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What are we doing here?! Deprivation, family manoeuvres and a microbusiness 'on the edge'

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the living experience of a start-up enterprise as the author and co-founders navigate their deprived community context. Using a Polanyian lens on 'householding', it examines how they seek a hopeful future for themselves and their marginalized community through their entrepreneuring. Autoethnographic analysis explores experiences of investing themselves in the deprived UK community, from the position of a researcher living and entrepreneuring there. It exposes the slow processes through which the family temporarily and inadvertently comes to serve the business and starts to disembed from society. It identifies sets of just-in-time manoeuvrings and everyday repairs used to restore balance and keep the family re-embedding, while efforts to embed the business come at the expense of 'householding'. By examining living experience from within a microbusiness start-up 'on the edge', the paper helps to critically re-think how entrepreneuring by people in deprived places is understood and experienced, with mixed consequences over time.

Introduction

I am a co-founder of an everyday business that I set up with my brother, partner and mother in the place we (love to) live, which is characterized by remoteness and high levels of deprivation. I am also a full-time academic and parent of three teenagers, who – in theory at least – engage in and benefit from the business. I am the first to admit that, like many others, I find balancing life and entrepreneurship challenging. This article reflects on poignant episodes from my experiences of everyday entrepreneurial life over the last two years, presented as self-contained vignettes, demonstrating what feel like Herculean efforts to create a living and contribute in a small way to our 'left-behind' place with its poor reputation.

First, it seems important to address the question of positionality as academic-entrepreneur (Johannisson 2018). If I go back far enough, it becomes clear that my academic and entrepreneurial careers – and the deliberations I impose on family members about them – seem always to have been interwoven. My interest in deprived places stems from working in urban regeneration in London. By 2001, we had launched our first small business together, while I was working full time in a university administrative role. We closed the business down in 2008, two years after I started a PhD and had children. A second small venture filled the void before relocating to a post-doc position in 2013. Our

current business – a small restaurant and mobile street food business – started in 2022, at the same time as I secured my current post and re-entered academia. Engagement with entrepreneurship was, therefore, not as an 'entresearcher' first (Johannisson 2018) but intermittently as both entrepreneur and academic. This dual position brings specific subjectivities, which I aim to surface in my analysis, and seems uniquely able to offer insights into living experience of everyday entrepreneuring in a challenging context.

Everyday entrepreneuring plays a vital role in situations of poverty (Bruton, Ketchen, and Duane Ireland 2013; Kimmitt, Muñoz, and Newbery 2020; Santos and Neumeyer 2023). Around the world, people and communities entrepreneur in conditions of extreme or even absolute poverty, temporarily or permanently. Those who experience poverty at the margins (Calton et al. 2013) decide, or are forced, to entrepreneur in such challenging contexts, despite the barriers: increasing precarity for individuals, struggles with entrepreneurial legitimacy and structural and other contextual factors that make sustaining ventures difficult (Christopher, Bruton, and Chen 2019; Granados, Rosli, and Gotsi 2022; Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent 2021). How people entrepreneur where the market fails and their tactics in navigating precarity (Blennerhassett, Moore-Cherry, and Bonnin 2022) are the subject of significant research.

In no way do I compare our experiences to those of 'poverty entrepreneurs' in extreme situations! However, while much research focuses on extreme poverty, poverty is also a relative concept (Hussain, Bhuiyan, and Bakar 2014), contextually constructed and embedded and so manifests differently in different experiences. In our case, both our marginal context and prior ventures contribute to our sense of current and future precarity. Despite my full-time academic position, we face financial challenges in the everyday, partly stemming from previous enterprises and exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. Thus, in this paper I can reflect on experiences of deprivation during our start-up stage and our hopes for a better future through our entrepreneuring.

Still, I cannot speak to those for whom entrepreneuring is their only route to escaping poverty. Admittedly, setting up the business was partly a life choice (my co-founders could perhaps have found jobs locally, albeit generally low skilled work). Some financial challenges we face might be of our own doing, rather than of the place or the past. As an academic, I undoubtedly have more opportunities, security, mobility and income than many. As a family, we could move again but choose not to. However much a choice, setting up the business was in part an effort to get ourselves out of financial difficulties and increase our family income. Reflecting on our experiences forces me to challenge assumptions about the nature of income and who experiences precarity.

From the rare perspective of our direct living experience, then, this paper responds to calls for a nuanced understanding of how people and communities experience entrepreneuring in conditions of poverty (Christopher, Bruton, and Chen 2019) – and to calls for more contextually sensitive research (Steyaert and Katz 2004; Welter 2011) from the perspective of those entrepreneuring there (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2023). It is interested in the relative poverty that is often fragmented and hidden within wealthy developed countries. In the UK, relative poverty can be seen embodied in the concept of deprivation, which the government defines more broadly than poverty, as 'people can be regarded as deprived if they lack any kind of resources, not just income' (MHCLG 2019). Multiple deprivation captures spatial differences based on different experiences of poverty and inequality (Dymond-Green 2020). It is inherently *relative*, as the ranking of wards and areas relative to each other highlights spatial concentrations of poverty (Whelan, Layte, and Maître 2002, 102). Our UK town is seen as marginal and difficult for business: it is geographically remote from major urban centres, half of its wards are in the top 10% of most deprived in the country and it is set in a region characterized by stark contrasts between affluence and deprivation.

The UK policy focus on enterprise as route out of deprivation is heavily criticized (Southern 2011). Encouraging people into small-scale entrepreneuring can lead them into precarious livelihoods, particularly in areas of inequality (Rouse and Jayawarna 2011). Yet, everyday entrepreneurs like us persist in setting up small ventures at no lesser rate than in more prosperous areas (Frankish, Roberts, and Storey 2010). UK deprived areas have tended to see higher rates of 'unhealthy' businesses start

up (e.g. fast food, tanning salons, bookmakers, vape shops) (Royal Society for Public Health 2018). Our microenterprise is not one of those stereotypically associated with poor areas but more like the few 'aspirational' small businesses starting up around us (e.g. an artisan bakery, boutique clothing shop, barista coffee shop) – high quality 'everyday' businesses that could be found in more prosperous places and aim for a more hopeful collective future.

For more nuanced understanding of entrepreneuring in such contexts, research needs to understand experiences in social rather than purely economic terms. Where research has developed a more socialized understanding, we learn how entrepreneurs use their embeddedness in deprived communities for social and economic value to create better futures (Edward, Jack, and Anderson 2015; Gaddefors and Anderson 2018; Jack and Anderson 2002). Using our experience, I seek to further illuminate how, through embeddedness in local context, everyday entrepreneurs such as us interact with the contextual processes that sustain deprivation and the entrepreneurial agency to navigate potential precarity.

To underpin this exploration theoretically, I take a Polanyian lens on householding: self-sufficiency within a closed group and autonomous allocations within family units (Polanyi [1944] 2001). Theorising the economy as embedded differently in society over time and place, Polanyi ([1944] 2001) held that to function well societies require a combination of market, government and community institutions – plus household/family. These work on each other to prevent the destabilizing forces of unfettered free-market processes from allowing the economy to disembed – and work separately to, and against, society. Householding is applied in recent research in similar ways (Berndt, Werner, and Ramiro Fernández 2020; Laamanen, Wahlen, and Lorek 2018). Considering the practices of householding helps to understand the experiences of a microenterprise as it interacts with competing instituted processes specific to the deprived context.

