

# **How do Disabled People form Entrepreneurial Identity?**

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## Abstract

This study examines how disabled people become entrepreneurs, using the concept of ‘entrepreneurial identity’ as a theoretical lens for explaining the effects of disability on venture creation. The original theoretical contribution is a novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, one that applies to *all* entrepreneurs whilst including the experiences of disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions. Drawing on a critical realist philosophy, and a stratified, emergent ontology, entrepreneurial identity is defined as a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace. Entrepreneurial identity, as a causal power, is a tendency that may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised and realised unperceived. Although most people have the potential to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, exercise that power because of other countervailing powers – personal, material and social. Theorising identity as a causal power can account for both stability and change in identity formation, in contrast to studies that define entrepreneurial identity in terms of fixed characteristics determining behaviour, or as a dynamic process encompassing narrative performances. The empirical material comprises entrepreneur and stakeholder interview data, online visual data and shadowing field notes. The analysis reveals that the emergence of entrepreneurial identity presupposes three lower-level personal powers that must be exercised simultaneously: (1) the power to conceive of a new venture idea; (2) the power to commit to venture creation; and (3) the power to acquire new venture legitimacy. Depending on circumstances, disability can both enable and constrain individual capacity to realise the three powers, with implications for venture creation. The findings highlight the role of human relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts *as well as* society in the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. This novel theoretical framework is more inclusive in terms of the multiplicity of mechanisms at different identity strata and levels of reality that it can examine whilst accommodating the alternative approaches.

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## Chapter 1

# Outline of the study

### 1.1 Purpose, context and some definitions

This thesis presents a qualitative study of new venture creation by disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions.<sup>1</sup> The purpose is to examine how disabled people become entrepreneurs, utilising the concept of ‘entrepreneurial identity’ as a theoretical lens for explaining the effects of disability on the venture creation process. The original contribution of the study is a novel critical realist conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, one that applies to *all* entrepreneurs whilst including the experiences of people with a range of impairments and health conditions. Disabled people are a largely under-represented group in the field of entrepreneurship and, particularly, in the entrepreneurial identity literature. The study makes an important empirical contribution to our understanding of disability effects on venture creation and management in the United Kingdom (UK).

In the UK context, there is increasing pressure on working age disabled people to move out of welfare support into paid work (Grover 2015). Entrepreneurship has been embraced by consecutive governments as a solution to unemployment, welfare dependency and poverty among disadvantaged groups (ODPM 2004a), including disabled people (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Fisher and Cruse 2004, ODPM 2004b, HM Government 2009). The research community, however, is more cautious in promoting entrepreneurship as a way of alleviating social exclusion (Callahan *et al.* 2002, Blackburn and Ram 2006, Kitching 2006). Considering the levels of low-paid self-employment associated with poverty, the financial rewards from entrepreneurship have been questioned (Carter 2011, Kitching 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Disabled people’ will sometimes be used as a shorter reference to both disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions to improve readability, while recognising that not all people with long-term conditions self-identify as disabled.

Since the introduction of austerity measures in 2010, there has been a gradual reduction of social security benefits for disabled people of working age. In 2015, for example, the government announced a plan to abolish the ‘Work-Related Activity Component’ of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – the benefit supporting disabled people out of work. From April 2017, new ESA claimants who are placed in the ‘Work-Related Activity Group’ (WRAG) are no longer eligible for the additional component worth £29.05 a week, aligning the rate of ESA for WRAG with the rate of Job Seeker’s Allowance – the main out of work benefit (Kennedy *et al.* 2017). This change was driven by the belief that it would further incentivise disabled people into paid work (Grover 2015). It is also estimated to save the Treasury £1.4 billion over four years (Butler 2016). For Grover, the change symbolises a major cultural shift. Disabled people assessed by the government as capable of work are essentially treated as unemployed – that is, as *equally* capable of work, rather than living with a condition that potentially constrains their access to employment.

Working age disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to become self-employed (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Pagán 2009, Meager and Higgins 2011). Yet, people with disabilities have been described as a ‘forgotten minority’ in entrepreneurship (Cooney 2008). While there is an emerging interest in disability entrepreneurship (Parker Harris *et al.* 2014, Renko *et al.* 2016), disabled people are under-researched in small business, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identity literature. There is a tendency, Cooney (2008) notes, to associate disability with welfare support, reinforcing the view that disabled people are not suitable for business. Similarly, venture creation has largely been neglected in disability studies where employment is perceived as a prime route into work. *Disability & Society* journal, for example, has only five articles published on self-employment or entrepreneurship at the time of writing (Bagheri and Abbariki 2016, Hwang and Roulstone 2015, Parker Harris *et al.* 2014, Pagán 2009, Pavey 2006).

Recognising the contested nature of ‘entrepreneurship’ and its distinctive features in relation to self-employment and small business ownership (Carland *et al.* 1984, Dale 2015), entrepreneurship is defined as *creation of a new venture that succeeds*

*in the marketplace*. A ‘new venture’ refers to a new combination of resources undertaken by a person or a group, and organised into a novel product offering with an aim to create value (Schumpeter 1934, Carland *et al.* 1984). A product might be a physical good or a service, hereafter referred to simply as ‘product’. There are, of course, variable meanings of ‘success’ and success could be short-lived given that venture creation is a highly dynamic activity. The subjective measure of success depends on the personal perception; each person will attach different meanings to success. The objective measure, for the purposes of this study, is the birth of a new firm or organisation which, following Reynolds and Miller (1992), could involve as little as personal commitment and initial sales.

## **1.2 Aims and research questions**

The aim is to investigate how disabled people in the UK become entrepreneurs, utilising new empirical data. The study draws upon a number of key concepts, including new venture ideas, entrepreneurial motivation and new venture legitimacy, but it does not provide a comprehensive review of the related bodies of literature. A short overview of disability and disability entrepreneurship studies is produced to explicate the key concepts and to draw connections with the new empirical material, however, the main theoretical contribution is situated within the ‘entrepreneurial identity’ literature. The study is guided by one core research question, and several subsidiary questions:

- How do disabled people form entrepreneurial identity?
  - What is disability?
  - What is entrepreneurial identity?
  - How does disability affect the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity, and under what circumstances?

A study of entrepreneurial identity involves questions about ‘who is’ and ‘how one becomes’ an entrepreneur. Gartner’s (1988) seminal paper entitled “*Who Is an Entrepreneur? Is the Wrong Question*” stimulated a debate (Carland *et al.* 1988) and a major shift in the focus from searching for the essence of an entrepreneur towards understanding the practice and process of entrepreneurship. The former will be referred to as the strong essentialist approach, characterised by the search

for individual characteristics that determine entrepreneurial behaviour. The latter will be described as the strong constructionist approach, manifest in studies that theorise entrepreneurial identity as a dynamic and fluid process. Although many contemporary studies lie moderately between the two, there is a lack of ontological and conceptual basis for theorising both ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, with consequences for our understanding of entrepreneurial agency, the process of entrepreneurship and the external enabling or constraining conditions. To address these issues, this study adopts a critical realist ontology of identity as a stratified and emergent personal power (Archer 2000, Bhaskar and Danermark 2006, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O’Mahoney 2014), rather than a fixed characteristic or a dynamic process. Theorising identity as an emergent power can account for both stability and change in identity formation. The key features of critical realist approach to identity and its benefits in relation to the alternative approaches are briefly outlined in what follows.

### **1.3 Entrepreneurial identity: research developments**

There has been a continuous effort within the field of entrepreneurship to explain entrepreneurial activities in terms of the individual, their context and the interaction between the two (Sarason *et al.* 2006, Dimov 2007, Mole and Mole 2010, Welter 2011). This study contributes to the debate by theorising these connections through the lens of ‘entrepreneurial identity’. Over the past few decades, the concept of entrepreneurial identity has grown in popularity as an alternative to the early personality traits theories. Entrepreneurial personality studies sought to identify individual characteristics, such as propensity to risk-taking, that determine entrepreneurial behaviour (Hornaday and Bunker 1970, Carland *et al.* 1984, Chen *et al.* 1998); for example, by trying to establish how entrepreneurs differ from small business owners (Carland *et al.* 1984). In contrast, contemporary studies informed by social constructionist approaches focus on how entrepreneurial identity is constructed, for instance, through narrative performances in social interaction (Down and Reveley 2004, Johansson 2004, Hytti 2005, Essers and Benschop 2007), rather than whether the constructions are a ‘true’ representation of reality (Karp 2006). There has been an important shift

towards theorising how one becomes an entrepreneur (Cohen and Musson 2000, Essers and Benschop 2007), rather than what generates becoming.

It will be argued that the two dominant entrepreneurial identity approaches are underpinned by several problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies in relation to how they theorise the nature and causality of entrepreneurial identity, and the mind-body as well as structure-agency relationships. A major assumption in the literature is that entrepreneurs are a homogeneous group in terms of their embodied properties, and therefore equally capable of starting and running a business (Kašperová and Kitching 2014).<sup>2</sup> With a few exceptions (Clarke 2007, Rouse 2008, 2009, Clarke 2011, Cornelissen *et al.* 2012, Kašperová and Kitching 2014, Rouse and Kitching 2014), most studies under-theorise the role of embodiment and treat entrepreneurs implicitly as *disembodied*. Although bodies are always present in entrepreneurs' interactions with researchers, they are rarely at the centre of investigation. Entrepreneurs are typically assumed to be able-bodied, as opposed to *differently-abled* agents. Disabled people have largely been invisible in the entrepreneurial identity literature as a result (Kašperová and Kitching 2014).

These problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies limit our understanding of an entrepreneurial agent, the process of entrepreneurship, and the external enabling and constraining conditions. Neither of the two approaches can adequately account for disabled entrepreneurs' material realities of impairment effects without reducing entrepreneurial identity to an impaired body, to how entrepreneurs talk about their particular impairments, or to discourses of the impaired body. Reductionism is a claim that the effects of some higher-level power or mechanism, for example social identity, can be explained in terms of a summation of the effects of lower-level mechanisms (Elder-Vass 2010), for example the sense of self or impairment. In order to adequately explain events, such as venture creation, researchers must analyse causal powers and mechanisms at these different levels as well as the relationships between them.

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<sup>2</sup> This article, based on the initial review of the entrepreneurial identity literature, was co-authored with my second supervisor and published in advance of examination. A copy of the article is provided in Appendix 1.1.

The main contribution of this study is a novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as an emergent *personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace*. Emergence is the appearance of a new causal property (Porpora 2015) or something qualitatively new emergent from a lower-level (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Entrepreneurial identity will be theorised as a causal power emergent from three lower-level personal capacities: (1) the power to conceive of a new venture idea; (2) the power to commit to venture creation; and (3) the power to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders. Entrepreneurial identity cannot emerge without agents exercising and realising *all* three lower-level powers simultaneously. This is the structure and the mechanism of entrepreneurial identity. Through downwards causation (Elder-Vass 2010), entrepreneurial identity can react back on its lower-level parts, so that once an entrepreneurial identity is realised, agents may become more, or less, innovative, committed or legitimate.

This novel conceptualisation draws primarily on a critical realist philosophy (Sayer 1992, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008, Elder-Vass 2010, 2012), a stratified, emergent ontology of personhood and identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), the embodiment literature (Burkitt 1999, Shilling 2003, Crossley 2006), and impression management, stigma and legitimacy theories (Goffman, 1959, 1963, Suchman 1995, Clair *et al.* 2005, De Clercq and Voronov 2009, Clarke 2011). The new conceptual framework will be applied to the empirical material, comprising entrepreneur and stakeholder interviews, shadowing field notes and online visual data, to illustrate the effects of disability on the emergence of entrepreneurial identity.

Each person possesses embodied properties that shape our action in the world (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010). Personal properties can be both powers and liabilities, enabling us to flourish or causing us suffering (Sayer 1992, 2011). Particular impairments and health conditions are one example of personal properties that can be powers as well as liabilities, depending on circumstances. Some personal properties are material, such as the body, while others do not have

the same material qualities, for example self-consciousness or curiosity, although they exert material influence.

Causal powers, from a critical realist viewpoint, may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised or realised unperceived (Bhaskar 2008). As a particular kind of causal power, entrepreneurial identity is a tendency or a potentiality that may or may not be realised because of other countervailing powers – personal, material or social – that enable or constrain, encourage or discourage, action. Although most people have the potential to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, to exercise that power. Theorising entrepreneurial identity as a *potential power* is very different from the two dominant identity approaches that define it in terms of fixed and stable characteristics *determining* behaviour, or as a dynamic and fluid *process*. Entrepreneurial identity, as an emergent personal power, is dynamic only up to a point.

Critical realist philosophy makes an ontological claim that the world exists independently of any individual perception or knowledge of it (Sayer 1992, Archer 1995, Bhaskar 2008). Social objects, such as entrepreneurial identity, therefore exist regardless of, and prior to, their identification and conceptualisation by researchers. Bhaskar's depth stratification of the world is an attack on the positivist paradigm associated with empiricism whereby the world is believed to consist of human experiences and constant conjunction of atomistic events (2008: xiv). For Bhaskar, the world consists of three domains: the empirical (experiences), the actual (experiences and events that happen regardless of whether observed or not) and the real (comprising all – experiences, events and the underlying causes and mechanisms that generate those experiences and events). Depth ontology allows for entrepreneurial identity to be theorised as an underlying causal power that may, or may not, be narratively expressed, or conceptualised by researchers, but still exert influence. Entrepreneurial identity is a *real* causal power that generates particular behaviours and narrative practices, rather than the behaviour or practice itself.

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is organised into nine chapters. In setting the scene, chapter 2 outlines



the dominant theoretical perspectives on disability and highlights the advantages of adopting a critical realist standpoint. It then describes the demographic, economic and historical policy context that has influenced the conditions under which disabled people in the UK work and enter self-employment. Finally, it offers an overview of the extant disability entrepreneurship literature, identifying important gaps that can be rectified by adopting the lens of entrepreneurial identity in researching disabled entrepreneurs. Chapter 3 critically reviews and contrasts the key features of the main theoretical perspectives on entrepreneurial identity – strong essentialism, strong social constructionism and the psycho-social approach. The review identifies several problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies that render disabled people largely invisible in the literature and limit our understanding of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. Chapter 4 develops a novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as a *personal power*, rather than a fixed characteristic determining behaviour, or a narrative practice. Utilising a stratified and emergent ontology of identity, the new conceptualisation applies to *all* entrepreneurs while incorporating disabled entrepreneurs’ experiences. This is the main theoretical contribution. The methodological approach is described in chapter 5. The new conceptual framework is then applied to the empirical material in the three chapters that follow. It is illustrated how disabled people form entrepreneurial identity by exercising the power to conceive of a new venture idea (chapter 6), the power to commit to venture creation (chapter 7), and the power to acquire legitimacy (chapter 8). Chapter 9 provides a concluding summary of the key findings and theoretical implications.

## Chapter 2

# Disability, work, self-employment and entrepreneurship

### 2.1 Introduction

The lives of working age disabled people in the UK have been shaped by major demographic, economic, political and historical policy changes over the past few decades. These changes have created enabling as well as constraining conditions for disabled peoples' capacity to participate in economic life and to enter self-employment. The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the remainder of the thesis by discussing what is already known about disability and its effects on work, self-employment and entrepreneurship. The chapter has three objectives: first, to outline the key theoretical perspectives on disability and position this study in the critical realist tradition; second, to describe the conditions under which disabled people enter self-employment; and third, to provide a critical review of research on disability in entrepreneurship, small business management and self-employment literature.

Disability, as a particular kind of emergent identity, involves the interplay of impairment, structural enablements / constraints and socio-cultural elaboration over time (Williams 1999: 813). Using the concept of entrepreneurial identity was therefore well-suited for the purposes of examining how disabled people become entrepreneurs. Disability, however, is largely absent from studies of entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial identity in particular. This chapter will argue that researching disabled entrepreneurs through the analytical lens of identity can provide novel insights to our understanding of disability effects on venture creation.

The chapter commences by setting out the legal definition of disability and the dominant perspectives on disability in social theory. The second part describes how the socio-economic context has shaped the conditions under which disabled

people enter work and self-employment. The third part offers an overview of disability entrepreneurship literature, highlighting the gaps and limitations of existing studies. The concluding section summarises the key arguments of the chapter and provides a rationale for applying entrepreneurial identity – defined as a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace – as a theoretical lens for examining the effects of disability on entrepreneurship.

## 2.2 Models of disability

The meaning of disability varies across social-cultural contexts, with consequences for the lives and legal rights of people categorised as disabled. The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) defines 'disabilities' as an umbrella term referring to impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.<sup>3</sup> Disability, following the ICF, is a complex phenomenon involving interaction between a person's body and the society in which they live. In the UK, one is considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if they have a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. It is the *effect* of impairment that determines whether a person is considered disabled – that is, any disagreements about whether a person is disabled would be about whether the impairment effects are substantial and long-term (ODI 2010).<sup>4</sup> Although the definition requires that the effects experienced by a person must arise from a physical or mental impairment, it is not necessary for the cause of impairment to be established. The focus on *effects* is justified because it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of conditions that qualify as impairments, for the purposes of the Act. Medical knowledge constantly advances and so any attempt to generate such a list would in due course become out-of-date.

The Act, nevertheless, recognises that a disability can arise from a wide range of impairments which can be:

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<sup>3</sup> 'An *impairment* is a problem in body function or structure; an *activity limitation* is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; and a *participation restriction* is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.' See more at: <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this is a person with severe disfigurement (ODI 2010).

- sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing;
- impairments with fluctuating or recurring effects such as rheumatoid arthritis, myalgic encephalitis, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, depression and epilepsy;
- progressive, such as motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy, and forms of dementia;
- auto-immune conditions such as systemic lupus erythematosus;
- organ specific, including respiratory conditions, such as asthma, and cardiovascular diseases, including thrombosis, stroke and heart disease;
- developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia and dyspraxia;
- learning disabilities;
- mental health conditions with symptoms such as anxiety, low mood, panic attacks, phobias, or unshared perceptions; eating disorders; bipolar affective disorders; obsessive compulsive disorders; personality disorders; post traumatic stress disorder, and some self-harming behaviour;
- mental illnesses, such as depression and schizophrenia;
- produced by injury to the body, including to the brain.

In social theory and disability studies, a number of perspectives or models of disability can be distinguished. The forthcoming paragraphs briefly outline and compare four disability models, and the case is made for adopting the critical realist approach to disability.

The conception of impairment as a problem in the structure or functioning of the body originates in the medical profession. Disability, from the viewpoint of *medical model*, is a problem located in a person; it is either synonymous with impairment or with restrictions of activity caused by impairment (Thomas 2004). The *social model* of disability, pioneered by Oliver (1990), rejects the medical view and, by contrast, emphasises that people with impairments are disabled by societal attitudes, institutions and environmental barriers. It distinguishes ‘impairment’ as a limitation of the mind and body from ‘disability’ perceived as social exclusion (Shakespeare 2006). The *cultural model* emphasises the variable

meaning of disability across cultures (Ingstad and Reynolds Whyte 1995). People with a specific impairment may be defined as disabled in some places, or at certain times, but not in others. Finally, from the critical realist standpoint, disability has been conceptualised as a *necessarily laminated system* (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006). That is – *all* physical, biological, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic, cultural and normative kinds of mechanisms, types of context and characteristic effects are essential to a robust understanding of disability.

Critical realism is ontologically least restrictive in terms of causally relevant levels of reality and metatheoretical perspectives that it can include and accommodate to explain disability (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006). Each of the alternative models – medical, social and cultural – is reductionist and partial because it emphasises just one set of mechanisms in the formation and reproduction of disabilities. The medical model focuses on mechanisms at the biological level, reducing the experience of disability to the physical limitation of the body. At the same time, the physical body is assumed to have no social meaning and is “separate from the self” (Hughes 2002: 67). The social model highlights socio-economic mechanisms that generate events such as access barriers. While it reveals discriminatory social attitudes faced by disabled people, it neglects the lived experience of impairment (Shakespeare 2006, 2017) and creates a *disembodied* notion of disability (Hughes and Patersen 1997). Finally, the cultural model reduces disability simply to a linguistic category or a construct with variable socio-cultural meaning. Like the social model of disability, the cultural model underplays the materiality and heterogeneity of the impaired body and its effects on individual capacities independently of particular socio-cultural contexts.

There are a number of ways in which critical realism can help bridge the impairment-disability divide to address the reductionist tendencies in disability theory (Williams 1999). First, the biological body must be brought ‘back in’. The body – impaired or otherwise – should not be reduced to what is known about it but treated as a real entity with its own particular properties, both powers and liabilities, capable of producing real effects, regardless of what we call it or how we observe it. Second, disability is best conceptualised as “an *emergent* property,

located, temporally speaking, in terms of the *interplay* between the biological reality of *physiological impairment, structural conditioning* (i.e. *enablements/constraints*), and *socio-cultural interaction/elaboration* (1999: italics in original). Lastly, diversity and difference, and therefore identities, are rooted in real impaired bodies. Identities are embodied and this places certain limits on the human capacity to construct and reconstruct identities in socio-cultural interaction (Williams 1999). Once the limitation of *strong* tendencies within socially constructed notion of identity is recognised (Elder-Vass 2012), we can begin to theorise personhood and identity in terms of embodied relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts as well as society (Archer 2000).

To ‘bring the body back in’, Hughes and Patersen (1997) call for the development of a sociology of impairment. Impairment may be present in research practice and in the narratives which reflect it, but it remains under-theorised in studies of disability. Impairment is not only a physical property of the body unrelated to social context, nor is disability simply a social construct unrelated to the physical body (Hughes 2002). Treating impairment as a social phenomenon is to recognise that impaired bodies have a history and are culturally defined *as well as* physically constituted. This places the body at the centre of analyses of culture, self and experience (Paterson and Hughes 1999). Impairment, as a socially produced phenomenon, can be observed, for example, in the effects of war or industrial accidents on the body (Thomas 2004).

Individual capacities to act in the world and to form social identities, such as entrepreneurial identity, may be influenced by multiple dimensions of impairment: by origin, type, severity, duration, and by whether impairments are a stable, long-term condition, degenerative or impose fluctuating or recurring restrictions on activity (Boyd 2012). Disabled people are a heterogeneous group in terms of various personal properties, including impairment, sex, ethnicity and skills, *as well as* socio-economic circumstances that shape their actions and experiences; for example, access to education and income level.

To provide a robust understanding of disability, researchers can do *both*, recognise that disability *is* socially constructed and produced through language, processes of

classification, and events such as industrial accidents, *and* acknowledge that the body, impaired or otherwise, has real material effects (Thomas 2004), regardless of our knowledge of the effects and the socio-cultural context we live in. A critical realist approach to disability can provide the most inclusive and the least restrictive framework for researching and theorising the causal effects and mechanisms of disability at multiple levels, including physiological, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic and cultural (Williams 1999, Bhaskar and Danermark 2006, Rhodes *et al.* 2008).

Finally, there has been a call to abandon the binary division of ‘disabled’ and ‘non-disabled’ (Turner 2001, OECD 2014). Disability is often associated with stigma (Goffman 1963) and many people with long-term impairments and health conditions do not self-identify as disabled. Challenging the hegemony of ‘normal’, it has been argued that ‘able-bodiedness’ is a temporary status since most people experience impairment at some point in their lives (Turner 2001). Impairment is not a fixed characteristic of a person – it can be temporary, relatively stable or progressive over time as human bodies change through diet, exercise, medical intervention and the process of ageing – but it does affect personal capacities to act in the world and to form identities.

The notion of ‘normal’ or ‘able-bodied’ (like ‘disability’ or ‘impairment’) is of course culturally-defined and its meaning may vary across socio-cultural contexts. Yet, such concepts serve as necessary analytical categories without which words like ‘impaired’ would be meaningless when applied to human bodies or persons (C. Smith 2010: 45n). Hence, researchers should be cautious of adopting simple disabled / non-disabled binary, but bold in examining the effects of particular impairments and health conditions on identity formation.<sup>5</sup> There are fears that ‘impairment-specific identities’ could potentially undermine the shared political struggles of disabled people (Oliver 2013). But we *can* acquire deeper insights into how the environment is acutely felt through impaired bodies without failing

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<sup>5</sup> Terms such as ‘impairment’, ‘health condition’ or ‘ill health’ will be used throughout the thesis when referring specifically to disability effects at the individual-level (e.g. physiological or psychological). ‘Disability’ will be used when referring more broadly to the effects at multiple levels, including physiological, psychological, social and cultural, and the interaction between them. The terms ‘disabled people’ and ‘people with disabilities’ will be used interchangeably.

to tell of disabling social structures (Lourens and Swartz 2016).

The next section describes the conditions under which disabled people enter work and self-employment in the UK context, including the demographic, economic-political and historical policy changes that have affected working age disabled people over the past few decades.

### **2.3 Disability, work and self-employment in the UK**

National data on the social and economic situation of disabled people is relatively limited, with implications for participation of disabled people in research (Purdam *et al.* 2008). The Labour Force Survey provides data on employment and self-employment by health status and disability, including specific types of impairments and health conditions. However, survey methodologies have particular limitations, including issues with design, definition of disability and interpretation of questions (Fevre *et al.* 2016, Purdam *et al.* 2008). Additionally, Purdam and colleagues found that there is a lack of robust evidence and effective survey methodologies to capture how the circumstances of disabled people change over time in relation to policy interventions. The existing datasets provide some insights into the circumstances of working age disabled people.<sup>6</sup>

In the third quarter of 2016, there were an estimated 7.2 million people of working age who have a long-term disability that limits their daily activities (ONS 2017a). Examining changes over time, disabled people are more likely to be employed than they were a few decades ago. The gap between disabled and non-disabled workers narrowed by nearly 10 per cent between 1998 and 2008 (Barrett 2010). More recently, the level of employment has continued to increase for disabled people which has further narrowed the gap. Yet, disabled people are still under-represented in the labour market. Less than half, or 48.3 per cent, of disabled people (3.47million) were in employment compared to 80.5 per cent (28.3million) of non-disabled people (Mirza-Davies and Brown 2016, Q3).

Disabled people are more likely to work part-time (33 per cent), compared to non-disabled people (25 per cent) (Coleman *et al.* 2013). They are also more likely to

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<sup>6</sup> In 2017, working age people under the State Pension Age include men aged 16 to 65 and women aged 16 to 60 (AgeUK).



work in low skilled jobs and to have lower earnings (Meager and Higgins 2011, Coleman *et al.* 2013, Longhi 2017). Unfavourable labour market conditions have consequences for the living standards of individuals and their families; disabled adults are more likely than non-disabled adults to live in low-income households (DWP 2014b). Additionally, disabled employees are more likely to suffer ill-treatment in the workplace and those with different types of impairments and health conditions face different types of ill-treatment (Fevre *et al.* 2013).

Impairments have varied consequences for labour market participation and working practices. The likelihood of employment varies by type, severity and other impairment attributes (Berthoud 2008, Mirza-Davies and Brown 2016). People with learning difficulties, mental illnesses and progressive or episodic conditions, such as epilepsy, are least likely to work, while those with skin conditions, heart and circulatory conditions and mobility difficulties are most likely to be in work (ONS 2011, Mirza-Davies and Brown 2016).

Experiences of a long-term or a short-term, fluctuating or intermittent condition, have implications for individual working lives. Only a small proportion of people who experience disability are long-term disabled. More than half of adults experiencing day-to-day and work limitations remain disabled for a period lasting less than two years. Intermittent disabilities, especially mental illness, are also frequent (Burchardt 2000). Finally, there are variations in terms of disability onset; only 11 per cent of disabled adults are born with disability, 12 per cent acquire disability in childhood and 75 per cent become disabled in the course of their working life (Burchardt 2003).

Policy-makers are increasingly interested in promoting and supporting self-employment as an alternative route into work for disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Fisher and Cruse 2004, EMDA 2009, Meager and Higgins 2011, Kitching 2014, OECD 2014). Encouraging disabled people to enter self-employment has been driven by at least three policy motivations: (1) it can promote entrepreneurship among disadvantaged groups; (2) it can narrow the gap in employment rates between disabled people and the population as a whole; and (3) it can prevent social

exclusion (Boylan and Burchardt 2002).

Working age disabled people in the UK, and other countries, are more likely than non-disabled people to become self-employed (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Pagán 2009, Jones and Latreille 2011, Meager and Higgins 2011). In the second quarter of 2010, 15.5 per cent of disabled people in work were self-employed compared to 13.1 per cent of non-disabled people (Meager and Higgins 2011). By 2017, the number of self-employed people overall increased to 4.86 million (15.1 per cent of all people in work) (ONS 2017b), however, the latest estimates by disability status were unavailable at the time of writing.

### *2.3.1 Demographic context*

Around 15 per cent of the world's population are estimated to live with some form of disability, of which 2-4 per cent also experience significant difficulties in functioning. The prevalence of disability globally is thought to be on the rise due to the increase in ageing population, the increasing occurrence of chronic diseases, and the improvements in methodologies used to measure disability (WHO 2010). In the UK, there are over 11 million people with a long-term health condition, impairment or disability. The most frequently reported impairments are those affecting mobility, lifting or carrying (DWP & ODI 2014).

The prevalence of disability rises with age; almost half of adults of state pension age (SPA) are disabled, compared to a quarter of working age adults and less than 10 per cent of children (DWP & ODI 2014). Life expectancy in the UK has risen over the years. People aged 65 have, on average, a further 18.3 years (men) and 20.8 years (women) of life remaining (ONS 2014a). Around 10.3 million people are aged 65-and over, and the number is estimated to reach 16.9 million by 2035 (Rutherford 2012). Population ageing has significant consequences for public services. There will be more elderly dependents in the UK in future. A fall in the ratio of workers to pensioners will, in turn, affect state pension funding and demands on health and social care services (Rutherford 2012). Older workers are increasingly expected to work longer to fund their retirement and the associated cost of public services.

While there are currently more working people aged 50-and over than previously,

a decision to exit work before SPA is a concern. Around 2.9 million people aged 50-SPA are out of work (DWP 2014a). At the same time, many people now continue working beyond retirement age. The number of self-employed aged 65-and over has more than doubled in the five years to 2014 (ONS 2014b). More than half of SME owners below SPA either expect to keep on working once they reach retirement age, or do not know when they will retire. Around a half have changed their retirement plans due to the economic downturn in 2008-09, and 42 per cent anticipate they will carry on working for longer (Blundel *et al.* 2012).

Since the abolition of the default retirement age in 2011, it is no longer compulsory for workers in the UK to retire once they reach SPA, arguably helping to alleviate funding pressures (ScienceDaily 2014). The SPA for women is set to rise to 65 years by 2018. Further increase in SPA is expected, for both men and women, to 66 years by 2020 and 67 years between 2026 and 2028 (AgeUK 2017). The planned changes reflect the wider concern of policy-makers with the long-term affordability and inter-generational fairness of the state pension system.

Greater prevalence of self-employment among disabled people in the UK, and other European countries, can be attributed partly to the growth in older population entering self-employment whilst disability rises with age (Pagán-Rodríguez 2011). There is a growing interest within the academic and policy circles in older entrepreneurship as a solution to the public spending pressures and the economic inactivity of older workers (Sappleton and Lourenço 2015, Kibler *et al.* 2015, Wainwright and Kibler 2014, OECD/EC 2012, Wainwright *et al.* 2011, Kautonen *et al.* 2008). The UK government, for example, has committed to promote and support business start-up among older workers (DWP 2014a). Yet, the support available to senior entrepreneurs in the UK is particularly under-developed (OECD/EC 2016).

### *2.3.2 Economic and political context*

While the real gross domestic product in the UK has grown between 1980 and 2014 on average by 2.2 per cent per year, the country has undergone three economic downturns in that period. Following the early 1990s decline, the economy experienced sixteen consecutive years of growth until the recession of

2008-09. Output has been growing again from 2010 (ONS 2015). More recently, growth has been positive for seventeen consecutive quarters since the start of 2013 until the second quarter of 2017 (ONS 2017c).

Successive governments have operated a budget deficit most years since 1981, with consequences for the total level of national debt. The sharpest deficit growth occurred in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2009 (ONS 2015). In the following year, the newly elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government instigated a programme of austerity measures to tackle budget deficit and reduce national debt. This involved, among other measures, a reform of the welfare system in the form of ‘welfare-to-work policies’ designed to simplify the system, reduce welfare dependency and encourage more people into paid work (DWP 2015).

The coalition government’s policies could be viewed as a continuation of the reforms started by New Labour since the mid-1990s. The aim then was to reduce the numbers in receipt of incapacity benefit (IB) while supporting more people into work (DWP 2006). There has been a steady rise in welfare spending over the past 30 years in cash and real terms, broadly in line with growth in the economy (OBR 2014). Disability related benefits such as IB and disability living allowance (DLA) have been on the rise. The numbers claiming IB more than trebled between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, partly due to the collapse of employment in many traditional industries during two recessions (DWP 2006).

The long-term changes in welfare spending had been projected to occur mainly in relation to incapacity and disability benefits (OBR 2015). In the face of demographic changes and efforts to reduce public borrowing, the coalition government sought savings of around 20 per cent on the DLA expenditure. Subsequently, some of the recipients of the DLA have been losing financial support while the bar for new claimants is set higher (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee 2012). Savings of almost £1.8 billion a year are expected by 2019-20 because of changes to income support benefit for working age disabled people (Kennedy *et al.* 2016).

In this context, self-employment plays a significant role in the UK economy and labour market. Around a third of the increase in employment since 2010 has been due to self-employment (Tatomir 2015). In 2016, there were 5.5 million businesses in the UK and most of them (99 per cent) are small or medium sized enterprises, employing 0-249 people. 5.3 million (96 per cent) of businesses are micro-enterprises, with 0-9 employees, constituting 32 per cent of employment and 19 per cent of turnover (Rhodes 2016). There has been a growth in the number of businesses since 2000 with an average increase of 3 per cent each year. The UK was home to 1.8 million more businesses in 2014 than at the start of the previous decade – a 51 per cent increase on 2000 levels. In the same period, there has been a fall in the number of employers from around a third to a quarter, mainly due to the growth in the number of businesses with no employees (Rhodes 2015).

Much of the increase in self-employment is thought to be a result of an ageing workforce – a longer-term trend that started before the crisis in 2008-09. Indeed, the ageing of the workforce accounts for around half of the increase in self-employment since 2004. The increased participation of women in the labour force has also contributed to this growth in self-employment levels (Tatomir 2015). While the number of people becoming self-employed in recent years has grown significantly, the average income from self-employment has fallen by 22 per cent since 2008-09 (ONS 2014b), suggesting that many of the newly self-employed workers are likely to be low-income earners.

### *2.3.3 Historical policy context*

Disability and long-term illness have historically been associated with poverty and social exclusion, largely due to considerably lower employment rates and incomes among disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions (Bambra and Smith 2010). Since the Post-World War II period, consecutive UK governments addressed this issue by what Bambra and Smith characterise as three distinct phases – passive welfarism, active welfarism and workfare. The welfare provision, they argue, has transformed over the years from ‘welfare’ characterised by passive and unconditional nature of benefits where all

are entitled to support by virtue of their citizenship, to 'workfare' characterised by provision that is conditional upon fulfilling certain obligations, such as taking active part in work experience or a training programme.

Since the 1990s, several statutory and policy measures have been implemented to address social exclusion and promote participation of disabled people in the labour market while reducing dependency on welfare support (Hyde 2000). The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people and placed a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace in order to remove any disadvantages disabled employees may face. The initial exemption of firms with less than 20 employees from the statutory duty was removed in 2004. Although employment rates for disabled people have increased over the past few decades (Barrett 2010), the evidence of the direct impact of DDA on disabled workers has been inconclusive (Jones 2006, Jones and Jones 2008, Bell and Heitmueller 2009). The Equality Act 2010 replaced the DDA and other discrimination laws, creating a single legal framework to tackle disadvantage and discrimination.

Under the New Labour government's welfare-to-work policies, a number of interventions targeting disabled people specifically addressed the issues around barriers to employment. The New Deal for Disabled People scheme was implemented nationally in 2001 to promote employment as a route off benefits and out of poverty. While the positive effects of the scheme have been highlighted (Heenan 2002) others have argued there is a long way to go in shifting the culture of expectations associated with employment of disabled people (Walker and Wiseman 2003). The employment policy has shown a degree of continuity with previous strategies informed by the fundamental distinction between those who are seen as capable of work and those considered incapable (Danieli and Wheeler 2006). The exclusion of disabled people from employment has been linked to the way the labour market is organised and to the wider social and environmental barriers such as access to education, information and transport (Barnes and Mercer 2005).

