry for myself. I was testing new drugs all the time. Drugs would make me sick. I'd be vomiting before I went to work and sometimes at work." [David]

Deliberation. At the second stage of internal conversation, we question the worth of our various concerns and how much we care about them (Archer, 2000). Having come to terms with a newly embodied sense of self, participants then started to question how to balance their concerns with well-being around their concerns with performative achievement and self-worth. This is when they start considering venture creation as a way of fitting the specific impairment effects around working life. Again, Sarah's, Garry's and David's moments of deliberation remind us of Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) problem-focused coping strategy, aimed at addressing the underlying cause of distress.

> "So, then, I had to get angry with myself really, and start thinking 'Ok, I can spend all the year talking about what I can't do anymore, but who is that gonna help? And how is that gonna be productive? Ok, it's different, it's worse, it's different, it's not what I have chosen, it is what it is. So what can I do with this? I can't do 90 per cent of the things I used to be able to do, but I can still do things that are of value to people.'" [Sarah]

> "When you're in the deepest, darkest hole you could ever think you could be in, covered in all kinds of crap, if you like, what do you do? There's only two ways you can go. You go up and fight back, or you go under. So you fight back. I tried everything. It didn't work. I was ill and I couldn't stop it, right? So I had to accept

> it, but fought against it inside. A lot of turmoil in my life as well. 12 years on dialysis, I didn't like it, but you start to understand what matters." [Garry]
>
> "It was near to Christmas and I just couldn't see a future. And I thought 'There is another way to this and it's not getting a job in a traditional sense, it's striking out what is it that I do, that I do better than anybody.'" [David]

Dedication. The final stage of internal conversation is when a strict personal identity with its unique pattern of commitments is formed (Archer, 2000). Having deliberated over their concerns with well-being in relation to working life, this is the moment when Sarah, Garry and David committed to venture creation by acting on their concerns. While at the discernment and deliberation phases the three entrepreneurs mulled over their various concerns, at the stage of dedication they arrived at a particular balance that they can live with and committed themselves to a course of action. These commitments are what makes them a unique person, and a particular kind of entrepreneur.

> "Now I'm not that person regretting, I still have moments about it [disability] of course, everybody does, but you know I'm concentrating now on the here and now. So you know, the focus will be 'Oh I need to phone [a client] this afternoon to find out if they're going to put any more adverts on.'" [Sarah]
>
> "All of my attitudes and egos went. I'm just doing what I do. I've been in a dark place and I've learned from being there. Now I could've died. So I really had the

> full hit, if you like. So I shouldn't be here, but it made me, instead of killing me it made me stronger. And that's why I'm so passionate about making this [business] work, because it's about my life. I understand what matters. And what matters more than anything is, you have control of your own life." [Garry]
>
> "In some ways, it's [disability] the best thing really that happened to me because you've gotten off climbing that [corporate] ladder, thinking 'how cool I look in that shirt and tie', to kind of, 'look at what's important.' …I think for me it's been the best thing ever [starting a business]. I mean, don't get me wrong, I sometime wake up in the middle of the night thinking 'What am I doing?' But it's like you've been programmed, that you should do that." [David]

This section has highlighted three principal points. First, the onset of impairment, as harm to the body, can elicit strong first-order emotions, such as anger, frustration or self-pity. Second, these emotions emergent from our relations with the natural order exist independently of the practical and social orders, although they exert influence on personal concerns in *all* three orders. Third, reflection on the three sets of concerns, consideration of venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others, and commitment to venture creation are three stages of the internal conversation in the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to behaviour. It is at the stage of dedication that participants accomplished a liveable balance and committed themselves to pursuing venture creation. Yet, there is a sense of a continuing internal conversation reflected in

their commentaries. Sarah still has moments of regret about things she can no longer do, and David sometimes questions his decision to become self-employed. Garry, on the other hand, has made a deep commitment to his new venture.

Discussion

Entrepreneurial identity studies, rooted in distinct ontological traditions, have sought to explain and describe 'who is' (Carland et al., 1984; Gartner, 1988) and 'how one becomes' an entrepreneur (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Steyaert, 2007). The notion of a lone individual, possessing fixed traits in isolation from context, was challenged by emphasising the relational aspect of identity work (Watson, 2008; 2009), drawing attention to the social context (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Anderson and Warren, 2011; Reveley and Down, 2009), and the dynamic and changing nature of becoming an entrepreneur (Bjursell and Melin, 2011; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Jones et al., 2008). While we agree that entrepreneurial identity is not static and is always influenced by social relations and conditions, we highlighted that constructionist approaches to entrepreneurial identity under-theorise the powers of nature and material culture of artefacts in shaping agential motivation to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation.