I draw in this paper on qualitative autoethnographic research conducted over 18 months (ongoing). Data sources comprise reflective audio diary entries, recorded conversations and personal reflections. Following a three-stage process typical of autoethnography (Anderson 2006), firstly I develop an autobiographical narrative in the form of *vignettes* (Humphreys 2005), capturing poignant moments in our start-up phase. Secondly, I show how recorded conversations and personal reflections about the vignette experiences also become data. These data in turn become the subject of reflexive analysis in the third stage – a reflexive analytical process of sense-making, moving between the analysis and theory similar to constant comparison (Fram 2013, cited in; Jack et al. 2015).

Theoretically, the paper contributes a more nuanced understanding of embeddedness by taking a broad Polanyian lens on householding to show the manoeuvrings a family uses while entrepreneuring in deprived contexts. Methodologically, the paper demonstrates how entrepreneuring and relative poverty at the margins can be researched autoethnographically to elicit how living experience *feels*, in time and in context. Referring to the 'double autoethnography' outlined by Learmonth and Humphreys (2012), I combine evocative and analytic approaches to both evoke experience and engage with theoretical debate. Autoethnography allows my practitioner voice (and others') to be heard (Fletcher 2011) and my academic sense-making to be surfaced.

Theoretical background

Entrepreneurship, poverty and deprivation

Poverty is a complex concept, understood here as a relative and social phenomenon experienced individually and collectively in context. Poverty is often defined as lacking the financial resources to meet essential needs (Hussain, Bhuiyan, and Bakar 2014) or lack of individual/collective income, living standards, and education (Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent 2021). Without reducing poverty solely to income levels, research can conceptualize poverty as relative, contextually constructed and embedded (Hussain, Bhuiyan, and Bakar 2014). Poverty is understood as human experience –

perhaps by the 'precariat', a class unified by their exclusion from secure labour, occupational identity and collective voice (Standing 2012) or more universally felt in the microspaces of everyday living (Ettlinger 2007). It is in the everydayness, Ettlinger contends (2007), that people routinely develop practices that help them find certainty as they engage in uncertain social, political, economic and cultural life.

In countries like the UK there has been a broad but not total shift in emphasis away from poverty (Whelan, Layte, and Maître 2002) since Townsend's nation-based relational poverty (1970, quoted in Southern 2011), which emphasized the role of social structures in understanding poverty, towards more multifaceted forms of inequality such as social exclusion (Blackburn and Ram 2006, Levitas 2006, quoted in Southern 2011) and deprivation. However, poverty persists within the taken-for-granted nature of uneven development.

Uneven development is an enduring feature of capitalist societies, the relationships between places that (re)produce inequality and create regional problems and problem regions (Peck, Werner, and Jones 2022). Capitalist development leaves traces, with de-industrialized areas (such as where I live) facing intractable development challenges without the growth mechanisms to deal with them (Hudson 2001). Because of the roles places played in capitalist production historically, communities in such areas face depletion and economic decline – and relative poverty – as the space of capitalist development is left behind.

Relative poverty can be hidden within wealth in developed countries like the UK and becomes visible through measures such as multiple deprivation. Multiple deprivation is defined as lack of any kind of resources (Dymond-Green 2020) and incorporates experiences of poverty and inequality as captured by seven measures of multiple deprivation. A neighbourhood that ranks highly on multiple deprivation indices is likely to experience a range of socio-economic issues relating to, for example, poor health and education outcomes, relative to less deprived areas that might sit adjacent to them. There are many definitional issues surrounding the terminology of deprivation that are not reconcilable here but alternative notions of 'materially disadvantaged', 'constrained', 'depleted', or 'left behind' places (Martin et al. 2021) all reflect this relative nature of place-based poverty, which is experienced in situ as a complex mix of social and economic factors.

Poverty might also be fragmented or concentrated in pockets, neighbourhoods or enclaves (Trevizo and Lopez 2016), manifesting differently in different spatial geographies. However central these appear (for instance, enclaves in the inner city), people living in deprived communities are among those entrepreneuring at the margins of society (Dodd 2014), often at the interface of social and economic dysfunction. The case for researching at the edge of society (Anderson 2000) suggests peripheral environments might provide different insights into entrepreneurship. Everyday entrepreneurship might indeed be found in the dynamic spaces at the edge and between institutions (Al-Dajani et al. 2023).

However, it is problematic to position people living in left-behind or constrained areas as 'other', people whose entrepreneurial actions make them somehow more ingenious and research-worthy (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2023). Poverty contexts and the 'low income people' living in them can become stigmatized (Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent 2021). It seems important that research should avoid 'simply theorising "down" or "back" from what is presumed to be the most "advanced" form of economic development' (Peck 2013, 246). There is a risk of deterministic treatments of people in deprived communities, top down and from the outside, and research celebrating entrepreneurs and their activities without full regard to their context.

Most significantly to me, deprivation does not mean that towns like ours are not rich sites of meaningful social life (Hudson 2001) despite the economic depletion and geographical marginality. Indeed, in Massey's (1991) conceptualization of uneven development as emergent, historically contingent, and malleable, place is always in the making and can be shaped. Entrepreneuring has a role to play in that but how far enterprise can turn around communities worst affected by uneven development is critiqued. Founders of enterprises in such areas might be among those most trapped in poverty. They might equally be key agents in the shaping of left behind places through their

(complex) interactions with institutions and structures. In locations that experience dislocation from the mainstream market, entrepreneurs might be important components in locking or unlocking deprivation – but themselves might need protection from free market processes (Southern 2011).

Contextualising entrepreneuring in deprived communities

Few studies have sought to understand either deprivation itself or the contextually specific nature of the entrepreneur's relationship with the deprived context. Empirical studies are criticized for conceptualizing deprivation as a static setting, in which entrepreneurship occurs (Parkinson, Howorth, and Southern 2017). Any community is more than simply *where* an entrepreneur is or entrepreneurs; it is a factor shaping the entrepreneurial process and its outcomes. The interplay between incubating context and participating entrepreneurs is particularly interesting in more communitarian societies (Shymko and Khoury 2023). Surfacing the historical, cultural and social is necessary for understanding how everyday entrepreneuring and context work together in locations that seem not to make sense (Huggins and Thompson 2014).

Contextualization then is less about depicting the setting and more about understanding how acting entrepreneurially allows contextualization (Fletcher 2011). It could involve making audible the voices of people 'left behind' in places who entrepreneur (Welter 2011; Welter and Baker 2021). Endogenous construction of context (Chalmers and Shaw 2017) could reveal not only how people entrepreneuring at the margins become agentic because of the context but how their agency and practices shape the context (Welter and Baker 2021) more dialectically perhaps than in well-functioning economic places.

Recent research has advanced a more socialized understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurship and deprived contexts. Studies continue to add empirical insights into social capital and collective aspects of entrepreneuring in low-income communities (Cairns, Southern, and Whittam 2024; Williams, Huggins, and Thompson 2020) in depleted coastal towns (Redhead and Bika 2022) and former industrial towns (Gherhes, Vorley, and Brooks 2020), the latter providing further evidence of context-specific legacies of the past affecting local perceptions and limiting local entrepreneurial cultures.

Some studies progress our understanding of entrepreneuring as socially constituted, dynamic and historically and culturally contingent, through micro level and locally specific processes (Bensemann, Warren, and Anderson 2018). Together they respond to calls to re-think how entrepreneuring by people and in places is understood (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack 2023) and help understand how social processes in deprived communities can be seen to work for or against enterprising futures. How communities talk themselves and their place into being (Welter and Baker 2021) – or otherwise – is one of the paradoxes at the heart of entrepreneuring in deprived communities. Looking at immigrant entrepreneurship, Blennerhasset et al. (2022) expose the ways individuals negotiate precarity as paradoxical but productive in a Dublin market, allowing insights into how precarity can be navigated by acting entrepreneurially within contexts of deprivation.