The Work Programme of the 2010-15 Coalition government replaced schemes,

such as the New Deal, but continued with the welfare-to-work policy agenda, while introducing further marketisation of the employment service delivery started under the New Labour (Whitworth and Carter 2014). The programme has been widely criticised for its treatment of disabled workers; for example, individualising disability while neglecting the social barriers that shape disabled peoples' equal participation in the labour market (Patrick 2012). The Work Programme is being replaced in 2017 with a smaller-scale Work and Health Programme focusing primarily on specialist support for the long-term unemployed, particularly disabled people and those with health conditions. Funding for employment services is expected to reduce by 75 per cent, potentially undermining the government's commitment to halve the disability employment gap by 2020 (Butler 2017).

The welfare-to-work schemes aimed at disabled people have typically been supplemented by health and social care related cash benefits for people with long-term health conditions and disabilities, including the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)<sup>7</sup>, Personal Independence Payment (PIP)<sup>8</sup> and Personal Budgets and Direct Payments. The introduction of individualised budgets in 1996 has marked an era of considerable social transformation. The public responsibility for adult social care was essentially transferred to the individual who becomes an employer and is expected to be both managerial and entrepreneurial (Scourfield 2007).

Particularly important for working age disabled people has been the 'permitted work rules' for those in receipt of ESA.<sup>9</sup> The rules, relevant to both employees and self-employed, specify the level of earnings and hours of work one can undertake while still claiming benefit. This enables disabled people to try out a job before leaving the security of regular benefit income. Disabled people in paid work, both employees and self-employed, have also been eligible for Working Tax Credit, a means-tested in-work benefit which tops up the income of disabled workers on

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<sup>7</sup> The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced the Incapacity Benefit (IB) in 2014.

<sup>8</sup> The Personal Independence Payment (PIP) replaced the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in 2013.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance/eligibility>

low pay.<sup>10</sup> The Access to Work (AtW) scheme provides financial help to disabled people towards the cost of getting to and from work, adapting premises and the cost of equipment such as assistive technologies, help with communication at job interviews or paying for a support worker.<sup>11</sup> All of these measures reflect the efforts of consecutive governments to reduce welfare dependency and make work pay.

Tackling regional deprivation and social exclusion became a central policy issue of the 1997 New Labour government (DWP 2003). Coupled with a continued commitment to promote enterprise culture (Curran 2000), the government looked into self-employment and enterprise as an alternative route into work for the disadvantaged groups (DTI 2004, ODPM 2004a), including disabled people (Fisher and Cruse 2004, ODPM 2004b, Boylan and Burchardt 2002). Two policy initiatives have been particularly relevant to disabled people: (1) the AtW scheme providing up to 100 per cent of the costs of support in self-employment; and (2) the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) assisting the long-term unemployed, including disabled people in receipt of ESA, who want to start their own business.

Finally, voluntary and private sector organisations have played a key role in promoting and supporting self-employment among disabled people in the UK. For example, the Association of Disabled Professionals offers employment advice, information and support services, including networking opportunities through its Disabled Entrepreneurs Network.<sup>12</sup> Disability Dynamics<sup>13</sup> and Leonard Cheshire Disability<sup>14</sup> have been providing a range of training support programmes for business start-up. The Stelios Award for Disabled Entrepreneurs in the UK, delivered by the Leonard Cheshire, annually awards successful entrepreneurs with prizes of over £50,000.

## **2.4 Disability and entrepreneurship**

People with disabilities have been described as a ‘forgotten minority’ in the field

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/working-tax-credit/eligibility>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/eligibility>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.adp.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.disabilitydynamics.co.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/>



of entrepreneurship (Cooney 2008). There is a dearth of empirical research on the experiences of business start-up and management among disabled people and those with long-term impairments and health conditions. Studies typically assume that most entrepreneurs are *able-bodied*, and therefore equally capable of starting and running a business. Consequently, the experiences of entrepreneurs who are *differently-abled* are largely under-theorised, rendering disabled people invisible in the entrepreneurial identity literature (Kašperová and Kitching 2014).

There is, nevertheless, an emerging interest in disability entrepreneurship (Bagheri and Abbariki 2016, Hwang and Roulstone 2015, Parker Harris *et al.* 2014). This section provides an overview of the literature on disability self-employment and entrepreneurship, including academic articles and research reports by public, private and third sector organisations. The section is not intended to provide a comprehensive review, but rather to offer some key insights about the effects of disability on entrepreneurship.

Research on disability entrepreneurship emerged initially in the context of vocational rehabilitation in the USA, exploring self-employment as an option for people with disabilities (Arnold and Seekins 2002, Callahan *et al.* 2002, Doyel 2002, Ipsen *et al.* 2005, Ashley and Graf 2017). Similarly, policy-makers in the UK instigated studies into self-employment and entrepreneurship as an alternative route into work for disabled people (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Fisher and Cruse 2004, Meager and Higgins 2011). Research suggests that disabled people across national contexts are more likely to become self-employed than non-disabled people (Gouskova 2012, Pagán-Rodríguez 2009, 2011, Jones and Latreille 2011, Boylan and Burchardt 2002). Yet, start-up efforts of entrepreneurs with disabilities are less likely to result in the emergence of a viable organisation (Renko *et al.* 2016).

Entrepreneurship and self-employment have been considered as a means of addressing social exclusion among disadvantaged groups in the labour market (Blackburn and Ram 2006, Cooney 2013, OECD 2014). Disabled people as both consumers and producers can make an important contribution to the economy (Pavey 2006, Coogan and Cluley 2016) and can potentially benefit from

exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities related to their specific situation (EMDA 2009, De Clercq and Honig 2011). However, encouraging entrepreneurship as a way of tackling social exclusion and unemployment has been viewed with caution (Callahan *et al.* 2002, Blackburn and Ram 2006, Kitching 2006, Pavey 2006, Pagán 2009). Self-employment, particularly when working from home, can be isolating and even more so for people with severe impairments and restrictions on activity (Callahan *et al.* 2002). Policy-makers may be keen to promote business creation to disabled people, but the labour market barriers, such as employer discrimination, must also be addressed (Pagán 2009). While anyone could potentially become an entrepreneur, not everyone has the capacity to work (Callahan *et al.* 2002, Pavey 2006).

Three areas of research have received particular attention in the disability entrepreneurship literature: (1) motivations for business start-up; (2) personal and business characteristics of disabled entrepreneurs; and (3) constraints and enablers of entrepreneurship.

#### *2.4.1 Motivations for business start-up*

The entrepreneurial motivation literature has developed along the lines of the ‘push-pull’ and ‘necessity-opportunity’ dichotomies, distinguishing negative and positive motivations for entrepreneurial entry (Stephen *et al.* 2015). Disabled people become self-employed for similar reasons as their non-disabled counterparts; for example, because of redundancy, wanting to re-build their self-confidence, or interest in the type of work (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, EMDA 2009).

Disabled self-employed people have reported ‘pull’ motivations, such as flexibility and control over work tasks and demands, location and hours worked, and the ability to accommodate work around impairment effects (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Callahan *et al.* 2002, Doyel 2002, Fisher and Cruse 2004, Pagán 2009, EMDA 2009, Jones and Latreille 2011, Meager and Higgins 2011, Gouskova 2012). Self-employed people with disabilities were found to experience higher levels of job satisfaction than disabled employees regarding the type of work and working conditions (Pagán 2009, Pagán-Rodríguez 2011). The lack of

opportunities in the labour market, not being able to find a suitable job, access barriers and employer discrimination are some of the main ‘push’ reasons for turning to self-employment (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, EMDA 2009). Disabled people in the UK are less likely to cite positive reasons for becoming self-employed than the population as a whole (Boylan and Burchardt 2002).

Self-employment motivations can vary by multiple dimensions of impairment, including type, onset, severity and whether the individual impairment is relatively stable, progressive or fluctuating. Self-employment was found to be a positive choice particularly for people with mental health conditions (Fisher and Cruse 2004). Additionally, differences have been observed between self-employed people who are born disabled and those who acquire disability during a life-time (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, EMDA 2009). While both groups may face particular access and participation challenges in society, people who are born disabled, or become disabled at young age, often experience additional barriers within the education system. The educational barriers can leave disabled people with low or no qualifications, with implications for their capacity to compete in the labour market.

People with degenerative conditions (for example, multiple sclerosis) or episodic impairments (for example, epilepsy) may be motivated to enter self-employment because of the unpredictable nature of their condition. A study of working practices of people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.),<sup>15</sup> for instance, found that the individual capacity to work can be severely constrained by muscle fatigue, mobility issues, poor concentration and other impairment effects (SKS Scotland 2011) that potentially motivate self-employment. Most entrepreneurial motivation studies adopt survey methodologies that treat disabled self-employed people as a homogenous group or do not distinguish impairment dimensions, such as type and severity, and therefore fail to capture such nuances.

Studies have examined ‘push’ and ‘pull’ motivations for venture creation at both individual and social structural level, to a degree. However, the generic focus on

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<sup>15</sup>Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) is a long-term, fluctuating, neurological condition that causes symptoms affecting the nervous and immune systems. M.E. affects around 250,000 people in the UK. People with M.E. can experience severe, persistent fatigue and other symptoms. See more at: <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/>

the individual motives, or social influences, has limited a deeper analytical examination of the diversity of reasons and motives beyond the push-pull binary. Little is known about how motivations translate into entrepreneurial behaviour, considering the particular challenges associated with disability, how particular impairments and health conditions affect entrepreneurial motivations in different ways, or how disabled people balance start-up motivation and physical well-being.

#### *2.4.2 Personal and business characteristics of disabled entrepreneurs*

Disabled self-employed people share several characteristics with their non-disabled counterparts, including older age, vocational qualifications, living in particular geographical locations, and similarity in terms of industry and the number of employees and customers (Boylan and Burchardt 2002). However, others found that disabled self-employed people are more likely to work on their own, rather than employ others (Jones and Latreille 2011), and to run a home-based business (EMDA 2009, Jones and Latreille 2011). Self-employment generates significantly less income for disabled people and further differences were observed by occupation; disabled self-employed men in particular are more likely to work in low skilled occupations (Boylan and Burchardt 2002).

Self-employment prevalence was found to vary by impairment type. Men and women with musculoskeletal problems, and women with mental health problems, are particularly likely to enter self-employment. Men with sensory impairments, on the other hand, are much less likely to do so (Boylan and Burchardt 2002). More than a quarter of entrepreneurs in the UK, and around a third in the US, are thought to be dyslexic. Dyslexic entrepreneurs tend to grow their companies more quickly than non-dyslexic entrepreneurs (Logan 2009) due to the perceived higher ability to delegate, good oral communication, leadership skills and creativity (Logan 2009, Logan and Martin 2012, Halfpenny and Halfpenny 2012).

People with impairments and health conditions that severely limit their day-to-day activities are more likely to be self-employed than those with no or less limiting impairments (Pagán 2009, Jones and Latreille 2011). At the same time, the probability of employment tends to be much lower for people with severe

impairments than for those with milder impairments (Burchardt 2000). A study of people with learning disabilities, for example, found that micro-enterprise is often the only alternative to unemployment or volunteering for this group (Reddington and Fitzsimons 2011).

Disabled entrepreneurs tend to be older than disabled employees, and non-disabled entrepreneurs. This is largely because both self-employment and disability prevalence rise with age (Boylan and Burchardt 2002). There are, however, age variations across national contexts. In the UK, the average age of disabled self-employed people is 49 and 45 for men and women, compared to 43 and 42 for non-disabled men and women respectively (Boylan and Burchardt 2002). The mean age of disabled entrepreneurs in Sweden is 43 years which is on average 4 years older than the age of non-disabled entrepreneurs (Larsson 2006). Disabled entrepreneurs in South Korea, aged between 50 and 59, are the most entrepreneurial age group (40.9 per cent) (Hwang and Roulstone 2015).

Part-time work is important to disabled entrepreneurs (Schur 2003, Larsson 2006, Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Meager and Higgins 2011, Reddington and Fitzsimons 2011), but their experiences vary across contexts. Less than a third of those surveyed in Sweden (Larsson 2006) were fully involved in their business while the majority worked part-time. 'Health problems' were reported as one of the main reasons for part-time work. Disabled self-employed people in the UK, in contrast, do not differ substantially from the non-disabled in terms of hours worked (Boylan and Burchardt 2002). Additionally, impairment type and severity can affect the pattern of working hours. Entrepreneurs with learning disabilities, for instance, tend to work mainly part-time (Reddington and Fitzsimons 2011).

Businesses started by disadvantaged groups tend to be more socially-orientated than profit-driven. Disabled people in the UK are 2.3 times more likely than non-disabled people to engage in social rather than commercial entrepreneurship (Williams 2007). Social entrepreneurship has been promoted as a potential tool for empowering people with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Caldwell *et al.* 2012). Disability can stimulate independent problem-solving and innovation, generating novel and creative

solutions to existing problems (Cooney 2008, Caldwell *et al.* 2012, Parker Harris *et al.* 2014). Innovative and growth-orientated entrepreneurship, rather than simply self-employment, can potentially lead to hiring of others with disabilities (Parker Harris *et al.* 2014).

The literature provides important insights into how disability affects working and business practices of entrepreneurs with long-term impairments and health conditions and the potential influences of context. Yet, quantitative studies tend to limit their research to analyses of empirical patterns while under-theorising causal powers and mechanisms that underlie observable events, such as part-time work or home-based work. Qualitatively-oriented studies could provide additional level of theoretical depth to the literature, for example by examining how different impairment types can be a source of innovative product ideas, or how disabled entrepreneurs manage their relations with employees.

#### *2.4.3 Constraints and enablers of entrepreneurship*

Disabled people experience similar challenges as non-disabled people in starting and running a business, such as lack of capital and insecurity of income, in addition to specific barriers associated with disability, including access issues, lack of skills, inappropriate support and lack of confidence due to disability (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, EMDA 2009, OECD 2014, Kitching 2014). Disability may both enable and constrain venture creation and management, depending on circumstances. Studies have highlighted influences at the individual as well as at the socio-cultural level.

Particular impairments and health conditions may pose specific challenges, for example, difficulties of getting to and from a workplace, using artefacts such as technologies, and communicating and building relationships with customers, employees and others (Kašperová and Kitching 2014). Some impairments may have no impact in terms of activity limitations, while others could inflict major constraints on activities (Kitching 2014), with consequences for individual capacity to start and manage a business. Impairment effects have implications for how disabled people negotiate organisational contexts in the face of normative expectations (Williams and Mavin 2012). People with intellectual and

developmental disabilities, for example, may need to resolve issues around guardianship and its effects on business ownership and management decisions (Caldwell *et al.* 2012).

Disabled people were found to face material and social barriers in the form of inaccessible premises, transport and information, lack of appropriate training and business advice, negative attitudes of financial institutions, business advisers and the employment services, and difficulties with navigating the benefit system (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Bichard and Thomas 2008, EMDA 2009, Caldwell *et al.* 2012). There is often a lack of awareness of the in-work support that is available and many fear losing the security of regular benefit income by entering self-employment (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Doyel 2002, Bichard and Thomas 2008) or find self-employment opportunities uninviting where the salary is not significantly higher than income from social security (Doyel 2002). Some disabled entrepreneurs may face discrimination by consumers in the absence of legal protection (Jones and Latreille 2011).

Some of the material barriers have been alleviated, to a degree, by changes to urban design and technological innovations. A range of adaptive equipment and assistive and digital technologies (AT) are available to help people with functional limitations to pursue self-employment. People with visual impairments, for instance, can use devices such as magnifiers, screen readers and voice recognition software to access and convey information online. AT can enable entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions to operate a home-based business and to effectively reach distant markets despite transportation and other access barriers (Angelocci *et al.* 2008).

Assistive technologies can be distinguished further in terms of AT accessibility (devices, such as a hearing aid, that seek to address functional limitations) and IT accessibility (for example, websites and technological applications) (Vaziri *et al.* 2014). Developments in both AT and IT can have significant consequences for disabled peoples' experiences of accessing online information, advice and support related to entrepreneurship (Vaziri *et al.* 2014).

There is yet a dearth of empirical research on barriers and enablers of business

creation and management specific to disabled entrepreneurs. For example, little is known about how disabled entrepreneurs build and maintain relationships with customers, employees, finance providers and other business stakeholders, how do they overcome any attitudinal barriers, or how the material culture of artefacts enables and constrains entrepreneurs with particular impairments or health conditions.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to set the scene for the remainder of the thesis by offering an overview of what is known about disability, disabled entrepreneurs and the effects of disability on work, self-employment and entrepreneurship. To explain how disabled people form entrepreneurial identity, researchers must explicate what they mean by disability. Several problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies have been identified within the dominant disability models. The critical realist approach to disability is ontologically least restrictive in terms of causally relevant levels of reality and metatheoretical perspectives that it can include and accommodate to explain disability (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006). Theorising disability as a causal property that exerts influence at multiple levels is compatible with a stratified and emergent ontology of personhood (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010) and the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity that will be advanced in the forthcoming chapters.

The emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity is necessarily shaped by the social structural and cultural properties that enable or constrain action. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the UK economy and the labour market. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis and increasing demographic pressures, entrepreneurship and innovation that stimulates growth has been encouraged. To tackle the national debt, the country is undergoing a programme of extensive public spending cuts likely to affect the most vulnerable in society. Disabled people are particularly affected by the welfare reforms that have seen their income and disability benefits reduced, or taken away. Welfare support is increasingly conditional on the basis of individual 'fitness for work' rather than the rights of a citizen. These developments have consequences for the support that is available to working age disabled people starting and running their own business.



The extant literature provides important insights into disabled peoples' motivations for entering self-employment, their personal and business characteristics, and the constraints they face in starting and running a business. While there is an emerging interest in disability entrepreneurship, most studies have been undertaken by researchers in the areas of employment, disability and vocational rehabilitation. Disability remains largely under-researched in small business and entrepreneurship literature. There is a particular dearth of research into how disabled entrepreneurs build and maintain relationships with customers, employees, finance providers and others, what are the challenges they face in doing so, and how they overcome them. Disability can be an important source of new venture ideas which is another potential avenue for research, currently under-developed. The motivation literature is perhaps most fruitful in relation to disability entrepreneurship; however, little is known about how disabled peoples' motivations translate into venture creation.

Surprisingly, none of the reviewed studies have drawn on the concept of 'identity' to explain disabled peoples' experiences of venture creation and management. Disability, as a stigmatised social identity (Goffman 1963), is likely to have a significant impact on the individual capacity to create and manage a new venture. The review has identified several empirical and theoretical gaps which can be credited partly to the dominance of quantitative methodologies in disability entrepreneurship research. Deeper understanding can be gained through qualitative approach with a more robust conceptual grounding in terms of theorising multiple dimensions of disability. The present study employs the analytical lens of identity in order to provide novel insights. The forthcoming chapter offers a critical review of the entrepreneurial identity literature.

## Chapter 3

# Entrepreneurial identity: A literature review

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of the entrepreneurial identity literature. It examines how entrepreneurial identity is conceptualised, whether and how studies theorise the effects of disability on entrepreneurial identity formation, and the ontological assumptions that underpin research studies in this area. The review is not restricted to studies referring specifically to ‘entrepreneurial identity’. For example, the personality traits literature is included in the review as part of the wider body of work concerned with the question of ‘who is’ and ‘how one becomes’ an entrepreneur. The word ‘identity’ often refers to social categories associated with gender, ethnicity, nationality and other markers of difference. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to review studies of women entrepreneurship, ethnic minority and migrant entrepreneurship, and other social categories of entrepreneurs, unless there is also an explicit reference to the ‘identity’ concept.

The review identifies three main approaches to entrepreneurial identity – strong essentialism, strong social constructionism and the psycho-social approach. Each perspective is underpinned by particular ontological views, assumptions about the mind-body and the structure-agency relationships, and views of causality. Researchers’ metatheoretical presuppositions have necessary consequences for the way they theorise and research entrepreneurial identity. It will be shown that most studies either fail to explicitly define entrepreneurial identity, or conflate it with properties at a higher level (for example, enterprise discourse) or with properties at a lower level (for example, personality characteristics, such as propensity to risk-taking). These underlying assumptions have implications for researching entrepreneurs, and disabled entrepreneurs in particular. With a few exceptions (De Clercq and Honig 2011, Haynie and Shepherd 2011), disabled people are largely neglected in studies of entrepreneurial identity.

A critical realist ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and

O'Mahoney 2014) will be proposed as the most robust and inclusive metatheoretical approach (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006) – one that can accommodate the alternative viewpoints while avoiding some of their problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies. Adopting a critical realist ontology has several advantages over the alternative approaches, particularly in enabling researchers to theorise the effects of disability on entrepreneurial identity – defined here as the personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace.

First, the philosophical ontology of critical realism (Bhaskar 2008) allows for the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as an underlying *causal power* that exerts material influence on the world regardless of any individual perception, narrative expression or conceptualisation of it. This differs significantly from contemporary studies that theorise entrepreneurial identity primarily in terms of entrepreneurs' *linguistic practices*. Entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced simply to how people see themselves and self-narrate as entrepreneurs. Instead, entrepreneurial identity is a causal power that sometimes motivates entrepreneurial narratives. Disabled entrepreneurs, for instance, may not express themselves as entrepreneurs, or may be excluded from the enterprise discourse, yet they create new ventures because of some underlying powers that enable and motivate their entrepreneurial behaviour.

Second, a stratified, emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) makes it possible for researchers to theorise causal powers and mechanisms, and the interaction between them, at multiple emergent strata or levels – including the body, the self, personal identity and social identities (Archer 2000).<sup>16</sup> Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, it is importantly shaped by its lower-level identity strata. This is particularly important in researching disability effects on entrepreneurial identity, without conflating disability with social attitudes or with impaired bodies. A stratified ontology helps us overcome such tendencies and to resolve the mind-

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<sup>16</sup> The distinct identity strata will be defined and elaborated in chapter 4, following Archer's (2000) conceptualisation. For the purposes of this chapter, social identity refers to the roles and relationships people occupy from birth within societies' distribution of resources, or commit themselves to in their lifetime (Archer 2000).

body and the structure-agency dualisms that the alternative approaches cannot without the concept of emergence.

Third, a critical realist notion of causality enables us to conceptualise entrepreneurial identity as a particular kind of causal power. Causal powers are tendencies or potentialities that may, or may not, be realised (Bhaskar 2008). This differs significantly from the alternative strong essentialist view of entrepreneurial identity as a fixed personality trait determining entrepreneurial behaviour (Miller 2015, Antoncic *et al.* 2015). It also differs from the strong constructionist conception of entrepreneurial identity as a linguistic practice, performed dialogically in relation to others (Hytti *et al.* 2017, Karhunen *et al.* 2017).

Finally, although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity – that is, it can only be formed in relation to other people and social structures – its emergence may not depend on social interaction alone. Entrepreneurial identity presupposes some lower-level personal powers, including consciousness, interest formation, self-reflexivity and abstract reasoning (C. Smith 2010). These lower-level capacities are importantly formed through our relations with *all* three analytical orders of reality – nature, the material culture of artefacts and society (Archer 2000).

The chapter has two parts. It commences with an outline of the three main approaches to entrepreneurial identity and their key features. It then provides a critique of the problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies identified in the literature, and contrasts existing studies with a critical realist approach to identity, before concluding.

## **3.2 Entrepreneurial identity perspectives**

### *3.2.1 Strong essentialism and entrepreneurial personality*

Early studies of entrepreneurship adopted what has been referred to as the entrepreneurial personality approach (Chell 1985, 2008), associated with the positivist paradigm and characterised by strong essentialist tendencies (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2010). Essentialism is a view that for any object, for instance an entrepreneur, there is set of attributes or essential properties necessary to identify

and distinguish it from other objects. Besides these essential properties, it may have other attributes which are merely accidental (Cartwright 1968, Sayer 1997).

Essentialism has been associated with biological reductionism and determinism (Sayer 1997) – that is, the idea that one’s social identity, for instance gender, can be reduced to a particular biological characteristic, such as sex, determining behaviour. Men and women, from this perspective, are thought to be essentially different and individuals within each category assumed to act in a uniform way (Somers 1994). However, critics of essentialism assume that the only way to avoid biological determinism is to deny that the biological has any significance for social matters (Gunnarsson 2013).

Following Sayer (1997), *strong* versions of essentialism, associated with determinism, can be distinguished from a *moderate* non-deterministic essentialism. While the former is always wrong and dangerously misleading, essentialism in its moderate forms is necessary to explain social phenomena, such as resistance to discourses that presupposes the potential to communicate (Sayer 1997, O’Mahoney 2012). Unlike strong essentialists who believe that everything has a fixed and stable essence, one can be a moderate essentialist and recognise that identifying an object as having essential properties does not assume the object is unchanging (Sayer 1997), or that it always produces the same effects.

The strong essentialist approach to entrepreneurial identity has several features. In trying to define entrepreneurship, early studies sought to explain why some people engage in entrepreneurial activities while others do not, and what distinguishes entrepreneurs from other groups, such as owner managers (Hornaday and Bunker 1970, Carland *et al.* 1984, Chen *et al.* 1998). There has been a particular interest in identifying a psychological trait, or a collection of traits, that make successful entrepreneurs. Researchers have, for example, examined attributes such as need for achievement, locus of control, risk-taking propensity and tolerance of ambiguity (Brockhaus 1980, Begley and Boyd 1987). These traits – or dispositions to behave in a consistent way (Pervin 1994) – are assumed to be inherently given, stable and possessed by individuals in isolation from their context.

Studies from this perspective, furthermore, sought to measure differences between female and male entrepreneurs to explain the persistently lower engagement of women in entrepreneurship (Masters and Meier 1988, Sexton and Bowman-Upton 1990, Fisher *et al.* 1993). Although the emphasis on personality traits and other individual characteristics generated inconclusive evidence, and was widely criticised (Chell 1985, Gartner 1988, Low and MacMillan 1988, Mitchell 1997, Baron 1998, Down and Reveley 2004), there has been a revival of interest in researching entrepreneurial personality (Ciavarella *et al.* 2004, Zhao and Seibert 2006, Rauch and Frese 2007, Zhao *et al.* 2010, Caliendo and Kritikos 2012, Miller 2015, Antoncic *et al.* 2015).

Researchers over the past three or four decades have challenged the dominance of the strong essentialist-positivist paradigm in entrepreneurship. Positivism operates under the Humean ‘covering law’ model of causality, based on the assumption that all science can allow is empirical regularities of events (Danermark *et al.* 2002, Elder-Vass 2010). For example, whenever event A occurs (risk-taking behaviour), event B follows (entrepreneurial behaviour). A cause therefore affects outcomes in a similar way across all similar cases. Consequently, events, such as business creation, are largely determined because whenever the cause is present, its influence is consistent in some way (Elder-Vass 2010: 40).

The regularity model of causality makes predictions in natural sciences possible because natural objects are typically studied under experimentally closed conditions (Bhaskar 2008). Yet, unlike natural objects of study, entrepreneurs can convey meanings and act purposefully, rather than in a deterministic manner. Social phenomena cannot be studied in the same way. Entrepreneurship research, it has been argued, should focus on meanings and actions constructed in the wider social environment (Stanworth and Curran 1976). There is now a growing consensus that personality theories are inadequate in explaining entrepreneurial identity. We must focus instead on the interactions between individuals and society (Down and Reveley 2004, Down and Warren 2008, Reveley and Down 2009, Gill and Larson 2014, Berglund *et al.* 2016).

### 3.2.2 *Strong social constructionism and enterprise discourse*

Challenging the prevailing emphasis on entrepreneurial personality, a social constructionist approach emerged as an alternative to the strong essentialist-positivist paradigm. It has been suggested that the *process* of entrepreneurship itself should be the focus of inquiry, rather than the individual entrepreneur and their *characteristics* (Low and MacMillan 1988, Gartner 1988). Contemporary organisation studies tend to conceptualise agency in processual and relational terms, emphasising the role of language and discourse in on-going ‘identity work’ (Sveningsson and Alvensson 2003, Steyaert 2007, Watson 2008).

There has been a shift of emphasis from the question of ‘who is an entrepreneur’ to ‘how one becomes an entrepreneur’ in relation to their particular social context. Entrepreneurial identity has been theorised as a fluid, dynamic and changing process (Down and Warren 2008, Bjursell and Melin 2011, Mills and Pawson 2012, Gherardi 2015, Leitch and Harrison 2016), rather than a fixed and stable entity. Moreover, entrepreneurial identity is not formed in isolation, but always in relation to significant others, such as customers (Warren 2004, Down and Reveley 2004, Down 2006, Jones *et al.* 2008, Watson 2009).

Constructionist studies have contributed to our understanding of entrepreneurial identity by highlighting the role of social context and the power of discourse in enabling or constraining agency. Studies have helped to deconstruct stereotypical views of an entrepreneur (Down and Warren 2008, Anderson and Warren 2011, Gill 2014, Hamilton 2013, Giazitzoglu and Down 2017) and to give voice to under-represented and disadvantaged groups, including women and ethnic minorities (Nadin 2007, Iyer 2009, Essers *et al.* 2010, Orser *et al.* 2011, Díaz García and Welter 2013).

Critical realism shares with the constructionist tradition the potential of emancipatory identity theorising (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006, Marks and O’Mahoney 2014). What is more, constructionism is valuable and necessary to critical realists in describing the world and building robust, inclusive and critical social theories. Yet, constructionist studies typically lean towards a *strong* version of constructionism (C. Smith 2010, Elder-Vass 2012) – one that offers only partial

or incomplete explanations of entrepreneurial identity (Kašperová and Kitching 2014).

Following Elder-Vass (2012), *strong* constructionism is the view that the only reality we can have access to is a linguistically mediated one. From this standpoint, social objects, such as entrepreneurial identity, cannot exist independently of our conversations. Strong constructionism can be distinguished, however, from a more moderate form which permits variation in agents' linguistic expressions but does not reduce identity to such practices. A *moderate* constructionist recognises that entrepreneurs can express themselves in a variety of ways, coherent, contradictory or misleading, yet entrepreneurial identity cannot be conflated with such linguistic accounts.

Two forms of constructionism can be distinguished in the literature: (1) studies of entrepreneurial identity as a narrative practice, performed by entrepreneurs dialogically in relation to customers, employees and others; and (2) studies of enterprise discourse, and other powerful discourses, that exist in society and shape acceptable ways of seeing and talking about entrepreneurship. The former is concerned with how entrepreneurs see and talk of themselves (Down and Reveley 2004). The latter focuses on the content of the dominant representations of entrepreneurs in discourses that essentialise entrepreneurial identity (Hamilton 2013). While the former tends to emphasise agency and the latter structure, most studies in this tradition try to link structure and agency in different ways. Elder-Vass (2012) distinguishes the two approaches as *linguistic* and *discursive* constructionism.

The linguistic approach suggests that entrepreneurial identity is constructed and reconstructed dialogically, through stories or narratives (Hytti 2005, Johansson 2004, Warren 2004, Essers and Benschop 2007, 2009, Jones *et al.* 2008, Down 2006, Down and Warren 2008, Watson 2009, Reveley and Down 2009, R. Smith 2010, Hytti *et al.* 2017, Karhunen *et al.* 2017). Agents draw upon a range of linguistic resources, such as metaphors and clichés (Down 2006) to construct an entrepreneurial identity in ongoing 'identity work' which is about saying 'who we are not' as well as 'who we are' (Watson 2009, Karhunen *et al.* 2017). Storytelling



helps entrepreneurs to present themselves as legitimate to important business stakeholders, including customers and investors. To the extent they succeed, coming across as a credible entrepreneur enables access to resources and markets (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Holt and Macpherson 2010, Navis and Glynn 2011, Williams Middleton 2013, Stenholm and Hytti 2014).

Studies from the discursive approach argue that entrepreneurial identity is shaped by various *discourses* that exist in society, including the enterprise discourse (Watson 2009, Gill and Larson 2014). Down (2010: 70) defines the discourse of enterprise as “...all the ways of talking about enterprise; the character of the entrepreneur and the moral expectations we have of enterprising acts... The discourse of enterprise will tend to prescribe what are legitimate acts and narratives for people who define themselves as entrepreneurs. We would want a very convincing narrative to be persuaded that an actuary, vicar or soldier was an entrepreneur: the discourse frames what is possible.” Individual agents draw upon and reproduce, but also resist, the enterprise discourse (Cohen and Musson 2000, Warren 2004, Hytti 2005, Jones *et al.* 2008, Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, Watson 2009, Iyer 2009, Anderson and Warren 2011, Díaz García and Welter 2013, Karhunen *et al.* 2017). Agents are often powerfully constituted by the discourse of enterprise (Warren 2004, Essers and Benschop 2007, Achtenhagen and Welter 2011), empowered as entrepreneurs (Anderson and Warren 2011), but also excluded from it (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, 2009).

The constructionist tradition tells us how entrepreneurial identity is *formed* but not what it *is*. Studies typically fail to define what they mean by entrepreneurial identity, perhaps because of their anti-positivist sentiment and scepticism of producing ‘truths’ about the nature of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs (Hytti 2005, Karp 2006, R. Smith 2010). Those who *do* define entrepreneurial identity tend to conflate it with narrative or storytelling practices.

### *3.2.3 Psycho-social approach to entrepreneurial identity*

There is a third perspective on identity in entrepreneurship which may be described as the ‘psycho-social approach’. Studies in this tradition draw upon two identity theories from social psychology – role identity theory (RIT) elaborated in

the work of Stryker and Burke (Stryker 1968, Stryker and Burke 2000), and the social identity theory (SIT) developed by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Turner 1985). Both perspectives seek to explain the development of self-concept – that is, how one reflexively perceives oneself – in relation to their social environment through processes of ‘identification’ with existing social roles (RIT), or through ‘self-categorisation’ with social categories or groups (SIT) (Stets and Burke 2000). The two theories have often been viewed as competing standpoints, although there is much overlap (Stets and Burke 2000) and many recent studies draw upon both theories in their conceptualisations of entrepreneurial identity (Farmer *et al.* 2009, Vesala and Vesala 2010, Miller and Breton-Miller 2011, Powell and Baker 2014).

The psycho-social approach has its origins in symbolic interactionism, particularly the work of Mead (1934), concerned with how social structures affect the self which, in turn, affects social behaviour (Stryker and Burke 2000). While strong constructionist studies highlight language and discourse, the psycho-social approach focuses on social roles and categories. Both traditions are informed by interactionism, examining how identity formation occurs through the interaction of people and society. The psycho-social approach, however, differs in seeking to measure the effects of social identity on entrepreneurial behaviour, typically through statistical analyses that draw upon the regularity view of causality. Studies, for example, investigate the effects of identity centrality or salience (Hoang and Gimeno 2010, Murnieks *et al.* 2014), or identity type (Sieger *et al.* 2016, Alsos *et al.* 2016), on entrepreneurial activities. This contrasts with the constructionist objective to describe or deconstruct the meanings associated with entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurial ‘self’ from the psycho-social approach is understood to derive from social interaction, unlike the isolated entrepreneur of earlier studies. The psycho-social approach however tends to theorise identity as a stable given, which is reminiscent of entrepreneurial personality theories. The following passage from Fauchart and Gruber (2011) is a case in point: “On the basis of the distinct meanings that individuals in our sample attached to their self-concepts as firm founders, the founders we interviewed could usually be classified as belonging to

one of three “pure” types of founder identity— darwinian, communitarian, and missionary—or to a group of founders with a “hybrid” identity combining elements of the pure types. ... Our results also show that founders behave and act in ways that are consistent with their identities and thereby imprint their self-concepts on key dimensions of their emerging firms” (2011: 936).

Hence, in common with constructionism, the psycho-social approach locates an entrepreneur firmly in their social context. Yet, it also reproduces the strong essentialist notion of entrepreneurial identity as a relatively stable role or category, in common with personality traits theories.

### **3.3 Critique of the entrepreneurial identity literature**

This section will argue, from a critical realist perspective, that each of the entrepreneurial identity traditions suffers from a number of problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies that limit the explanatory power of the entrepreneurial identity concept. The section commences with a critique of metatheoretical beliefs adopted by researchers, including their assumptions about: (1) the ontology of entrepreneurial identity; (2) mind-body relationship; (3) structure-agency relationship; and (4) causality.

#### *3.3.1 Ontological assumptions*

The ontological assumptions (what *is*) made about objects of study importantly shape researchers’ epistemological assumptions (how can we *know*), and consequently the methods used in researching social phenomena, such as venture creation. Each of the entrepreneurial identity traditions makes particular assumptions about entrepreneurial identity and how it should be studied.

The idea of an entrepreneur as a certain personality type in possession of characteristics that are fixed, consistent over time, and determinant of behaviour, has been widely criticised (Mitchell 1997, Vesalainen and Pihkala 1999, Down and Warren 2008, Reveley and Down 2009, Gill and Larson 2014, Berglund *et al.* 2016). The popular view of an entrepreneur as a risk-taker, for example, takes no consideration of change in personal circumstances over the life-course. The entrepreneurial personality is assumed to be unique to a special group of individuals, even though the characteristics thought to distinguish entrepreneurs

from other groups, such as the need for achievement, can be found in managers, students, nurses and others. Entrepreneurs are treated as an homogeneous group, despite there being as much difference among entrepreneurs as between entrepreneurs and people generally (Low and MacMillan 1988).