Our analysis offers novel insights into how and why disabled people and those with long-term impairments and health conditions become entrepreneurs. Disability is largely absent in the entrepreneurial identity literature; where entrepreneurs are assumed

to be an homogeneous group in terms of embodied properties, and therefore equally capable of starting and running a business (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014). Consequently, studies under-theorise the effects of impairments, such as mobility difficulties, in enabling or constraining, encouraging or discouraging, new venture creation. Such effects are emergent in our relations with the natural order and cannot be reduced simply to social relations. Archer (2000) reminds us that our capacity to develop as 'society's beings' always presupposes a particular human nature. Depending on circumstances, each of us is capable of flourishing and vulnerable to suffering (Sayer, 2011) because we are embodied in a particular way. Human development and identity formation are importantly influenced by our embodied powers and liabilities in relation to the enabling and constraining conditions of *all* three orders of reality. Building on, and extending, the constructionist emphasis on the social context, particularly the power of enterprise discourse (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; Cohen and Musson, 2000), we highlight that the discourse of enterprise is one of many external conditions and influences on entrepreneurial identity formation.

Adopting a stratified, emergent ontology of identity (Archer, 2000; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010) has enabled us to explain how the onset of impairment, as an environmental threat to the body, can elicit strong emotions that shape the motivation to pursue, and to commit to, an entrepreneurial role. We applied Archer's (2000) concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration to illustrate how

agents transition from motivation to venture creation, regardless of whether or not their concerns and emotions are expressed publicly, or are conceptualised by researchers. Although studies acknowledge the role of 'inner' dialogues (Bjursell and Melin, 2011; Karp, 2006) and emotions (Anderson and Warren, 2011; Downing, 2005; Haynie and Shepherd, 2011; Hytti, 2005), the dominant constructionist approach is to theorise entrepreneurial identity as something that is a product of, and realised in, narrative performances in relation to others (Downing, 2005; Hytti, 2005). Without a stratified notion of identity, researchers focus on particular identity levels, for example, entrepreneurs' sense of self (Down and Reveley, 2004; Phillips, 2013), to the neglect of other identity strata and their lower-level properties, including personal identity and the body.

We highlighted the body and the emergent sense of self, personal identity and social identity as distinct strata of personhood, with their own properties and powers. Entrepreneurial identity, as a type of social identity, can only be realised in the social order. The underlying personal powers and concerns that make its emergence possible cannot be reduced to social relations alone, given the effects of nature and material culture. Recognising these variable powers is crucial in researching disability as a multi-level phenomenon (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006), involving causal mechanisms at the biological and psychological, as well as social and cultural, levels. Such multi-level analyses can provide more inclusive and robust explanations of disability effects on

entrepreneurial identity. Our findings illustrate, for example, how the onset of impairment at the biological level can importantly shape concerns with well-being, and the subsequent motivation to pursue venture creation at the social level. The stratified, emergent ontology of identity provides a framework for future studies seeking to explain the effects of the body, impaired or otherwise, on new venture creation without resorting to biological determinism associated with personality traits theories. Equally, studies of enterprise discourse, as a powerful influence on identity formation, can avoid charges of social determinism by recognising the role of lower-level personal powers, such as concerns with well-being, in enabling or constraining venture creation.

We have developed a conception of entrepreneurial identity as a *personal power*, rather than as a fixed characteristic determining behaviour (Chen et al., 1998), or as a dynamic and continually changing process (Leitch and Harrison, 2016). Our stratified, emergent view of entrepreneurial identity has advantages over the alternatives. It allows researchers to theorise both stability and change in the conditions that enable some people, but not others, to realise their power to create a new venture. As a 'higher-level' personal power, entrepreneurial identity is a potentiality emergent from the body that is one of its 'lower-level' preconditions. The physical body provides at least temporarily stable conditions for the emergence of self-consciousness, memory, reflexivity and other personal powers that make entrepreneurial action possible. Yet, the body itself is not a fixed entity; it ages and is liable to ill-health, injury or the onset of

impairment, with consequences for identity formation. At the same time, the realisation of entrepreneurial identity can be manifested through a range of practices, linguistic and *non*-linguistic, that change over time and generate the process of becoming. Agents may, or may not, express themselves, in a variety of ways in their interactions with others, at different points in a lifetime, but still retain a stable set of concerns that consistently guide their actions. Hence, the power to create a new venture is a potentiality that most people have, that is emergent and changing within the limits of our variable embodied properties, powers and liabilities.