Context is dealt with in research on embeddedness in deprived communities (Jack 2005; Jack and Anderson 2002). McKeever, Anderson, and Jack (2014) take the context as their unit of analysis. As Redhead and Bika (2022) suggest, researchers mostly neglect how entrepreneurs embed themselves contingently within place, despite or because of depletion. Embeddedness is a concept famously associated with Polanyi, for whom 'actually existing economies must be understood in grounded terms', in specific context (Peck 2013, 245). The notion of embeddedness, Peck argues, is part of a wider programmatic commitment; it is not reducible to a simple concept but has potential for understanding local/regional economic formations that are 'both internally heterogeneous and deeply interconnected' (245). Polanyi's comparative approach involves 'placing' economies by researching how economic processes are instituted specifically in place and at points in time,

recognizing 'internal' forms of economic diversity but also placing this diversity in social and historical context (Polanyi 1957, cited in; Peck 2013).

Polanyi's is a macro level notion of embeddedness that is not fully suited to this autoethnographical exploration of experience at the local level; I do not, like Nowak and Raffaelli (2022) for example, use embeddedness to understand macro and micro interactions and different levels of embeddedness. Instead, I take it as a broad metaphorical idea that the environment in which we entrepreneur is specifically shaped by various structures and institutions that influence our actions and with which we specifically interact.

Family, entrepreneuring and 'householding'

The blurred boundaries between the household and the workplace are well established and family households have been conceptualized as the basis of economies (Baines, Wheelock, and Oughton 2011; Wheelock and Oughton 1996). Although in-depth studies on everyday practices of starting new businesses are few (Jones and Li 2017), entrepreneuring families are rich sites for understanding how deprivation is experienced and navigated entrepreneurially through interactions with their context.

Conceived as a social system in its own right and the product of social relations, in which family members are embedded (Discua Cruz, Hamilton, and Jack 2020), the family starting up a venture offers a rich site of learning into processes of entrepreneuring as they shape and are shaped by the context. Families are involved in entanglements with place in multiple, complex ways and are key to changing places now and for the future. This seems particularly the case where they entrepreneur in deprived communities. In poverty situations, we might see best the move from heroic economic entrepreneur to mundane everyday practices that sustain material life (Al-Dajani et al. 2023).

The working family household is also increasingly the site of poverty. In the UK, the risk of poverty for adults living in working households has risen over decades, especially for households with only one worker (Hick and Lanau 2018) and working families (McBride, Smith, and Mbala 2018). Despite my fulltime position, our family experiences the same as many UK households in working poverty, even if our situation is not typical of in-work poverty. Paying off business debts/assets, high-rate mortgages and poor credit ratings affecting access to finance, are challenges we face in the everyday. The current cost of living crisis exacerbates our lack of disposable income. Distance from a major regional hub creates conflicts between the business and my academic job when timetables make it impossible to get back to the restaurant or require costly stopovers for 9 am teaching. Prior to start-up, one co-founder worked in supermarkets to make ends meet for a while, the other in a local food factory on night shifts. Pensions and national insurance payments are patchy or non-existent. That some of those challenges stem from previous business ventures reminds me that entrepreneuring family households experience not only a blurring between household and workplace, but also perhaps particular experiences of working poverty.

A broad Polanyian lens on *householding* helps produce insights into how family members work entrepreneurially to navigate deprivation. Householding is defined as autonomous allocations within family units, the self-sufficiency within a closed group, 'producing and storing for the satisfaction of the wants of the members of the group' (Polanyi [1944] 2001, 56). Householding works alongside price-making markets in market society; redistribution, by processes of central institutions (the state) and reciprocity within kinship and community (Berndt, Werner, and Ramiro Fernández 2020). Through householding practices, resources are allocated to cater to the needs of the household and social relationships. Berndt, Werner, and Ramiro Fernández (2020) give an example of farmers setting aside a portion of their harvest for their own future production, organizing in a black market where retained seeds are stored for subsequent sale. The household is the site of everyday practices where economic decisions affecting the collective are made; those householding practices are organized around mutual interest of the members, who act for individual and collective livelihoods (Laamanen, Wahlen, and Lorek 2018).

Although Polanyi's theorizing was mostly at a macro level, as noted, and offers a 'top down' understanding of the self-regulating market and double movement of society (Halperin 2018) – acknowledging also that *householding* was written out of Polanyi's later theorizing (Nowak and Raffaelli 2022) – I propose that understanding the processes of householding as it works alongside redistribution, exchange and reciprocity and interacts with institutions is still relevant – particularly as a means of understanding experiences of entrepreneuring in placed economies. Householding could be stabilizing where it works with other institutions to counter the overreach of commodification/marketization (Berndt, Werner, and Ramiro Fernández 2020).

Through my own experiences, I demonstrate a shift in understanding of how the family not only seeks to create value for themselves through entrepreneurial experiences – but entrepreneurs instead for a different type of fulfilment, in this case that of the deprived community/place. Here I draw on Kimmitt et al.'s distinction between the former as the hedonic perspective and the latter as a more eudemonic perspective (Kimmitt, Muñoz, and Newbery 2020). This responds to Al-Dajani et al. (2023) in seeking to 'place' the factors that drive families to entrepreneur for the community as well as themselves. In broad Polanyian terms, I show how a family might entrepreneur in redistributive and reciprocal ways (because of the deficit in the deprived context) with the unintended effect that the family continuously *dis*embeds and must be re-embedded through everyday repairs.

Research design

My objective in reflecting for this paper was to understand how the family experiences and navigates deprivation entrepreneurially through our interactions with our deprived context. The paper is exploratory and draws on qualitative autoethnographic research conducted over 18 months.

Autoethnography is a well-established research style that seeks to actively expose aspects of entrepreneurial experience – and surfaces associated positionalities and subjectivities – that more conventional methods tend to hide. It provides 'unrivaled access to the inner mind' and insights into 'what I'm thinking about what I'm saying' (Marks 2021, 950). The act of writing itself allows the researcher to surface subjectivities and positionalities (Vershinina and Discua Cruz 2021) and narrative practices are often the conduit to deeper understanding and insights of reflexive understanding (Slade, Martin, and Watson 2020). Autoethnography thus allows the voices of entrepreneurship practitioners to be heard that might otherwise remain unheard (Fletcher 2011) and insights to be shared from within.

Importantly, autoethnography also brings in voices of others involved (in this case, family members engaged in the entrepreneuring) and allows the researcher to address their emotions and anxieties from different viewpoints (in our cases as parent, sibling, offspring, local resident, prior employee, etc. – as well as people setting up a family business together in the here and now). In this way, autoethnography balances the insider's perspective and account of (shared) experiences. It is especially interesting for exploring lived experience because it immerses the reader into the everyday life of the subjects (Al-Dajani et al. 2023). As a form of ethnography, it allows the recipient to engage more intimately with what is being researched.

There are no rules for how to conduct autoethnographies, although researchers are united that they should draw on own experiences and stories to understand phenomena, share personal experiences that are opened up for critique, purposefully engage the reader in that, and contribute to scholarly knowledge and debates (Holman et al. 2013). My approach involves deep academic engagement with the non-academic world of entrepreneurial practice, aligning somewhat with enactive research, whereby researchers enact entrepreneurship by engaging directly in entrepreneurial activities as 'entresearcher' and aim to experience firsthand the lives of practitioners (Johannisson 2018). As my experience is not temporary and I am already the subject interacting with all elements of context, I do not need to fully immerse in an entrepreneurial event, as such. Nevertheless, the principles of enactive research are helpful for the approach I adopt and elucidate below, particularly the retrospective view. The enactive researcher looks back deeply at their insights

from engagement in the field and later stands back and 'reclaims' the role of scholar (Bertella 2024). This seems true of the reflexive sensemaking process I undertake to understand our experiences.