From a critical realist viewpoint, strong essentialism associated with personality traits theories suffers from reductionist tendencies of a psychological form. That is, studies tend to reduce the effects of a mechanism at a higher level (for example, the capacity to create a business) to the effects of psychological mechanisms at a lower level (for example, the capacity to take risks). Such reductionist theorising provides an incomplete account of entrepreneurial identity and action because the power to create a new venture is explained simply in terms of a single mechanism, rather than the multiplicity of mechanisms that operate at different strata of reality to generate venture creation. Parallels can be drawn with the medical model of disability, discussed in chapter 2, and the tendency to reduce disability identity simply to an individual problem, or limitation of the body or mind.

Constructionist studies reject the essentialist conception of entrepreneurial identity (Down and Reveley 2004, Hamilton 2013). It has been argued that the search for the entrepreneurial personality has contributed to a 'mythical status of entrepreneurs' (Mitchell 1997), often reinforced by the media representations of entrepreneurs as heroic individuals (Nicholson and Anderson 2005, Anderson and Warren 2011) and other stereotypes, such as the male norm (Achtenhagen and Welter 2011). Entrepreneurial identity is argued to be a dynamic process, enacted in narrative performances (Hytti 2005, Essers and Benschop, 2007, 2009, Jones *et al.* 2008, Down and Warren 2008), rather than a fixed personality characteristic. Both the role and the social meaning of the term 'entrepreneur' are thought to be dynamic and changing over time (Down 2010).

Entrepreneurial identity, defined as a personal power, *is* emergent and dynamic, rather than fixed. It is dynamic, but it is also shaped by real properties of humans. Embodied properties, such as impairment, ill-health or pregnancy, can significantly influence agents' capacities to accomplish entrepreneurial identity

(Kašperová and Kitching 2014, Rouse and Kitching 2014). People cannot simply describe themselves in any way they want and expect to have those descriptions accepted by others. Like the enterprise discourse, embodiment shapes what is, and what is not, possible. It is *because* we are embodied in particular ways that resistance to dominant discourses *is* possible (O'Mahoney 2012, italics added for emphasis).

Social constructionism is not a unified approach but studies tend to agree that we can never know the ontologically objective reality, only our constructions of it (Porpora 2015). How we collectively think and communicate about the world necessarily affects how the world is (Elder-Vass 2012). Because our constructions of the world vary across cultures, truth itself is relative (Porpora 2015). Critical realism aligns with constructionism in acknowledging the cultural variability of our constructions, but it rejects conclusions drawn from epistemic relativism. Most studies in the constructionist tradition commit the 'epistemic fallacy' whereby statements about being are transposed into statements about our knowledge of being (Bhaskar 2008: 5).

Although there are competing constructions of reality, not all of them carry the same epistemic credibility. Some constructions, from a critical realist perspective, are superior to others (Porpora 2015). The idea is known as 'judgemental rationality' (Bhaskar 2008) or the ability to discriminate between competing accounts of reality. Critical realism allows for the possibility that text, for instance entrepreneurs' narrative accounts, may be fallible, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). Knowledge or knowing from the critical realist viewpoint is always fallible. This does not mean however that we cannot 'know' enough to be reasonably successful in the projects we undertake. We can always discriminate among theories in terms of their ability to inform us about external reality (Archer *et al.* 1998, Danermark *et al.* 2002).

The criteria for choosing rationally between competing theories is one of the less developed of Bhaskar's ideas (Isaksen 2016), but some conditions can help us differentiate theories. A theory can be judged as more credible relative to other theories when it has "greater explanatory power within or across several

disciplines or fields” (Isaksen 2016: 256). Theories can also be judged on the basis of ‘practical adequacy’ of knowledge. Such knowledge necessarily generates “expectations about the world and about the results of our actions which are actually realised” (Sayer 1992: 69).

Theorising identity as socially produced, studies in the psycho-social tradition may be considered constructionist to a degree. Yet, the approach also shares the strong essentialist conception of identity as something people *have*, that is stable over time, even though it originates in social interaction. Shepherd and Haynie (2009a), for instance, define entrepreneurial identity by the central (innovator, risk bearer) and peripheral (organizer, facilitator) characteristics representative of a particular role. Identity is how one defines themselves in terms of these characteristics, internalising behavioural expectations associated with the role (Shepherd and Haynie 2009b: 1246). Although studies avoid psychological determinism associated with personality traits theories, they replace it with a kind of social determinism whereby social categorisation and role expectations alone determine entrepreneurial identity and behaviour. Once individuals internalise particular roles and categories, their identities are more or less fixed. Parallels can be drawn with discursive constructionists who assume the power of enterprise discourse to shape entrepreneurial identity to the extent that some people are excluded from becoming an entrepreneur (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, 2009).

Central to the entrepreneurial identity literature is how studies theorise the temporal dimension of identity. While strong essentialists treat identity as fixed and stable over time, strong constructionists view it as a constantly changing process. Both stability and change are inevitable from the critical realist viewpoint. As Mutch puts it “critical realism has a focus on process at its heart, but is also concerned with how the products of such processes become stabilized and form the conditions for action.” (2016: 825). Archer’s (1995, 2000) morphogenetic account of social change and the relationship between structure and agency offers a resolution. Following Porpora (2015: 98), social structure refers to “(material) relations among social positions and social constructs”. Although social structures are dependent on human activity for their emergence, reproduction and transformation, structures always pre-exist agents here and now

who inherit particular social structures from previous generations (Archer 1995). Social structures exert real, objective causal influence on people. Social structures, such as an entrepreneurial role, are the product of human activity. However, once emergent from that activity, roles endure over time, despite changes in personal circumstances of role occupants, and provide objective conditions for any future rounds of activity to occur. Social roles, of course, can be variably defined as there may be a range of diverse role expectations (Kemp and Holmwood 2012).

### 3.3.2 *Mind-body relationship*

Mind-body dualism, or Cartesian dualism, is the Western philosophical tradition maintaining the existence of two separate realms – mind and matter. The tradition asserts that claims of one's own existence and, by extension, knowing can be exercised through consciousness alone (Burkitt 1999). Cognitive processes, such as thinking and reasoning, are thought to be the essence of being. How researchers theorise the relationship between mind and body affects how they conceptualise 'the self' and the causal powers of persons.

Cartesian dualism has had a major influence on Western scientific knowledge; for example, by implying that reasoning, emotional upheaval, or suffering that comes from physical pain might exist separately from the body (Damasio 1994). The idea of a disembodied mind has been widely refuted; mind necessarily presupposes a body (Burkitt 1999, Damasio 1994, 2000), although the body is often under-theorised in social sciences. For critical realists, mind is emergent from matter; and so, a stratified and emergent ontology can help us overcome the issue of mind-body dualism (Archer *et al.* 1998).

Entrepreneurial personality theories necessarily commit to mind-body dualism by focusing principally on agents' psychological characteristics, as properties of the mind that determine entrepreneurial behaviour, to the neglect of the body. Personal embodied properties at the biological and physiological levels, for example the capacity to walk, have largely been under-theorised as an influence on entrepreneurial activities. There is a dearth of research into the effects of mechanisms at these lower levels on the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity. For example, the question of how particular impairments

and health conditions might influence entrepreneurial identity could provide novel insights.

Most recently, researchers have turned to examine genetic predispositions as factors that may influence why some people engage in entrepreneurial activity (Nicolaou *et al.* 2008, Nicolaou and Shane 2009, Shane and Nicolaou 2015). The authors are careful not to indicate that genes *determine* entrepreneurial behaviour, only that biology has some influence, in addition to stressing the role of context. Consider this passage from Nicolaou and Shane: “Genetic factors do not *cause* people to engage in social activities, like entrepreneurship. Genes only affect the probability that people will engage in those activities” (2009: 4, italics in original). While careful not to make a causal argument, causality is implied. The authors’ adherence to the regularity view of causality is likely to reproduce mind-body dualism in its biological guise.

Causal explanations, from a critical realist viewpoint, depend on the concept of emergence and the idea of a stratified world. Actual events, such as business creation, occur through a combination of a multiplicity of causal mechanisms at different strata or levels. Studies that seek to explain social events in terms of a single biological factor are therefore incomplete and often misleading. Social events are a result of a complex interaction of multiple causal mechanisms of distinct entities as well as relations between causal powers at different compositional levels of a particular entity (Elder-Vass 2010).

According to Down (2010), the constructionist approach to entrepreneurial identity overcomes mind-body dualism by challenging the existence of the self as a mind (evident in personality traits theories) and arguing that the self, and the mind itself, is socially constructed. Down recognises the biological basis of the self, but considers mechanisms at the biological level of limited utility to explain the social and economic significance of identity. The present study, in contrast, will explicitly theorise the role of the body and embodied practices, particularly impairment effects, on entrepreneurial identity.

Constructionist studies of entrepreneurial identity are underpinned by several problematic assumptions that limit our understanding of entrepreneurship and



entrepreneurial identity (Kašperová and Kitching 2014). First, the material body is an absent presence; it is always present in the researcher-entrepreneur interaction but never a focus of investigation. Hence, the effects of the body on entrepreneurial identity are largely unexplored. Second, because the body is taken for granted, entrepreneurs are implicitly treated as an homogeneous group in terms of their personal properties, rather than as uniquely embodied agents. Studies consequently generate a disembodied notion of an entrepreneur. Third, entrepreneurs are assumed to be *able*-bodied, equally capable of starting and running a business, rather than *differently*-abled agents. The assumed able-bodiedness, in turn, renders disabled people invisible in the literature; excluding entrepreneurs who do not fit the stereotypical image of an able-bodied person. Finally, treating able-bodiedness implicitly as a stable attribute of entrepreneurs, studies paradoxically commit the same flaw of essentialism they reject in personality traits theories.

Taking the materiality of human embodiment for granted, most studies of entrepreneurial identity necessarily reproduce mind-body dualism, although perhaps unintentionally. Consciousness and cognitive capacities, such as perception, thinking and imagining ideas, are given priority over other embodied powers that often presuppose such cognitive capacities. The serious neglect of the body in the literature produces a disembodied conception of an entrepreneur, one that pays limited attention to agents' embodied powers and liabilities, including impairment effects. Treating entrepreneurs as disembodied has adverse consequences for deeper theorising of entrepreneurship. While the present study does not subscribe to *strong*, deterministic essentialism, a degree of essentialism is necessary for the notion of the self (O'Mahoney 2012). Embodied self is an ever-present condition of *all* action.

The few studies of entrepreneurial identity that *do* engage with the material body, either fail to theorise it explicitly (Haynie and Shepherd 2011) or reduce the body to a discursive construct (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, 2009). Writing from the psycho-social approach, Haynie and Shepherd (2011) illustrate how injury can impact on identity formation when the sense of self is closely linked to a career role one is unable to retain because of impairment. The authors point out,

importantly, that impairment can also motivate entrepreneurial activities and shape individual experiences of it. Yet, they analyse the onset of impairment simply in terms of mechanisms at a psychological level – as a ‘traumatic life event’ – while under-theorising the material, physiological consequences of impairment for day-to-day activities and identity formation.

### *3.3.3 Structure-agency relationship*

The question of how to theorise agency in relation to structure has been a defining issue of social sciences. It has also influenced debates in entrepreneurship (Sarason *et al.* 2006, Dimov 2007, Mole and Mole 2010, Welter 2011). How researchers theorise the link between social structure and entrepreneurial agency necessarily shapes how they conceive of the direction of causality. Studies typically view causality as operating in a particular direction, with specific implications for our understanding of causal powers of structures and agents *and* how the two interact. This is widely known as the problem of structure and agency, or “difficulty about how to link two sets of properties and powers; those belonging to the parts of society and those belonging to the people.” (Archer 2000: 1).

Entrepreneurial personality studies overemphasise causes at the individual level of inquiry and, in doing so, commit what Archer (1995, 2000) describes as ‘upwards conflation’ or reduction – that is, when we conceive of individual agents as having causal effect on social structure which does not react back. Causality, in other words, occurs simply in one direction – upwards. On the other hand, discursive constructionist studies tend to exaggerate the role of structure and how it impresses upon people – this is referred to as ‘downwards conflation’ (Archer 1995, 2000). Those writing from the psycho-social approach informed by the RIT and SIT are guilty of the same. According to Stets and Burke, “both traditions recognize that individuals view themselves in terms of meanings imparted by a structured society” (2000: 226). Agency however is not absent from the psycho-social accounts of identity; studies assume that people choose particular roles because of the social identities they already possess. Yet, they under-theorise why people have particular social identities, and not others, in the first place. Where do

their preferences come from? Fauchart and Gruber (2011), for instance, assume that the ‘founder identity’ is a given without defining it. It is shaped by multiple social identities which, in turn, shape the types of firms created. In a similar vein, Powell and Baker go on to define founder identity as “the set of identities that is chronically salient to a founder in her/his day-to-day work” (2014: 1406), accepting a circular definition.

There is often an inclination towards one or the other in social theorising, so that structure is dominant and agency subordinate or vice versa. Yet, it is now recognised that we ought to explain causal powers of *both* structure and agency *as well as* how they link (Archer 1982, 1995, 2000). There are two dominant approaches to the problem of how to link structures and agents: duality of structure advanced by structuration theory, and analytical dualism advocated by critical realism. The former represents another form of conflation, ‘central conflation’, because it insists that ‘parts’ and the ‘people’ are inseparable (Archer 1982, 1995, 2000). Contrary to the upwards and the downwards kinds, central conflation is *a*reductionist yet still problematic. By theorising structures and agents as mutually constitutive, researchers necessarily deny their autonomous powers. Consequently, their reciprocal influence cannot be fully teased out.

Analytical dualism is the idea that we must examine independent properties and powers of *both* structure and agency *as well as* their interplay (Archer 1995, 2000). Although agency and structure are ‘inextricably intertwined’ that does not make them analytically inseparable. The idea assumes that structure and agency operate over different time periods, so that:

- I. structure necessarily pre-dates the actions which reproduce or transform it;
- II. structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions (1995: 15).

Hence, while central conflationism simply states their theoretical interdependence, analytical dualism provides accounts of how structures and agents interlink over time through a morphogenetic sequence of structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration (Archer 1995). It is only by acknowledging the causal powers of social structures, such as the pre-existing role array, that we can explain how particular agents conditioned by particular structures can

accomplish particular social identities – for example, becoming an entrepreneur – and in so doing reproduce or transform structures.

Central conflationism is perhaps most evident in constructionist studies that treat entrepreneurial identity as ‘a process of becoming’ whereby agents narratively construct a sense of self, drawing on the linguistic resources available in society (Hytti 2005, Essers and Benschop 2007, Down and Warren 2008, Jones *et al.* 2008, Anderson and Warren 2011). Consider the following passage from Hytti: “...identities are not created neither internally in the entrepreneur’s mind, nor externally by the society and its structure but constructed dialogically between entrepreneurs and others in everyday conversations and life” (2005: 598). Studies in this tradition focus on the micro-level *practices* of constructing, while under-theorising the causal powers of structures, agents and the interplay between them. Structures and agents are mutually constitutive. In contrast, analytical dualism allows for the possibility that the objective existence of a market economy and an entrepreneurial role must have pre-dated agents who collectively act on those conditions, for example, by seeking to occupy an entrepreneurial role and to accomplish an entrepreneurial identity in the process.

Despite claiming to emphasise entrepreneurial *practices*, rather than the *essence* of an entrepreneur, researchers implicitly, and sometimes even explicitly (a study by R. Smith 2010 is a case in point), presuppose embodied agents who carry out such linguistic practices. Hence, there is a failure to specify the enabling and constraining conditions that make entrepreneurial identity, and the practices of expressing it, possible. Robust social theorising must explain properties and powers of *both* structure and agency *as well as* their interplay (Archer 2000).

#### 3.3.4 View of causality

Finally, researchers’ assumptions about the nature of causality significantly shape their descriptions and explanations of reality. This final section of the critique discusses how the three dominant views of entrepreneurial identity approach causality in contrast to critical realism. One of the distinctive features of critical realism is its understanding of causality – one that is based on a causal powers theory – compared to the dominant regularity view of causality mentioned earlier.

From a critical realist viewpoint, causal relations are relations of natural necessity – that is, arising from the nature of objects studied – rather than of regularity (Elder-Vass 2010). One may ask, what is the nature of entrepreneurship, or the nature of being an entrepreneur?

Bhaskar's (2008) particular approach to causality has two features: first, it assumes the existence of *real causal powers* (or 'the ways of acting of things') with particular structures and mechanisms that are relatively enduring; and second, the *actual causation* is produced by a combination of causal powers of different entities (Elder-Vass 2010). The regularity view of causality, in contrast, assumes that social events are produced by a single causal factor, or a small set of factors, under closed conditions, similar to those found in the laboratory, rather than by a complex interaction of causal powers normally found in the open system that is society.

Both the entrepreneurial personality and the psycho-social traditions subscribe to the regularity view of causality (Sayer 1997, Porpora 2015) where constant conjunctions of events are the basis for establishing causal laws. The causal laws can be identified through observation of regularity between events, using survey methods, so that any time event A occurs (for example, risk-taking behaviour), event B follows (for example, business creation). The regularity model is problematic as most studies simply link observable events without explaining the underlying causal powers of structures and entities that generate them. Causality is viewed merely as an empirical regularity (Porpora 2015). For critical realists, in contrast, a cause is a 'potentiality' or anything responsible for producing change (Sayer 1997). Causality is about "expressing tendencies of things, not conjunctions of events" (Bhaskar 2008: xxxi). Tendencies are not dependent on empirical generalisation.

Despite their anti-positivist sentiment, even approaches that emphasise interpretivist or hermeneutic methods, including linguistic constructionism, concur with the regularity view of causality (Porpora 2015). The aim of social science, from the interpretivist standpoint, is merely to describe meanings, while the search for causality should be reserved for natural sciences (Porpora 2015).

Interpretivist studies therefore indirectly accept the regularity view of causality in the social sciences. Additionally, despite rejecting the search for causation, studies at least implicitly presuppose some personal and structural causal powers that enable entrepreneurs to self-narrate as they do.

Causal explanations are more explicit in discursive constructionist studies whereby agents often come across as powerless in the face of the enterprise discourse dictating who can or cannot be an entrepreneur. Díaz García and Welter (2013), for instance, analyse how women business owners construct their gender identity as they confront conflicting discourses of womanhood and entrepreneurship. While previous studies found that being a woman is not a defining feature of business owners' identities, the authors note that 'the sex category is difficult to hide' and so resistance to gender norms can be challenging (2013: 399). Both gender identity and sex have been of interest (Eddleston and Powell 2008, R. Smith 2010, Orser *et al.* 2011, Díaz García and Welter 2013, Giazitzoglu and Down 2017), but the effects of embodied properties, such as sex, as potentially enabling as well as constraining, are still under-theorised in entrepreneurship.

Analyses of discursive representations of entrepreneurs offer important insights into the causal power of culture. Yet they leave open the question of what causes enterprise discourses to be what they are, and to have the alleged powers that they do. There must be some powers of persons that generate, reproduce, resist and challenge such discourses. Because of their anti-essentialist leanings, discursive constructionists cannot resolve the structure-agency dualism, and thus fail to explain how the enterprise discourse reproduces or transforms over time through the discursive actions of embodied agents.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The review has identified three metatheoretical traditions within the literature – strong essentialism, strong constructionism and the psycho-social approach. Each tradition is underpinned by particular ontological assumptions about entrepreneurial identity and reductionist tendencies that render disabled entrepreneurs largely invisible in the literature. It has been argued that these

underlying assumptions have consequences for the explanatory power of the entrepreneurial identity concept. Most studies either fail to explicitly define entrepreneurial identity, or conflate it with higher-level properties (for instance, discourse) or lower-level properties (for example, propensity to risk-taking).

The three traditions have been contrasted with a critical realist-informed view of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). Critical realism is the ontologically most inclusive and least restrictive metatheoretical approach (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006) because it allows for a multi-level analysis of identity and its causal mechanisms while accommodating the alternative standpoints. Unlike the alternatives, a critical realist approach can theorise the effects of disability on entrepreneurial identity without conflating disability with social attitudes, or with impaired bodies. Chapter 4 elaborates a novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as a particular kind of personal power, rather than a fixed trait determining behaviour, or a linguistic practice.

## Chapter 4

# The emergence of entrepreneurial identity: A theoretical framework

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a novel theoretical framework for researching entrepreneurial identity. A theoretical framework is a system of assumptions and concepts guiding a research study (Maxwell 2013). A framework influences questions, data collection and analysis, and interpretations of phenomena. Entrepreneurial identity has been drawn upon as a key concept to explain how and why disabled people become entrepreneurs. The framework developed in this chapter builds upon contemporary literature and incorporates disabled entrepreneurs' experiences to provide a robust conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, while avoiding the problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies identified in chapter 3. Although the specific focus is on how disability affects entrepreneurial identity formation, the framework has wider implications for researching entrepreneurial identity generally.

Drawing on a critical realist ontology (Bhaskar 2008, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Elder-Vass 2010, 2012, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), entrepreneurial identity is theorised as a particular kind of causal power – a *personal power*. As a causal power, entrepreneurial identity is a tendency or a potentiality that may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised, or realised but undetected by researchers (Bhaskar 2008). Although most people have the potential to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, exercise and realise that power because of other countervailing powers – personal, material and social – that discourage, or constrain, entrepreneurial action.

The conception of entrepreneurial identity as a *potential power* that may or may not be realised in practice differs from the personality traits theories that treat identity as a *fixed characteristic* of entrepreneurs that determines behaviour (Masters and Meier 1988). It also differs from strong constructionist studies that



theorise identity as a *narrative practice* entrepreneurs perform in social interaction (Hytti 2005). Entrepreneurial identity, in contrast, is the power that generates particular narrative performances, rather than the performance itself.

Utilising a stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), the embodiment literature (Burkitt 1999, Crossley 2006), Goffman's work on the presentation of self and stigma (1959, 1963) and legitimacy theories (Suchman 1995, De Clercq and Voronov 2009, Überbacher 2014), this novel conception of entrepreneurial identity has several features that distinguish it from alternative approaches. First, it theorises the role of *embodied* properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, in shaping the agential capacity to act and to form desirable identities. Entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced to the body, yet we could not be selves or persons without having a body, enabling us to act in the world (Burkitt 1999).

Second, entrepreneurs are contextualised within three analytical orders of reality – natural, practical and social (Archer 2000). Although entrepreneurial identity can only be assumed in society, in relation to other people and social structures, the underlying causal powers and mechanisms that make its emergence possible cannot be reduced to social interaction alone. Embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, enable as well as constrain individual capacities in nature (for example, walking uphill), in the material culture of artefacts (for example, driving a car) and in society (for example, communicating effectively), with consequences for entrepreneurial identity formation.

Third, *personal* identity, a unique set of concerns each person has in the natural, practical and social orders, is distinguished from *social* identity, a public role some people commit to in society (Archer 2000). While entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, personal identity is much broader and regulates our relations with *all* three orders. Personal concerns with physical well-being in nature (for example, resting when tired), with performative achievement in the material culture (for example, mastering touch-typing) and with self-worth in society (for example, providing for a family) shape the public roles and

relationships we are motivated to pursue, and to commit to.

Finally, as an emergent causal power, entrepreneurial identity presupposes three lower-level powers that agents must exercise simultaneously to accomplish entrepreneurial identity: (1) the power to conceive of a new venture idea; (2) the power to commit to venture creation; and (3) the power to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders. It is through a unique combination of the three lower-level powers, and the internal relations between them, that agents can realise the power to create a new venture and thus to become a particular kind of entrepreneur. This is the structure and the mechanism of entrepreneurial identity.

The chapter commences by explicating the novel conception of entrepreneurial identity and its key features (section 4.2). It then elaborates on the three lower-level powers and the mechanism that makes the emergence of entrepreneurial identity possible (sections 4.3 to 4.5), before concluding.

#### **4.2 A stratified and emergent ontology of identity**

Each person possesses properties, both causal powers and liabilities, emergent from their body (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010). Causal powers are capacities that enable human beings to “bring about changes in material and mental phenomena, to produce or influence objects and events in the world” (C. Smith 2010: 42). Causal powers are tendencies as there is no guarantee that the powers will be actualised or realised in particular actions or events because their effects may be blocked by countervailing powers (Bhaskar 2008, Elder-Vass 2010). C. Smith (2010) identifies 30 hierarchical capacities constitutive of personhood, including consciousness, the capacity to feel emotions, creativity, self-reflexivity and identity formation.

Drawing on critical realist ontology, and primarily the work of Archer (2000), this section develops a conceptualisation of identity as *emergent* and *stratified*. Emergence refers to the appearance of a new causal property (Porpora 2015) or something qualitatively new emergent from a lower level (Danermark *et al.* 2002).<sup>17</sup> An emergent property, sometimes referred to as an entity or a whole

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<sup>17</sup> Two aspects of emergence can be distinguished: synchronic and diachronic (Elder-Vass 2000). Synchronic emergence is concerned with relations between the parts that constitute an emergent property. Diachronic emergence is concerned with causal explanation of how the

(Elder-Vass 2010), arises out of combination of lower-level properties and their relations. Water is a classic example in natural science; the causal properties of water, for instance being able to put out fires, are different from the properties of its constituent hydrogen and oxygen atoms which do not have the same power (Elder-Vass 2007). Similarly, emergent properties theorised in social science, such as entrepreneurial identity, must have causal powers irreducible to the powers of its constituent parts. A personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace cannot be reduced to the power to creatively imagine a product idea. One may conceive of a product idea but fail to successfully translate it into an actual product that sells. Hence, different strata of social reality possess different emergent properties and powers (Archer 1995).

According to C. Smith (2010), emergence occurs when the following happens: 1) two or more entities that exist at a “lower” level interact or combine in particular ways; 2) that interaction or combination serves as the basis of some new, real entity that has existence at a “higher” level; 3) the existence of the new higher-level entity is fully dependent upon the two or more lower-level entities interacting or combining in particular ways; yet 4) the new, higher-level entity possesses characteristic qualities that cannot be reduced to those of the lower-level entities. The newly emergent property can react back on its components (Archer 1995). For instance, a person who creates a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace may, in turn, be perceived as more legitimate by potential customers and gain further support.

Ontology is stratified in two senses – philosophical and scientific (Bhaskar 2008, Elder-Vass 2012). Assuming that the world exists independently of our knowledge, Bhaskar distinguishes three ontological domains – the empirical, the actual and the real. The empirical domain is what we experience. Recognising that not all events are experienced, this domain can be distinguished from the actual domain which comprises both experiences and events that happen regardless of whether observed. These two domains differ from the domain of the real comprising all – human experiences, events and the underlying causes and

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emergent property came to exist in this form historically. This chapter is concerned primarily with developing a synchronic account of emergence of entrepreneurial identity.

mechanisms that generate those experiences and events. Hence, instead of a one-dimensional reality that we can access merely through sense data, emergence implies that reality is stratified and involves non-observable entities (Archer 1995: 50).

A stratified ontology in the scientific sense is about postulating particular entities and processes through a substantive theory (Bhaskar 2008, 2005) within specific contexts, areas of concern, such as entrepreneurship, and disciplines (Elder-Vass 2012). The social and natural world, for Bhaskar, represent two different layers of reality. Such differentiation implies that the world must be stratified (2008), rather than ‘flat’. It is the assumption that causal powers and mechanisms operate at multiple strata or levels of reality that makes phenomena such as atoms and capitalism possible objects of study in their respective fields (Bhaskar 2008).

A stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000), for instance, assumes that human consciousness emerges from the body, a lower-level stratum, although it cannot be reduced to it. The self or self-consciousness, in turn, emerges from consciousness. Although the self can be viewed as abstract and non-physical, it possesses powers with real material consequences, enabling and constraining action. Reductionism occurs when the effects of a higher-level mechanism (for example, self-consciousness) are theorised as nothing more than a sum of the effects of lower-level mechanisms (for example, bodily functions). All properties and events at these higher levels are then explained by reference to properties of lower-level entities (Elder-Vass 2010: 54).

#### *4.2.1 Embodied self*

There is a growing recognition in social science that ‘who we are’ cannot be separated from how we are embodied (Turner 1984, Giddens 1991, Burkitt 1999, Archer 2000, Shilling 2003, Jenkins 2008, C. Smith 2010). Framing *the self* as a unity of mind and body, the concept of embodiment seeks to overcome the Western philosophical tradition of mind-body dualism, which maintains the existence of two separate realms – mind and matter (Burkitt 1999). The notion of mind as non-physical has contributed to a widespread neglect of the body across disciplines. Studies typically associate identity formation with cognitive

processes, such as thinking, memory and language, and assume that such processes are inherently non-physical and separate from the body. The concept of embodiment brings the body back into analyses of the self and personhood. Although the self cannot be reduced to the body, we could not be selves or persons without having a body enabling us to act in the world (Burkitt 1999, Shilling 2003, Crossley 2006).

To adequately analyse the body, social scientists need to begin conceptualising it as “...a material, physical and biological phenomenon which is irreducible to immediate social processes or classifications... Human bodies are taken up and transformed as a result of living in society, but they remain material, physical and biological entities.” (Shilling 2003: 10). There are limits to human embodiment and its powers; nature conditions our capacities to act in society, although of course it does not determine behaviour. At the same time, society is not only possible because of natural conditions; it also changes nature (Gunnarsson 2013).

Studies adopting the lens of embodiment have highlighted the role of the material body in conceptions of identity and personhood. Human consciousness and cognitive processes that presuppose identity formation, such as perception, thought, reason, memory and language, are embodied and grounded in the practical action of the body (Varela *et al.* 1991, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Burkitt 1999, Archer 2000, Gibbs 2003, Shilling 2000, Farnell and Varela 2008). Embodiment is integral to sense-making (Cunliffe and Coupland 2011) and sense-giving (Cornelissen *et al.* 2012) as we reflect on who we are as embodied agents (Crossley 2006) and communicate to others through our practices, including but also extending beyond the use of language.

Bodily movement in particular is an important meaning-making resource (Farnell and Varela 2008). Through movement, human beings communicate their conscious states such as beliefs, intentions and emotions, both purposefully *and* inadvertently. We are often conscious of how we present ourselves in our interactions with others, yet we can never be totally aware of the impressions our embodiment gives off (Goffman 1959, 1963). The practical action of embodied agents is central to Archer’s (2000) stratified view of personhood, which provides

a theoretical framework for the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity elaborated next.

#### *4.2.2 Archer's three levels of identity and analytical orders of reality*

Archer (2000) distinguishes three levels or strata of identity – the self, personal identity and social identity – emergent from the practical action of embodied agents. Each identity level emerges from lower levels, but is irreducible to them, and each possesses its own unique properties and powers that do not occur at lower strata. Hence, the self emerges from consciousness, personal identity from the self and social identity from personal identity. This is a stratified conception of identity.

Archer, furthermore, distinguishes three orders of reality – natural, practical and social – that shape our capacities to act and to form identities (2000). Our personal capacities are necessarily enabled and constrain by the powers of nature, by the material culture of artefacts, and by the propositional culture of social norms, values and arguments. Agents' variable capacities in relation to *all* three orders influence identity formation in unique ways. The 'three orders' is an analytical distinction (Archer 2000) – we are always embedded in the natural, practical and social orders simultaneously – yet it highlights the role of non-social relations in identity formation. The concept of 'identity work' has been used to theorise entrepreneurial identity in terms of socio-cultural interaction (Watson 2009, Leitch and Harrison 2016), to the neglect of personal relations with nature and the material culture.

*Self*, or the sense of self, is the most fundamental of human powers (Archer 2000: 119). It is what makes each of us a unique human being. The self emerges from the practical action of agents' embodied relations with the natural order independently of, and prior to, the development of linguistic competence. It arises at a very early stage of life as babies acquire awareness of themselves as materially embodied beings, separate from other physical objects in their environment, able to act causally on the material world.

Human beings acquire practical knowledge that is non-linguistic before learning how to speak and continue bodily, non-linguistic, learning in relation to the

natural environment throughout life (Archer 2000). For the self to emerge, practical action is more important than language acquisition; individuals acquire a sense of self even if they lack the capacity to speak. The formation of the self continues in relation to the practical order as we learn how to use various human-made artefacts, and finally, through linguistic and discursive interaction in the social order. While embodied practice is crucial for the emergence of the self, embodied memory is necessary for the continuous sense of self over time. Here, procedural memories derived from the exercise of tacit bodily skills are more resilient than declarative or verbal memories and endure for a lifetime (Archer 2000).

*Personal identity*, emergent from the self, refers to the unique constellation of concerns that makes each of us a particular person (Archer 2000: 191). It encompasses what we care about most in our interactions with the natural, practical and social orders. Each person has a distinct set of concerns which shape, and are shaped by, personal embodied properties in relation to each order. People's relationship to the world is one of concern (Sayer 2011). People do not simply think and act; we evaluate relationships, practices and events in relation to what matters to us and what we perceive enables us to flourish, or holds us back. People are also moral creatures, capable of reflecting and acting on their personal beliefs, values and commitments (C. Smith 2010, Sayer 2011). Unlike the sense of self which is held to be universal to all human beings, personal identity is an achievement that occurs in maturity and is realised through an *internal conversation*, or self-talk (Archer 2000, 2003).

Personal identity, Archer notes, is not attained by all. Emotions fuel internal conversations and act as commentaries on agents' concerns (2000). In the natural order, fear emerges from anticipation of known dangers, such as fire, as a commentary on our "physical well-being". In the practical order, joy or frustration emerge from the use of artefacts, such as cars, and act as commentaries on our concern with "performative achievement". And in the social order, emotions such as pride or shame emerge in relation to other people as commentaries on our concern with "self-worth". To survive and thrive, we must attend to our concerns in *all* three orders simultaneously, although individuals will set their own

priorities as to which concerns matter most. It is how we prioritise and balance our various concerns that makes each of us a unique person.

*Social identity* refers to the relationships and roles that each person involuntarily occupies from birth, for example daughter-mother, and those that people voluntarily choose to commit to in their life-time (Archer 2000: 251), such as entrepreneurial roles. An entrepreneurial role refers to the appearance and behavioural norms and expectations associated with the social position of an entrepreneur. Different societies and cultures may attach different meanings to entrepreneurial roles and so there may be more than one definition of an entrepreneurial role. Of course, social roles do not *determine* behaviour and personal identity; people can act flexibly in a role to accommodate their various concerns. Different people will personify entrepreneurial roles in different ways within the limits set by the expectations of important others.

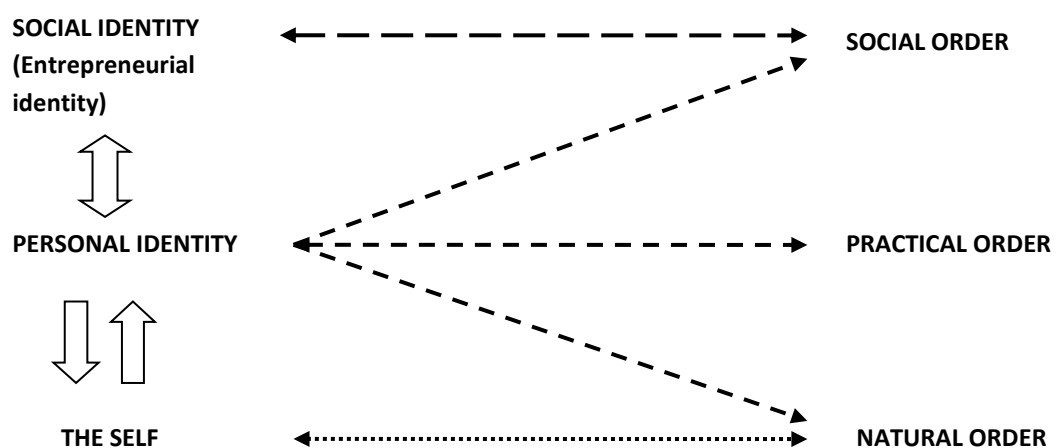
Personal identity and social identities are dialectically related – that is, they contribute to one another's emergence and distinctiveness, although they are ontologically distinct (Archer 2000: 288). This generates a dilemma because it appears that personal identity cannot be attained before social identity is achieved. The achievement of social identity, equally, is dependent upon having sufficient personal identity to personify any role in a unique way. Although the two identity strata are co-dependent, personal identity is always broader as it *both* animates social identity and defines its standing in relation to other concerns (Archer 2000). Our social concerns do not necessarily outweigh our natural and practical concerns. While personal identity regulates our relations with *all* three orders, a social identity can only be accomplished through social interaction and could be viewed as a sub-set of personal identity. Social identities emerge when agents personify a particular social role which then becomes part of their personal identity.