Conclusion and implications

This paper has developed a novel conception of entrepreneurial identity, drawing upon a critical realist ontology (Archer, 2000, 2003; Bhaskar, 2005, 2008; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010). Our conception is informed by two key features of realist ontology. We have theorised entrepreneurial identity as a *causal power* that exists independently of its narrative expression by entrepreneurs, or its conceptualisation by researchers. Furthermore, we have utilised a stratified, emergent ontology to distinguish multiple identity levels as distinct causal powers of persons, and multiple orders of reality as analytically distinct external conditions with powers to enable and constrain identity formation. This new conception of entrepreneurial identity permits us to theorise the connection between motivation, context and venture creation.

Entrepreneurial identity, as a causal power, contributes to action and the production of events, along with other causal powers in the natural, practical and social orders. We have drawn on qualitative interview data from three UK-based disabled entrepreneurs to demonstrate the value of our conceptual framework.

The paper has several theoretical implications that might inform future research. First, to explain the conditions that make the emergence of a particular entrepreneurial identity possible, researchers must theorise entrepreneurs' relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts *as well as* social relations. The powers of nature and material culture enable and constrain, encourage and discourage, venture creation. Agents personify entrepreneurial roles in very different ways contingent upon their particular concerns in the three orders. While most entrepreneurial identity studies focus primarily on social relations, some assume, at least implicitly, that entrepreneurs have particular concerns in relation to nature and material culture. Studies of environmental entrepreneurship, for example, highlight the pursuit of activities for ecological benefit (York et al., 2016). We have theorised, and empirically illustrated, how personal concerns with well-being, and with task ease or difficulty in using human-made artefacts, including digital technologies, shape entrepreneurial motivation.

Second, to explain entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour fully, researchers cannot ignore the effects of personal embodied properties, such as particular impairments and

health conditions, emergent from our relations with nature. Constructionist studies under-theorise such personal powers and liabilities, although they implicitly presuppose that entrepreneurs must possess at least the embodied power to self-narrate (Gill and Larson, 2014; Phillips, 2012) and to either draw on, or resist, the dominant enterprise discourse (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Mallett and Wapshott, 2015). Particular embodied properties have variable implications for personal concerns and the capacity to commit to an entrepreneurial role. Our paper illustrates the heterogeneity of entrepreneurs in terms of their embodied powers and liabilities. We have argued that emergent personal properties, including impairments, the self, personal identity and entrepreneurial identity, are different kinds of potentialities. Parallels can be drawn with the 'capabilities approach', questioning what specific conditions must be in place for any individual to freely exercise their entrepreneurial potential (Wilson and Martin, 2015).

Third, our novel conception of entrepreneurial identity helps to unpack the linkages between motivation, context and venture creation, contributing to recent debates on the entrepreneurial intention-behaviour link (Adam and Fayolle, 2016; Kolvereid, 2016, Wilson and Martin, 2015) and entrepreneurial commitment (Fayolle, et al., 2011). We have drawn attention to three stages of internal conversation (Archer, 2000) to explain the motivation-behaviour transition: discernment (reflecting on personal concerns); deliberation (considering venture creation) and dedication (committing to an

entrepreneurial role). The onset of impairment can fuel the process of internal conversation and emotional elaboration, generating commitment to a particular course of action. Constructionist studies of entrepreneurial identity under-theorise the link, or presume agents are motivated to pursue venture creation without drawing explicit causal connections between motivation and behaviour. Identity studies that do theorise how entrepreneurial motivation leads to behaviour restrict their focus to motives arising from how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011), to the neglect of natural and practical relations and the variable personal concerns that motivate action.

Our new conception of entrepreneurial identity is applicable to *all* entrepreneurs. All entrepreneurs are uniquely embodied – not just those with impairments and health conditions – and their particular embodied properties may generate different concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth. This has implications for entrepreneurial motivation and the type of venture created. Future studies could examine how different embodied powers and liabilities shape personal concerns in the three orders in different ways, and motivate venture creation. Furthermore, our framework encourages entrepreneurship researchers to re-think debates around ethnicity, gender and age as emergent causal powers and liabilities that generate particular personal concerns. A critical realist ontology offers greater emancipatory potential for identity research, compared with the constructionist and empiricist

accounts by, for example, providing better descriptions of antecedents and consequences of identity (Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014). All social identities presuppose prior conditions of possibility; not all identities are possible in all circumstances. Critical realists, moreover, would question how an individual can pursue empowering and emancipatory acts, if the individual is simply constructed by social, economic and cultural powers, such as gender positions or discourses, to perform prescribed roles (Poutanen, 2018). Finally, deeper examination of the processes involved in balancing, prioritising and subordinating personal concerns could offer new insights into how entrepreneurs reconcile conflicting concerns to become a particular kind of entrepreneur.

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