Epistemological considerations

Authoethnographic approaches used in entrepreneurship research (Fletcher 2011; Sarasvathy 2001) and other practice-based fields embrace reflexivity and the self, seeing knowledge as co-created and contextualized. The researcher places front and centre their subjectivity as influencing the way they see things and they in turn influence the settings and situations they research. Morrow and Kettle (2024) highlight the challenge for researchers to actively carry out reflexivity and analyse their positionality, as well as the messy reality of autoethnographic research.

With its place in post-qualitative methodologies, autoethnography like other forms of ethnography sees the researcher as both affected by and affecting the research subject; all elements of research are entangled in complex ways that are researchable through their intra-actions, and data move with the research (Gherardi 2019). Such a research style is interested in how understanding is produced differently and non-linearly, in context, and so does not seek out any truth or start from theoretical application.

Earlier, I argued for research to embrace the complex interactions and contextual factors that affect experiences of entrepreneuring. I start from the position that the experience of entrepreneurship and context itself depends on interpretation and through hermeneutical conversation remains open to further interpretation. My research on us recognizes that context changes with time, challenging treatments of embeddedness and context as static. What I present is the result of an iterative, non-linear process, in which sensemaking happens everywhere, whenever, and analysis becomes data.

Autoethnographic approach

Autoethnography is generally divided into *evocative* autoethnography, with its interest in experience (Anderson 2006), and *analytic* autoethnography, which focuses on improving theoretical understanding of social phenomena through an analytical research agenda. Both evocative and analytic approaches demand full membership in the research setting but an analytic approach additionally requires analytic reflexivity, visible narrative presence and dialogue with others. Like Learmonth and Humphreys (2011) and Marks (2021), I avoid the problematic distinction between evocative and analytic autoethnography, agreeing that this autoethnography can both evoke and engage with relevant theoretical conversations.

Similar approaches have been used in organization studies (Learmonth and Humphreys 2012; Liu 2018) and in distinctly separate fields of practice, such as social work (Morrow and Kettle 2024) and health and physical education (Slade, Martin, and Watson 2020). In entrepreneurship research, autoethnographic work is still quite rare. Pelly and Duncan (2016), in this journal, explore the formation of adhocracies in the journey to becoming an entrepreneur using autoethnography as a means of storytelling and rethinking entrepreneurship. Marks (2021) examines her public narrative as a female entrepreneurial role model and contrasts it with her alternative, unspoken story to expose differences and influences on her antinarrative to the dominant narrative of the heroic entrepreneur.

My journey involved capturing autoethnographic data reflecting on our start-up over 18 months through several data sources: reflective audio diary entries (approximately 30 hours), recorded conversations with my brother and my partner (9 hours) and personal reflections. Reflections and conversations were mostly recorded in transit between places – while waiting for customers to arrive, in the hour at close of play before going home – fragmented but everywhere and all the time.

I broadly followed three steps that are common to autoethnographic approaches. The first stage is usually autobiographical; a process of capturing memories associated with the phenomenon, akin

to 'reflexive journaling' used in practitioner-based autoethnographical work (Slade, Martin, and Watson 2020). I developed seven vignettes of key 'episodes', all in 2023. These were moments that offered poignant insights or threshold moments in understanding our entrepreneuring experiences and create a central focus for analysing our lived experience. Vignettes are a powerful instrument in qualitative analysis that provide visceral accounts of phenomena/experience in mundane life (Humphreys 2005). I write them in the present tense and first-person to give the reader a more vicarious sense of the autoethnographic experience.

The episodes were selected in consultation with my co-founders and children as poignant moments or memories, answering the question, 'What for you have been highs and lows since we set up the business?'. The vignettes drew on my own audio diary data/recorded conversations. Sometimes memories were prompted by social media posts, useful as a type of artefact to invoke remembering (Johansson and Jones 2019). Writing condensed versions of the poignant memories allowed initial processing and categorizing in the early analysis of experiences. Two key vignettes become the focus of the analysis for this paper, drawing on the other five vignettes, which are outlined in Table 1.

The second stage involved reflecting both personally and in conversations with my co-founders on the episodes written up. These live, sense-making conversations often took place at home or in the business. They were recorded at various points to ensure they reflect our shared memory of events over time. This stage commonly leads to *data production*: for instance, recorded group discussions or reflexive vignettes (Marks 2021; Pelly and Duncan 2016). The two main vignettes in this paper show some of this positioning and shared sensemaking of memories in condensed form.

In the third and final stage, I reflect on the vignettes, which now combine the memory of the episode and our shared sense-making. My aim in this stage was to stand back and reflect on connections between experiences and how they are affected by my various positions (as academic-entrepreneur-family member). The reflexive analysis comes more from me (though in practice in continued real-time dialogue with my co-founders). I refer again to Fletcher (2011) in setting out that this involves highly personalized writing, public account of personal experience with all the vulner-abilities that are generally denied in scholarly writing. Like her, I aim to give an account that is both about me and stems from me, to share how entrepreneurship affects us as a family and brings about discontinuities. In the process, I dipped back into my authoethnographic diaries to make sense of themes as I looked back on the events, our conversations and my own feelings. Analysis at this point starts to feel similar the constant comparative method, iteratively comparing themes in the data and theory (Jack et al. 2015) but it is only loosely informed by the theoretical underpinning outlined earlier (theoretical connections are left mainly for the Discussion section).

Ethical considerations

Full ethical clearance was obtained for this, as part of a wider ethnographic study. In autoethno-graphy, ethical considerations have specific challenges. Like Morrow and Kettle (2024), I had to constantly balance my duty of care and responsibility to potentially vulnerable people (including my children) and sensitivities (including around my co-founders' employment situations). Throughout writing, I was transparent about my interests in our shared experiences, as a researcher, continuously re-securing their consent. At the same time, I acknowledge that because family life and business are so interwoven – additionally in this case interwoven with my own academic interests becoming part and parcel of everyday thinking and reflecting in the moment – the boundaries of what constitutes research and life is rather blurred.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) suggest that, while ethical considerations are important, given the nature of inquiry, standard procedures and universal rules do not apply. The researcher must balance ethical concerns with the ways research can be conducted (which can be limited in terms of who is involved) and how important an autoethnographic approach is for that. Given the aims are to explore our living experience, I knew I had to conduct my autoethnographic research appropriately while trying to maintain some balance for everyone involved. My co-founders were consulted before

Table 1. Overview of the vignettes.