The differently dotted arrows in Figure 4.1 highlight that each identity level is a qualitatively different entity, with distinct relations with the three orders. Social identity can only emerge in the social order, in relation to other people, although it shapes, and is importantly influenced by, the practical and natural orders. Personal



identity, however, emerges through our relations with *all* three orders; our concerns cannot be reduced to those arising from social interaction. Finally, the self is emergent in the natural order in so far as it does not depend on the other two orders for its existence. The self, of course, is a component part of personal and social identity and therefore affects human relations with all three orders. The double arrow at the level of the self indicates that self-consciousness is the most fundamental of human powers and a prior condition for *all* other powers at the higher identity strata, although both social identity and personal identity can react back on the self and alter it to a degree. The single arrow between personal and social identity indicates that there is a dialectical relationship between the two identity strata.

**Figure 4.1** A stratified and emergent ontology of identity



Source: Adapted from Archer (2000)

Building on the ideas developed so far, the novel theoretical framework has three elements that distinguish it from the dominant constructionist conception of entrepreneurial identity. First, it contextualises the emergence of entrepreneurial identity in relation to *all* three analytical orders – natural, practical and social. Second, it distinguishes *personal* identity, a set of concerns in the three orders that motivate our actions from *social* identity, a public role we may invest ourselves in and commit to in society. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying concerns that motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role involve more than social relations. Third, our personal concerns are inevitably

embodied. People have properties – both powers and liabilities – by virtue of their variable embodiment that motivate them to attend to particular concerns, to perform particular practices and to commit to particular social roles. However, commitment to new venture creation alone does not make one an entrepreneur. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity depends on the exercise of two other lower-level powers.

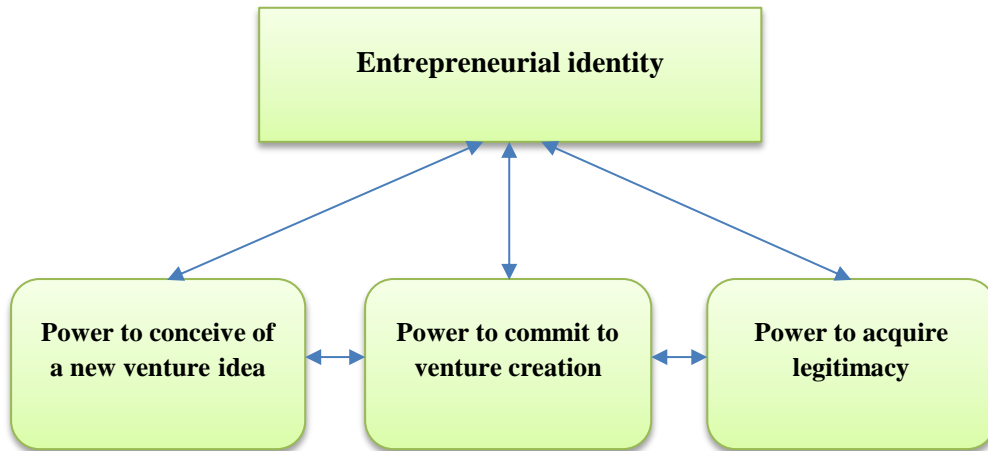
#### *4.2.3 Entrepreneurial identity and its constituent lower-level powers*

Drawing on a critical realist ontology (Bhaskar 2008, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Elder-Vass 2010, 2012), entrepreneurial identity may best be defined as an emergent *personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace*. Entrepreneurial identity, as an emergent property, is the product of a causal mechanism that depends on the interaction of its ‘parts’. This section theorises three lower-level powers or ‘parts’ of entrepreneurial identity, and the interdependent relations between them. A causal mechanism is a process whereby ‘parts’ of the entity interact and are organised in the particular relations that constitute them into wholes possessing this emergent property (Elder-Vass 2010). A causal mechanism, in other words, is a particular structure – a complex organisation of different elements (Porpora 2015). The structure or mechanism of entrepreneurial identity is constituted by three lower-level powers of persons:

- The power to conceive of a new venture idea;
- The power to commit to venture creation; and
- The power to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders.

Entrepreneurial identity, as an emergent property, is irreducible to the three lower-level powers that make its emergence possible (Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2** The three lower-level powers constituting entrepreneurial identity



One cannot accomplish or realise the power of entrepreneurial identity unless their venture succeeds in the marketplace. There are both subjective and objective measures of entrepreneurial success (Wach *et al.* 2016). The subjective measure of success depends on the personal perception; each entrepreneur will attach different meanings to success. The objective measure, for the purposes of this study, is the birth of a new firm or organisation which, following Reynolds and Miller (1992), could involve as little as personal commitment and initial sales.

There is an internal, *necessary* relation (Sayer 1992) between the three lower-level powers; the emergence of entrepreneurial identity depends on agents' exercise of *all* three powers simultaneously. For example, one may conceive of a new venture idea but decide not to pursue it further because of having to prioritise other commitments. One may be committed to venture creation, but the new venture idea may turn out to be practically inadequate. One may be perceived as a legitimate entrepreneur in the eyes of stakeholders but lack commitment to venture creation. Additionally, agents can exercise all three lower-level powers simultaneously, but fail to accomplish entrepreneurial identity because of other personal, material and socio-cultural forces; for example, high levels of competition within a particular sector, or a lack of management experience affecting the individual capacity to generate sales.

There is a particular relationship between the three lower-level powers

constitutive of entrepreneurial identity and the three analytical orders of reality – natural, practical and social (Figure 4.3). While the capacity to build, and acquire, legitimacy can only be exercised in the social order, in relation to other people, the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea can be exercised in *all* three orders. Likewise, personal relations with *all* three orders significantly influence how people balance their various concerns that motivate some to commit to venture creation while discouraging others from doing so. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity is significantly shaped by the powers of nature and material culture *as well as* society.

**Figure 4.3** Relations between three lower-level powers and three orders of reality

	<b>The power to conceive of a new venture idea</b>	<b>The power to commit to venture creation</b>	<b>The power to acquire legitimacy with others</b>
<b>NATURAL ORDER</b>	x	x	
<b>PRACTICAL ORDER</b>	x	x	
<b>SOCIAL ORDER</b>	x	x	x

*Adapted from Archer (2000)*

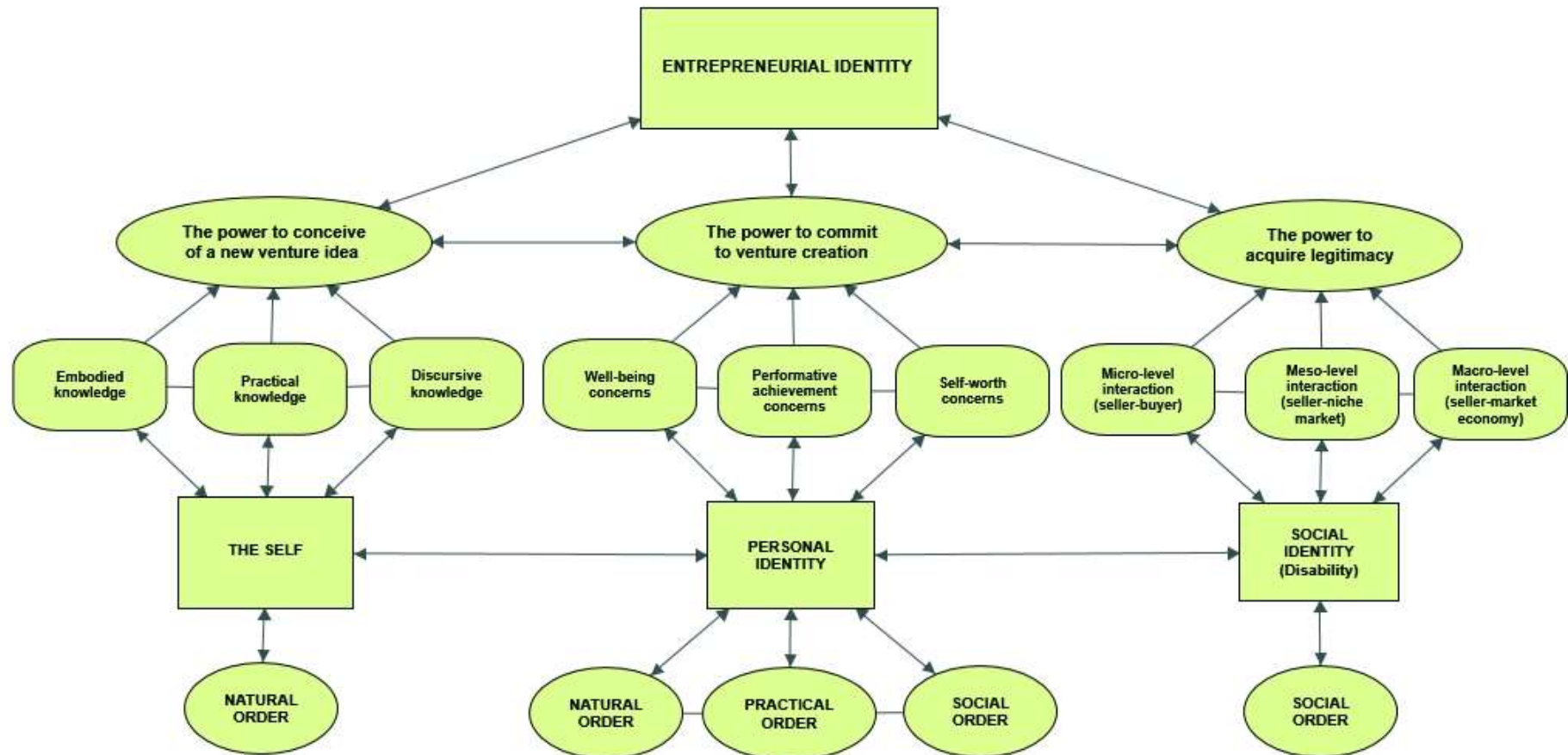
Importantly, the emergent entrepreneurial identity can react back on its lower-level parts – the power to conceive of a new venture idea, the power to commit to venture creation and the power to acquire legitimacy – through downward causation. Downward causation refers to the capability of an entity with causal powers to have a causal impact on its own parts (Elder-Vass 2010: 58). Successful entrepreneurs, for instance, may become more: (a) motivated to actively innovate; (b) committed to maintaining or growing their business; and (c) legitimate in the eyes of new customers, finance providers and other stakeholders.

There is as yet no conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as a *personal power* in the field of entrepreneurship. However, the three lower-level powers are discussed extensively in the form of studies that examine: (i) new venture ideas and opportunity recognition or discovery; (ii) start-up motivations and intentions; and (iii) new venture or entrepreneurial legitimacy. Several studies bridge the concepts of entrepreneurial identity and legitimacy (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Holt and Macpherson 2010, Navis and Glynn 2011, De

Clercq and Honig 2011, Williams Middleton 2013, Stenholm and Hytti 2014). Many entrepreneurial identity studies discuss start-up motivations or intentions (Farmer *et al.* 2009, Bjursell and Melin 2011, Fauchart and Gruber 2011, Mills and Pawson 2012, Falck *et al.* 2012, Murnieks *et al.* 2014, Obschonka *et al.* 2015, Alsos *et al.* 2016, York *et al.* 2016, Yitshaki and Kropp 2016, Morris *et al.* 2016). And some literature examines opportunity recognition or discovery through an identity lens (Farmer *et al.* 2009, Mitchell and Shepherd 2010, Gill 2014, Mathias and William 2017). However, none of these studies theorise the emergence of new venture ideas, commitment and legitimacy in terms of personal powers, or draw explicit connections between their internal relations.

Finally, the three causal powers constitutive of entrepreneurial identity are also emergent from lower-level powers. The capacity to conceive of a new venture idea, for example, presupposes powers of mental representation and creativity. The capacity to commit to venture creation emerges from self-reflection and internal conversation. The capacity to acquire legitimacy arises from the power of inter-personal communication. The three personal powers constitutive of entrepreneurial identity are the higher-level powers of the self, personal identity and social identity. Figure 4.4 provides a visual graphic of the synchronic emergence of entrepreneurial identity. The rest of the chapter elaborates on the emergence of the three lower-level powers. To set the scene for the empirical material in the forthcoming chapters, each power is theorised with specific reference to disability effects on identity formation.

**Figure 4.4** Synchronic emergence of entrepreneurial identity



### 4.3 The self and the power to conceive of a new venture idea

Discussions around how new venture ideas come into being are often framed in terms of ‘opportunities’. Opportunity theories have been a dominant lens for examining entrepreneurial activities over the past few decades (Busenitz *et al.* 2014). The literature, for example, examines why and how some individuals are better than others in identifying and exploiting opportunities. Yet, the concept has been under growing scrutiny. Studies often fail to define what they mean by opportunity (Davidsson 2015) or use the word to refer simultaneously to social context, embodied practices, beliefs or ideas (Kitching and Rouse 2017). To avoid the confusion associated with the use of the opportunity concept, the present study theorises how external enabling and constraining conditions in the three orders – natural, practical and social – fuel the power to conceive of a new venture idea.

‘New venture ideas’ refer to “imaginary combinations of product/service offerings; potential markets or users, and means of bringing these offerings into existence” (Davidsson 2015: 11). Following Davidsson, several assumptions can be made about new venture ideas. First, the intended activity does not need to be ‘innovative’ but it must introduce something not previously offered by the same actor. Second, ideas are cognitive and non-material; they are individual interpretations of external enabling conditions and represent what one *might* be aiming to create rather than what gradually materialises into a venture itself. Third, the cognitive nature of ideas does not make them completely inseparable from an individual actor; ideas may be articulated and shared within teams and transferred between its successive supporters. They can be codified and communicated to others, for instance potential customers. Finally, new venture ideas are not necessarily perceived as favourable; they can be good or bad. One might conceive of a novel idea and then decide not to act on it because they conclude it is not sensible to pursue, while others considering the same idea may assess it differently (Davidsson 2015).

But how does a new venture idea emerge? Practical action of embodied agents is pivotal to self-consciousness and knowing (Archer 2000: 152). Accordingly, it is the embodied *non*-linguistic knowledge comprising tacit information, skills and know-how that emerges initially through our practical interaction with nature.

Although we acquire linguistic knowing through social interaction, we continue non-linguistic learning throughout our lifetimes. The continuous sense of self and, by extension, knowing is importantly shaped by our relations with nature (for example, learning how to float on water), with the material culture of artefacts (for example, learning how to touch-type), and with the propositional culture of theories, beliefs, values and arguments (for example, learning social rules). Even in our social relations, much of our knowing is non-linguistic, for example turn-taking in conversation.

This section will argue that new venture ideas can emerge from different forms of knowledge that agents acquire in relation to nature, the material culture and society. Archer (2000) distinguishes three knowledge forms – embodied, practical and discursive – attained in the three respective orders (Figure 4.5). Because a new venture idea can arise from any one form of knowing, the *emergence* of entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced to our relations with society alone. Social interaction is, of course, necessary for the development of ideas into viable products and the eventual creation of a new venture.

**Figure 4.5** Three knowledge forms and the emergence of new venture ideas

<b>ORDER OF REALITY</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE FORM</b>	<b>NEW VENTURE IDEA</b>
SOCIAL ORDER / PROPOSITIONAL CULTURE	DISCURSIVE KNOWLEDGE	Example: Discursive knowing in relation to the propositional culture led to the invention of services, such as public relations
PRACTICAL ORDER / MATERIAL CULTURE	PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE	Example: Practical knowing in relation to the material culture led to product improvements, such as development of mobile phones.
NATURAL ORDER / NATURE	EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE	Example: Embodied knowing in relation to nature led to the invention of products, such as swim rings or umbrellas.

*Adapted from Archer (2000)*

The three knowledge forms are importantly intertwined but each possesses distinct properties (Archer 2000). A new venture idea can originate in any one knowledge form. Agents may conceive of an idea through their interaction with



nature (for example, experience of water buoyancy) and later translate embodied knowing into discursive knowing by developing the idea in collaboration with others into a novel product (for example, fitness training programme in water). Ideas emerge at the level of consciousness and self-consciousness as agents exercise the capacity to conceive of an idea *here and now*, stimulated by ‘new’ information from the environment combined with their pre-existing knowledge. New venture ideas can of course develop further through processes of internal conversation and inter-personal communication, as people reflect on and communicate their ideas.

#### *4.3.1 Three forms of knowledge as sources of ideas*

*Embodied knowledge* refers to ‘knowing how’ that is based upon our sensory-motor interactions with nature, living and non-living, rather than ‘knowing that’ in thought (Archer 2000). For Archer, embodied knowledge is ‘unthinking’ or acquired in unawareness of its cognitive content, yet not necessarily unintentional. Indeed, our bodies are often ‘absent’ from consciousness or perform in a ‘corporeal background’ in routine situations (Leder 1990) so that we do not think of our actions as we perform them. For example, we usually do not think about how our legs move as we walk until we trip on a pavement that is uneven. Each knowledge form has cognitive content; however embodied know-how is based exclusively on experience and acquired primarily through repetition rather than reflexivity (Archer 2000, 2012).<sup>18</sup> Embodied knowledge can only be accomplished in direct contact with nature; it cannot be an abstract decontextualised proposition. Finally, the acquisition of embodied knowledge always entails an element of bodily discovery (2000: 161-66) as we learn for ourselves what it feels like to float on water or to walk unsteadily on ice.

Considering how venture ideas may arise from our relations with nature, the translation of embodied knowing and ideas into material and the propositional cultures must necessarily presuppose a degree of conscious deliberation. Although embodied knowing tends to be routinised, it is often in critical situations such as

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<sup>18</sup> Although much of our embodied knowing becomes discursive over time, Archer notes that some embodied knowing must be ‘recapitulated anew’ by every human being. None of us read an instruction manual on how to lean our body forward when walking uphill or against the wind; each person must learn this for themselves in relation with nature (2004).

instances of pain, fatigue or discomfort that bodies ‘reappear’ problematically into consciousness (Leder 1990, Shilling 2003, Gimlin 2006).

The onset of impairment or injury can bring the body and embodied knowing to the foreground of attention (Leder 1990). Disruptions to embodied knowing can potentially stimulate the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea. As we reflect upon a ‘newly acquired’ embodied knowing, we seek to enhance our embodied powers, or address our bodily liabilities, by developing the material culture of artefacts. Acquiring visual impairment, for example, can disrupt embodied know-how and personal capacities to navigate the natural environment. Disruptions to embodied know-how can, in turn, generate product ideas, such as a white cane, that help enhance embodied powers.

*Practical knowledge* differs from embodied knowledge in that it is acquired through our practical relations with the material culture (Archer 2000). What distinguishes humans from their primitive ancestors, and other animals, is our capacity to enhance our embodied knowledge by inventing artefacts and, in doing so, developing material culture. For example, an umbrella protects us from sun radiation and rain. Our relations with the material culture involve artefacts that can be highly sophisticated, incorporating cutting-edge scientific knowledge, like computers, or more mundane, like coasters. While knowing in nature is gained mainly through repetition of practices, for instance walking, the acquisition of practical knowledge involves ‘higher cognitive content’. Practical know-how requires a degree of conscious non-verbal deliberation; it becomes tacit only once it is mastered into a skill, such as touch-typing (Archer 2000: 170).

Practical knowledge differs from discursive knowledge in four respects. First, it is procedural (knowing how) – involving a process of doing in relation to the material culture – rather than declarative (knowing that). Second, it is implicit or encoded in the body as skills. Third, it is tacit or understood through activity involving the use of artefacts, as opposed to manipulation of symbols of propositional culture, such as words. Unlike Bourdieu (1993), who considers such knowledge to be beyond the grasp of consciousness, Archer (2000: 166) maintains that much of practical knowledge becomes explicit through public codification of

practice over time, as in the case of development of maps or knitting patterns. Finally, practical knowledge is an extension of bodily powers which can be amplified by the possibilities afforded in the practical order. For example, a microscope enables scientists to examine objects too small to see with the human eye with the potential to expand human knowledge and powers beyond what our unaided natural senses permit.

New venture ideas often arise from practical knowing as we seek to enhance our embodied powers by developing a range of artefacts. People with particular impairments, for example mobility difficulties, may be especially attentive to how their embodied powers are enabled or constrained by the conditions of material culture as they interact with and use various artefacts, such as trains, lifts or cash machines. If the material culture caters primarily to the able-bodied majority, others may be excluded from mainstream provision but also enthused to develop more inclusive ways of performing day-to-day practical tasks. For example, talking cash machines can make bank branches more accessible to blind and partially sighted people.

Finally, *discursive knowledge* refers to declarative or linguistic knowing (knowing that) in relation to the social order (Archer 2000). This differs from embodied and practical knowledge forms, both of a procedural kind (knowing how), emergent in relation to the natural and the practical orders. Just as the human body is analytically distinct from nature, and a subject from objects of the material culture, so are discursive relations between people analytically distinct from the propositional culture they reproduce or transform over time (Archer 2000). Propositional culture is a cultural system comprising theories, beliefs, values, norms and arguments that exist at any given time (Archer 2000: 173). Archer offers an example of groups maintaining ideas that are contradictory or complementary to others, for instance, policy debates on welfare reforms. Those ideas affect discursive relations of individuals within and between groups and, in turn, condition the development of ideas.

Discursive knowing can also be an important source of new venture ideas. Novel product ideas may arise from agents' interaction with theories, beliefs, values,

rules and arguments that prevail in the propositional culture of particular social contexts. For instance, equality laws and commitment to address discrimination in the labour market, or participation barriers in the workplace, may stimulate some people to create a consultancy business providing equality and diversity training to employers.

#### *4.3.2 Relations between embodied, practical and discursive knowledge*

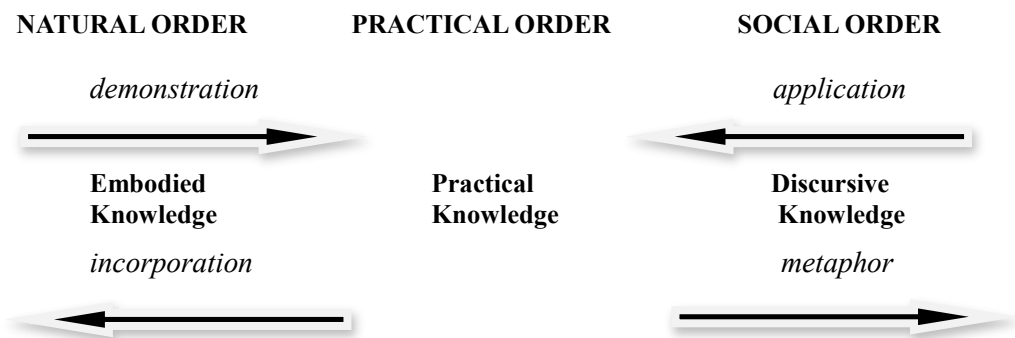
All knowledge emerges from the interplay of personal powers and the properties and powers of objects found in the three orders of reality – natural, practical and social. The three orders condition the powers of people by shaping the situations in which they find themselves (Archer 2000). Knowledge therefore comprises what people learn to do in nature (embodied knowledge), the skills they acquire in practice (practical knowledge) and the propositional elaborations they make in particular cultural contexts (discursive knowledge).

New venture ideas can arise from any one type of knowledge. The three knowledge forms are importantly intertwined as their value to wider audiences depends on their successful transfer between the three orders (Archer 2000). However, ideas can arise from any one form of knowledge independently of the others. Assuming that each knowledge form is ontologically distinct provides a basis for the argument that the power to conceive of a new venture idea cannot be reduced to discursive knowing alone. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity thus cannot be reduced simply to social relations. Agents' embodied interactions with nature and the material culture are an important source of new venture ideas. Particular impairments and health conditions, for example blindness, may stimulate the power to conceive of a new product idea regardless of the socio-cultural context.

New venture ideas originating in the natural or practical order must of course be transferred into the social order to develop into viable products. There is a continuous communication between embodied, practical and discursive knowing because each form benefits from the creativity offered by the others. The transfer and translation from one form to another is enabled or constrained by human interests vested in each knowledge form (Archer 2000); encompassing processes

of demonstration, application, embodied incorporation and metaphoric communication (Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6** Relations between embodied, practical and discursive knowledge



Source: Archer (2000: 179)

Established or well *demonstrated* embodied and practical knowledge (for example, a knife cut will cause bleeding which can be stopped by a plaster) may be challenged and extended by discursive knowledge and its abstract explanation of the causal powers involved. Yet, a well-tried practice may be hard to abandon unless a new theory can prove itself to enhance practice (for example, an improved type of plaster). Those proposing new explanations must illustrate the *application* of their theories in practice before the established practice is replaced by the new, more elaborate one (Archer 2000).

Working in the opposite direction, the new possibilities offered by discursively informed practice (for example, an improved plaster made from new materials and different packaging), confront agents by setting a new challenge to embodied *incorporation*. Agents must adopt new embodied ways of doing things. Working from the middle in both directions, innovations in practical knowledge challenge individual embodied capacity to master such know-how by naturalising practices (for example, using a new method for applying a plaster) *and* the capacity to *metaphorically* convey the new skill for discursive appreciation (for example, explaining to others the method for applying the plaster) (Archer 2000).

Just as the power to conceive of a new venture idea arises from our relations with *all* three orders, so does the power to commit to venture creation emerge from our concerns in nature, the material culture of artefacts and society. The next section

explicates how personal concerns in *all* three orders can motivate commitment to venture creation.

#### **4.4 Personal identity and the power to commit to venture creation**

For entrepreneurial identity to emerge, it is not enough to imagine a new venture idea; agents must commercialise the idea by creating a business venture that sells products in the marketplace. This section elaborates on how the personal power to commit to venture creation emerges in relation to Archer's (2000) three analytical orders – natural, practical and social. Although entrepreneurial identity can only be assumed in society, it will be argued that the underlying concerns that motivate the agential power to pursue, and commit to, an entrepreneurial role cannot be reduced simply to social interaction. Personal identity regulates our relations with *all* three orders. Drawing on Archer's concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration, the section theorises the connections between entrepreneurial motivation, the natural, practical and social orders, and venture creation.

Motivations, as causes of venture creation, tend to be discussed only implicitly in the entrepreneurial identity literature. Constructionist-informed studies focus primarily on how people make sense of their entrepreneurial self-identities and ventures, drawing upon various narrative and discursive resources (Cohen and Musson 2000, Down and Warren 2008, Jones *et al.* 2008). The causes underpinning personal concerns that motivate commitment to venture creation are often under-analysed. Where motivations are discussed, explicitly or implicitly, researchers tend to examine the influence of social and economic relations (Phillips *et al.* 2013). For example, studies highlight that entrepreneurs' behaviours are shaped primarily through how they perceive themselves in relation to others (Alsos *et al.* 2016, Fauchart and Gruber 2011, Gruber and MacMillan 2017).

Studies of entrepreneurial identity typically under-theorise concerns with physical well-being in nature (for example, coping with illness), and with performative achievement in the material culture (for example, difficulties in using technologies) as an influence on entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour,

although such concerns are implicitly assumed. Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity as a narrative or discursive practice in the social order has serious consequences for researchers' capacity to theorise the material realities of disabled entrepreneurs' lives, including: (1) the causal powers of nature and the material culture *as well as* society in encouraging or discouraging entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour; and (2) the effects of embodied properties, such as ill-health or impairment, on personal concerns and the motivation to pursue, and commit to, an entrepreneurial role.

The entrepreneurial motivation literature is often framed in terms of pull/push and opportunity/necessity dichotomies (Carsrud and Brännback 2011). Motivations tend to be explained as particular needs, for example financial security or a need for achievement. Such dichotomies, however, tend to over-simplify individual motives which, in practice, not only involve a combination of necessity and opportunity but also change over time (Williams and Williams 2011). Moreover, there is little sense in such studies of the standing or importance of push/pull factors in relation to various other personal concerns and commitments that emerge and change over time. Stephan *et al.* (2015) recently suggested a multi-dimensional approach to recognise that entrepreneurial agents may be motivated by several dimensions, with distinct outcomes in terms of firm performance. Research on motivational profiles is believed to provide novel insights into the relative importance entrepreneurs ascribe to different aspects of motivation (Stephan *et al.* 2015) and at different points in the life course (Jayawarna *et al.* 2013).

In what follows, the connections between entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour are theorised by postulating: first, how personal concerns with well-being in nature, with performative achievement in the material culture, and with self-worth in society shape individual consideration of venture creation; and second, how the onset of disability can fuel processes of internal conversation and emotional elaboration that shape the personal power to commit to an entrepreneurial role. Framing the linkages between entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour through the lens of internal conversation can help extend the research agenda beyond simplistic dichotomies and the over-socialised understanding of

entrepreneurial motivation.

#### 4.4.1 Concerns, internal conversation and consideration of venture creation

To survive and thrive (Archer 2000), each person must attend simultaneously to their concerns with physical well-being in the natural order, with performative achievement in the practical order, and with self-worth in the social order (Figure 4.7). A unique set of concerns that each person has in the three orders can enable and constrain, encourage and discourage, venture creation. For example, people with particular impairments and health conditions may find it difficult to accommodate employment around well-being concerns and consider venture creation as a more flexible means of working. Some may be motivated by a novel product idea conceived of in response to a specific task difficulty experienced in the material culture. Others may consider venture creation due to discrimination in the labour market.

**Figure 4.7** Personal concerns in the three orders of reality

ORDER OF REALITY	A SET OF CONCERNS	SPECIFIC CONCERNS
SOCIAL ORDER / PROPOSITIONAL CULTURE	SELF-WORTH	Example: choosing roles / careers, gaining others' approval, acquiring legitimacy, facing discriminatory attitudes
PRACTICAL ORDER / MATERIAL CULTURE	PERFORMATIVE ACHIEVEMENT	Example: using man-made artefacts, for instance technology, to perform tasks, such as sending an email or driving a car
NATURAL ORDER / NATURE	PHYSICAL WELL-BEING	Example: resting when tired, attending to ill-health, diet, exercise and protection from environmental harm

*Adapted from Archer (2000)*

Personal identity, or what we care about (Archer 2000), cannot be reduced to how we narratively express our concerns; there is much that goes unspoken in our day-to-day interactions with others. Moreover, each person may attach different meanings to well-being, performative achievement and self-worth at different times. However, the three sets of concerns are relatively stable, rather than continuously changing. We may narratively express ourselves in a variety of



ways, and act differently on what we care about, but we *all* must attend, at least to a degree, to the three inescapable sets of concerns (Archer 2000). Our concern with physical well-being, for example, is an objective condition of human nature although there are subjective variations in how people attend to their well-being (Sayer 2011). Personal identity, at the same time, is not fixed and does not determine entrepreneurial behaviour. Although personal concerns are importantly shaped by embodiment, what we care about cannot be reduced to embodied properties, such as particular impairments. There is an ontological distinction between the embodied properties that shape our personal concerns, what we care about and how we attend to our various concerns, and the way we narratively express our concerns.

Personal concerns transform over a lifetime as we continuously react to environmental imports from the natural, practical and social orders (Archer 2000). ‘Import’ refers to the situational and relational character of emotions – that is, emotions are always intentional towards something. 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. For instance, bodily harm caused by an earthquake is an import to the body that may elicit the feeling of pain or fear.

Emotions are the fuel of *internal conversation*, or self-talk, a process through which we reflect on our personal concerns and how we feel about them (Archer 2000). How we evaluate our various concerns depends on how much we care; some concerns may be more important than others. For example, working long hours to satisfy customers and colleagues (self-worth) may be more important than physical exercise (well-being). However, we must always attend simultaneously to *all* our concerns in the three orders, prioritising some while perhaps subordinating others. There is an ontological distinction between the three sets of concerns and emotional commentary on them. What we care about does not always amount to how we feel about our concerns in each order. That is why internal conversation never stops. Because the emotional commentary on our

concerns is also ongoing; it is only in urgent situations that we become aware of specific emotions and reflect upon them (Archer 2000).

Critical situations or events, such as the onset of impairment, are examples of environmental imports that can elicit strong emotions, including pain and fear, and trigger internal conversation (Archer 2000). A traumatic event, like bodily injury, can significantly impact on the sense of self, particularly when a person's identity is closely linked to a career discontinued by injury (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011). The event can generate emotions, such as helplessness, and shatter one's assumptions about personal competence and self-worth. Haynie and Shepherd looked specifically at career transitions of soldiers disabled by war-time injuries who took part in an entrepreneurship retraining programme.

Consideration of venture creation can be fuelled by emotions elicited through our relations with *all* three orders – natural, practical and social. Although entrepreneurial identity can only be assumed in society, the underlying concerns and emotions that motivate venture creation can arise through our relations with *all* three orders. The manifestation of fear in nature (for instance, fear of illness) may not depend on our interaction with the other two orders. Emotions emergent from our relations with nature can, in turn, influence 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).

#### *4.4.2 Emotional elaboration and commitment to 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 *emotional elaboration* – the process through which people evaluate how they feel about their various concerns and prioritise emotions. The onset of disability can generate internal conversation by eliciting strong first-order emotions, such as anger, frustration or self-pity. Fuelled by these emotions, agents undergo emotional elaboration resulting in the second-order prioritisation of emotions that leads to commitment. Emotional elaboration drives internal conversation and helps us to prioritise our concerns and commit to particular roles in society, such as becoming an entrepreneur.

The processes of internal conversation and emotional elaboration are reminiscent of Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) coping strategies that influence how well people affected by the onset of injury transition into an entrepreneurial career. The authors found that those who transitioned well have changed their approach over time from 'emotion-focused coping' aimed at alleviating distress (for example, by drinking excessively), toward 'problem-focused coping' aimed at addressing the underlying problem causing distress (for example, reflecting on the obstacles or talking to family). Hence, it is those who undergo internal conversation (Archer 2000), reflecting on their concerns and how they feel about them, who are able to transition well into entrepreneurship.

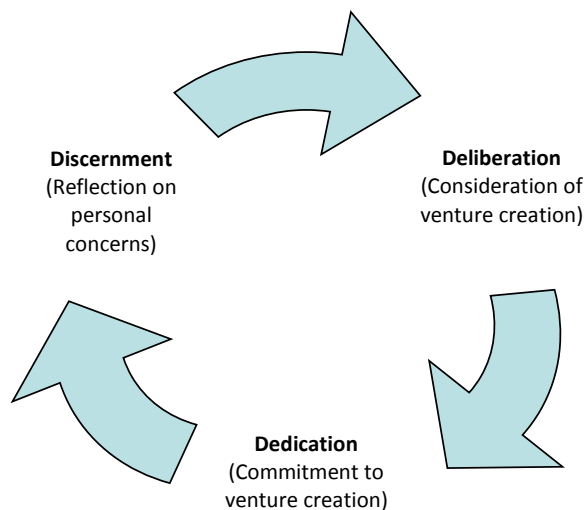
Archer (2000) identifies three phases of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – that precede second-order prioritisation of emotions. *Discernment* is a preliminary judgment that we make about the worth and attraction of projects and relationships in the three orders. It is a process of 'sifting' through the array of possible concerns available to us. At the phase of *deliberation*, we evaluate those concerns recognised as worthy of a further dialogue, for example venture creation. This involves a process of questioning and re-questioning 'how much do I care' and 'how far am I willing to go'. *Dedication* refers to a moment of arriving at judgement about the 'ranking' of personal concerns, their importance, and whether one can live with them emotionally.

The three phases of internal conversation provide a lens for theorising the linkages between entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour, in terms of three stages: (1) reflecting on our personal *concerns* in the three orders; (2) *considering* venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others; and (3) *committing* oneself to an entrepreneurial role. This novel conception contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial commitment (Fayolle *et al.* 2011) and offers a new way of theorising the entrepreneurial intention-behaviour connection (Adam and Fayolle 2016, Kolvereid 2016). It has been argued that the existing intention models do not adequately explain the processes by which intentions translate into actions (Adam and Fayolle 2016).

The full cycle of internal conversation and emotional elaboration (Figure 4.8)

progresses from first-order emotions at the stage of discernment, through to deliberation, and to final dedication. At this last stage, the second-order emotions where a person arrives at their ultimate concerns, those that they can live with emotionally, are the outcome of internal conversation (Archer 2000). The cycle is, of course, ongoing as we continuously respond to environmental imports from nature, the material culture and society throughout a lifetime. People who initially commit themselves to venture creation and succeed in the marketplace may later decide to sell their business or may be forced to close it because circumstances change over time.

**Figure 4.8** Connections between entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour



*Adapted from Archer (2000)*

The power to commit to venture creation is realised when a person dedicates themselves to an entrepreneurial role by acting on their particular concerns and commitments in the three orders. However, as noted earlier, the realisation of the personal power to commit to venture creation alone does not explain the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. Agents must additionally exercise and realise the power to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders. The next and final section of this chapter elaborates on how the power to acquire legitimacy arises in the social order.

#### **4.5 Social identity and the power to acquire legitimacy**

The emergence of entrepreneurial identity necessarily presupposes the power of

agents to acquire legitimacy. Following Suchman, legitimacy refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (1995: 574). Legitimacy is central to the process of creating, sustaining and transforming organisations (Suchman 1995). All entrepreneurs must be concerned, at least to a degree, with legitimacy-building in relation to important business stakeholders who have the power to grant or reject their support. Agents cannot simply perform any role they choose. To create and manage a successful business venture, entrepreneurs must be perceived as credible by customers, investors, employees, suppliers and other stakeholders or audiences. The capacity to gain and maintain legitimacy enables continuous access to resources, such as finance, and markets (Suchman 1995). This section explicates how the power to acquire new venture legitimacy emerges in relation to other people and markets.

Social relations are central to constructionist-informed conception of entrepreneurial identity (Jones *et al.* 2008, Down and Warren 2008, Watson 2009, Leitch and Harrison 2016). Studies in this tradition highlight the role of language and linguistic resources, such as narratives and discourses, in the process of constructing and negotiating entrepreneurial identity (Doolin 2002, Warren 2004, Essers and Benschop 2007, Bjursell and Melin 2011). Yet, only a small number of studies explicitly theorise links between legitimacy and entrepreneurial identity (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Drori *et al.* 2009, Navis and Glynn 2011), although they too emphasise the role of narrative performances and linguistic resources, for instance metaphors, as legitimation mechanisms.

There is a tendency in the entrepreneurial identity literature to under-theorise the embodied *non*-linguistic practices, including movement, posture and the use of artefacts, and the visibility of embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions. Only one study, to the extent of my knowledge, has considered the effects of disability on entrepreneurial legitimacy (De Clercq and Voronov 2009). Likewise, the new venture legitimacy literature generally focuses mainly on the role of linguistic practices and resources (Delmar and Shane 2004, Holt and Macpherson 2010, Garud *et al.* 2014, Parhankangas and Ehrlich 2014).

The literature, moreover, tends to emphasise micro-level interactions with customers, investors and other stakeholders.

Personal power to acquire new venture legitimacy can be exercised at different levels of interaction with other people and social structures. Blom and Moren (2011) distinguish micro, meso and macro levels of social interaction. Micro-social interaction refers to individual level interactions involving dyads or small groups. Meso-social interaction refers to group or organisational level interactions that involve collective social actions. And macro-social interaction refers to interactions at societal level involving collective social actions within and between societies and its institutions, such as banking and education systems (Blom and Moren 2011).

At the macro-social level, the power to acquire legitimacy thrives under conditions of a competitive market economy and private property (Peng 2001). There is an internal and necessary relation between entrepreneurs (producers) and customers (consumers) as it is only in this combination that they can exercise their respective powers (Sayer 1992: 89, Danermark *et al.* 2002: 64). The relation is asymmetric (Sayer 1992: 80), however, because customers could still consume without entrepreneurs under monopoly capitalism whereby there is a single supplier of goods, but not vice versa. Hence the very existence of ‘entrepreneur’ as a legitimate social role depends on a market economy, conditioning the power of customers to grant or reject their support for new ventures. The causal power of a market economy affects the involuntary pre-grouping of agents, or collectivities, within society’s distribution of resources, and conditions their possibilities of accessing the existing role array (Archer 2000). A market economy is an important structural precondition for agents to exercise the power to acquire legitimacy and, in so doing, to become an entrepreneur.

In a recent review of new venture legitimacy literature, Überbacher (2014) suggests to analytically combine macro and micro level studies with those that examine legitimacy in terms of locus of control – that is, the influence of entrepreneurs versus their audiences – into: (1) the *macro-level, audience-centred* view, focusing on audiences’ (for instance, customers’) perceptions of the

attributes of new ventures and their markets as legitimation mechanisms; and (2) the *micro-level, actor-centred* view focusing on the actions of new venture representatives in building legitimacy when interacting with customers.

Each customer may be acting independently by purchasing goods from a new venture. As a micro-level event, legitimacy is acquired through an entrepreneur's effort to convince a customer, or a small group of customers, about the value of their product offering. As a macro-level event, however, legitimacy is acquired through an aggregation of many customers purchasing independently of each other, generating firm growth (Elder-Vass 2010). The latter is shaped by customer perceptions of, and reactions to, a firm rather than the actions of an entrepreneur. Although entrepreneurs will make at least some initial strategic decision about interacting with particular markets or 'collectivities', the decision (for example, about branding or advertising) can have some unintended consequences for their new ventures. As a macro-level event, legitimacy may be accomplished simply due to the forces of supply and demand. The two respective approaches are outlined in what follows.

To distinguish a competitive market economy as a structural power (macro-level) from specific markets in the economy (meso-level), Überbacher's (2014) notion of a 'macro-level' will be referred to as a 'meso-level' in the rest of this chapter and thesis.

#### *4.5.1 Meso-level, audience-centred view*

From the meso-level, audience-centred view, studies have highlighted that new venture legitimacy is largely determined by its structural context, including industry or market niche, and by the density of the business population (i.e. number of organisations) in the context (Überbacher 2014). Low density, for instance, can have positive effects for the legitimation process, resulting in high rates of organisational founding, while high density leads to more competition with consequences for the declining rates of founding and growth in mortality rates (Carroll and Hannan 1989). On the contrary, new ventures may lack legitimacy if they enter a nascent context with limited density, and may be perceived as legitimate within more established contexts with higher density of

businesses with similar structures and ‘identities’ (Hsu and Hannan 2005). This of course is relative to the level of demand, and importantly shaped by how the audiences, for instance customers, perceive particular markets or industries.

Studies from this viewpoint typically assume that audiences are an homogeneous group in terms of their embodied properties, rather than differently-abled agents. Consequently, disabled customers and those with various impairments and health conditions are largely under-theorised as important stakeholders with powers to influence market norms, expectations and behaviours, and to grant or withdraw their support for new ventures. Creating a new venture in different market environments can have different effects on disabled entrepreneurs’ capacity to acquire legitimacy. Selling to a niche disability-related market, for instance, may help some entrepreneurs to come across as legitimate with disabled customers more easily, compared to those selling to a mainstream market. ‘Disability market’ refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products where the buyers are disabled customers or customers disabled by association, for example carers. ‘Mainstream market’ refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products where the buyers are customers in general.

To create and manage a successful business, entrepreneurs must *both* ‘fit-in’ with existing market arrangements and rules *and* ‘stand-out’ as rule breakers (De Clercq and Voronov 2009); they must successfully balance their similarity with, but also difference from, others in the marketplace. Suchman (1995) distinguishes three clusters of legitimacy-building strategies that new entrants might adopt, ranging from passive conformity to active manipulation:

- *conforming* to pre-existing audiences within entrants’ current environment;
- *selecting* from multiple environments those audiences most likely to support entrants’ current practices, and;
- *manipulating*, or transforming, environmental structure by creating new audiences.

Disabled entrepreneurs may have to exert greater effort to accomplish legitimacy in the eyes of important others (De Clercq and Voronov 2009). They may not ‘fit-in’ with the stereotypical image of an able-bodied entrepreneur and may ‘stand-



out' unintentionally for the wrong reasons, for their impairment rather than the product offering (Kašperová and Kitching 2014). Depending on the type, severity, duration, stability and visibility of different health conditions and impairments, disabled entrepreneurs' strategies of conforming to, selecting, or transforming environments in relation to specific markets may vary.

The visibility of personal attributes, such as particular impairments, may pose specific challenges in organisational settings. People with invisible or less visible impairments, for instance, face a dilemma of whether to reveal or conceal their difference from employers and colleagues to avoid potentially negative reactions (Clair *et al.* 2005). Employees with disabilities have reported experiences of marginalisation and harassment in the workplace (Robert and Harlan 2006). Disabled entrepreneurs may, similarly, experience negative reactions from customers, employees and others. To avoid such negative reactions, entrepreneurs may have to continuously control information about their appearance and behaviour in social encounters. Impairment visibility may shape individual concerns with self-worth (Archer 2000), based on prior experiences of approval or disapproval by others, and influence the initial decision to conform to, select or transform market environments in the process of new venture creation.

#### *4.5.2 Micro-level, actor-centred view*

From the micro-level, actor-centred view (Überbacher 2014), studies have highlighted that entrepreneurs employ various narrative and discursive resources, such as stories and metaphors, to craft an entrepreneurial identity – conceptualised in terms of narrative practice – and, in doing so, acquire legitimacy with business stakeholders (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Holt and Macpherson 2010, Navis and Glynn 2011, Landau *et al.* 2014, Werven *et al.* 2015). Yet, the power to acquire new venture legitimacy cannot be realised simply through talk, or the use of narrative and discursive resources. Communication is crucial for legitimacy but is not limited to discourse; a range of non-verbal displays and meaning-laden actions shape how stakeholders perceive organisations and their representatives (Suchman 1995).

Social roles, such as that of an entrepreneur, prescribe appropriate behaviours and

appearances that reveal ‘information’ to others about the social identity of role occupants (Goffman 1959). To adopt and perform a social role successfully, agents must conform, to a degree, to the behavioural and appearance norms associated with the role – they must make the right impression to satisfy the expectations of others (Goffman 1959). Social roles shape, but do not determine, personal identity and behaviour; individual role incumbents are active agents capable of interpreting role requirements, acting upon them flexibly and maybe even transforming particular roles.

Social identities are formed, in part, intentionally, through the impressions we consciously make on others, *as well as* unintentionally, by virtue of being embodied in a certain way, involuntarily signalling particular meanings to others. These others reinforce or challenge such meanings through their actions. Agents possess the capacity to perceive, emote about, reflect on, and act upon, their bodies, and to transform their body image, with the intention of achieving desirable social identities. Such reflexive embodiment (Crossley 2006) involves various *non*-linguistic practices, such as bodily movement, posture, gestures and the use of artefacts.

Entrepreneurs communicate their values, beliefs, concerns and emotions intentionally through *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices and symbolic actions. For instance, the use of artefacts such as settings, props and dress, and bodily cues like expressiveness and gestures influence entrepreneurs’ ability to achieve support for novel ventures (Clarke 2011, Cornelissen *et al.* 2012). Those who perform a variety of symbolic actions skilfully and frequently are also more likely to acquire resources (Zott and Huy 2007).

Concurrently, we are often unaware of the impressions our embodied practices make on others inadvertently. The visibility of ‘undesirable’ or stigmatising bodily attributes, such as particular impairments, and agents’ variable capacity to control such information in social interaction, can influence others’ perceptions and reactions. Depending on circumstances, the stigma associated with such undesirable attributes can affect individual capacity to accomplish sought-after social identities and their related benefits (Goffman 1963). Stigmatising attributes

that are less visible can pose different challenges. Relatively hidden impairments may exert influence on entrepreneurs' practices even though they may be unknown to others. Failure to disclose disability could be detrimental to business relationships, unless entrepreneurs can successfully conceal their impairment effects.

Stigma can however generate positive outcomes in particular situations (Slay and Smith 2011) and enable rather than constrain entrepreneurial activities; for instance, when disabled entrepreneurs sell to a niche, disability-related market. To avoid the negative effects of stigma on business, entrepreneurs must highlight the beneficial aspects while concealing the stigmatising attributes of their social identities (Elsbach 2003, Clair *et al.* 2005, Clarke 2011).

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theatrical metaphor, the power to acquire legitimacy may be conceived in terms of successfully performing entrepreneurial roles in the 'back' and 'front' regions of the business. The back-region is where no member of audience will intrude, for instance a warehouse, whereas the front-region is where the audience can observe entrepreneurs' performances, for example, a high-street shop. This partly depends on audience type – a customer, an employee or a potential investor. Moreover, entrepreneurs' business practices in the back and front regions may vary depending on the type, severity and visibility of impairment, and other circumstances. People with severe and visible mobility difficulties, for instance, may prefer to work back-stage (for example, at home) to avoid potentially negative effects of stigma on business. Performing front-stage (for example, interacting with customers in a shop), may be less challenging for people with hidden impairments. The front and the back stage performances can have varied consequences for the personal power to acquire new venture legitimacy.

Finally, the *visibility* of social identities is generally under-researched in the entrepreneurial identity literature, although researchers have highlighted the dominant stereotype of an entrepreneur as white, male (Essers and Benschop 2007, Essers and Benschop 2009, Boje and Smith 2010, Essers and Tedmanson 2014, Giazitzoglu and Down 2017), young (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008) and able-

bodied (Kašperová and Kitching 2014). Constructionist studies often accept entrepreneurs' narrative accounts uncritically without seeking to verify them, for instance through observation, or to gain alternative viewpoints from significant others (Zott and Huy 2007). Both embodied *non*-linguistic and linguistic practices, including visible impairment effects, can influence the power to acquire legitimacy.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The theoretical framework developed in this chapter will be applied to the empirical material presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8. The forthcoming chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in collecting and analysing primary data in relation to the conceptual framework.

## Chapter 5

# Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach that generated new empirical material about how disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions form entrepreneurial identity. A methodological approach that draws upon critical realist ontology of Bhaskar (2008), Archer (1995), Sayer (1992) and others, involves a theoretically-informed research design that considers the nature of objects of our interest. Having defined entrepreneurial identity as *a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace*, how can we know about it? What kinds of things count as relevant evidence? And how can we obtain data about unobservable causal powers, structures and mechanisms that generate entrepreneurial identity?

A realist study of identity seeks to incorporate a multilevel analysis, framing identity formation as interplay between people, groups, organisations, political and economic systems, and social structures (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). Moreover, the emergence of distinct identity strata can be analysed in terms of human relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts as well as society (Archer 2000). Different sources of information must be sought to understand which entities or levels are important in identity formation. A realist approach involves not only multiple data collection methods to generate empirical material but also the analysis of underlying causal powers, structures and mechanisms that make phenomena, such as venture creation, possible objects of study (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014).

Qualitative data was collected in several stages over a period of two years, comprising: interviews with disabled entrepreneurs; a review of online material, such as images, text and videos, obtained from the entrepreneurs' business and personal profiles; interviews with business stakeholders, including customers and employees, of selected entrepreneurs; and shadowing of three selected

entrepreneurs for a period of one working day. The research design was theory-driven (Sayer 1992, Smith and Elger 2014), so that the concepts developed in the theoretical framework informed both data collection and analysis.

The chapter commences by outlining a critical realist approach adopted throughout the study, including the ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of identity and how it should be studied. It then describes data collection methods and how the data was analysed, before concluding.

## **5.2 Research approach**

Critical realism presupposes particular philosophical commitments (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Archer 2000, Bhaskar and Danermark 2006, Bhaskar 2008, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) about the nature of social objects, such as entrepreneurial identity. Assumptions about the objects of study (ontological questions) must form a basis for the assumptions we make about the nature of knowledge and how we acquire knowledge about objects (epistemological questions) (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Studies that fail to distinguish ontology from epistemology commit to the 'epistemic fallacy', the idea that "statements about being can always be transposed into statements about our knowledge of being" (Bhaskar 2008: 5). Constructionist approaches, for example, theorise entrepreneurial identity in terms of entrepreneurs' narrative or storytelling practices (Hytti 2005, Jones *et al.* 2008). Although most studies presuppose an agent, with particular properties and powers, capable of telling a story, the focus is on storytelling practice, rather than the conditions that generate it. The anti-essentialist sentiment is, paradoxically, self-defeating for constructionists (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009). The idea that social reality is continuously constructed and reconstructed itself has an 'essence' as it presupposes someone doing the construction. Social constructions themselves are objective phenomena.

The social and natural world, for Bhaskar (2008), consists of three domains: the empirical, the actual and the real. The *domain of empirical* is what we experience. Recognising that not all events are experienced, this domain can be distinguished from the *domain of actual* which comprises both experiences and events that

happen regardless of whether observed or not. Finally, these two domains differ from the *domain of real* which comprises of all – human experiences, events and the underlying mechanisms that generate those experiences and events (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1** Bhaskar’s three domains of reality

	<i>Domain of Real</i>	<i>Domain of Actual</i>	<i>Domain of Empirical</i>
<i>Mechanisms</i>	✓		
<i>Events</i>	✓	✓	
<i>Experiences</i>	✓	✓	✓

*Source: Bhaskar (2008: 2)*

In contrast to positivist and constructionist metatheories, critical realism encourages researchers to move beyond the empirical and actual domains to theorise the underlying causal powers, structures and mechanisms that make phenomena, such as entrepreneurial identity, possible objects of study. Such causal powers, structures and mechanisms exist prior to, and independently of, any individual perception or conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity. Although identities have properties and powers that can be inferred from empirical observations, for instance entrepreneurs’ narrative accounts, such descriptions tell us little about why identities exist in the first place (Marks and O’Mahoney 2014). Any individual accounts of reality may be corrigible and limited by the existence of “unacknowledged conditions, unintended consequences, tacit skills and unconscious motivations” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009: 43). Reality cannot be explained simply through methods that generate descriptions, but through researchers’ analysis of phenomena (Marks and O’Mahoney 2014). This is especially important in researching disabled entrepreneurs, whose stories are largely invisible in the entrepreneurial identity literature. Disabled people create and manage new ventures regardless of researchers’ descriptions.

Distinguishing three domains of reality – the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar 2008) – has particular methodological implications for identity research (Marks and O’Mahoney 2014). First, it allows for possibility that entrepreneurs’ narrative interview accounts may be fallible, intentionally or unintentionally.

Underlying structures and mechanisms cannot be uncovered simply by interviewing people about them (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009: 43). Second, it recognises that people may have accomplished particular social identities, such as becoming an entrepreneur, prior to, and independently of, narratively expressing their identities in a dialogue with academic researchers and others. Third, it allows researchers to link actual events (for example, venture creation) with generative mechanisms (for example, concerns that motivate action) and therefore to theorise the effects of such mechanisms on identities at an empirical level (for example, entrepreneurs' narratives) (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014).

A stratified, emergent ontology (Archer 2000, Bhaskar and Danermark 2006, Bhaskar 2008, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) enables investigation of multiple identity levels or strata (Archer 2000). Each identity level has its own properties and powers that emerge from lower-level properties but exist independently of, and are irreducible to, its component parts, although they are necessarily intertwined. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity, for example, is dependent upon, yet irreducible to, consciousness and memory. Equally, higher-level properties, for instance the enterprise discourse, may be dependent upon but irreducible to people who reproduce or transform them. Theorising entrepreneurial identity as an emergent personal power can help us avoid conflationary tendencies (Archer 1995, 2000) of studies that conflate identity with narrative practice or discourse (see chapter 3). The idea of emergence helps to bridge the divide between disciplines that study different levels of identity (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) and resolve mind-body and structure-agency relationships (Archer 1995, Elder-Vass 2007).

Critical realist-informed theory seeks to explain, not only describe, phenomena by moving back and forth between theory and concrete empirical observation to identify the nature of objects and their external (or contingent) and internal (or necessary) relations (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002). For example, the relation between landlord and tenant is internal and necessary as the existence of one presupposes the other – that is, a person cannot be a tenant without a landlord and vice versa (Sayer 1992). The fact that the landlord is religious and the tenant



is nonbeliever is an external, contingent relation – that is, landlords and tenants exist regardless of their beliefs. Through such abstraction, researchers can theorise the structure<sup>19</sup> of objects and their relations by means of structural analysis (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002). Entrepreneurial identity, similarly, presupposes a relation between a seller and a buyer and its emergence may be constrained by a lack of buyer support. The fact that the seller may be disabled and her customer non-disabled is again a contingent relation.

However, theorising the structure of objects and their relations is insufficient to explain the existence of objects, or their origins, and the processes and changes that generate them. Researchers must also analyse the causal conditions that make the emergence of objects possible by means of causal analysis (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002). A realist approach to causality is about identifying objects' causal powers and liabilities, and ways of acting or mechanisms, rather than a relationship between events (Sayer 1992: 104). People have particular powers (for example, the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea) and causal liabilities (for example, vulnerability to suffering from natural disasters). Structural and causal analyses can help researchers explain how entrepreneurial identity, as a causal power, is enabled or constrained by other countervailing powers or liabilities, for example the onset of impairment or a global economic recession.

A critical realist analysis of identity should move from empirical findings to causal mechanisms through retroductive inference (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) by posing questions, such as 'What must be the conditions for entrepreneurial identity to exist?' or 'What makes the emergence of entrepreneurial identity possible?' Having a clear conception of entrepreneurial identity at the outset can provide guidance for data collection and interpretation which, in turn, enables further abstraction of the phenomena and facilitates retroduction (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). Moreover, studying pathological circumstances or extreme cases (Danermark *et al.* 2002), such as the effects of disability on entrepreneurship, can help uncover causal powers, structures and mechanisms that

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<sup>19</sup> Sayer (1992: 92) defines 'structure' as "sets of internally related objects or practices".

generate, or constrain, the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. For instance, the conditions for acquiring legitimacy with stakeholders may best be studied in cases where legitimacy is threatened. Failure to deliver customer orders due to ill health may be one extreme case.

While the methods used to research entrepreneurial identity from a realist viewpoint may not differ from those employed by the alternative approaches, the focus is on understanding the conditions and processes that enable or constrain identity formation. The aim of interviewing is not simply to elicit information about discourses, but to uncover biographical and structural information related to the interview questions (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). To explain the effects of disability on entrepreneurial identity formation, the present study sought to examine phenomena often taken for granted, for instance, the use of artefacts, the visibility of impairment or health condition, and the structural and cultural conditions, such as the level of legitimacy accorded to entrepreneurs by all kinds of stakeholders. A particular impairment, for instance autism, may constrain individual capacity to come across as legitimate in the eyes of customers and others, depending on the market in which one operates, the product or service offering, and the individual ability to control the revealing aspects of impairment when interacting with important stakeholders. The visibility of other personal properties, such as age or sex, may generate different effects.

### **5.3 Data collection**

Constructionist approaches to entrepreneurial identity emphasise the role of linguistic resources, such as narratives (Johansson 2004, Hytti 2005, Jones *et al.* 2008, Boje and Smith 2010, Bjursell and Melin 2011, Gherardi 2015), drawn upon in the process of identity work (Watson 2009), and the enabling or constraining influence of enterprise discourse (e.g. Essers and Benschop 2007, Ainsworth and Hardy 2009). Studies in this tradition are concerned primarily with entrepreneurs' narrative accounts obtained through interviews, or textual analyses of dominant discourses in society. Narrative interviews enable researchers to incorporate autobiographical dimension of identity; to analyse entrepreneurs' past, present and anticipated future (Hytti 2005, Tomlinson and Colgan 2014, Yitshaki and Kropp 2016). Analyses of discourses, on the other hand, can help uncover the dominant

stereotypes and norms associated with entrepreneurship in particular contexts (Anderson and Warren 2011, Giazitzoglu and Down 2017). These studies provide important insights into the processes of entrepreneurship (Bjursell and Melin 2011, Alsos *et al.* 2016) as well as giving voice to under-represented groups of entrepreneurs (Essers and Benschop 2009, Essers *et al.* 2010).

However, the assumption that social reality is a social construction, and that the focus should be on how this construction is carried out, generates some anti-theoretical tendencies, such as descriptivism (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009: 37). Narratives tend to “under-specify causality in the processes they describe” (Sayer 1992: 260). Narrative interview accounts, for example, paint a disembodied picture of an entrepreneur whereby embodied properties and powers, such as particular impairments and health conditions, are largely under-theorised. Studying embodied *non-linguistic* as well as linguistic practices, including movement and the use of artefacts, can offer novel insights into entrepreneurial identity formation. The importance of attending to embodiment has been emphasised particularly in qualitative health research (Sandelowski 2002, Seymour 2007, Sharma *et al.* 2009) but the body and the visual symbols, such as dress and expressiveness, play a role in how entrepreneurs present themselves to important stakeholders (Clarke 2011). Researching both visual and unobservable aspects of entrepreneurial identity formation, such as concerns, emotions, hidden impairments and stakeholders’ perceptions of legitimacy, requires a different methodological approach.

Most studies highlight the role of socio-cultural environment in shaping identity formation (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Alsos *et al.*, 2016; Anderson and Warren, 2011). Yet, what is missing from constructionist accounts are entrepreneurs’ relations with the wider natural and practical context within which they operate as embodied agents. Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity as a narrative or discursive practice has particular consequences for researchers’ capacity to theorise the material realities of disabled entrepreneurs’ lives (Kašperová *et al.* forthcoming). Studies seriously under-theorise the causal powers of nature and the material culture of artefacts as well as society in enabling and constraining entrepreneurial identity formation.

The present study sought to address these gaps in the literature by employing several methods, including interviews, desk-based review of online material and shadowing, to examine how disabled people, as embodied agents, form entrepreneurial identity in relation to their natural, practical and social contexts (Archer 2000). Utilising multiple data collection methods, with different strengths and limitations, can support researchers' claims, reduce the risk of biases associated with a single method, provide a depth of understanding, and give more credibility to the conclusions drawn from a research study (Maxwell 2013). The data collection was conducted between August 2013 and September 2015 in four stages:

- I. semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs;
- II. review of online material, including images, videos and text, obtained from entrepreneurs' business websites and personal profiles;
- III. semi-structured interviews with business stakeholders, including customers, employees and business partners, of selected entrepreneurs; and
- IV. shadowing of three selected entrepreneurs for a period of one working day.

Appendix 5.1 outlines a research design matrix, adapted from Maxwell (2013), specifying the rationale for choosing particular data collection and analysis methods. Appendix 5.2 offers a summary matrix of data collection methods and the specific information sought at each stage.

### *5.3.1 Entrepreneur interviews*

Interviews from a critical realist viewpoint should be explicitly theory-driven. Although people are conscious of the reasons for their action, they are never totally aware of the entire set of structural conditions which prompt the action or its consequences (Smith and Elger 2014: 117). Accounts of entrepreneurial identity that rely solely on entrepreneurs' stories provide only a partial understanding of identity formation. For example, uncovering how entrepreneurs see and talk about themselves may limit deeper examination of concerns, reasons, feelings, values, commitments and relationships that underpin particular stories.

Researchers must take a much more active and explicit role in explaining concepts and assumptions that underpin their interview questions, which in turn helps interviewees to make more sense of each question (Smith and Elger 2014). Steps were undertaken to ensure theory-informed interviewing.

Prior to each interview, the purpose of the study was explained and participants had the opportunity to ask questions at the start and the end of the interview. Although the interviewees had some freedom in answering open-ended questions, generating novel insights, each question was underpinned by particular assumptions formulated in the initial theoretical framework. One of the assumptions was that disability is likely to have negative effects on entrepreneurs' social interactions because of the stigma associated with disability (Goffman 1963). It soon emerged, however, that individual experiences depend on particular circumstances, for example, the market in which one operates or the product / service offering. The subsequent interviews sought to gain deeper insights into disability as potentially enabling as well as constraining.

Participants were selected using a combination of purposeful, theoretical and snowball sampling. Unlike random sampling where the aim is to select a sample representative of the population as a whole, a purposeful sampling strategy is based on the appropriateness of the participant to the research question (Coyne 1997). The sampling approach was purposeful in two respects. First, the study focused on one particular group of entrepreneurs – people with long-term impairments and health conditions who self-identified as disabled, or as being affected by disability. While some of the participants self-identified as disabled, others experienced disability-related disadvantage without necessarily self-identifying as disabled. Second, the participants were self-employed or small business owners residing in the UK, distributed across parts of England, Wales and Scotland.

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher formulates a topic guide with specific questions covering the subject matter. The questions are mostly open-ended, the interviewee has a degree of freedom in how to reply and the interviewer may ask new questions to elaborate on the issues of interest (Bryman

and Bell 2011). A pilot study, comprising face-to-face interviews, was conducted initially with five entrepreneurs in 2013 to test and revise the interview topic guide (Appendix 5.3). These entrepreneurs were revisited in 2015 and included in the sample of the larger study. The final sample comprised 43 participants, including two pre-start businesses where sales had not yet been generated and one recently closed business. Although these three participants were not making sales, or operating a business, at the time of the interview, their accounts provided additional insights into disabled people's experiences of creating and managing a new venture – they were therefore included in the analysis. Face-to-face (N=39) and telephone (N=4) interviews were carried out, lasting on average 90 minutes, ranging from 1-3 hours. Each interview was audio-recorded, with the respondent's permission, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim.

The entrepreneurs were approached for interview in two ways – through intermediary organisations or directly. First, disability organisations with different remit assisted by inviting their members to participate. And second, direct contact was made with those who self-identified as disabled on various online platforms and business websites. In both cases, a research project information sheet (Appendix 5.4) was provided to explain study aims and expected outcomes, and to establish informed consent. All participants were assured of confidentiality. The data, including any personal information, was stored securely on the university network drive. Transcripts were anonymised so that no individuals or organisations can be identified in the published material. Snowball or respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn 2011) where participants are invited through referrals from other participants also helped to generate interest. Snowball sampling is particularly helpful in approaching hard-to-reach groups. Furthermore, two small business membership organisations assisted in recruiting entrepreneurs who may have been affected by disability but do not associate with disability organisations, generating some interest.

The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health is a widely-recognised framework for measuring health and disability, taking into account bodily structure and functioning, activity limitations

and participation restrictions as well as environmental factors.<sup>20</sup> Disabled entrepreneurs are a heterogeneous group in terms of multiple dimensions of impairment and their variable effects on day-to-day and working practices. Depending on the context, different dimensions of impairment can affect the three lower-level powers of entrepreneurial identity – the power to conceive of a new venture idea, the power to commit to venture creation, and the power to acquire legitimacy – in different ways.

- *Impairment type* – physical impairments (for example, mobility difficulties), sensory impairments (for example, blindness), mental health conditions (for example, depression), learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia), cognitive impairments (for example, memory loss) and long-standing illnesses or health conditions (such as, cancer) (White 2009);
- *Activity limitation* – different impairment types may impose different activity limitations, such as difficulties with learning and applying knowledge, general tasks and demands, communication, mobility, and interpersonal interaction (WHO-ICF);
- *Onset* – many people acquire impairment or health condition in the course of their working life while some are born with impairment or health condition (Burchardt 2003);
- *Severity* – impairments vary in the level of restriction affecting the individual capacity to undertake ‘normal’ day-to-day activities; some impairment types may have no impact while others may impose moderate or severe restrictions on activities (Kitching 2014);<sup>21</sup>
- *Stability* – impairments may be relatively stable, long-term conditions, degenerative, or impose fluctuating, episodic or recurring restrictions on activity (Boyd 2012);
- *Visibility* – individual experiences may be shaped by impairment visibility and the normative expectations of embodiment within particular socio-

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<sup>20</sup> WHO-ICF: <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

<sup>21</sup> Definition of ‘normal’, like ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’, can of course vary by socio-cultural context.

cultural contexts. Highly visible impairments may be stigmatising (Goffman 1963, Zitzelsberger 2005) while hidden impairments can generate different effects (Matthews and Harrington 2000).

The sample comprised people with physical impairments, long-term health conditions causing physical impairment, sensory and cognitive impairments and mental health conditions. This broadly reflects the UK population of disabled people, with the most commonly reported impairments relating to mobility, lifting and carrying (DWP & ODI 2014). Some participants stated multiple impairments and health conditions. The most commonly reported activity limitations included mobility difficulties, such as walking, standing, lifting, carrying and using arms and hands, communication difficulties, including issues with receiving non-verbal and written messages, and limitations related to interpersonal interaction, learning and applying knowledge. The sample included people with relatively stable impairments (N=22) as well as those with progressive conditions (N=18), and fluctuating or episodic conditions (N=3).

Most participants acquired impairment in the course of their working life (N=27) while some were born with impairment or health condition (N=15), or both (N=1). More than half of the sample (N=25) were people with severe impairments in terms of the level of restrictions imposed on day-to-day activities, although not all explicitly described themselves as severely disabled. For example, Ben and Lena – both wheelchair users with multiple mobility restrictions and a significant speech impediment – clearly experience severe activity limitations. The remainder could be described as moderately disabled (N=18), including people with conditions that impose fewer and lesser activity limitations. For example, in contrast to Ben, Colin can stand and walk with the use of a cane while his speech impediment is milder. Of course, the measure of impairment severity is more complex (Martin and Elliot 1992, Buuren and Hopman-Rock 2001), shaped by individual as well as environmental circumstances. The distinction of ‘severe’ and ‘moderate’ used in this study reflects participants’ self-reported circumstances and the researcher’s observation of impairment effects.

Finally, the sample varied by impairment visibility. Almost half (N=21) could be



described as people with ‘highly visible’ impairments or health conditions, manifested through personal use of artefacts, such as wheelchairs, mobility scooters, prosthetics, canes and hearing aids. Postural instability and limping were also highly revealing. ‘Less visible’ impairments, or those noticeable only in some circumstances, for example, when a person speaks to reveal a speech impediment, were also present (N=12). A small group of participants had ‘hidden’ or invisible conditions (N=10) that are not immediately noticeable by an observer, for example cancer. The effects of impairment visibility are of course shaped by circumstances. Entrepreneurs with highly visible impairments who interact with customers face-to-face may have different experiences compared to those who operate a home-based business.

Participant entrepreneurs varied in terms of other personal and business characteristics, including sex, ethnicity, age, product/service offering and markets. Figure 5.2 offers a sample overview, while appendices 5.5 and 5.6 detail the 43 participants’ personal and business characteristics.

**Figure 5.2** Sample characteristics of participant entrepreneurs

Characteristics	N	%
<b>Impairment type(s)</b>		
Long-term condition causing physical impairment	19	44
Physical impairment	7	17
Multiple impairments	6	14
Sensory impairment	4	9
Long-term condition	4	9
Mental health condition	2	5
Cognitive impairment	1	2
<b>Impairment stability</b>		
Stable	22	51
Progressive	18	42
Fluctuating / episodic	3	7
<b>Impairment onset</b>		
Acquired	27	63
Congenital	15	35
Both	1	2
<b>Impairment severity</b>		
Severe	25	58
Moderate	18	42
<b>Impairment visibility</b>		
Highly visible	21	49
Less visible	12	28

Hidden	10	23
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	25	58
Female	18	42
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White British	39	91
Asian British	2	5
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1	2
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	1	2
<b>Age</b>		
18-30	3	7
31-40	13	30
41-50	8	19
51-60	14	32
61+	5	12
<b>Product/service</b>		
Product only	6	14
Service only	34	79
Combination	3	7
Mainstream only <sup>1</sup>	22	51
Disability-related only <sup>2</sup>	16	37
Combination	5	12
<b>Market</b>		
Mainstream only <sup>3</sup>	27	63
Disability-related only <sup>4</sup>	1	2
Combination	15	35

**Key note:**

(1) 'Mainstream product/service' refers to products/services in general, for example marketing services.

(2) 'Disability-related product/service' refers to specialist products/services related to particular impairments or health conditions (for example, clothing for wheelchair users) and disability (for example, disability equality training).

(3) 'Mainstream market' refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products or services where the buyers are customers in general.

(4) 'Disability market' refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products or services where the buyers are disabled customers or customers disabled by association, for example carers.

Entrepreneur interviews provided important insights into individual reflexivity and reasoning, personal concerns, motivations, reflections on the onset of disability and its effects on business practices and relationships. Although interviews are necessary to access human thought, meaning and experience, they are limited to accounts, perceptions and points of views of specific informants. Interviews do not reflect the multiplicity of causal factors that shape identity formation, such as the effects of practices performed inadvertently, or all of the structural and cultural conditions that influence individual life chances.

### 5.3.2 Review of online material

Entrepreneur interview data was complemented by a desk-based review of online material, including images, videos and text, obtained from business websites and personal profiles of participant entrepreneurs. The majority have a business website (N=32) or a LinkedIn profile (N=38). The objective was to gain insights into how these entrepreneurs present themselves to important business stakeholders, including potential customers, employees and finance providers. The online material has shed additional light on the processes of identity formation, particularly when analysing legitimacy-building strategies and tactics adopted by entrepreneurs.

Digital technologies transform the way businesses operate worldwide, increasing growth in the global economy (Ziyae *et al.* 2014). However, while the digital age may facilitate entrepreneurial entry and help potential entrepreneurs to conceal the visible markers of disadvantage online, offline inequality is often reproduced in online environments (Dy *et al.* 2017). The visibility of race in particular can importantly shape strategies ethnic minority entrepreneurs use to acquire legitimacy online. For example, in order to appeal to a wider market, ‘whitewashing’ has been used by Black British and Black Asian entrepreneurs as a strategy for concealing ethnic names, identities and racialised physical appearances (Dy *et al.* 2017).

Entrepreneurs with a range of impairments and health conditions are likely to manage their online profile information in different ways, revealing or concealing disability, depending on the product offering and the market in which they operate. Many participant entrepreneurs run a home-based business while managing their relations with customers, employees and others remotely. For entrepreneurs with severe impairments and health conditions, working from home provides greater control and flexibility in balancing work commitments and well-being concerns. This working arrangement is facilitated by digital and assistive technologies, enabling entrepreneurs to develop an online presence and to communicate with stakeholders by email, telephone and video chat without having to interact in person.

It was this online presence that became the focus of the review. Entrepreneurs' business websites and LinkedIn profiles were 'print screened' prior to each interview. Screenshot material from all entrepreneurs was later printed out and analysed in aggregate. By analysing this online material, it was possible to add a layer of detail, complementing entrepreneur interview accounts, to illustrate how these entrepreneurs present themselves in digital environments and how they manage visual and textual information about their disability - a potentially stigmatised social identity (Goffman 1959, 1963). What do they communicate online? How do they communicate it? Why do they communicate it in this way? And what are the potential advantages or disadvantages of such communication?