A	Local Fun Day	We are catering at a community event raising money for a local charity, which we're so glad to be at as we were away last year doing a wedding. It's a wet, grey June day, and I feel sorry for the organizers but take 2 minutes to share their Facebook post in a show of solidarity en route. We're dropping our prices and putting 20% of our sales to the cause and I have to remember to redo the menu boards. We've just been running around like headless chickens before it, as usual. This time we have more to do as I suggested we try out Granny's desserts' stall alongside our food van – assuming she wanted to do that, now looking at her I'm not sure that was fair. I watch us all acting nervously – actually shaking. This a 'new unknown' again. We've no idea how to set it up or how it will do. I don't know why we're nervous though. As soon as we arrive, we bump into old faces and everyone's now running around in the rain, having a bit of banter and a laugh. We nearly split our sides laughing when we have to find M to do a shout out over the loud speaker to a customer to come and get their food. It's not funny really but the way it's done, camaraderie and all that made it just funny. The community turned out in number despite the rain – it always amazes me this place. And I am SO happy when I take a look up from the food to see not just a queue of lovely local people but all three generations are here and Dan's family's turned up and helping out too.
B	In the queue for fish	I've arrived ridiculously early – 2 whole hours early – and am now sitting on the pavement on the quayside looking like an idiot, just to be at the front of the queue for fish off the boat. I've stayed back to make sure we get crabs and mackerel for our big seafood night. And to get those I have to be early to get ahead of the restaurants that have started coming from all over the place. It's weird being here so early, it's so quiet but lovely. Time to actually look around and appreciate this amazing place. Quiet before the madness. Dan's taken the children to his mum for their birthday tomorrow – I'm gutted to miss it but they'll be back that night. I can't complain as it was my idea to stay and help Sam. People start arriving eventually, including an Irish visitor who starts talking to me and asks if she can stay to watch the fish buying process. I feel weird as I don't really know what I'm doing – but I do a good job of 'selling' the place and people to her. At least I know some of the crew and they're good local people – though I am feeling increasingly awkward and different. Finally, the fish is landed and W asks who's first. I jump up like an overexcited child (so embarrassing! – I blame the visitor) and then do a really awkward job of the ordering under pressure of the huge queue. I wish Dan was here, he's better at talking to the lads. As I drive away I realize I didn't even manage to get the mackerel! And I wonder why I was acting so oddly.
C	Vandalism of the food van	It's Sunday morning, and we're getting prepped to do the golf club tournament. It's all a bit up to the wire but Dan's finally gone to get the food van, while Sam and I finish packing up. Dan comes back looking like a ghost and says, bit of a nightmare – someone's slashed all the tyres on the food van and trailer. I ask if he's sure, can't be, must have gone down. We drop everything and run round the corner and he's right, there's no way that was not on purpose. I feel – think we're all feeling it – stunned, thinking who the heck would do this to us (why?) – but also what on earth are we going to do about this event. I feel really strange, like someone's watching and doesn't like us doing what we're doing. That had never occurred to me before. We start guessing and Dan gets really irate, as he does (takes it out on inanimate objects). I don't know who, but one of us suggests a plan to get all our spare equipment and food to the venue. Dan drops us so we can get on, while he goes round local scrapyards for replacement tyres as we don't have the funds for brand new ones. Once we get into service, I post on facebook – as a show of defiance. I think. S at the club adds a post calling it mindless vandalism, which surprises me. Perhaps it isn't personal.
D	Breaking down	Just home after clearing up at 11pm on Friday, at the end of a VERY long week working away. I stepped straight from the train into the business when I got back tonight and I'm honestly on my knees. I think about colleagues saying, I don't know how you do it, which I usually laugh off, feeling secretly a tiny bit heroic. But tonight I've really been wondering how I'm keeping going. We've forgotten to make ourselves any food so Dan's been for a terrible takeaway (feels slightly unfair given we've just cooked fresh food for customer all evening). Actually, I'm not sure even if the kids have had anything – they must have done but I think I'd better go and check they're in and ok. I come down to find Sam's dog's pinched my bloody kebab! The others are eating and hadn't noticed, and now the takeaway's closed! I feel a rage coming out of me that I can't control and goes on for longer than it should, all about how unfair it all is on me. One of the girls (not sure which) comes down to see if I'm ok and I just scream back that no I'm not. That is so awful and I feel terrible as they all retreat back to their bedrooms. But I can't stop until I go to bed (hungry).

Table 1. (Continued).

E	Build up to Christmas	We found out at short notice that we can't take the food van this weekend to the major Christmas fair we did last year. Great … .Apparently it's because local businesses objected it was taking trade from them. So typical of that snooty town! Imagine if that happened the other way round – well it wouldn't because people here don't think like that. It happens to coincide with our local lights switch-on so we've decided to be around for that instead and we've cobbled together a pop up with hot drinks and Granny's first festive treats. We have no idea if opening in the day will work but we're just right there so we may as well try. I think it was me who suggested doing this, to open up to local families who probably wouldn't usually come in, even though we offer good deals for local families and wonder why they don't take it up. This really is an unknown and I'm so glad mum is there as we're setting up a counter inside our restaurant, as she's done this sort of thing before for Rotary. It occurs to me during this faffing around that we ought to do it for a local cause, who I've just found out are running the Santa's grotto next door. So we've set it up as pay-as-much-as-you-wish and wait to see what happens. I'm so surprised when people do come in and put handsomely into the kitty (and also annoyed at the people who just want to use the toilet of course – so I start demanding 50p for the kitty for that too!) I'm worried that we should have asked the charity first. Anyway the feedback on the festive treats is so good, we've decided to run pop-ups on the four Saturdays up to Christmas to keep it going (and give mum lots of extra baking to do). It sort of makes sense, as someone's here getting ready for the evening anyway, though I'm not sure when we're going to get our own Christmas ready. But it is lovely to see new faces coming in and having a bit of a craic.

conversations were recorded. The children were not directly engaged, other than in discussing highs and lows of the business in selecting moments for the vignettes, and never recorded. As with any other research, the data are anonymized (most of which are mine and will be identifiable given the nature of publishing) and will be destroyed at the end of the research.

Doing business in the right way for the context

Vignette 1: Poshville Wedding

This is one of many wedding parties that Sam and I are catering at. Sam set off earlier with the food van and I'm following after work. I'm actually grateful, weirdly, of the time to think on the way there. We might be having to travel halfway across the county and it will be midnight at least before we're back–but it's so stunning, so beautiful and this really is a privilege in a way. It reminds me of things we used to do out and about with the girls and I miss that. I have to take some time off to do stuff with them before they're too old to want to. The pre-party's set next to the family's house very deep up a valley, which is particularly breathtaking and the weather's actually lovely for once (we're used to turning up at these things in wind and rain . . .). I was begrudging about setting off tonight (I think Sam enjoys these things more than I do) but the money's good and now we're here and focussing on the food it's fine. I'm finding the guests a bit standoffish but they seem to love the food. Near the end, the bride's parents come over and we chat about the business, where we're based and so on. The father's posh accent grates on me. He comments, 'you can't get too many visitors *there*, do you?' which annoys me for some reason. So I set him straight (mentioning of course that I'm an academic doing research there, as I do when I feel I need to). I wonder on my way back if it that was very professional of me. On the long, tired drive home with the left-over food and my voice recorder, I rant on about the whole thing and my mixed feelings about why we do this–but happy to be munching on something.

   Discussing this seemingly uneventful event later, we talk about this as a 'Robin Hood' moment. Sam argued why not if 'they want to pay twelve hundred quid for us to come and cook basic food, 'it's money for nothing really'. He suggests that it 'lets us do what we do here' (referring to sensible pricing in our restaurant, catering for local events supporting local causes, deals for local families etc). I agree that the mobile food business becomes a 'kind of a vehicle for using the power we have to subsidize what we do' back home. It is me who likens this to Robin Hood, as we bring in money from the wealthier to redistribute in our local economy and fund our activities ('we take from over here,

and we give to over there'). Dan corrects this Robin Hood characterization, as 'we're not literally giving to the poor, you don't mean that'. No I don't.

But listening back to my diary entries, I am struck by how protective I am about our community, which none of us originates from, and also aware of the relative prosperity of others. As well as begrudging being away from the family on yet another Friday night after working away in the week, I seem resentful of our customers I should value ('to think I've given up my night to look after, to feed the wealthy, the landowners!'). I mimic the posh in a ridiculous voice (ironic since my own girls, born and bred locally, laugh at my own accent) and complain about 'burning up the planet to come and feed people with more money than sense'. I position us repeatedly as 'really just skivs', though of course this core to our business. Maybe I am jealous of their trappings, despite my academic status and social mobility, since I rant so much about their second homes and new 4 × 4s. But mostly it is clear to me how much I want to belong to 'over there' and proud to be doing something good for it, and how that perhaps affects my seeing.