The analysis focused primarily on whether and how participants self-identified as disabled online, using text, images or videos, and the implications of disability disclosure for venture creation and management, particularly the capacity to acquire legitimacy. Additionally, did they have any online presence? Did they self-identify as an entrepreneur? What did they communicate through their websites/profiles? (For example, products, skills, values, client testimonials). Exploring how participants present themselves online has fed into the analysis of legitimacy-building strategies (chapter 8). There is a relationship between the product offering, the market and how disabled entrepreneurs present themselves in the digital environment. Entrepreneurs operating in a disability-related market and / or offering a disability-related product tend to disclose disability online intentionally to position themselves as experts in their field. Entrepreneurs selling a mainstream product in the mainstream market are less likely to do so. The visibility of impairment, moreover, has important implications for the type of product offering and market in which one operates.

### *5.3.3 Stakeholder interviews*

Social identities, such as being an entrepreneur, are not formed in isolation but always in relation to significant others (Watson 2008). To start and operate a successful business, agents must accomplish legitimacy in the eyes of customers, employees, finance providers and other stakeholders. Coming across as a legitimate entrepreneur can enable access to resources, such as finance, and

markets (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). The entrepreneurial identity literature offers insights into how new venture legitimacy is accomplished from the viewpoint of entrepreneurs (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Warren 2004, Mallett and Wapshott 2015). However, there is a lack of research into the role of different kinds of stakeholders in the legitimacy-building process. How do significant others influence the power of agents to create a new venture? And what are their accounts of entrepreneurial identity formation?

The specific objective was to interview business stakeholders about their perceptions of, and reactions to, entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions, especially those with highly visible impairments. How does disability affect individual capacity to come across as a legitimate entrepreneur with customers and others? Studies incorporating stakeholder interviews, with an explicit focus on embodiment, are rare in entrepreneurship. Yet, such multilevel interpretations can provide richer accounts of identity formation. Paying explicit attention to embodiment can add insights into the ‘subjective’ body through which individuals experience the world as embodied agents, the self-consciousness of their own body reflected upon as an object as well as their ‘objective’ body as observed by others (Finlay 2006). In addition to examining entrepreneurs’ experiences, stakeholder interviews were drawn upon to shed light on what *actually* happens, regardless of whether entrepreneurs themselves are aware of it.

Studies of entrepreneurial legitimacy tend to highlight linguistic practices, including storytelling, metaphors and arguments, agents draw upon to legitimise their entrepreneurial activities in the eyes of important business stakeholders (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012; Werven *et al.*, 2015). Less is known, however, about the role of embodied *non-linguistic* practices and visual symbols, including gestures, facial expressions, dress and setting (Clarke 2011, Cornelissen *et al.* 2012) in how entrepreneurs convey meanings and accomplish a legitimate entrepreneurial identity. Such *non-linguistic* practices are especially relevant in the case of disabled entrepreneurs. Visible impairments, for instance, could be stigmatising (Goffman 1963) and constrain entrepreneurs’ attempts to present themselves as legitimate actors. What might be the reactions of stakeholders to visible impairments and the consequences for disabled

entrepreneurs' capacity to acquire legitimacy?

Twelve entrepreneurs were approached to facilitate further interviews with their business stakeholders, including customers, employees / sub-contractors and business partners. Four agreed to help at this stage. The selection of businesses was based on the product offering, markets in which they operate, the type and visibility of entrepreneurs' particular impairment or health condition, the possible number of stakeholders that could be interviewed, and the potential for providing novel theoretical insights in relation to how legitimacy is built and acquired from the viewpoint of different types of stakeholders (Figure 5.3). Entrepreneurs with visible impairments were particularly suitable for exploring how impairment visibility may affect individual relationships with business stakeholders. A total of 15 stakeholders took part in the study.

**Figure 5.3** Selection of businesses for stakeholder interviews

<b>Entrepreneur pseudonym</b>	<b>Market</b>	<b>Product</b>	<b>Impairment type &amp; visibility</b>	<b>Interviewed stakeholders</b>
Victoria	Mainstream Disability	Mainstream	Visual impairment Less visible	2 business partners 2 customers 1 sub-contractor
Michael	Mainstream Disability	Mainstream Disability	Multiple sclerosis Highly visible	2 employees 1 customer
Dean	Mainstream Disability	Mainstream Disability	Lower limb paralysis Highly visible	3 customers
Tamara	Mainstream	Disability	Visual impairment Less visible	3 employees 1 customer

Stakeholder interviews were valuable in terms of providing deeper understanding of how disability affects business relationships and the individual capacity to acquire entrepreneurial legitimacy. Semi-structured face-to-face (N=11) and telephone (N=4) interviews were conducted with three stakeholder groups – employees / sub-contractors, customers and business partners. An information

sheet was emailed to each stakeholder prior to arranging an interview to establish informed consent (Appendix 5.7). An interview topic guide was designed and tailored to different stakeholder groups, for example customers (Appendix 5.8). The interview questions sought to uncover biographical information about the stakeholders, how they got to know participant entrepreneurs, what motivated them to purchase from, work for and collaborate with them, what were their experiences of interacting with the entrepreneurs, and whether and how disability affected their relationships.

The interviews revealed, for instance, that entrepreneurial legitimacy is importantly influenced by homophily – the tendency of individuals to bond with similar others (McPherson *et al.* 2001, Phillips *et al.* 2013). Some disabled customers, for instance, preferred buying a product from someone with a lived experience of disability because they could build rapport and trust with them easily. A lack of supply of particular services was also found to be an important legitimisation mechanism. Yet, neither entrepreneurs nor their stakeholders can be totally aware of, and revealing about, the consequences of their actions, such as those performed inadvertently, or the external conditions that shape them. Using a method of shadowing to collect further data about entrepreneurs' relations with nature, the material culture of artefacts and society provided additional insights into the processes of entrepreneurial identity formation.

#### *5.3.4 Shadowing or 'observation on the move'*

Observation in social science involves systematic recording, description, analysis and interpretation of behaviour of the observed individual (Bøllingtoft 2007). In outlining 'what can be observed', Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) draw attention to action and behaviour, verbal and non-verbal communication, what does *not* happen as well as what does, and observations of material world, for instance the room setting, the use of artefacts and the capacity to negotiate the built environment. While observations alone cannot identify the underlying mechanisms that produce observable events, they can help uncover aspects that were unknown or not thought of as relevant, and to specify the contexts in which mechanisms operate (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Some of the advantages of

observation methods include the ability to gather data about phenomena in their natural context, at different times, about informal relations of participants which may not be easily accessible through interviews, or to uncover any implicit problems (Bøllingtoft 2007).

Shadowing is a type of non-participant observation method which differs from 'participant observation' in one major respect – it does not require a researcher to engage simultaneously in the observed action as well as observation (Czarniawska 2014). Unlike 'stationary observation', which is also non-participatory, 'shadowing' can be described as 'observation on the move'. Shadowing involves a greater degree of mobility or movement and a dynamic interaction between the person being shadowed and the person doing the shadowing, allowing researcher to ask questions about events and perceptions (Czarniawska 2014). The method is particularly useful in trying to understand roles (McDonald 2005) and has been widely employed in medical and educational settings to learn about professional roles and for research purposes (McDonald and Simpson 2014).

Shadowing involves not merely observing action but also grasping the meaning of observed action or practice. This has implications for the shadower-shadowed interaction. The shadower should, in the process, ask the people they shadow to explain their actions and the reasons behind each activity throughout the day, gaining insights into their thoughts, feelings and emotions (McDonald 2005). This has certain advantages over conducting interviews alone. Not only can researchers observe what is happening, they can ask the person shadowed about the activities and events as they occur in real-time rather than in retrospect, gaining understanding of the mundane, routine and habitual that may have been lost otherwise (McDonald and Simpson 2014).

For this last stage of fieldwork, three entrepreneurs agreed to be shadowed, each for a period of one working day. Shadowing involves extensive field note taking (McDonald 2005). Being conscious of the potential data overload, a decision was made to limit the number of participants to the 3-5 most theory-enriching cases. The selected entrepreneurs – Michael, Dean and Tamara – already agreed to facilitate stakeholder interviews and expressed willingness to participate in



shadowing. The selection was constrained, to a degree, by individual readiness to continue their involvement in the study. The aim was to shadow entrepreneurs with visible impairments who typically meet their customers and employees face-to-face. Such cases seemed most interesting in terms of providing deeper understanding of how the visibility of disability may affect interactions with business stakeholders.

Shadowing enabled examination of entrepreneurs' relations with their natural, practical and social contexts, for instance challenges faced in navigating the built environment and interactions with stakeholders. There was a specific focus on observing embodied *non*-linguistic practices, such as movement, posture, emotional displays and the use of artefacts. Previous studies employing observation and ethnographic methods in researching entrepreneurial identity and legitimacy have highlighted visual embodied aspects of identity formation (Clarke 2011, Cornelissen *et al.* 2012, Giazitzoglu and Down 2017). Clarke, for example, found that entrepreneurs use a range of visual symbols, such as setting, props, dress and expressiveness to present an appropriate scene to stakeholders in order to create professional identity, to emphasise control and to regulate emotions (2011). To facilitate data collection, a shadowing template (Appendix 5.9) was designed to capture data as comprehensively as possible while ensuring consistency across the three cases. The template covered information about the actors present during shadowing, including their physical appearance, the purpose of events such as business meetings, the layout and general atmosphere of places, for instance offices, and the use of artefacts, such as cars and mobility aids.

The observation was overt so that the entrepreneurs and stakeholders being shadowed were aware of the purpose of shadowing and gave consent to being observed in the course of their working day. Field notes were taken during the day, where possible, and at the end of each day. All notes were subsequently typed up into a Word document. In addition to the field notes from shadowing, the data analysis incorporated field notes from interviews with all 43 entrepreneurs in the form of reflection notes. These notes, typically about one-page long, covered first impressions, such as moods and emotions, entrepreneurs' physical appearance and behaviour, descriptions of surroundings and things said off record.

#### 5.4 Data analysis

The analysis of generative mechanisms involves theory-building through analytical work based on empirical observation (Blom and Morén 2011). A critical realist approach to data analysis encourages description and abstraction, moving from concrete to abstract, through abductive and retroductive forms of inference (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Blom and Morén 2011, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). Abduction is about moving from concrete descriptions of observable events to general structures underlying such events. This is done by interpreting and re-contextualising observed phenomena within a theoretical framework, and subsequently interpreting and understanding it in a new way. The process enables researchers to test and develop theories about social relationships, structures and mechanisms. Retroduction encourages questions about the conditions that make the existence of phenomena, such as venture creation, possible objects of study (Danermark *et al.* 2002).

This differs from traditional modes of inference – induction and deduction – that focus primarily on empirical generalisations and regularities to establish causal laws (Danermark *et al.* 2002). While induction is concerned with drawing conclusions about all from observations of a limited number of cases, a deductive logic assumes that the conclusion must be true if all the premises are true, such as – if A occurs then B follows. Although induction and deduction are a complementary part of analysis, critical realism rejects the assumption that regularities in relationships between events are necessary to establish causation. Social objects and relationships have causal powers which may or may not produce regularities (Bhaskar 2008, Sayer 1992).

Following the logic of abduction and retroduction, the analysis progressed from theory to data, back to theory and data, and so forth until reaching theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt 1989, Fusch and Ness 2015), that is, "...the point at which incremental learning is minimal because the researchers are observing phenomena seen before" (Eisenhardt 1989: 545), and "...when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch and Ness 2015: 1408). Theoretical saturation, in practice, is often reached when pragmatic

considerations are made, for instance about time and money, to decide when the data collection and analysis should come to an end (Eisenhardt 1989). Both theory-building and pragmatic considerations were taken into account when reaching theoretical saturation.

Three core themes have been identified in the process of moving between theory and data and asking what makes the emergence of entrepreneurial identity possible – new venture ideas, venture creation commitment and new venture legitimacy. Each theme, in turn, informed the development of the theoretical framework, elaborating the three lower-level powers constitutive of entrepreneurial identity – the power to conceive of a new venture idea, the power to commit to venture creation and the power to acquire legitimacy. The analysis within each theme is discussed in more detail next.

#### *5.4.1 Theme one: new venture ideas*

The emergence of a new venture idea, as a core theme, was informed initially by entrepreneur interview data. Entrepreneurs described how they conceived of, or imagined, a novel product idea which has, in turn, fuelled consideration of venture creation. *Personal power to conceive of a new venture idea* was subsequently theorised as an underlying causal power that makes entrepreneurial identity possible. However, what must be the conditions for agents to imagine a new venture idea? Archer's (2000) conceptualisation of three forms of knowledge – embodied, practical and discursive – provided a theoretical lens for interpreting how entrepreneurs in this study conceived of novel product ideas through their interaction with nature, the material culture of artefacts and society.

Moreover, entrepreneurs described how their initial ideas developed over time into viable products. Archer's framework (2000) was drawn upon to interpret how different forms of knowing translate and transfer from one form to another through processes of demonstration, application, embodied incorporation and metaphoric communication. The entrepreneurs explained how they demonstrated their ideas to different audiences, including potential customers or product design consultants, to test and develop their products. The process often involved several cycles of demonstration, application, incorporation and communication to

transform their knowledge and ideas into a viable product. The online material, including images and videos from entrepreneurs' websites, offered additional insights into how these entrepreneurs demonstrate and communicate the value of their product offering to wider audiences, gaining support in the marketplace.

#### *5.4.2 Theme two: venture creation commitment*

The second theme arising from the analysis was venture creation and, more specifically, individual transition from the initial motivation to the actual commitment to venture creation. There is a large body of literature on entrepreneurial motivation (e.g. Stephan *et al.* 2015) and an emerging interest in the concept of 'entrepreneurial commitment' (Fayolle *et al.* 2011, Adam and Fayolle 2015, 2016). To become an entrepreneur, one must be motivated to create a new venture and committed to doing so. In other words, the emergence of entrepreneurial identity necessarily presupposes an agent motivated to pursue, and to commit to, an entrepreneurial role.

Participant entrepreneurs were asked 'What motivated you to start a business?' Archer's (2000) stratified notion of identity provided a framework for interpreting how particular impairments (the body) influenced individual self-perceptions (the self) and personal concerns in nature, material culture and society (personal identity) that underpinned the motivation and commitment to an entrepreneurial role (social identity). Agents accomplish entrepreneurial identity when they commit to venture creation by acting on their sense of self and concerns motivating a particular course of action. *Personal power to commit to venture creation* was subsequently theorised as an underlying causal power that makes entrepreneurial identity possible. Entrepreneurial identity, defined as a power to create a new venture, cannot emerge without personal commitment.

But how do agents exercise their power to commit to venture creation? How do they move from motivation to action? Archer's (2000) concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration have been utilised to interpret the process of moving from having particular concerns, to considering venture creation, and committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role. The interview data provided insights into how participant entrepreneurs' concerns in the three orders shaped

their consideration of, and the eventual commitment to, venture creation. Additionally, reflection notes from interviews offered personal impressions of entrepreneurs' appearance and behaviour during interview, including their emotional commentaries on their concerns. For example, where interviewees reflected on events, such as the onset of impairment, the pain and suffering they experienced was sometimes observable in their facial expressions and voices. Such emotional commentaries added an important layer of understanding how strong emotions can fuel internal conversation and the power to commit to venture creation.

#### *5.4.3 Theme three: new venture legitimacy*

The final theme arose from the assumption that disability – a potentially stigmatised social identity – is likely to have a negative impact on business relationships, with consequences for the individual capacity to accomplish entrepreneurial identity. Utilising Goffman's work on the presentation of self and stigma (1959, 1963), disability was initially perceived as a liability in the context of entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, entrepreneur interviews revealed that disability can be enabling as well as constraining in the process of creating and managing a new venture, depending on circumstances. The interview data and prior studies of legitimacy (Suchman 1995, De Clercq and Voronov 2009, Überbacher 2014) have been drawn upon to explain how disabled entrepreneurs gain credibility in the eyes of important others. *Personal power to acquire legitimacy* was subsequently theorised as an underlying causal power that makes entrepreneurial identity possible in particular socio-cultural contexts.

The explanatory power of the conceptual framework has been strengthened by utilising additional data, including stakeholder interview transcripts and shadowing notes, to explain how disabled entrepreneurs acquire legitimacy. Moving between the empirical material and the extant legitimacy theories has shed light into strategies and tactics entrepreneurs adopt to come across as legitimate in the eyes of important others. The power to acquire legitimacy, as a generative mechanism, was theorised to emerge at the meso-level interaction with particular markets (for example, mainstream or disability-related) as well as

micro-level interaction with audiences (for example, face-to-face encounters with customers). Entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions adopted particular legitimacy-building strategies and tactics, both intentionally and inadvertently, to accomplish entrepreneurial identity.

#### *5.4.4 Within-case and cross-case analysis*

The entrepreneurs participating in this study comprised people with various impairments, health conditions, activity limitations and experiences of disability, in addition to other personal characteristics that shaped their experiences of venture creation. Considering the sample heterogeneity, each entrepreneur could be treated as a stand-alone case with insightful theoretical contributions. Building theory from qualitative case studies involves analyses of individual cases, or what is known as ‘within-case analysis’, as well as comparisons with other cases, or ‘cross-case analysis’ (Eisenhardt 1989). The former is about getting to know the data and generating preliminary theories while the latter seeks to identify patterns across cases. Both within-case and cross-case analyses of the empirical material were carried out with the help of NVivo11 software.

A theory-driven approach to data analysis assumes that data coding is informed by pre-existing concepts developed within the initial theoretical framework. The first-stage coding was therefore based on the key concepts, including personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth, emotional commentaries on the three sets of concerns, the concepts of discernment, deliberation and dedication, and the legitimacy-building strategies of conforming to, selecting and manipulating environments. The second-stage coding involved moving between these pre-existing concepts and the empirical material to identify the three core themes – conceiving of a new venture idea, committing to venture creation and acquiring legitimacy. The third-stage coding comprised emerging themes, coded as new nodes or sub-nodes of the existing nodes. For example, ‘dignity’ and ‘employer discrimination’ were created as sub-nodes of ‘concerns with self-worth’. Although we all must attend to our concerns with self-worth, each person will determine for themselves where their self-worth stands in relation to their other concerns and commitments. In the process of moving

between theory and data, new combinations of concepts were created, building upon the presuppositions of the initial framework. The three core themes were eventually theorised as three lower-level powers of entrepreneurial identity. The three powers, exercised in a particular combination, enable the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. Appendix 5.10 illustrates how the data coding and theory-building progressed in three stages.

Analyses of the online material, stakeholder transcripts and field notes contributed to theory building in two respects. First, the data provided additional insights into entrepreneurs' working practices, relationships and events, as well as the causal powers that generate them, and often confirmed entrepreneurs' accounts of events. And second, the data uncovered novel themes that may have been overlooked otherwise. For instance, one entrepreneur described how she recognised a gap in the market for her service. Yet, it was only after interviewing one of her customers who highlighted low supply of such services that the demand-supply relationship emerged as a key legitimisation mechanism. In another example, shadowing revealed that disabled entrepreneurs employ emotional regulation, such as the use of humour, to build relationships with customers in particular situations, for example when they experience difficulties in entering buildings due to inaccessible premises.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The three chapters that follow present new empirical material to illustrate how disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions form entrepreneurial identity. Each respective chapter elaborates on how participant entrepreneurs have exercised and realised the three lower-level powers that make the emergence of entrepreneurial identity possible – the power to conceive of a new venture idea, the power to commit to venture creation and the power to acquire legitimacy.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the emergence of a new venture idea in relation to the three analytical orders of reality – natural, practical and social. Chapter 7 illustrates how entrepreneurs' unique constellation of concerns with well-being in nature, performative achievement in the material culture of artefacts and self-

worth in society has shaped their motivation to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation. Finally, chapter 8 demonstrates how disabled entrepreneurs acquire legitimacy with business stakeholders, including customers, employees and business partners.



## Chapter 6

# The self and the power to conceive of a new venture idea

### 6.1 Introduction

This is the first of three empirical chapters setting out to illustrate how disabled people form entrepreneurial identity – defined as a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace. Chapter 4 argued that entrepreneurial identity is constituted by three lower-level personal capacities: (1) the power to conceive of a new venture idea; (2) the power to commit to new venture creation; and (3) the power to acquire legitimacy. This chapter explicates how the power to conceive of a new venture idea is realised through agents' embodied sense of self and, by extension, knowing in relation to the world. New venture ideas can, but do not always, pre-date entrepreneurial intention (Krueger and Brazeal 1994). Commitment to venture creation, as elaborated in chapter 7, may arise prior to the emergence of an idea (Fayolle *et al.* 2011).

Drawing on the entrepreneur interview data, shadowing field notes and online visual material, the chapter demonstrates how new venture ideas originate from three types of knowing (embodied, practical and discursive) in the three orders of reality (natural, practical and social), utilising Archer's (2000) stratified conception of identity. 'Originate' in this context refers to the emergence of a new product idea from a unique combination of pre-existing knowledge and newly acquired knowledge at a particular point in time, in relation to a particular order of reality. People will of course have pre-existing embodied, practical and discursive knowledge, including understanding of self-employment as a career path, but the newly acquired knowledge may arise from any one form of knowing and stimulate the power to conceive of a new venture idea.

The chapter furthermore illustrates how new venture ideas develop into viable products as agents translate their knowledge between orders and act on that knowledge. Although most people have the power to conceive of a new venture

idea, not everyone will develop their idea into a product. This is because translation of knowledge depends on agents' interests and commitment. The experience of disability can be an important source of knowing that stimulates the power to conceive of a new venture idea. Illustrating how this power can be exercised in *all* three orders provides a basis for the argument that entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced simply to social interaction alone. Although social relations are necessary for further development of ideas into products, new venture ideas are often imagined through our relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts as well as society.

The practical action of embodied agents is central to acquiring knowledge (Archer 2000). Although much of our embodied, practical and discursive knowing has conceptual reference, not *all* of our knowledge is language-mediated. Studies of entrepreneurial identity largely under-theorise knowing and the power to conceive of a new venture idea as a precondition of entrepreneurial identity. Those that do theorise how entrepreneurs acquire ideas, or rather create 'opportunities', view knowledge and opportunity creation as entirely socially constituted and mediated by language; individual agents make sense of their actions and information in social interaction alone (Achtenhagen and Welter 2011, Díaz-García and Welter 2013). There is a focus on how entrepreneurs narratively make sense of the recognised opportunities in a dialogue with others (Johansson 2004), while under-theorising personal, material and socio-cultural conditions that generate new venture ideas, or 'opportunities'. People conceive of ideas through embodied *non-linguistic* as well as linguistic practices, including movement and the use of artefacts. New venture ideas are distinct from agents' linguistic articulations of them.

Applying the conceptual framework, and particularly Archer's stratified view of identity (2000), the chapter demonstrates how entrepreneurial identity emerges when agents exercise the power to conceive of a new venture idea in relation to *all* three orders. This is a novel contribution to the entrepreneurial identity literature. Most studies fail to explicitly link the ability to conceive of a new venture idea with the power to create a new venture. Personal properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, can constrain but also enable action and

knowing that stimulates the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea. Theorising impairments and health conditions as particular personal powers contrasts with the literature that treats disability mainly as a barrier to entrepreneurial entry (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, Renko *et al.* 2016), while contributing to studies that highlight the potentially enabling effects of disability on entrepreneurship (Pavey 2006, De Clercq and Honig 2011).

The chapter is organised into two parts. It first illustrates how ideas can originate in each knowledge form through agential interaction with the natural, practical and social orders. The subsequent section demonstrates how ideas develop over time into viable products as agents translate knowledge between the three orders. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

## **6.2 Three knowledge forms and the emergence of new venture ideas**

In contrast to studies that emphasise the centrality of language in constructing entrepreneurial identity, this study highlights the primacy of practice, of which language use is one form, in human development and identity formation (Archer 2000). Human interactions with nature, the material culture and the propositional culture generate three distinct types of knowledge. The three knowledge forms are intricately linked but should not be reduced to each other. Much of our knowing acquired through embodied *non*-linguistic practices, such as movement, cannot be fully translated into discursive meaning, and is often expressed merely as a metaphor (Archer 2000), for example, the practice of cycling. Each knowledge form has a role in the visualisation and development of new venture ideas. This of course does not mean that newly acquired knowledge exists in isolation. People may have specific pre-existing knowledge (for example, work experience in architecture), but may only conceive of a new venture idea when this pre-existing knowledge is *combined* with a newly acquired knowledge (for example, how hard it may be for someone with mobility difficulties to access buildings).

Human beings possess properties, both powers and liabilities, that shape their action in the world (Sayer 1992, 2011, Archer 2000). Injury, ill health or impairment can disrupt individual capacity to learn. The onset of impairment may force some to learn anew how to move around the natural environment, how to

perform various practical tasks, or how to communicate effectively with others. Such impairment effects, however, can be enabling as well as constraining in particular circumstances. People with sight loss, for instance, may acquire new embodied knowledge as a result of having to rely on their other senses. Ideas for novel products can arise from individual frustration experienced in relation to the three orders. A range of assistive technologies, for instance, the hearing aid, have developed from our embodied interaction with each order to avoid environmental threat, to address performative incompetence and to communicate effectively with others. The three knowledge forms have been an important source of new venture ideas for participant entrepreneurs.

### *6.2.1 Embodied knowledge in the natural order*

Embodied knowledge refers to ‘knowing how’ that is based upon our sensory-motor interactions with natural order (Archer 2000). Embodied knowing is procedural in kind, gained mainly through repetition of practices such as walking, moving and navigating in space. Embodied know-how of people with particular impairments and health conditions in relation to the natural order can be an important source of new venture ideas. Natural relations, for Archer, are those that involve most basic human practices that enable our physical survival, our “embodied accommodation to the mercy of nature” (2000: 18); for instance, the ability to move around and navigate the natural environment safely. Relations with nature are a necessary precondition for the possibility of being a human. Participant entrepreneurs reflected on their experience of acquiring impairment and its effects on their actions and knowing in the natural order.

Tamara, founder of a rehabilitation services agency, developed a visual impairment when she was nine years old. At the time, she had to learn anew how to move around her natural environment safely without having central vision. Tamara described her experience of acquiring new embodied know-how, as she learnt to navigate independently.

“Every morning I’d get on the tube [London Underground System].<sup>22</sup>  
And I’d come off the tube at different station and I go like ‘I don’t  
know where I am.’ I’d get lost every day, every day going to a college.

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<sup>22</sup> Text in square brackets added to retain the sense of quotation.

But it made me learn the tube system. So now I can come to London and I can take you anywhere.” [Tamara]

In adulthood, Tamara’s experience of inadequate support for people with vision loss prompted her to set up a business that provides rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired. As a rehabilitation worker, Tamara supports people in performing day-to-day activities, such as getting to and from places, shopping and cooking, independently. When I shadowed Tamara during her working day, she was supporting a teenage student who was learning how to make a journey from school to the town centre. Tamara encouraged the student to memorise various environmental cues in order to learn how to navigate the streets on her own. She was advised to use her senses of hearing, smell, touch and proprioception<sup>23</sup> to remember environmental cues, including buildings, lamp posts and traffic lights. For example, the unique smell associated with the fast food chain Subways located on the street corner was a cue to identify a particular part of the town centre. The embodied know-how Tamara acquired as a person with visual impairment was crucial in helping her develop her new venture idea into a viable business.

Wesley, founder of a specialist accessibility training consultancy, was already a successful business owner with years of experience in the hotel industry and marketing when he became disabled. Acquiring impairment has enabled him to conceive of an idea for his second business through a novel combination of pre-existing and newly acquired embodied knowledge.

“I’m an above knee amputee. And I started to experience what it was like for people with disabilities when they were staying in the hotels...And I must admit, I was not impressed by the hotel industry’s ability to look after people with disabilities. ...but the actual disability I said many times, my disability was the best thing that ever happened to me because it gave me the opportunity to create [business name] ... And so I put my hotel background [together] with my disability and decided to do something about it. My disability hasn’t disabled me. It’s actually enabled me to set up [the business]. And if I hadn’t been disabled I wouldn’t have had the experience that I’ve had. And

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<sup>23</sup> Proprioception is “the sense that allows us to perceive and regulate our body’s movements in space” (Vannini *et al.* 2012: 150). For example, proprioception enables people to drive a car by moving their limbs without looking at them.

therefore I wouldn't have the knowledge that I've had." [Wesley]

Clara, a web designer diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy<sup>24</sup> in her 20s, reflected on how her health condition has influenced her capacity to conceive of a new venture idea which eventually developed into an online accessibility blog.

"It's hard to separate my condition from other things. It does have a huge [impact], but conversely it also has a benefit. So that if I didn't have the background in graphic design and web design, and if I didn't happen to have impairment and I haven't had that experience of finding solutions, I wouldn't have actually been embarking [business name]. I've never thought of it. Nobody out there is doing this [service]. There are plenty of organisations that are trying to address access, [but] nobody is using [video] which to me is now obvious thing." [Clara]

Peter, founder of a manufacturing firm that produces specialist gripping aids for people with limited hand function, conceived of a new venture idea in hospital, following a skiing accident which left him paralysed from the waist down with a damaged upper limb function.

"When I was in hospital, I was trying to find something which helped me to overcome the weak grip on my hands and there was nothing out there at all. And I've found that really frustrating that I couldn't for example build my arm strength back, because I couldn't hold any weights in my hands, because my hands were too weak. And I wanted to do a lot of sports and for that I needed to hold things and do things with my arm, my body strength. And that was just really frustrating not having a product available. So I kind of waded about a few ideas and basic prototypes and eventually we came up with what became known as [product name] and now we also have two other products as well, but that was the main starting place for it really." [Peter]

Several entrepreneurs highlighted the unique insights gained as disabled people which, they believed, could not have been acquired otherwise. Samuel, a freelance writer born with Spina Bifida<sup>25</sup>, felt that he could not have published a book about the lived experience of disability, was he not a disabled person. Similarly, Fiona

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<sup>24</sup> Muscular Dystrophy is an umbrella term for over 60 very rare progressive muscle-weakening and muscle-wasting conditions. See more at: <http://www.musculardystrophyuk.org/>

<sup>25</sup> Spina Bifida (SB) literally means "split spine". SB is a birth defect; it happens when a baby is in the womb and the spinal column does not close all of the way. SB affects mobility and is associated with a range of other conditions, including bladder, bowel and gastrointestinal disorders. See more at: <http://spinabifidaassociation.org/>

drew on her experience of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) to found two businesses: a consultancy practice run by people with M.E. catering to voluntary sector clients, and a support organisation that helps people with M.E. to work collaboratively while accommodating work around their health concerns.

Dean's embodied know-how of Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)<sup>26</sup> inspired him to set up a wheelchair clothing company specialising in products for a niche market of wheelchair users with SCI. The quotations below illustrate how new venture ideas emergent from embodied know-how in the natural order enabled these entrepreneurs to 'stand out' as different in the marketplace (De Clercq and Voronov 2009) in terms of a unique product offering.

"I suppose with something like [a theatre play], I couldn't have written it as an able-bodied person. It [disability] gives me an insight that an able-bodied person could not have. And I think if an able-bodied person tried to write it, it wouldn't be true; it would be a false piece of work." [Samuel]

"My consultancy practice is very person-centred, it's very much about enabling and empowering people. So the learning from that [disability], I took into the day job, you know the business. So I can go to a charity [client] and talk about that, both from a lived experience point of view and because it's a world I've lived, you know, I inhabit, which if I hadn't had ME, I wouldn't have been exposed to." [Fiona]

"For the new products [clothing] it was mostly spinal cord injury [customers]. I just found that that was, it was my area of knowledge. It was sort of my group and so you know, I was getting people there." [Dean]

The experience of particular impairments or health conditions, for example, those of a neurological or cognitive nature, can importantly shape individual capacity to creatively imagine new products in response to environmental imports, such as pain. Beverly, for example, is a knitting patterns designer suffering from Migraines and Rheumatoid Arthritis who attributes her sense of creativity and logical thinking to her health conditions, to a degree. As a result of having low energy levels most of the time, Beverly finds herself more creative, in terms of

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<sup>26</sup> When the spinal cord is damaged, the communication between our brain and the rest of our body is disrupted, resulting in a loss of movement and sensation from below the level of injury. See more at: <https://www.spinal.co.uk/>

producing new designs, when she feels well.

“One of the things that goes with Migraine is creativity. Another thing that goes with Migraine is logical thought. ...which means that on a good day I can stand back and look at both of those. And I can have a good look ahead and work out ‘Well, yes I can do this first step [of a knitting pattern], but can I do the step here?’ And that comes with Migraine. ...I think the other thing is when you’ve got very low energy, if you’re also relatively bright... you will think not just how can this be done, but how can this *best* be done. So you’re looking for the most elegant solution.” [Beverly, italics denote respondent emphasis]

Medical and neuroscience research suggests there is a relationship between Migraine experiences and artistic inspiration and creativity (Podoll and Robinson 2000, Aguggia and Grassi 2014). Like dreams, hallucinations, or drug-induced phenomena, experiences of Migraine with visual aura – that is, a subjective experience of graphic illustrations (Schott 2007) – have been shown to act as a source of inspiration among artists (Podoll and Robinson 2000, Aguggia and Grassi 2014). Beverly’s experience of Migraine, as a form of embodied know-how, has similarly shaped her creative work.

This section has illustrated how agents’ relations with the natural order can generate embodied knowledge that stimulates the power to conceive of a new venture idea.

### *6.2.2 Practical knowledge in the practical order*

Practical knowledge differs from embodied knowledge in that it is acquired through our practical relations with the material culture of artefacts (Archer 2000), incorporating highly sophisticated technologies, such as computers, or more mundane, for example spoons. While embodied know-how is possessed by all humans, what distinguishes us from other animals is the capacity to enhance our embodied knowledge by inventing artefacts and, in so doing, developing the material culture. Like embodied knowledge, practical knowledge is also procedural in kind but it involves ‘higher cognitive content’ that enables agents to know how to use various artefacts (Archer 2000).

Particular impairments and health conditions can enable the emergence of a new



venture idea, especially when the onset of impairment disrupts practical knowing. People with physical and sensory impairments often face material constraints in accessing spaces, such as buildings or transport systems, and using artefacts designed with able-bodied people in mind. Participant entrepreneurs were found to create and develop a range of products that help extend their bodily powers, creating new niche markets in the process. Michael who is a leather goods designer developed a special wheelchair glove from his personal experience of becoming a wheelchair user when he acquired Multiple Sclerosis (MS)<sup>27</sup>. Michael came up with the idea when moving around in a manual wheelchair and getting blisters on his hands. In what follows, he describes how he acquired a practical know-how of ‘pushing wheels with bare hands can be painful’.

“About this time, I became a full-time wheelchair user and I got this manual wheelchair because this [right] arm now doesn’t work at all, but at the time I could work it. So I bought a quite nice Swiss wheelchair and [pause] the very first time I used it in anger, like seriously, was at this event. It was called a Mobility Roadshow. ...So I was going around in this new chair, and I was like a little boy in a new Ferrari... And anyway, after about an hour my hands were getting really sore and blistered, so [I thought] ‘I’d better buy some wheelchair gloves.’ So I went around this whole place. There was about hundred different companies selling things, nobody was selling wheelchair gloves.” [Michael]

George, founder of a product design consultancy, acquired MS in his late 20s. As his condition progressed over time, George had to reflect on how to adapt his working practices in order to sustain his business. To do so, he designed an innovative digital service to lower labour intensiveness of the business and to work more efficiently whilst managing impairment effects. Furthermore, as a trained product designer, George has since considered developing a number of ideas, emergent from his practical know-how, into products.

“There are ideas of how we [the company] can do the work that we do to be much less labour intensive, much less moving about...The digital service that is a new technological innovation, *that* actually has come

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<sup>27</sup> Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition of the central nervous system that affects the immune system and can cause nerve damage. Physical symptoms include vision problems, balance problems and dizziness, fatigue, bladder problems and stiffness and/or spasms. MS can also affect memory, thinking and emotions. See more at: <https://www.msociety.org.uk/>

out because I start thinking about things from a point of view of a disabled person who's movement is unreliable. ...We could, pretty easily get hundred grand to investigate one of these ideas. And so, yeah, we could make that happen. And I wouldn't have thought of those things without this disability." [George, italics denote respondent emphasis]

Although the material culture of artefacts can extend bodily powers, there are limits to our practical knowledge at any given time – the effects of material culture can constrain as well as enable human powers (Archer 2000: 168-69). There is an analytical distinction between agents and the material culture they reproduce or transform – artefacts eventually become independent of their makers. This is because practical knowledge is conveyed by the objects themselves and the causal powers of those objects may have been unrealised by their first inventor. This is well illustrated in the case of Garry, founder of a fitness training company, who invented a new buoyancy suit when he became dissatisfied with the existing alternatives in the marketplace. Garry's football career came to a halt due to ill health. Having undergone two kidney transplant operations, Garry persevered with sports. The idea for his business emanated from his personal experience of training under extreme illness.

"Well, my foot was broken; I couldn't run. So how can you run? ... Well they [coaches] have found these flotation belts from the United States, wrapped them round your waist, [it] keeps you buoyant in the pool, and I was running in the swimming pool with no impact. I trained twice a day [pause], seven days a week for six weeks. My foot healed. ...And I went and I won the gold medal at the World Games. ...I didn't think of this running as a business, I just used to do it and it made me feel great. And I thought 'This aqua running. I need to learn more.' Now I couldn't learn anything, no one knew." [Garry]

By acquiring impairment later in life, some informants have also gained new practical knowledge of using various artefacts that both enable and constrain the exercise of personal powers. Novel products have been designed and developed to extend bodily powers and to compensate for the liabilities of particular impairments and health conditions. For example, when George's condition deteriorated and he started using a walking stick to move around, he conceived of an idea for a clip that stops walking sticks from falling on the ground. Similarly, Michael designed a number of products, including a blue badge holder, initially

for his own use prior to successfully selling to a niche market of people with disabled parking permits.

“[For example] walking sticks, they do this [illustrates how they fall]. They fall on the floor all the time. I found a very simple solution to this. This is a little clip. This is my innovation...if I have to use two hands as I’m stood in the middle of wherever, I click it onto my coat. So I mean, that’s absolutely a minor thing but I’ve never seen that one.” [George]

“By law in the UK you have to have the timer and the blue badge on display at any one time in a car. And I made the first one [blue badge holder] for myself, I physically made it myself because ... for my own personal use, because ... when you’ve got to carry both, you don’t want them flopping around because I used to change cars. ... you just put that in your pocket and zoom off.” [Michael]

Different impairments and health conditions can generate unique practical know-how in relation to the material culture of artefacts, stimulating the power to conceive of a new venture idea. Participant entrepreneurs have designed and developed a range of products to extend their bodily powers. In so doing, they have transformed established practices of the material culture. The above examples have illustrated how mobility difficulties in particular can be an important source of novel product ideas.

### *6.2.3 Discursive knowledge in the social order*

Unlike embodied and practical knowledge forms, both of a procedural kind, discursive knowledge refers to declarative or linguistic kind of knowing. This type of knowing is a product of discursive relations among people who, through their interaction, reproduce or transform propositional culture that is an emergent property of historical socio-cultural interaction, comprising theories, beliefs, values and arguments (Archer 2000).

The emergence of a new venture idea from discursive knowing is best illustrated by Sarah, founder of a social enterprise providing online recruitment services. Sarah conceived of the idea for her business by connecting with two groups – inclusive employers and disabled job candidates. Sarah became disabled in her early 40s through a degenerative neurological condition that restricts her ability to sit and stand for long periods of time. She has previously run a company

delivering diversity training to organisations around the UK. Sarah's current business challenges established cultural norms within the labour market where disability tends to be perceived as a liability.

“The idea for my current work sort of happened almost by accident because when I talked to employers about employing disabled people, most would say ‘Well why would I want to employ a disabled person?’ But some would say, ‘Actually we understand the business case for employing disabled people but we can’t find them, we can’t attract disabled candidates.’ And then I became disabled, I’m trying to get used to my identity so I get in touch with lots of forums for disabled people and ask the question. ‘Why is it that employers can’t find us?’ And they said ‘Because the minute you tell somebody that you have a sight impairment or mental health condition or whatever, your application form goes straight into the bin.’ So just seeing, looking at it, that there were some employers who were desperate to find disabled candidates and disabled people with loads of skills that those employers wanted but the two groups just weren’t finding each other.” [Sarah]

There has been a significant shift in organisational structures and practices in many sectors of the economy over the past few decades from full-time, permanent, employment to freelance and contract work (Storey *et al.* 2005, Kitching and Smallbone 2012, Leighton and McKeown 2015). Participant entrepreneurs were sometimes encouraged to start a business by former clients with whom they had built relationships in previous employment. Like many professionals increasingly setting themselves up as freelance contractors, Fred has launched his own PR/communications consultancy when there was an explicit demand from would-be customers for his services. Beverly, likewise, set herself up as a self-employed knitwear designer when she realised there was a demand for her services.

“So I [thought] ‘This is too much hassle! I just want to launch my own business.’ Because a lot of clients and customers were saying to me ‘Why don’t you launch your own business, you know, you can do some work for me.’ You know, it’s people like Sony, Apple, a lot of electronics [companies].” [Fred]

“I didn’t sit down one day and say ‘I am going to do this [business]’, in a sense it happened. ...I was living across from the Craft Cooperative who, one thing they did was knitwear and they needed somebody. I was working in the shop one morning a week and they

needed somebody, you know, to come up with [knitwear] patterns. ...And so it started there and then it gradually moved out. I mean I got a book, I realised that people were wanting to buy the yarn...but there were no patterns specifically for it and people wanted patterns.” [Beverly]

Discursive knowledge acquired through the education system has been an important source of new venture ideas for some participants. Dominic, who is at the start-up stage of his business, has cognitive impairment due to a head injury. He became passionate about the approach to product design he was exposed to while studying for a university degree. Garry, similarly, sought to gain theoretical understanding of water running from professionals and academics in the United States prior to setting up his training company in the UK.

“I’m looking to set up a product design label... What we learned [at university] is [how to] design the design, not about a product, whereas if you study something like Automotive Design, like car design you learn how to design cars. We didn’t do that. ...that’s why I loved the subjects, why I loved the course, because you know how to design everything. So whatever comes in fashion, that’s what I’d like to be designing, it could be a salt and pepper box, you know, it could be candles, or glasses.” [Dominic]

“So aqua running is no-impact running in the swimming pool with a flotation belt. So you can't... There was nowhere to learn, no training course in Europe. But in the United States, there's professors and people who take it seriously there in sport. So I thought ‘That's where I've got to go.’ So I sold everything in the house to travel to the United States for two years, backwards and forwards, learned from them, took all these exams. Learned all, came back after two years and in 2004 I had the [kidney] transplant, 2006 [was] when I started the business. After two years I started aqua running with the belts.” [Garry]

For some entrepreneurs, new venture ideas materialised by talking to, or reading about, other people and imitating their ideas. This enabled them to imagine novel combinations of products in ways which may not have been previously thought of, or realised. Samuel wrote a book about disability inspired by a theatre play and discussions with an actor performing in the play. Similarly, Tom who had set up a landscaping business, and David who is an artist using technology to paint, were both inspired by others when they conceived of a new venture idea.

“...So it was those things that really intrigued me [questions of disability and belonging] as to what impact does that have on my life? And how it might affect other people? So I thought ‘Well, how can I tell the story?’ and so this actor [name], I spent a long time actually talking [to him] about this very thing. And he questioned me about what it’s like to have a disability? ...And when I saw [him] acting, I just thought ‘What an amazing way of actually telling a story.’” [Samuel]

“I met an Australian who...he used to make an awful lot of money telling people how to run a business and then he set up his own business...and he was using a similar system to this [business model]. And I happened to stumble across this and I thought ‘Yes, brilliant, I’m going to mimic this guy’ which I have done really, really well.” [Tom]

“And the fortune of this was that, the good fortune was that I read an article by accident about [an artist] using iPads. And a lightbulb flashed. And I thought ‘Well, even if I’m laying in bed, I can still do stuff.’” [David]

Internet and digital services have grown significantly over the past few decades, making communication quicker and easier. Provision of information and services previously delivered in person have gradually been digitised as the internet enabled many to acquire and convey information more rapidly and cost efficiently. At the same time, the digital era has created challenges for people with particular impairments. Online content is often inaccessible to people with sensory impairments and cognitive and learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Rachel realised this gap in service provision when working for a broadcasting company and communicating with its website users. She went on to set up an online accessibility consultancy.

“I worked at [Broadcaster] for about eight or nine years in new media and while I was there I became very interested in usability. I was producing content websites and I was getting a lot of feedback from users, and some of those were disabled users who were quite frustrated about not being able to use the website as fully as they thought they should be able to. So I just got quite interested in that.” [Rachel]

This section has illustrated how new venture ideas emerge from three types of knowing – embodied, practical and discursive. Novel ideas for products can be conceived of in relation to the properties and powers of *all* three orders – natural,

practical and social. Particular impairments and health conditions importantly *enable* as well as constrain knowing in the three orders and the power to conceive of a new venture idea. Entrepreneurial identity, as an emergent power, thus cannot be realised simply through social relations alone. The next section examines the relations between the three knowledge forms and how new venture ideas develop into viable products.

### **6.3 Relations between knowledge forms and the development of ideas into products**

Although the three knowledge forms are analytically independent of each other, they are importantly intertwined in practice (Archer 2000). The relations between embodied, practical and discursive knowing operate in three directions: (1) the ‘demonstration’ of embodied knowledge in the practical order; (2) the ‘application’ of discursive knowledge in the practical order; and (3) the embodied ‘incorporation’ and ‘metaphoric’ communication of practical knowledge in the natural and social orders. The section draws on the data from three entrepreneurs – Lewys, Michael and Garry – to illustrate in-depth how knowledge transfer over time facilitates the development of new venture ideas into viable products. Each entrepreneur developed a new disability-related product from their personal experience of disability.

#### *6.3.1 The ‘demonstration’ of embodied knowledge*

Embodied knowledge manifests itself in two ways: first, in the privacy of human relations with nature (for example, a scratched knee will bleed) and; second, externally in the desire of people to extend the utility of that knowledge by capturing and disseminating it further discursively (Archer 2000). Material culture is central in the elaboration of artefacts which become tools for the dissemination of embodied knowledge to a wider population (for example, a plaster will stop the bleeding). Yet, the usefulness of embodied knowledge requires convincing demonstration before it can be translated into the material culture, replacing old practice (Archer 2000: 180). The three entrepreneurs designed and developed new products to replace what was, in their experience, ineffective practice.

As a wheelchair user with severe Muscular Dystrophy, Lewys conceived of a new venture idea from his personal experience of manual handling when moving from,

or into, a wheelchair. This typically involved support from several people grabbing hold of his limbs to lift him out. Lewys was concerned about the negative effects of this practice on the physical well-being of handlers as well as his own well-being. He described how his idea for a manual handling sling that would replace the old practice had to be demonstrated to others before it developed into a viable product.

“So I developed a product, a manual handling sling, for my own use really, and then thought about marketing it, and the business developed. ...I first did proof of principle. It took just over a year to get from there to market. At that time, there was an organisation called [organisation name] ... And I first met this technology advisor when I'd just had a piece of fabric made with ribbons tied to it, or stitched onto it... It [the prototype] didn't work but it was simply a demonstration of what I had in mind.” [Lewys]

Michael, a leather goods designer suffering from MS, got the idea for wheelchair gloves from his experience of moving about in a manual wheelchair and hurting his hands. At the time, the only pair of specialist wheelchair gloves he could find was sold in the USA for \$100 a pair. Unsatisfied with the cost and quality of the product, Michael decided to design a new pair of wheelchair gloves. He recruited wheelchair users to help him test prototypes of early designs, demonstrating his embodied know-how in practice. The new design provided additional hand support, a marked improvement on previous products, and was successfully sold to wheelchair users at tradeshow and online.

“I went down to town...And anybody who passed in a wheelchair, that were actually wheeling it themselves, not being pushed, I said ‘Look, do you wanna help me out to do some research?’ And I went out and bought two specialist glove-making sewing machines...in the end it was 13, 14 [wheelchair users] including myself. We did nothing but test wheelchair gloves. I was up most nights making new pairs and...It's got a 4-finger, because when you're wheeling you don't want caresses on the side of your thumb. It's extra padding there where you kick it off. ...And that's the first glove I came up with.” [Michael]

Finally, Garry explained how his initial design for a buoyancy suit had to undergo several alterations and to pass safety standards and intellectual property hurdles before it reached an optimum design and was ready for commercialisation. In the



process of demonstrating his embodied know-how, Garry's main challenge was to secure the patent and to register design rights for his idea. Protecting the suit has cost him large amounts of money and time.

“There are influences all around the world that I looked at but this 'optimum design' I call it, the sleeves and the collar, I had to pass all these safety standards so I had to patent the [buoyancy] suit. I had to design register the suit. ...I designed the prototype and I sent the drawings to China and they made the suit in China. And then they'd send it back to me, I'd test it, say it needs an alteration, they'd send another one back. So it was kind of like that for several months... So eventually the suit was the way I wanted it... from children's suit right up to extra-large.” [Garry]

The three entrepreneurs demonstrated their embodied know-how in practice by creating prototypes and sharing their ideas with potential customers, product designers, manufacturers and other stakeholders who, in turn, helped them test and develop their initial designs. Such demonstrations necessarily involve translation of embodied know-how into practical and discursive knowledge. Entrepreneurs had to do both demonstrate how their ideas worked in practice *and* share their ideas discursively to convince others about the viability of the product.

### *6.3.2 The 'application' of discursive knowledge in practice*

Discursive knowing of ideas and theories within propositional culture must, in turn, penetrate and refine the practical order (Archer 2000: 182). Once a new venture idea originating in embodied know-how becomes discursively communicated, entrepreneurs must show its applicability in practice. The emergent discursive knowledge – a theory of how new practice could replace or enhance old practice – was applied in the practical order by advancing new product designs and, in so doing, refining the material culture of artefacts. However, the application of new theory in practice takes time. The new theory challenges established practices, yet the old practice will not be replaced unless the new theory can show that the old practice is inadequate, and provide an alternative. When Michael became a manual wheelchair user and realised that wheeling without protective gear could hurt his hands, he noticed that wheelchair users often move around without gloves, or use gloves not fit for purpose. Garry similarly felt that the existing water running equipment was insufficient to

encourage people to take the practice more seriously.

“So I looked at what other people were using. Most people would be using their bare hands, but some people were using weightlifting gloves and other gardening gloves. I even saw [laughs] a girl with a pair of yellow, marigold washing-up gloves. I was a bit horrified.” [Michael]

“There are buoyancy suits out there. They're like different shapes but I didn't feel that was the optimum design that looked serious, to make people want to run. ...So I set about devising this suit and after about two years I came to the design.” [Garry]

New theories can be applied in the practical order only if their additions to material culture prove successful – that is, when they accomplished all that previous practices enabled, plus some additional practices (Archer 2000: 183). Lewys' proposed practice of handling wheelchair users with a sling, rather than by hand, challenges established practice. The sling was to transform how vulnerable people are physically transferred from place to place more safely, replacing the old practice of hand grabbing. When the prototype eventually developed into a product, it was sold to individual users and organisations, such as fire and emergency services. The application of the idea in practice subsequently generated feedback from customers and further elaboration of the manual handling practice.

“The first sling was quite basic. It had handles... it's for people to grab hold of... instead of grabbing hold of the individual. It [the sling] goes underneath you very simply without having to lift the individual or roll them and then there are handles for a team of two, three, four people to physically lift them. And the first model just had handles made from webbing and they were quite hard on the hands.” [Lewys]

New venture ideas emergent from embodied know-how must eventually be translated into discursive knowing of propositional culture to communicate the potential benefits of new practice to the wider audiences. However, in order to replace the old practice, the new idea or theory of practice must have practical application in the material culture of artefacts. Entrepreneurs must show that the proposed practice is an advancement on the old practice.

### 6.3.3 Embodied 'incorporation' and 'metaphoric' communication

The previous two sections illustrated: (1) how knowledge originating in embodied relations with nature must *first* be demonstrated in practice for its utility to reach wider audiences discursively; and (2) how newly articulated and disseminated discursive knowledge in turn penetrates and refines the practical order, replacing old practices. The embodied knowledge and the discursive knowledge were both shown to interact with material culture that bridges the two knowledge forms. What is left to examine from Archer's (2000) model of relations between the three forms of knowing (Figure 4.5) is how practical knowledge originating in the practical order communicates with the natural order and the social order.

For Archer (2000: 184), material culture comprises not only a variety of artefacts, such as cars, paintings and buildings but, importantly, the codification of practice itself whereby a particular practice translates into the other two orders through 'embodied incorporation' in nature on one hand and 'metaphoric communication' in the propositional culture on the other hand. An example that best illustrates such codification of practice is that of Garry's invention of a water running training programme. As an injured athlete, Garry initially trained in the water with no impact using buoyancy belts. This experience prompted him to develop a new buoyancy suit, an advancement on existing belts that would extend users' bodily powers in the practice of water running and aid embodied incorporation. Moreover, Garry designed a training programme to facilitate use of the suit and to communicate the practice of water running to wider audiences by licencing the method of training.

"I devised a method of training where you can put 36 people or 40 people in a pool and have them all under control. ...I devised a way of control like a chess board. ... People get in, they get the [buoyancy] suit, they get in the pool, they clip themselves onto the lane line. ...So you'd have ten there, ten on the next line, ten on the next...all facing the trainer. They're not going anywhere so they're not... no one's intimidated by someone who's faster than someone else, or fitter. Everyone...we could have Ronaldo next to a 70 year old lady, next to someone who's pregnant, next to someone who's, I don't know, got arthritis. That's the business." [Garry]

Running in the water with no impact was developed into a new codified practice,

involving the use of equipment (the new suit, lane ropes and clips) *and* the training programme to facilitate its use. The embodied incorporation of water running is enabled through equipment use whereas its metaphoric communication is facilitated by the training method. Garry has furthermore disseminated the benefits of water running through various channels, including YouTube videos. The technique has also been passed on by experienced coaches delivering training sessions for those who buy a licence for the training programme. Codification of training has been crucial to business success because potential clients cannot use the buoyancy suit in isolation from the specialist training technique.

“The people who have bought the suit have got somewhere to take the suit and they are coached properly in the techniques. That’s the way to do it. So because there’s a lot of thought involved in it all and a lot of trial and error; a lot of piloting; a lot of, I didn’t just think of that five years ago. It’s been trial, making mistakes, trying different ways.”  
[Garry]

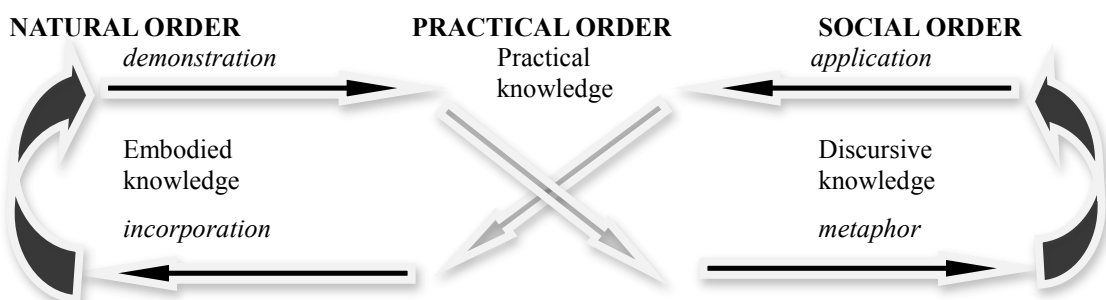
To replace established and less effective practices, entrepreneurs must communicate the benefits of new practice to successfully translate their embodied and practical know-how into propositional culture. They must codify the new practice. Because much of our know-how can only be communicated metaphorically, the dissemination of new practice can be lengthy. Some entrepreneurs have used visual materials on their business websites, including videos and photographs, to communicate product benefits and instructions on how to use them in practice. Lewys, for instance, posted a video of himself to explain and visually demonstrate the new codified practice of manual handling that utilises his novel product.

#### *6.3.4 The cycle of knowledge transfer, venture ideas and product development*

The relations between the three knowledge forms importantly shape the development of new venture ideas into products. Although ideas can originate in any one knowledge form, their development into viable products presupposes that the ideas are communicated and transferred between the three orders. This section builds upon Archer’s model of relations between the three knowledge forms (Figure 4.5) to suggest that the development of a new venture idea into a viable product involves a cyclical process.

For Archer, knowledge originates in each order independently of our relations with the other orders and moves in a particular direction. Embodied knowledge must be demonstrated in the practical order, the proposed new practice (discursive knowledge) must be applicable in the practical order, and the practical knowledge must become incorporated in the natural order and communicated metaphorically in the social order. Archer notes that knowledge is continuously communicated between the three orders, but that ‘translation’ of knowledge can be constrained or enabled by human interests in the three knowledge forms (2000: 178). For example, not all ideas originating in our embodied know-how may be communicated discursively. However, the development of a new venture idea into a viable product, as illustrated, involves a cyclical process of knowledge transfer between orders. The cycle commences with an idea originating in any one order and continues to move between orders as the idea translates into other forms of knowing and develops over time (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1** Cycle of knowledge transfer and development of new venture ideas



Source: Adapted from Archer (2000: 179)

A new venture idea originating in embodied relations with the natural order must first be demonstrated in practice, for example through a prototype. The demonstrated practice is then disseminated metaphorically in the social order. This involves, for instance, a marketing campaign of a new product. At this point, embodied knowledge is transferred into discursive knowledge. This is when a new theory of practice challenges established practices. Next, the emergent discursive knowledge penetrates and refines material culture as entrepreneurs develop their ideas, generating novel products. This is typically a more evolved version of an existing artefact/practice of material culture or a brand new, previously non-existent, artefact/practice enhancing bodily powers. In the following stage, the

new product is incorporated into embodied know-how as people learn how to perform various tasks by using/adopting previously unknown artefacts/practices. From there onwards, the cycle continues as agents confront their relations with each order and acquire new knowledge that must be demonstrated and applied in practice.

Entrepreneurs may conceive of a new venture idea and undergo several cycles of knowledge transfer in order to improve or refine their idea and to develop it into a viable product. In practice, knowledge is *always* transferring between forms, yet the analytical distinction of ‘cycles’ is particularly relevant in the context of entrepreneurship and innovation. In Lewys’ case, for instance, the first cycle of knowledge transfer generated a basic product – a manual handling sling – while subsequent cycles resulted in incremental product innovations, including colour coordination, padded handles, and different sizes for children and adults.

Agents’ capacity to continuously transfer ideas between knowledge forms, through multiple cycles of knowledge transfer, is crucial in generating a viable product and maintaining its success in the marketplace through ongoing innovation. This of course is importantly shaped by the agential power to commit to venture creation (chapter 7) and external conditions, including customer demand and competition. In a highly competitive market, knowledge transfer may be more cyclical and frequent, and firms that fail to continuously transfer knowledge from one form to another may be prone to stagnation or failure. In a monopoly market, knowledge transfer may be less cyclical because customers have little choice while providers have less incentive to innovate. The application of Archer’s framework, and its elaboration into a cyclical process of knowledge transfer, offers a novel contribution to the entrepreneurship and innovation literature. Parallels can be drawn with a recent study critiquing linear models of innovation, theorising innovation instead as an endless circle with interconnected cycles (Berkhout *et al.* 2010).

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explain how disabled people form entrepreneurial identity by illustrating how they exercise the power to conceive of a new venture

idea in relation to *all* three orders of reality – natural, practical and social. Ideas emerge from three types of knowing – embodied, practical and discursive – in relation to the three orders. Although social interaction is necessary for further development of ideas into viable products, it has been shown that the emergence of ideas does not depend on social interaction alone. Human relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts importantly influence the power to conceive of a new venture idea.

Applying Archer's (2000) stratified and emergent ontology of identity makes the conception of entrepreneurial identity developed in this study very different from the dominant social constructionist approaches to entrepreneurial identity. Constructionist studies under-theorise the links between the self, knowledge, the ability to imagine a new venture idea and the power to create a new venture. For constructionists, new venture ideas or 'opportunities' are assumed to arise primarily through social interaction as agents make sense of their experiences discursively (Johansson 2004, Achtenhagen and Welter 2011, Díaz-García and Welter 2013). New venture ideas, however, are distinct from agents' linguistic articulations of them. People conceive of ideas through embodied *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices, including movement and the use of artefacts, in relation to nature and material culture as well as society. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, its lower-level powers are not entirely socially constituted.

Particular impairments and health conditions can both enable and constrain action and knowing, and stimulate the power to conceive of a new venture idea. The onset of mobility difficulties and sensory impairments can be especially disruptive to the sense of self and one's embodied, practical and discursive knowing. Such impairment effects can however generate new knowledge and ideas. Entrepreneurs conceive of new venture ideas by combining their pre-existing knowledge with newly acquired knowledge originating in any one order – natural, practical and social. Disability has been an important inspiration for participant entrepreneurs to develop specific disability-related products. These findings challenge the assumptions in the disability entrepreneurship literature that frame disability largely as a barrier to venture creation (Boylan and Burchardt 2002,

Renko *et al.* 2016), contributing to studies that emphasise potentially enabling effects of disability in entrepreneurship (Pavey 2006, De Clercq and Honig 2011).

To accomplish entrepreneurial identity, agents must successfully transfer their knowledge from one form to another to develop a new venture idea into a viable product. Product development involves a cyclical process of knowledge transfer. Knowledge must be demonstrated by creating a prototype, metaphorically communicated to important others to challenge pre-existing practice, applied in practice to test the prototype, and incorporated into our embodied practices to see whether the new product can better extend our bodily powers, replacing the old practice. Entrepreneurs may undergo several cycles of knowledge transfer before arriving at a product that is viable, necessitating motivation and commitment.

The power to conceive of a new venture idea alone does not generate entrepreneurial identity. Agents must *additionally* be motivated to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation (chapter 7) *and* to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders (chapter 8). These two powers are elaborated in forthcoming chapters.



## Chapter 7

# Personal identity and the power to commit to venture creation

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that the emergence of entrepreneurial identity presupposes agential power to conceive of a new venture idea. Entrepreneurial identity, however, cannot be reduced to the visualisation of ideas. One may conceive of an idea but decide not to pursue it further (Davidsson 2015). This chapter explicates how personal identity – the unique set of concerns each person has in relation to the natural, practical and social orders – shapes the motivation for, and the power to commit to, venture creation. Commitment to an entrepreneurial role can sometimes pre-date the emergence of a new venture idea (Fayolle *et al.* 2011). Equally, venture ideas can arise prior to entrepreneurial commitment (Krueger and Brazeal 1994).

Drawing on entrepreneur interview data, the chapter illustrates the connections between entrepreneurial motivation, context and venture creation. Central to the conception of entrepreneurial identity developed in this study are personal concerns (Archer 2000, Sayer 2011) that motivate action, rather than the narrative practices that such concerns may generate. People are not simply rational decision makers and storytellers; we are also moral agents who evaluate the practices, relationships and values that matter to us and shape our actions (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Sayer 2011), regardless of whether we express those concerns and values in our interaction with others. We possess properties, both powers and liabilities, that enable us to flourish and cause us suffering (C. Smith 2010, Sayer 2011). Contemporary studies of entrepreneurial identity do not sufficiently theorise personal properties that underpin entrepreneurs' narrative practices.

The chapter demonstrates how the power to commit to venture creation emerges

from the unique way agents balance and prioritise their personal concerns with well-being in the natural order, performative achievement in the practical order, and self-worth in the social order (Archer 2000). Utilising Archer's concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration, connections are drawn between concerns that motivate venture creation, natural, practical and social orders, and commitment to venture creation. The onset of impairment is shown to elicit strong first-order emotions, such as anger, that fuel internal conversation leading to the second-order prioritisation of emotions and commitment. Archer's three phases of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – help elucidate the process of moving from motivation to behaviour in terms of three phases: reflecting on personal concerns, considering venture creation and committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role.

Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying concerns that motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role involve more than social relations alone. This necessitates a stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000), distinguishing *personal* identity, the set of concerns in the three orders that motivate action, from *social* identity, the public roles we commit to in society. Most studies of entrepreneurial identity do not distinguish different identity strata and analytical levels of reality. The failure to do so has consequences for researchers' ability to explicitly theorise personal causal powers, such as concerns and emotions, that exert influence on motivation independently of entrepreneurs' narrative accounts, and the powers of nature and material culture as well as society in shaping personal concerns and motivations.<sup>28</sup>

A thorough review of motivation, intention and commitment literatures is beyond the scope of this study; the focus has been on how entrepreneurial identity is theorised in relation to these concepts. The literature on disabled entrepreneurs, and more generally, tends to explain motivations in terms of 'push-pull' or 'necessity-opportunity' driven entrepreneurship (Hwang and Roulstone 2015, Caldwell *et al.* 2016), a binary that is increasingly questioned as too simplistic and

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<sup>28</sup> The arguments and some of the empirical material in this chapter will be published in a forthcoming journal article, co-authored with my supervisors. Appendix 7.1 provides a copy of the pre-published version.

ambiguous (Stephan *et al.* 2015, Dawson and Henley 2012, Williams 2008). The identity framework developed in this study provides an alternative, broader approach – one that recognises the variable influence of personal concerns in the three orders – contributing to the recent call for developing multi-dimensional typologies of entrepreneurial motivation (Stephan *et al.* 2015).

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, it explicates how personal concerns in the three orders shape the consideration of venture creation. Second, the onset of impairment is shown to generate internal conversation and emotional elaboration that fuels the power to commit to venture creation. Third, the unique pattern of personal concerns and commitments is not fixed, as illustrated through the way entrepreneurs continuously balance and prioritise their various concerns.

## **7.2 Concerns in the three orders and consideration of venture creation**

To survive and thrive, each person must attend simultaneously to their concerns with physical well-being in the natural order, performative achievement in the practical order and self-worth in the social order (Archer 2000). This section explicates how participant entrepreneurs' concerns in the three orders have shaped their consideration to pursue venture creation.

### *7.2.1 Concerns with physical well-being in the natural order*

We are all uniquely embodied and our embodied properties, both powers and liabilities, influence our capacity to act in the world (Archer 2000). Particular impairments and health conditions can constrain individual capacities to act and to form sought-after identities, stimulating internal conversation. This section elucidates how participants' impairment effects and well-being concerns shaped their day-to-day and working practices, motivating consideration of venture creation. Impairment effects of course are not the only influence on well-being, however, participants highlighted specific impairments and health conditions as crucial in motivating transition into self-employment. Personal concerns with well-being may be influenced by multiple dimensions of impairment – the onset, type, severity and by whether impairments are a stable, long-term condition, degenerative or impose fluctuating or recurring restrictions on activity (Boyd 2012).

*Impairment effects on activity.* Particular impairments and health conditions can have significant effects on day-to-day activities, such as movement, learning and communication. Such activity limitations can have consequences for individual working practices. The following quotations illustrate how different impairments and health conditions posed different activity limitations for the participant entrepreneurs.

“I had a stroke, there and then, basically. So I lost my sight and I lost my ability to talk for six months. And that returned within six months, I was quite lucky, but I was left with a mobility problem. I can’t balance, so if I stand, I find it very difficult to walk.” [Fred, PR / Marketing consultancy]

“So when they diagnosed me as having a brain injury they said that ‘you have still got a high IQ’. I just have problems with memory, concentration; very specific things that parts of the brain damaged have caused me massive problems. The trouble is they’ve caused the problems in everything I do, because there isn’t one thing in life that doesn’t require these parts of brain.” [Dominic, Freelance Product Designer]

“I have a genetic condition that when I was 16 it was diagnosed, and I was told that I could possibly lose the vision in both my eyes... I lost the central vision in one eye and then...lost the central vision in the second eye. So I could read, virtually, I could read one day and I couldn't the next.” [Victoria, Business Consultancy]

*The unpredictability of well-being.* The unpredictable nature of some impairments and health conditions has particular consequences for individual working practices. Entrepreneurs with progressive and fluctuating conditions, representing almost half of the sample (N=21), reported specific challenges in balancing working life and well-being, compared to entrepreneurs with relatively stable conditions (N=22). Self-employment was often viewed as the only option for people with progressive and fluctuating conditions who wanted paid work.

“I cannot guarantee that I can be in a certain place at a certain time because I may wake up tomorrow morning and there’s no way I can be round where I’m supposed to be tomorrow. I never know what’s gonna happen. ... So for me, it is a simple choice, I either am self-employed or I won’t be able to work.” [Anne, Disability Business Consultancy]

“Well, firstly, you don’t know when you’ll be able to get up. You don’t know when you’ll doze off during the day. You don’t know when you’ll have a chronic headache or some of your body will decide it’s absolutely exhausted and has no strength to do anything. You don’t know when you, if you have one of your episodes of vagueness, or you just can’t feel...your mind just goes blank. And you’ll just sit there. And you have to remember to obviously take all your medicines.” [Dominic, Freelance Product Designer]

“I mean it’s possible, more than possible that tomorrow, this evening, I might not be able to get up. It’s, you just never know what’s gonna happen with MS [Multiple Sclerosis].” [George, Sustainability Consultancy]

*Prioritising well-being over employment.* Personal concerns with well-being have prompted many participants to re-evaluate their motivation to stay in employment. Typically, there was a misfit between the nature of impairment and the expectations associated with the roles they performed in previous employment. Participants found it difficult to accommodate employment around their well-being. The decision to prioritise well-being over work eventually motivated their pursuit of self-employment.

“Emotionally, the hassle I was going through in salaried work was just horrendous. You know, you’d break with a migraine, and if it was four o’clock, you’d just about be ok maybe for driving to work the next day, but not always. The dizziness and the horrible feeling can last all day. So it was that constant worry.” [Gaby, Freelance Counsellor]

“[Asperger Syndrome] is absolutely the reason that I’m self-employed...Yes, normal workplaces don’t work for me at all. ... When I used to do standard nine to five office work, Monday to Friday, I would be at work all day and then I would go home and go to bed. I wouldn’t be able to do anything else because of the level of having to interact with people all day, fluorescent lights all day, computers, noise, telephones, having to constantly, you know, you’re just constantly bombarded with sensory input and that’s *exhausting*.” [Gill, Crafts Manufacturer, italics denote respondent emphasis]

“I tried some pub jobs, I tried working in a shop. Nope, just couldn’t do it, didn’t settle, didn’t feel comfortable because my mental health thing is [pause] it’s, they describe it as phobic anxiety with depression. So I have a fear of vomiting, other people and me. So [pause] if I worked in a place that wasn’t clean, or they didn’t clean the toilets...I just couldn’t do it... So I’d come to a conclusion I couldn’t work with other people.” [Sophie, Dog Walker]

*Accommodating work around well-being.* Most participants sought to accommodate work around their concerns with well-being. Self-employment provided many attractions in terms of greater flexibility and control over work tasks, location, demands and hours worked. Being able to set one's own pace of work with more frequent, or longer, breaks was perceived as crucial to participants' ability to undertake paid work. Greater control over the workplace environment enabled many to set up a home-based business that better accommodates the effects of particular impairments and health conditions on well-being. These findings are in line with prior studies highlighting the benefits of self-employment for people with disabilities (Pagán 2009, Jones and Latreille 2011).

“The thing behind it was, I needed the money. But then what was available? What could I do? What fitted in with my long-term conditions? ... I couldn't do anything that would require me to be in a place at a time, because I never knew whether I'd be up to leaving the house. So, it would have to be something based at home.” [Beverly, Freelance Designer]

“The main motivation was that I wanted to work. But I wasn't well enough to do even part-time hours. So, it was just purely a way of doing a bit of work, being in almost complete control about when and where you do it. So, the business that I've set up was deliberately something I could do, from home, in small bursts...where I could take lots of breaks. ... And so it was about building in time to recover because the nature of my condition is that sitting in one position at the computer, for a while, makes me very stiff...you get a lot of joint pain.” [Dara, Freelance Researcher]

“The professional jobs, there aren't that many out there that are flexible around 3 or 4 days of work. ... So, yeah, it was definitely kind of, I like to be a lot more flexible and working from home, it really really helps me as well. There's things like...certain lighting in the office could make me come out in my rash. So yeah, being based from home at least I can kind of manage my environment a lot better than I can, you know, in an office.” [Irene, HR Consultant]

This section has illustrated how personal concerns with physical well-being in the natural order prompted participant entrepreneurs to re-evaluate the motivation to stay in employment, and to consider the pursuit of venture creation. Different impairments and health conditions can pose different activity limitations, with

implications for the day-to-day and working practices. Many participants moved into self-employment to accommodate work around their specific concerns with well-being. Not all of them, of course, pursued venture creation due to impairment effects alone.

### *7.2.2 Concerns with performative achievement in the practical order*

Personal concerns with performative achievement can importantly shape individual motivation to pursue venture creation. The properties of material culture can both enable and constrain people with particular impairments and health conditions to perform particular practices and thus to accomplish sought-after social identities. Task ease or difficulty in relation to the material culture of artefacts can both encourage and discourage venture creation.

*Task difficulty.* Participant entrepreneurs reflected on the challenges faced in moving around the built environment and using various human-made artefacts, such as cars. Inaccessible buildings and transport systems can constrain people with specific impairments, for example mobility difficulties, from gaining or retaining employment within organisational contexts. Task difficulty in relation to the material culture can, in turn, motivate the pursuit of venture creation as a way of accommodating work around personal concerns with performative achievement.