Reflexive analysis

I feel this vignette highlights not only how we have come to use the mobile business to promote and leverage resources for the deprived context, but also the perpetual re-understanding and recalibration of our motivations and choices. Catering to exclusive weddings was not what we set out to do; it took on a life of its own and became a relatively big revenue generator. I am thankful now that we are more selective about weddings (we would have relished the booking in year one but now honouring bookings can feel hard). When we cater weddings now, I feel grateful for the Robin Hood mantra that came from our collective sensemaking – the activity is more than simply economic.

That we rationalize this as taking from the relatively rich to 'give' to the relatively poor is curious to me. If Polanyi's theory were applicable at the local level, our use of resources for redistributive processes to benefit our local context might position our entrepreneurial actions away from the instituted processes of market exchange (Polanyi [1944] 2001). Through a Polanyian lens on *householding*, we can see the economic decisions being made that affect and, in theory, benefit all members of our household. I had not thought of it like this until writing but the theorizing shows our intentions are to *provision*, 'storing' resources like the farmers in Berndt et al.'s example (2020) for mutual use. However, in this case it is not just for the household in terms of our family but to enable us to operate in our local economy with and for the community. I see now that flows and exchanges between the business *involve* the family but householding is largely transferred to a broader, more mutual collective notion of householding for the community.

These reflections 'place' our drive and rationale (I assess this now as being *to do business in the right way for where we are*). Other vignettes capture different feelings of belonging and happiness when we are at local events with the food van. At the charity Fun Day event (see A in Table 1), when I am 'feeling really part of something genuine, warm and lovely', I talk a lot about all the 'lovely people' and 'familiar faces'. Dan agrees that 'you realise that you know the people, they're not our friends as such, we don't know them personally, but we've known them over a long time'. This makes me consider the time it takes to develop the relationships in this context – or at least that is how we all feel it. The fact that 'you've been here and are here now, and even if you've gone and come back, it matters'.

Similarly, in our build up to last Christmas (E), we 'opened our doors to different bits of the community', firstly for the lights switch-on and later Saturday 'pop-ins'. I wanted to reach the 'local family', as people who we 'feel we're not really catering for'. I remember insisting 'it wasn't really about an enterprise. It was about a pop *in*'. Exhausted near Christmas, I ask 'why on earth' we wanted to do that extra work. Of course, there is a transactional aspect to this (becoming more visible, showcasing our produce, 'testing the water' for a possible future deli expansion to bring in more income: 'So there is that family impetus'). I insist though it was about connecting with the community, 'trying to do something to improve the place', but 'not riding rough shod' over the patch. We are all familiar with a couple of business owners in town who do that and watch them with intrigue from our side.

Other vignettes also reveal our sensibilities to the local community context. We talk of 'treading carefully' so that we can make gentle adaptations to the business, 'like trying out new interfaces with the community', as Dan helped me articulate. In the queue for the fishing boat (B), despite knowing the guys for years from a previous business, I felt intimidated and reflect that might be because of a sense of otherness and sensibilities to the long ties in the local community. These sensibilities are perhaps heightened because when we arrived decades ago there were few incomers. I am aware of 'treading carefully' to build the legitimacy over time. I know this is real from the research, as one local business owner actually said, 'as long as you talk to the community, they will support you'.

When the food van was vandalized (C), our reactions were revealingly different. Where I immediately jumped to worries about the community: 'The possibility that someone in the community would do that shook me to the core'., reflecting that 'it had never occurred to our business wouldn't be welcome!', Sam suspected it was drunk revellers (perhaps connected to someone with some grudge or reason to be jealous), while Dan had no doubts it was a neighbour exercising their muscles because the van was spoiling their view. In the end, we settled on Dan's version but now I can see how much my local sensibilities affect my perceptions of what could beaches in our aims to do 'good business' locally.

Admittedly, I am probably the one that cares about and is deeply conscious of the community – perhaps because of my passions for the place/community, which first caught my academic imagination and led to my PhD topic. I suspect my brother shares at least some of them. I *know* that Dan enjoys moments of standing in the community, but also that his perspective is sometimes more hedonic.

In writing this, I realize how proud I am that we 'walk the talk' and stand in our values, even if we are not getting rich doing so – and even if we have locked ourselves into a situation where we work increasingly hard to grow the business while the rewards seem to plateau. All these reflections capture our intentions to do 'good business' with and for our context (not just *in* it); they are us enacting a partly eudemonic ambition while also using this as reflexive sensemaking in practice, rationalizing at the time. And that sits well with me.

Fixing the family

Vignette 2: nearly losing Lilly

We're getting ready for a busy service and it turns out we forgot about our 16-year-old daughter (not streetwise, suffering with anxiety) who has set off on the bus to stay with a new friend from the college she started at two weeks ago. She rings from the bus panicking because her phone's dying. She has no cash on her apparently and she doesn't know exactly where she's meeting this friend. Dan and I carry on working until it dawns on me that she couldn't get home even if she had the money. It's now dark and the rural buses will be stopping fairly soon and anyway, we don't know where she is. I find a number for a friend's parent in the area and Dan sets off in the car to find her. I carry on cooking but suddenly it strikes me that she might not be there. Trying to juggle my phone and kitchen utensils, I find a number for the county police (eventually) who start a search of the area. As time unfolds – quickly and slowly at the same time – it becomes clear that none of her friends, Dan (now driving around the area 20 miles away), nor police can find her. I feel a complete, overwhelming wrench 'like through a vortex' from a world of focus on the customer into my role as a parent. Somehow one of her younger sisters is suddenly next to me helping to cook under scrambled instructions from Sam and me, while I'm in intermittent conversation with the police on the phone. It turns out that Lilly did in fact get off in the wrong place, long before her destination, and spends a terrified few hours walking around until she eventually she finds a McDonalds to charge her phone and call us. So of course, everything turns out fine. But the policeman who comes to do the follow-up visit later that night says reporting her missing was the right thing to do, 'things don't always turn out well'.

Reflecting on this visceral moment together, Dan and I admit 'We had completely forgotten' about our potentially vulnerable daughter. I am terrified at how long into service it took before we

got 'uncomfortable' enough to take steps away from the business. We (Sam included) agree that 'we've all learned a massive lesson from that'. Dan still gets a bit annoyed when I go on the 'very bitter feelings' I have around how 'the kids being left completely on their own for hours and hours', 'dragging themselves up' and 'not even being fed properly'. He usually says, 'they're teenagers and don't want to spend time with you anyway'. Yes, but they weren't back when we started this. And they're the ones who shame me when they complain, 'There's NEVER any laundry done' and 'there's literally never any food in to *actually eat*'.

In my diary, I reflect that 'This was the poignant moment, when you realize the business has taken too much from the family'. Reflecting back still evokes visceral pains from the realization that in the moment 'I/we probably care more about the business than we do about ourselves and our family'. I do take strength from the fact that, as the policeman said, we eventually 'did the right thing'. Just in time. And family intactness was restored.

Reflexive analysis

I feel this vignette exposes the dislocation we cause through our focus on the business in its start-up phase, as our family goes adrift. Contrary to my ideal notions of the family as security and certainty ('all I ever wanted for my kids was a nice home they could bring anyone into'), the family too often is the focus for feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

I imagine like many busy families in business, we seem unable to create time together. I am ashamed to become 'one of those families that never does anything together'. The very immediacy of the business stands out (in the Lilly episode, it was clear to me that 'the business was consuming every minute'). Our complicity in this stands out in the vandalism moment (C): 'We could've resigned for the day, and finally had day at home with the girls. But we fought on instead' and made it to the venue. I think anyone aware of the ephemerality of family would lament the loss of time together and wonder why I refuse to take action while there is time.

My guilt echoes in other vignettes. In the fish queue (B), I am so proud in the moment: 'This is what it's all about! Genuinely using local produce where we can because it matters, particularly in a place like this'. Yet, in the background, of course I am sad to be missing the twins' birthday the following day, as they have gone to visit their other grandmother and I have stayed to organize our special seafood event. In my breaking down episode (D), I selfishly scream my injustice, 'No-one should be expected to work like this!', while everyone else knows the routine and retreats into the corners of the house. Why I do this is unclear, when I know it is my own fault and anyway futile.

I, especially, idealize the family enterprise as itself a strategy to spend time together. I feel proud looking at the girls working with their grandmother at the Fun Day (A): 'Somehow in front of us was the apparition of a plan – everyone working together and pulling together, in and with the community, and everyone enjoying it'. It felt like taking a mental snapshot of success for future eventualities. We are of course aware of the delusion, as Dan admits the girls engage 'reluctantly most of the time' and the grandmother does not need or probably really want to go into business. When Dan reassures me that this is 'just for now' and 'give them time', I find myself wanting to believe in the ideal.

I find this ironic and frustrating, as the drive to set up the enterprise started from three generations sitting down together when the lockdowns lifted and slowly hatching an idea. I have often heard Sam telling people that 'this was something we'd all wanted to do for ages', the result of shared dreams and sense of the place's potential. At source, the business has always been rooted in a self-sufficiency imperative that is central to Polanyian householding.

We also idealize the family enterprise as itself an attempt at stabilizing life (Polanyi [1944] 2001) in our deprived context with all its economic constraints. It is our response to create a living locally following Sam's redundancy during Covid and Dan's fatigue with his small building business. Moreover, it is one way we can hope to support the children, in a way that our own income could not. 'Even as an academic how do I pay for university? I have no idea. No idea how we do that. How do we pay for our own retirement? No idea. I have no idea what lies ahead for us even though we've

all worked all our life, you know who has what pension?' ('I don't know' – Dan). I still see our family-run start-up as my 'faith and hope bundled up' for the future; it is our route out of a precarious situation, in which I have no disposable income despite working dual jobs (even though I know that entrepreneurship often worsens financial and social exclusion (Southern, 2011)).

I am again aware of the self-delusions. In practice, we see the breaking down of Polanyian householding. I am ashamed every day at the disinvestment in the house(hold). I reflect to Sam, 'That's our deprivation and it's hidden. We hide that from the world'; 'We live in here right in the middle, right on a shitty street next to Greggs'. I am surprised at our lack of self-efficacy in doing householding. We chose to live in what is considered a rundown town centre. I do feel proud that we as a family are so invested in the town (although really, we have little choice, as our escalating mortgage traps us in situ in a house we have let run down around us over the years). But financial and time constraints mean we fail to tackle worsening conditions despite our frequent plans. I am also frustrated at our complicit exploitation of social relations within the family household, albeit for a collective and mutual interest. Dan points out '*We're* struggling. The business isn't'. Of course, we recognize the typical (and reparable) issue, that we don't pay ourselves properly.

More hopefully, though, the analysis makes me appreciate our 'just-in time' manoeuvrings to repair, pull back in and re-anchor the family – in a Polanyian sense, how we use (emergency) provisioning to cater for the needs of the household. We are glad of 'just-in-time time together', the restorative time 'clawed back' wherever we can: at football matches, for family films on New Year's Day when we decide to close after all. Repairs are also made inside the business ('when the girls ever finally come and help' or dragging them along on business errands). We also react 'just in time' to what Sam calls 'the masses of squeaky bum [difficult] times' we face, when financially the business 'nearly didn't make it'. I reassure myself 'there's always enough, there's just-in-time enough to get their football kits sent'; 'there's just-in-time getting funds into their school dinner account, getting birthday presents sorted. Christmas will happen just in time too'. Dan rationalizes this as 'conjuring things out of thin air'. In reflecting, I can see that this is perhaps an entrepreneurial strength and part of the tactics we use to navigate our potential precarity and deprivation: just-in-time. As the business is growing quite well now, I see that we are actually achieving our goals and Dan is right; 'it just takes time'.

Discussion: returning to Polanyi

Householding: subordinating family for entrepreneurial efforts

As noted, Polanyi's theory on householding is not often applied empirically to explain the micro-processes of entrepreneurial organizations interacting with economy and society (Nowak and Raffaelli 2022). I use it here as a metaphor to understand how processes aimed at self-sufficiency and allocations operate within the family unit (Polanyi [1944] 2001).

Reciprocal and market exchange interactions occur within the household. We draw on household resources to support our venture, in the blurred boundaries between family and business. Financial subsidy rarely flows from the household into our business though, as might often be the case. Instead, flows are more likely to be in human experiences e.g. time, labour and relationships. Householding relationships are redistributive (Schaniel and Neale 2000) with flows between the generations and internal redistribution. We compensate for each other in our everyday practices (in the cooking, in the management of the business/customers, when ill, when busy, when expecting helpers who fail to turn up). While reciprocal and market exchange interactions do occur within the household, they mainly flow into and aid the family business. In itself, this partly explains some of our family's precarity.

I am ashamed of the extent to which the instituted processes of householding have started to fail. At a basic level of family, we are seen routinely not providing for the wants of our group members (Polanyi [1944] 2001) because of the immediate demands of the business. We are guilty of unpaid work, which is central to our accepted self-exploitation and precariousness (Baines, Wheelock, and Oughton 2011). Our mother's investment (financial and labour) and householding (holidays and

proxy parenting) is somehow written out of my analysis. Yet she provides desserts (her economic contribution, themselves tied in with household as 'old family favourites') when we forget to even ask her for them. I wonder where we all were when she had eye operations and took herself by train or bus to the hospital 30 miles away.

This exacerbates our sense of precarity and precariousness of family existence (Ettlinger 2007). That precariousness is also experienced in economic aspects of householding, where remittances fail to flow back into the household, repaired by managing the 'squeaky bum' times and emergency provisioning to ensure no permanent breach to the household.

There are of course degrees of informal remittances and production for our own use within our family – we take from the tips, we use the car fuel and other goods bought for the business. We use the business premises for family entertaining. We consume the left-over produce and feed the children (and friends) just-in-time, mid service. Therefore, elements of this speak to a Polanyian sense of householding (Polanyi [1944] 2001). However, food is only remitted 'as long there's some left' or surplus to what our customers want. Therefore, householding in the sense of provisioning is subject to logics of market exchange. Where householding is seen to work, the flows and remittances are slow to come back into the family household itself.

As my academic self looks critically through this theoretical application at my shortcomings in the real world, I hope that it is just in this start-up phase that processes of householding remain poor. I acknowledge that the interactions between householding and redistributive processes of community seem weak, ironically since Polanyi conflated these two forms of organizing (Peck 2013). Looked at from the perspective of household as one of the instituted processes provisioning society, little is done (through economic or non-market activities) to provision our household, until repair is needed. The answer must rest in our own self-efficacy, a key factor of entrepreneurship (Chen, Gene Greene, and Crick 1998).

Embedding the business into the local community

I feel relief at least that the reason for the collapse of householding for our family is not because of business 'as usual' in the sense of hedonic economic value creation, rather because of the more eudemonic imperative to our entrepreneuring. Using Polanyian thinking as metaphor, I see the business embedding nicely into society (the local community); it operates not solely out of self-interest but redistribution and reciprocity to navigate the deficits of market, out of sense of social responsibility (Vivek, Jamali, and Spence 2018). Redistribution is central in what we rationalize as 'Robin Hood style' manoeuvres, exploiting our mobility through the mobile business to leverage for the local economy.

'Trying on' interactions with the community carries a clear reciprocal imperative, which acknowledges differences within our community and our desire to cater to them. This explains theoretically how we seek to redistribute resources leveraged through the food van and how, by treading carefully and respecting time-aged relationships, we seek legitimacy within this historical and cultural context to interact with community. This leads to reciprocal interactions, albeit with an 'edge', as there is a dark side to any community. The food van is key to our business model being able to operate anywhere. Whatever else we 'try on' locally, we can fall back on that. That allows us to explore avenues, which allow us to continue operating here and do 'good business'. In this way, I see us (metaphorically) seeking to embed our business within and serving society. In Polanyian theory (Nowak 2018; Polanyi 1957), this is the right order of things; tensions occur if, conversely, society comes to serve the market, as generally business is perceived to do.

However, in the process of the business embedding effectively into society, using the metaphor of Polanyian *disembeddedness* (Polanyi [1944] 2001), the family becomes detached from society and at risk of embedding into the economy, to which it feels increasingly subordinated. In the process of ensuring the business services society, I suggest our family has inadvertently come to serve the business. Consequently, it feels as though the family becomes disembedded from society. Of course, theoretical rationalizing is not needed, as this stems from living experience in practice.

Theorising our just-in-time response to the collapse of householding

Despite my misgivings, theorizing has at least helped to explain and appreciate the manoeuvres we use to keep re-embedding the family. I recognize some of the resilient and resourceful practices that I would hope to instil in my own children and which seem so critical for entrepreneuring in the everyday. The way we idealize family enterprise shows a desire at least to entrepreneur 'house-holdingly'. By finding just-in-time time together – our Sunday dinners on a Monday when we can (our 'Smundays') – or just-in-time funds and doing just-in-time repairs or just-in-time laundry, I see our efforts to control the dislocation caused by investing too much into the business.

In Polanyian thinking, interactions are dynamic and everchanging, and relationships are expected to shift over time. Here Polanyi's double movement – a self-protecting mechanism that re-embeds the market within society when it becomes too imbalanced – can be seen operating at the household level. The manoeuvres we use can be understood as just-in-time reactions to re-embed the family before it is stretched beyond its possible 'give'. It is perhaps these constant rebalancing acts that allow us as a human collective to continue trying to navigate the deprived context. Personally, I admit to longing for some recognition of those Herculean efforts we are making, while we try to stabilize life for ourselves and the local community through our entrepreneurial actions. Perhaps this is because I am thinking differently about what we are doing as an academic-entrepreneur.

Final points

Theoretically, this Polanyian underpinning helps understand embeddedness in deprived contexts differently by focusing on entangled, beyond-economic interactions we engage in while entrepreneuring. It helps me to make sense of why we permit the exploitation of family 'give' in the interest of our start-up business. It shows how I redraw the boundaries of householding to understand how a business like ours becomes part of a collective entrepreneurial effort locally, combining and circulating resources among themselves – in the historical absence of either state or market success in addressing depletion and deprivation. It illuminates the time needed to develop the manoeuvrings to navigate our way entrepreneurially *because* the setting does not ostensibly make sense for business that interacts purely with economic processes and market-based exchanges. The journey itself (Al-Dajani et al. 2023) can be understood as a more contextualized process of becoming and growing in, with and for the community. It shows that in processes of embedding, and disembedding, the family entrepreneuring might need constant re-embedding and active recalibration.

Conclusions

There is nothing singular in our entrepreneurial experience as everyday entrepreneurs, nor in our business or context. They are, however, my experiences in my context. I am still moved when I revisit my recordings about family. Simultaneously, I am conscious of the irony of locking myself in a room for a whole weekend to revise a paper, leaving the business and household to others. I see the tensions and dislocations amplifying around us as the business grows, we work harder and harder, and the children near the end of their education. I do not claim to develop any radical insights into entrepreneurship from this exploration. I do, though, claim a relatively rare perspective on experience, which was the aim: to explore how it feels to entrepreneur as a family and how we navigate our deprived context entrepreneurially.

The paper demonstrates the imperfect analysis that reflects our messy experiences and sensemakings, using theoretical understanding of entrepreneuring through everyday interactions with processes of society and economy. It contributes by taking a Polanyian lens of householding (Polanyi [1944] 2001) to understand the manoeuvrings a family uses to navigate deprivation and highlight the slow processes of (dis)embedding while entrepreneuring in deprived contexts. It also extends understanding of a family entrepreneuring on the margins by showing a more contextualized process of becoming

and growing in the community and the family in need of constant recalibration. It should be noted that householding cannot be used to gauge family or social embeddedness in a local economy as such – but it can reveal the interactions and flows between households and businesses.

Methodologically, the paper demonstrates how entrepreneuring and poverty at the margins can be researched autoethnographically, to elicit how living experience *feels*, in time and in context. Welter and Baker (2021) suggest that approaches are needed to build theories that can capture the real world of entrepreneuring in time and place. Researching everyday entrepreneurship in contexts of poverty or deprivation requires ways of comprehending how marginal places are shaped by and shape entrepreneuring. This is particularly in poorer communities, where they experience decline at the same time as the image of decline, which can lock into collective imaginations to become part of a cumulative cycle (Southern 2011). Our experience of entrepreneuring locking us in deprivation – temporarily we trust, as the family, business, time and context evolve – invites a more critical view of entrepreneurship that demands further attention.

Beyond the typical limitations of qualitative research, this is necessarily a highly subjective exercise. In embracing the idea that researchers need to live and feel entrepreneurship before they can understand it (Johannisson 2018), autoethnography naturally limits wider sensemaking, While the experiences and reflections in this paper are partly collective, insofar as they involve family members, the analysis is largely from me. It is likely that reflecting on our experiences from that relatively singular perspective as academic-entrepreneur produces a singular version. Combining autoethnographic work with ethnography would allow more rigorous, multisided reflection and analysis (Al-Dajani et al. 2023).

A significant limitation noted earlier is that our experiences do not speak to those for whom entrepreneuring is the only way to navigate deprivation. They do, however, show how everyday entrepreneurs might experience precarity in particular ways, especially where previous business ventures come into play. In the start-up phase, the choices we make to entrepreneur *despite* other employment options available seem paradoxical; we are aware of the potential precarity but act now in faith that our efforts will come good in future. I *feel* locked in the entrepreneurial choices we have made yet make them willingly. This paradox could apply to everyday entrepreneuring anywhere but seems more intriguing when the constrained poverty context is factored in. We might at least feel challenged to rethink assumptions about the nature of income and who experiences precarity.

While the data are presented as authentically as possible within the conventional structure of a journal article, much of the rich qualitative analysis that is part of an otherwise honest account is redacted unintentionally in refining the paper for publication. There are scholars showing the way in 'writing differently' (Gilmore et al. 2019; Radu-Lefebvre and Hytti 2022) and this is a challenge for research seeking to understand lived experiences of entrepreneuring differently.

Finally, a thought on ethics: While full ethical clearance was obtained, perhaps the most important consideration is not the research but rather how I/we involve myself/ourselves and others in the business. Embroiling one's family in a start-up, however well intended (and, further, embroiling them in research) is morally tricky. What we have experienced cannot be undone but perhaps reflexive analysis will enable us to navigate our context entrepreneurially better together in future.

Disclosure statement

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