“One of the things that was a big barrier to working is that I no longer drive for medical reasons. I used to drive years ago; I haven’t really driven for ten years. It would be dangerous for me to drive, because another problem I have with the diagnosis is that I faint easily. ...if I wasn’t well enough to get the bus or the train, particularly if I’ve got a lot to carry, I need to take my laptop with me and it’s quite heavy, [I would need to] get a taxi rather than get on the train and bus.” [Dara, Freelance Researcher]

“So just after I had my accident I was developing commercial property up in Sheffield and, you know, I’d be on-site, I’d be on a roof, on scaffold, you know, I’d just get carried up ladders, you know, piggy backs up ladders. And it...the disability stopped me doing certain things because I physically couldn’t do them.” [Dean, Business Consultant]

“I went to about 12 interviews basically and I was offered jobs on eight or nine of them actually. But everything was on a condition that,

you know, the disabled issue was a real problem, because a lot of them were in Central London so they couldn't provide parking. A lot of the offices were upstairs. And they weren't disabled friendly at all."  
[Fred, PR / Marketing Consultant]

Prior studies have identified the physical barriers disabled people face in the material environment when starting and managing a business venture (Boylan and Burchardt 2002, EMDA 2009), however, such barriers to performative achievement have not been framed in connection with motivation for venture creation.

*Task ease.* Properties of material culture can be enabling as well as constraining, and encourage rather than discourage venture creation. Digital and assistive technologies, for instance, internet and voice recognition software, have been crucial in supporting participant entrepreneurs in starting and running a successful business. Technology can facilitate home-based working, enabling entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions to effectively communicate with customers and others remotely. Many have deliberately set-up an online business as a way of accommodating work around their concerns with performative achievement.

"I can phone people and I can write things... And that's all what it is and that's all that I need, which is why I said I work from my lap. I can work from anywhere. I've worked from a hospital before. I've been in a hospital for a week plus I carried on working. I've been on my phone. I've been on my laptop." [Matthew, Accessibility Consultant]

"My Asperger's impacts on what I'm able to do. ... I think it [self-employment] works well for me because the majority of what I do, although I'm now in a shop rather than working from home, the majority of what I do is still online. So that kind of separation works well for someone with my kind of disability." [Gill, Crafts Manufacturer]

"Well, I've always designed, but I started designing knitting for a company in [UK Council area], designing hand-knit patterns and then as the web got bigger I was able to sell my patterns to a much wider audience. So, from then on, I've been basically knitwear designer, but I've also, I write and I do illustrated articles still but under the basis of knitwear design. ...The big thing was the web. I got my first website in 1999." [Beverly, Freelance Designer]



The development of material culture, including buildings, transport systems, cars, computers and other technologies, is inextricably linked to social practices. Agents interact with the material culture and reproduce or transform it through their actions. Human-made artefacts, however, cannot be reduced to social practices – the material culture *at any given time* exists independently of individual agents currently interacting with artefacts created by the past generations (Archer 2000). Archer's morphogenetic cycle (1995, 2000) of structural conditioning, socio-cultural interaction and structural elaboration applies to human relations with the material culture.

With a few exceptions (Down and Reveley 2004, Marlow and McAdam 2015), contemporary studies largely neglect relations with the material culture of artefacts and its role in entrepreneurial identity formation. While Down and Reveley illustrate how technology serves as a material and symbolic marker of generational differences entrepreneurs draw upon to construct a sense of entrepreneurial self, Marlow and McAdam highlight technology entrepreneurship as a gendered construct, whereby women tend to be viewed as end users whereas men are positioned as technology innovators and designers. Contributing to this literature, the present study highlights the role of the material culture of artefacts in both enabling and constraining entrepreneurship. The material culture designed primarily with able-bodied people in mind can deepen the challenges disabled people face in the practical order. In contrast, the emancipatory potential of the material culture can be amplified by taking into account agents' variable embodied properties in designing and developing artefacts.

### *7.2.3 Concerns with self-worth in the social order*

Personal concerns with self-worth are inextricably linked to social approval; endorsement or rejection of our actions shapes our sense of self as persons worthy or valuable to others (Archer 2000). The onset of impairment, and the stigma associated with disability (Goffman 1963), had a significant impact on participant entrepreneurs' sense of worth in relation to others. Concerns with self-worth, in turn, prompted some to re-evaluate the motivation to stay in employment and to pursue venture creation. Disability was not the only influence on entrepreneurial

identity formation, but participants highlighted specific disability effects in relation to prior employment.

*Discriminatory employer attitudes.* Negative employer attitudes towards disability have been a major incentive for pursuing venture creation. Experiences of perceived discrimination, both during the job interview and once in employment, had significant implications for participants' concerns with self-worth. Participants often avoided disability disclosure for the fear of jeopardising their ability to secure a job and felt that employers treated them unfairly once they revealed disability.

“I applied to a job agency for a job, in Ireland. [Sighs] They interviewed me on the phone. Thought I was good. They've asked if we could have a face-to-face [interview]. And so I thought at that point, I wouldn't usually tell them that I'm blind, I thought 'He's gonna notice by my eyes the lack of the eye contact.' ... So, I told the agency and he was like 'That's fine, that's not a problem.' We had a Skype conversation, that was good. He put me forward for a job. It was a technical test, that was great. And all of the sudden the agency went quiet. And about two weeks later I emailed the guy and the agency only said 'I'm sorry the job has been...pulled for financial reasons.' So, I made up another email address and applied for the job as somebody else and the job was still open. So, I know that it was because I was blind and the employer didn't like that.” [Connie, Web Developer]

“Organisations just don't think about disabled people or what they need when they're employed. And the whole interview process. ...You don't know what to do. I haven't [disclosed disability] and then I got into trouble... because I had my flare up and they said 'Why didn't you declare it?' And I never in a million years thought that I should because I never identified myself as having to tell someone I had a medical condition. Why should I? You know, I just think that's crazy that you should have to. But then you do have to because you do need the support. But you shouldn't be in [the situation] of 'If I say this, will I not get this job?' because that's what happens.” [Rachel, Accessibility Consultant]

*Inflexible work culture.* Socio-cultural conditions within the market economy importantly constrained participants' ability to fit work around their concerns with well-being. Many experienced difficulties in conforming to organisational settings and work cultures designed largely with able-bodied people in mind. Employers were perceived to be inflexible and unwilling to make reasonable adjustments,

even when participants disclosed disability. Gaby and Akaash, both entrepreneurs with hidden or less visible impairments, highlighted how working conditions seriously undermine discrimination protection laws, with consequences for disabled peoples' ability to accommodate work around well-being and to succeed in employment.

“People pay lip service to the discrimination laws. ‘Of course we’ll make the adjustments, but only if we’ve got time, you know, it has to be the return on investment in our time and time has to be spent producing, not helping you produce.’ So [employment] wasn’t a good experience. But my lifestyle choices, especially with the disability where the amount of time the person spends going to see doctors, physiotherapists, nurses is a lot more than the average non-disabled person. ...That was my own experience in multiple industries, multiple organisations, even if these organisations’ social purpose is actually to help disadvantaged community.” [Gaby, Freelance Counsellor]

“So I don’t walk as quickly as most people. I get to the room, the guy looks at this watch, he goes ‘Akaash you’re a minute late.’ And now I’m thinking that ‘Is the guy joking? Is the guy being serious?’ and suddenly I’ve realised the guy’s been deadly serious. I was gonna joke saying ‘Maybe your clock’s wrong.’ I could go into the aspect ‘I’ve actually got a leg disability, I didn’t know where to go.’ But then you realise in that environment, in that culture it’s not just the person who’s being a prick, it’s actually his boss is being a dick to him. ...This person knows what my disability is. The person knows the logistics of how the building is. But the person’s still being so inflexible.” [Akaash, Social Entrepreneur / Business Consultant]

*(In)visibility of stigma.* The (in)visibility of particular impairments and health conditions can importantly affect individual motivation to pursue venture creation. Both highly visible and hidden impairments posed specific challenges for the participants in prior employment. Self-employment enabled those with highly visible impairments to avoid disability disclosure and the potentially stigmatising attitudes associated with disability (Goffman 1963), for example by working from home. On the other hand, those with hidden impairments considered venture creation as a way of overcoming negative attitudes of employers and co-workers who often questioned their *invisible* disability. These findings contribute to the literature that has highlighted the role of revealing and concealing aspects of identity in organisational settings and entrepreneurship (Elsbach 2003, Clair *et al.* 2005, Clarke 2011). Although people with invisible impairments may be able to

avoid disability disclosure, or ‘pass for normal’ (Mills 2017, Goffman 1963), their specific impairments and health conditions can exert major influence on their sense of self-worth, particularly in the face of disbelief from important others.

“I’ve always felt that I had to sort of over-perform basically. People are almost looking for you to fail, because you have a disability. I don’t know why that was, but you got that impression that people were [pause] almost saying ‘If you fail at something it is because of your disability.’ Not because you failed, that you haven’t done it very well [laughs].” [Leonard, Business Consultant]

“So that’s the difficulty with a hidden disability. ...and that constant worry about this sickness record, and the presumption from a lot of people that you’re not really ill, you’re just taking time off, there seems to be in society now. It probably always has been, anybody that takes more than a day off, they’re just ‘swinging the lead’, they’re not ill. And it prays on your mind because I am very loyal to wherever I worked, very conscientious, and so to have that sort of attitude, that I’m not pulling my weight, even though my job’s done and nobody else is being inconvenienced...” [Gaby, Freelance Counsellor]

“I’ve always put on a front. Always. No one ever really knew because I was really ashamed and embarrassed. And I never really told anyone at work because I think they thought it was silly. I mean, because like being sick is a natural thing. You know, it’s just a bodily function but to me it’s the worst thing ever. And I couldn’t really tell people at work. And then when I went to the occupational therapist, I think they told my manager but I certainly didn’t tell people I worked with. ...A lot of people didn’t understand or didn’t want to understand. Not everybody’s sympathetic.” [Sophie, Dog Walker]

*Loss of self-esteem and dignity.* Having experienced the loss of self-esteem and dignity in previous employment, the participants’ desire to regain confidence through work was a powerful motivation for moving into self-employment. Personal concerns with self-worth are often underpinned by the dominant cultural expectations of any individual’s role in society and the idea of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ associated with ‘work’ and ‘worklessness’ (Garthwaite 2011). Such norms are deeply ingrained in many cultures and were essentially internalised by participant entrepreneurs, shaping their concerns with self-worth that motivated the pursuit of venture creation.

“Most importantly, again, confidence and self-esteem to know that you’re doing something worthwhile and, you know, because society

will always put you down as a disabled person and at least you know with the business you've got something that you've done and that kind of helps build up your self-esteem." [John, Internet Services]

"Work was the best thing I did, getting back into work was, without a doubt, it built my self-esteem up, it built my confidence back up. I became useful again. ...Being self-employed is, especially when you think of your health condition, it's just brilliant. You can't beat it. It's satisfaction. You know, when you do a job, and especially if I do a garden design. When you stand back, it's your own work. It's something to be proud of. You tap yourself on basically 'Well done Harry.' It's so much better than working for somebody. Because nobody should feel worthless. It's one of the worst feelings." [Harry, Gardening Services]

*The culture of low expectations.* Most participants valued work and felt that their sense of self as a person worthy to others can be realised through work. For many, however, the culture of low expectations associated with disability has been a major barrier in being able to participate in social and economic life. The consideration of venture creation often arose due to the preconceptions and negative attitudes that participants experienced in their interaction with employment support and social service professionals.

"Well initially, when I became disabled, I was told I was to go home, I was too sick to work. That was the first barrier. 'Please could you help me? I want to go to work.' 'No, you're too sick to go to work.' 'Oh.' [pause] So, that was the first problem. [laughs] That was the Job Centre." [Anne, Disability Business Consultancy]

"I thought I'll contact social services and I'll ask a social worker what kind of job I can do? ...I was 18 and I said to him 'Can I meet another visually impaired person?' He said 'No, you can't do that.' And I said 'Well, what kind of job can I do? I don't know. You know, I've never met anyone else like me.' Anyway, he said 'What we'll do is we'll send you to the Highlands...', the Highlands in Scotland, '...and you can do pot planting.' And I said 'I don't want to do that.' I thought 'I don't know what to do, but I don't want to do that.' He said 'Oh you're just being difficult.' I said 'I'm not being difficult; I'm just not doing that.' So basically he was absolutely no good at giving me the support and the advice that I needed at that point in my life." [Tamara, Rehabilitation Services]

This section has shown how the consideration to pursue venture creation is importantly shaped by personal concerns with well-being in the natural order,

performative competence in the practical order, and self-worth in the social order. Figure 7.1 provides a summary of prominent personal concerns within each order. Although entrepreneurial identity can only be assumed in society, personal identity is broader and regulates our relations with *all* three orders.

**Figure 7.1** Prominent personal concerns motivating venture creation

<p><b>NATURAL ORDER</b> Concerns with physical well-being</p>	<p>Impairment effects on activity The unpredictability of well-being Prioritising well-being over employment Accommodating work around well-being</p>
<p><b>PRACTICAL ORDER</b> Concerns with performative achievement</p>	<p>Task difficulty in using artefacts, such as cars Task ease in using artefacts, such as digital and assistive technologies</p>
<p><b>SOCIAL ORDER</b> Concerns with self-worth</p>	<p>Discriminatory employer attitudes Inflexible work culture (In)visibility of stigma The loss of self-esteem and dignity The culture of low expectations</p>

The application of Archer’s (2000) identity framework in interpreting what motivates disabled people to pursue venture creation has several advantages over alternative approaches. First, these findings differ from theories that highlight the binary of ‘push-pull’ and ‘opportunity-necessity’ driven entrepreneurship by offering a more nuanced understanding of the variety of personal concerns that motivate venture creation. Second, taking into account the role of embodied powers and liabilities has enabled the analysis of impairment effects and the variable influence that particular impairments and health conditions exert on the individual consideration of venture creation. *All* entrepreneurs, however, are uniquely embodied and their embodied properties shape their personal concerns in specific ways. These findings differ from the contemporary entrepreneurial identity literature that largely under-theorises embodiment and the links between personal concerns and the emergence of entrepreneurial identity.

### **7.3 Internal conversation and commitment to venture creation**

Although each person must attend to their personal concerns with well-being,

performative achievement and self-worth simultaneously, the three sets of concerns are not of equal standing. Through *internal conversation*, or self-talk, we reflect on and evaluate our various concerns, prioritising some while subordinating others (Archer, 2000; 2003). How we prioritise our various concerns depends on how we feel about them, or how much we care. Some concerns are more important than others. Emotions act as commentaries on our personal concerns. ‘First-order’ emotions, triggered by our interaction with *all* three orders, differ from the ‘second-order’ emotions which are the outcome of internal conversation and emotional elaboration.

Archer (2000) distinguishes three phases of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – that precede second-order prioritisation of emotions. *Discernment* is a preliminary review of our concerns when we reflect on ‘what we care about’. *Deliberation* is the moment of questioning when we consider ‘how much do we care’ and which concerns are worth of further dialogue. *Dedication* is when a strict personal identity, with a unique pattern of commitments, is formed. That is when a person motivated to pursue venture creation commits to an entrepreneurial role and acts on their strict pattern of concerns and commitments.

The onset of impairment or ill health, as an environmental import of threat to the body, can fuel internal conversation and emotional elaboration. Forthcoming sections illustrate in depth how three entrepreneurs – Sarah, Garry and David – have undergone internal conversation following the onset of impairment that has fuelled their power to commit to venture creation. Archer’s (2000) three phases of internal conversation help explicate the process of moving from entrepreneurial motivation to venture creation in terms of three stages: (1) reflecting on personal *concerns* (discernment); (2) *considering* venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others (deliberation); and (3) *committing* oneself to an entrepreneurial role (dedication) Figure 7.2 outlines the three phases.

**Figure 7.2** Internal conversation and commitment to venture creation

<b>STAGES OF ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATION-BEHAVIOUR TRANSITION</b>	
<b>Reflecting on personal concerns</b> (discernment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental imports, for example the onset of impairment, trigger first-order emotions, such as pain, anger, frustration and self-pity</li> <li>• Agents reflect on their personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement, and self-worth ('what do I care about')</li> </ul>
<b>Considering venture creation</b> (deliberation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agents question their various concerns, and emotions, and consider their worth in relation to other concerns ('how much do I care')</li> <li>• Agents consider and evaluate venture creation as a way of balancing their various concerns, prioritising or subordinating</li> </ul>
<b>Committing to venture creation</b> (dedication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agents arrive at a balance of concerns that they can live with, resulting in the second-order elaboration of emotions</li> <li>• Agents commit to a particular course of action, for example, pursuing venture creation</li> </ul>

### *7.3.1 Reflecting on personal concerns*

At this 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 in the natural order, eliciting strong first-order emotions that fuelled internal conversation. The three entrepreneurs reflected primarily on how their particular impairments, at the time, constrained their day-to-day activities and affected their relationships.

“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, Recruitment Services]

“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, Fitness Trainer]

“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, Artist]

The phase of discernment (Archer 2000) is reminiscent of Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) 'emotion-focused coping' strategy (involving, for example, heavy drinking), aimed at alleviating distress. At this stage, Sarah, Garry and David experienced distress and hopelessness while each had to review their concerns with well-being and come to terms with a newly embodied sense of self.

### *7.3.2 Considering venture creation*

At the second stage of internal conversation, we question the worth of our various concerns and consider how much we care about them (Archer 2000). Having come to terms with the newly embodied sense of self, Sarah, Garry and David started to question how to balance their concerns with well-being around their concerns with performative achievement and self-worth.

"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, Recruitment Services]

"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, Fitness Trainer]

"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, Artist]

Again, Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) 'problem-focused copying' strategy aimed at addressing the underlying problem (involving, for example, talking to family) is comparable to the phase of deliberation that the three entrepreneurs experienced.

Each of them started to question their specific concerns with well-being, and how they feel about the effects of their particular impairments and health conditions, in relation to their working life. This is when they start considering venture creation as a way of balancing work and well-being.

### 7.3.3 *Committing to venture creation*

This final stage of internal conversation is when a strict personal identity, with a unique pattern of commitments, is formed (Archer 2000). Having deliberated over what matters to them most, Sarah, Garry and David arrive at a balance of concerns that they can live with and commit to venture creation. This is 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 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, Recruitment Services]

“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, Fitness Trainer]

“In some ways it’s [disability] the best thing really that happened to me because you 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, Artist]

This section has highlighted three points. First, the onset of impairment or a long-term health condition, as an environmental import of harm to the body in the natural order, can elicit strong first-order emotions, such as distress 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, reflecting on personal concerns in the

three orders, considering venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others, and committing oneself to venture creation are three stages of the internal conversation in the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to venture creation. It is at the stage of dedication that participants accomplished a liveable balance and committed themselves to an entrepreneurial role. 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.

#### **7.4 Commitment to venture creation and the continuing conversation**

Agents acquire a social identity when they commit to a particular social role, such as becoming an entrepreneur, and personify it so that it expresses their unique personal identity (Archer 2000). People commit to roles when they prioritise their ultimate concerns over subordinate ones, elaborating a unique pattern of commitments that they can live with. Social roles, however, do not fully prescribe behaviour; agents personify a role by investing themselves in, and executing, the role in a unique manner which makes them distinct from others who occupy the same role. Because each person must prioritise or subordinate their commitment to venture creation in relation to their various other commitments, arising from their personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth, the degree of commitment varies by person and changes over time. Internal conversation is a continuous process; each person strikes a different balance between their variable concerns at any given time, making them a unique person, with a unique pattern of commitments.

Participant entrepreneurs were found to balance their commitment to venture creation and the three sets of concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth in three ways: (1) *prioritising and subordinating concerns*; (2) *reconciling conflicting concerns*; and (3) *consolidating personal concerns*. Of course, the order of priority and the balance that each person strikes between their various concerns is not fixed; some concerns may become more prominent over time than others. And so the balance can change, with consequences for the individual capacity and motivation to perform an entrepreneurial role.

#### *7.4.1 Prioritising and subordinating concerns*

Creating a new venture has had a significant positive impact on participant entrepreneurs' lives in terms of enabling them to balance their variable concerns in the three orders effectively. Commitment to venture creation and management, however, generates novel challenges in relation to balancing personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth. Personal circumstances can change over time, prompting agents to re-evaluate their unique pattern of concerns and commitments. The motivation to stay in business may change when personal concerns with well-being, for example attending to a degenerative health condition, take priority. At other times, personal concerns with well-being may be subordinated at the expense of commitment to venture creation. Quotations from Dara, David and Garry illustrate how these entrepreneurs prioritise and subordinate their personal concerns and commitment to an entrepreneurial role in variable ways.

“I wanted to do a PhD then. So this is kind of 10 years ago. But my own health was deteriorating to the point where it just wasn't, I just couldn't have coped with the demands of doing a PhD and working. So therefore my... because things are going well, my thoughts are turning back to 'Ok, how do I want to move my career forward?' Being self-employed has worked very well for me for a while. But the nature of what I'm doing is just not as intellectually satisfying as I need it to be.” [Dara, Freelance Researcher]

“I would like to have apprentices. Because I'd like to give young people opportunities. The art world is really difficult. What I'm trying to do is to create the business environment that has conscience whilst looking after myself but not being daft about it. I don't want to end up in a tent somewhere [laughs]. But I also want to do; I'm a great believer that you can kind of give something back.” [David, Artist]

“So, I set about devising this suit [product] and after about two years I came to the design. While I was doing it I had to protect the suit because I knew what it was; I knew how fantastic it was, right? All my money was in the suit. I'd have no money for food, I'd have no money for bills. I almost bankrupted myself. And that's why I say to people 'In business there's challenges there, but you have to overcome them, if you believe in what you're doing.' And I completely 100 percent believed in what I was doing.” [Garry, Fitness Trainer]

The three entrepreneurs are committed to an entrepreneurial role to a very

different degree. While Dara is considering to move out of self-employment to pursue an academic career, David aspires to grow his business within the limits of maintaining good standard of living. Garry's unconditional commitment to succeeding in business, on the other hand, took priority over his well-being and financial stability.

#### *7.4.2 Reconciling conflicting concerns*

Different sets of personal concerns can generate contradictions, for instance, when impairment effects generate feelings of pain and constrain the individual capacity to manage a business. But how can one reconcile conflicting concerns when they feel they must attend to them simultaneously, without prioritising or subordinating any? The participant entrepreneurs could reconcile what, they believed, were at times conflicting or incompatible concerns by finding a liveable balance between physical well-being and working life. The practical order is pivotal in bridging personal concerns that matter to us most, but appear incompatible. Human-made artefacts, such as digital and assistive technologies, enabled entrepreneurs to operate a successful business by helping them reconcile their well-being concerns and the day-to-day running of their business.

“There are certain events that I'm pretty much barred from anyway. Or, if it's a sit down meal type of event, because I can't sit, I'm excluded from that as well. So you just have to pick your battles really and pick the things that you can do and make the most of those. But I think with the rise of technology there is so much more that you can do now online and social media and Skype.” [Sarah, Recruitment Services]

“I had to have my leg off, right? I reconciled my leg amputation that I'll make it work for the business. So ten days after leg amputation, I had myself videoed running in the pool. So, everything I do [pause] is connected with the business; to help the business push forwards.” [Garry, Fitness Trainer]

“If I'm speaking at a conference in London which I try to avoid [laughs] because it's torturous, [the driver] will drive me down to London and drop me right outside the venue and I'll hobble through whatever I'm doing, stay there with my back brace and my neck collar, and he drives me back home again. ... The journey itself is quite painful, because although I'm laying flat, you know, you're moving a lot, you're being jolted and my spine doesn't like being

jolted so, you know, usually there is a price to pay with two or three days of additional pain after an event like that. So it's a constant kind of judgment call about 'Is this event going to be important enough to the business to be worth knocking me out for three days afterwards?' And sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't." [Sarah, Recruitment Services]

The quotations from Sarah and Garry illustrate how personal concerns with physical well-being and commitment to venture creation and management may be reconciled, despite the suffering caused by impairment effects. Entrepreneurs have managed to attend to their conflicting concerns simultaneously, rather than prioritising or subordinating one over the other.

#### *7.4.3 Consolidating personal concerns*

Venture creation can provide disabled people with greater control and flexibility in accommodating working life around their personal concerns in the three orders. For some participants who transitioned into self-employment to take advantage of this flexibility, venture creation was central to their ability to consolidate their various concerns, achieving a liveable balance. Without creating a new venture, these entrepreneurs would be unable to attend effectively to their concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth. Whilst reconciliation of conflicting concerns involves a compromise between work and well-being, consolidation is about harmony that the individual commitment to an entrepreneurial role can generate between various concerns. Commitment to venture creation has enabled entrepreneurs to attend to those concerns that matter to them most.

“So [the business] gives me a whole life that without it I would just be lying in my bed all day [pause] doing nothing. And I don't think I could survive that, I'm just not that kind of person, I would have to find something productive to do and at the moment this seems to be the most productive, so it's the life saver. That sounds a bit dramatic, but it is. It is a life saver. I don't know what I would do without [the business], really, because it keeps me going.” [Sarah, Recruitment Services]

“Yeah, the motivation, it was because I needed to do something. I'd become depressed... clinically depressed after retiring and I did various things like art therapy and I was on anti-depressants for a while as well. So it was essential that I did something, and so I've been

running the business now for... well, since 2007.” [Lewys, Adaptive Equipment Manufacturer]

“I’m always painting. Or, I might email people at, you know, 12 o’clock at night or in the middle of the night sometimes. But the great thing is, I can rest when I want, I feel very tired as well so I have longevity of being able to sort of keep going for longer periods. But it doesn’t matter because I’ve got no-one breathing down my neck, only myself.” [David, Artist]

The quotations from Sarah, Lewys and David illustrate how these entrepreneurs consolidated their commitment to venture creation and their personal concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth in order to achieve a balance that they can live with.

To summarise, the last two parts of the chapter highlighted a number of key points. First, human relations with *all* three orders of reality – natural, practical and social – generate first-order emotions, such as pain, frustration and embarrassment. Second, the onset of impairment, as an environmental import of harm to the body in the natural order, can elicit strong first-order emotions. Third, those emotions fuel the processes of internal conversation and emotional elaboration, generating the second-order prioritisation of emotions and commitment to venture creation. Fourth, three phases of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – help explain the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to venture creation in terms of three stages: reflecting on personal concerns, considering venture creation and committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role. Finally, internal conversation is a continuing process, it never stops, and so the individual commitment to an entrepreneurial role can change over time.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explain how disabled people form entrepreneurial identity by illustrating the connections between personal concerns that motivate action and the power to commit to venture creation. Utilising a stratified, emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O’Mahoney 2014), it has been shown how concerns with physical well-being, performative achievement and self-worth can motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role. Although

entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying capacities and concerns that generate venture creation cannot be reduced simply to social interaction. Particular impairments and health conditions were found to affect personal capacities and concerns in *all* three orders – natural, practical and social – with implications for entrepreneurial identity formation.

Archer's (2000) concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration have been drawn upon to illustrate the connection between entrepreneurial motivation, the three orders of reality, and venture creation in terms of three stages: reflecting on personal concerns (discernment); considering venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others (deliberation); and committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role (dedication). It is only at the stage of dedication that, having mulled over their various concerns, study participants acted on those concerns that matter to them most to become a *particular* kind of entrepreneur. Internal conversation is a process in motion; because the unique pattern of commitments that each person has can change over time, commitment to venture creation and management can also change, with implications for entrepreneurial identity.

These findings differ from the contemporary entrepreneurial identity literature in several respects. First, most studies do not distinguish multiple identity strata, including the body, the self, personal identity and social identity, as distinct properties with both powers and liabilities that shape entrepreneurial motivation and action. This has consequences for researchers' ability to explicitly theorise personal causal powers, such as impairments, concerns and emotions, that can motivate venture creation regardless of whether narratively expressed, or not. Second, studies largely under-theorise the connections between the underlying causal powers and the emergent entrepreneurial identity. Focusing primarily on storytelling practices prevents researchers from utilising the concept of causal power, even though they necessarily presuppose agents with particular powers that enable them to self-narrate as they do. Third, using the concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration to theorise the links between motivation and behaviour provides a novel insight into the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity which may, or may not, be narratively expressed. Finally,



the chapter has illustrated how personal relations with the natural and the practical orders *as well as* the social order shape personal concerns and the motivation to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation. Most studies neglect the powers of nature and the material culture of artefacts in enabling or constraining identity formation.

It has been argued that the power to commit to venture creation is a lower-level property of entrepreneurial identity. Entrepreneurial identity, however, cannot be conflated with commitment. To further explain the emergence of entrepreneurial identity, the next chapter presents empirical data to illustrate how agents build and acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders, including customers and employees, in order to successfully create a new venture.

## Chapter 8

# Social identity and the power to acquire legitimacy

### 8.1 Introduction

This final empirical chapter completes the depiction of entrepreneurial identity as a personal power to create a new venture, underpinned by three lower-level powers. While the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea has been shown to emerge from the embodied sense of self, and the power to commit to an entrepreneurial role from personal identity, the capacity to acquire legitimacy is exercised at the level of social identity. To perform entrepreneurial roles successfully, entrepreneurs must be concerned with legitimacy-building in relation to important stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors and others. Entrepreneurial agents must meet stakeholder expectations associated with the roles; newcomers are not automatically deemed entrepreneurs (De Clercq and Voronov 2009). Entrepreneurial identity cannot be achieved without attaining legitimacy.

This chapter examines how disabled people build and acquire new venture legitimacy and, in doing so, accomplish entrepreneurial identity. Disability has been described as a stigmatised social identity (Goffman 1963). Disabled people are thought to be a disadvantaged group in the labour market (Jones 2008) and entrepreneurship (De Clercq and Honig 2011, Cooney 2013). Different impairments and health conditions can have variable effects on entrepreneurial activities, constraining but also enabling the power of new venture representatives to come across as legitimate. The (in)visibility of impairment (Mills 2017, Clair *et al.* 2005) in particular can generate concerns for disabled entrepreneurs, for instance, when considering whether and how to disclose disability to customers and what might be the consequences for business performance. The sense of self and personal identity not only shape the roles and relationships we commit to in society, but also how we go about personifying those roles and performing them

in relation to important others.

Drawing on entrepreneur interviews, shadowing fieldnotes, stakeholder interviews and the online visual material, the chapter illustrates how disabled entrepreneurs build and acquire legitimacy at the *meso-social* and *micro-social* level of interaction with particular markets and people. While the former involves collective social action at the group or organisational level (Blom and Morén 2011) whereby entrepreneurs strategically interact by ‘fitting-in’ or ‘standing-out’ within existing market arrangements (De Clercq and Voronov 2009), the latter comprises interactions with dyads or small groups at the individual level (Blom and Morén 2011), involving tactical actions of entrepreneurs from the ‘back-stage’ or the ‘front-stage’ of their business (Goffman 1959). Although meso-level interaction involves entrepreneurs’ initial decision about which ‘collectivities’ to engage with, it is shaped largely by the audiences’, particularly customers’, expectations and perceptions of the attributes of new ventures and their markets as legitimisation mechanisms. Micro-level interaction is influenced by entrepreneurs’ actions and efforts in building legitimacy (Überbacher 2014). Hence, meso-level interaction is shaped by the power of social structure while the micro-level interaction by the power of agents. Particular market arrangements always pre-exist entrepreneurs’ actions.

The entrepreneurial identity literature tends to under-theorise legitimacy. Studies that draw explicit links with legitimacy typically adopt the micro-level, actor-centred approach (Überbacher 2014), focusing primarily on the narrative and discursive resources, such as stories and metaphors, agents employ to craft an entrepreneurial identity – defined as a narrative practice – and, in doing so, acquire legitimacy with important stakeholders (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Holt and Macpherson 2010, Navis and Glynn 2011, Landau *et al.* 2014, Werven *et al.* 2015). Yet, entrepreneurial legitimacy cannot be accomplished through such narrative practices alone. Communication is crucial for legitimacy but is not limited to discourse; a range of non-verbal displays and meaning-laden actions shape how stakeholders perceive organisations and their representatives (Suchman 1995). Theorising entrepreneurial identity as a personal power, rather than a narrative practice, enables us to explore how entrepreneurs

communicate their values, beliefs, concerns and emotions, both intentionally and inadvertently, through embodied *non-linguistic* as well as linguistic practices and symbolic actions (Zott and Huy 2007; Clarke 2011, Cornelissen *et al.* 2012).

Visual symbols such as movement, posture, gestures, and the use of artefacts are particularly pertinent to disabled entrepreneurs, especially those with highly visible impairments who may have to work harder to present themselves as legitimate. The *visibility* of social identities more generally is under-analysed in the field of entrepreneurship. Although researchers have critiqued the dominant stereotype of entrepreneurs as white and male (Essers and Benschop 2007, Boje and Smith 2010), studies tend to focus on analyses of narrative and discourse while often accepting entrepreneurs' stories uncritically without seeking to verify them, for instance through observation, or to gain alternative viewpoints from others (Zott and Huy 2007). This chapter pays particular attention to embodied *non-linguistic* practices in the legitimacy building process.

Studies that emphasise the power of audiences in legitimising new ventures typically assume that audiences are able-bodied, as opposed to differently-abled agents. Disabled customers and those with various impairments and health conditions are largely under-researched as important business stakeholders with powers to influence market norms, expectations and behaviours, and to grant or withdraw support for new ventures. This chapter therefore examines the enabling and constraining effects of operating in two distinct markets – a specific disability-related market or a mainstream market. 'Disability market' refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products where the buyers are disabled consumers, or consumers disabled by association, for example, carers. 'Mainstream market' refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products where the buyers are consumers generally.

The chapter is organised into three parts. The first part examines legitimacy-building strategies adopted by entrepreneurs at the meso-level, as they balance their needs of 'fitting-in' and 'standing-out' in the marketplace. The second part elucidates legitimacy-building tactics entrepreneurs employ at the micro-level, as they interact with stakeholders from the 'back-stage' and the 'front-stage' of their

business. The final part synthesises the relations between different strategies and tactics, before concluding.

## 8.2 ‘Fitting-in’ and ‘standing-out’: legitimacy-building strategies at the meso-level

All entrepreneurs must conform to the appearance and behavioural norms associated with entrepreneurial roles within particular contexts, in order to satisfy the expectations of important others who may accept or challenge their actions. To create and manage a successful business, entrepreneurs must *both* ‘fit-in’ with existing market arrangements and rules *and* ‘stand-out’ as rule breakers (De Clercq and Voronov 2009); they must successfully balance similarity with, but also difference from, others in the marketplace. This section elucidates how entrepreneurs balance the demands of fitting-in and standing-out. More specifically, it demonstrates how the type, severity and visibility of particular impairments and health conditions influence entrepreneurs’ strategies of conforming to, selecting or manipulating the market environments (Suchman 1995).

Entrepreneur respondents found and managed new ventures under four distinct market conditions: (1) selling a mainstream product to the mainstream consumer market (for example, web hosting services); (2) selling a disability-related product to the disability market exclusively (for example, wheelchair clothing); (3) selling a disability-related product to the mainstream market (for example, disability awareness training); and finally (4) selling a mainstream product to the disability market (for example, marketing services sold to disability organisations) (Figure 8.1). ‘Mainstream product’ refers to a product that appeals to a broader spectrum of the society, for example, website design. ‘Disability-related product’ refers to a product that is impairment or disability specific, for example disability awareness training.

**Figure 8.1** Market conditions under which disabled entrepreneurs operate

<b>Product</b>	<b>Market</b>	<b>Product example</b>
Mainstream	Mainstream	Website design
Disability	Disability	Wheelchair clothing
Disability	Mainstream	Disability awareness training

Depending on circumstances, particular impairments and health conditions can constrain entrepreneurs' capacity to 'fit-in' with the appearance and behavioural expectations of customers and others, but also enable the entrepreneurs to 'stand-out' as different. The visibility of impairment in particular affects how various audiences perceive entrepreneurs, and shapes the legitimacy-building strategies entrepreneurs adopt under different market conditions, influencing their ability to come across as legitimate.

At the meso-level of interaction, disabled entrepreneurs were found to adopt four distinct legitimacy-building strategies in relation to the market environment:

- *Revealing* impairment and *conforming* to the environment;
- *Revealing* impairment and *selecting* among environments;
- *Revealing* impairment and *transforming* environment; and
- *Passing* for "normal" and *conforming* to the environment.<sup>29</sup>

The term 'strategy' refers to decisions about interacting with particular groups or collectivities of people with meso-level consequences, such as firm growth or stagnation, which can be unintended. 'Revealing' refers to the visible and therefore revealing nature of the impairment or health condition whereas 'passing' alludes to the capacity of people with less visible or hidden impairments to avoid disability disclosure and pass for "normal" in social interaction. Revealing and passing can be both intentional and unintentional. For instance, some entrepreneurs may reveal their impairment purposefully while others pass for "normal" without deliberately attempting to do so. Similarly, the decision to adopt a particular strategy may have some unintended consequences – entrepreneurs may be unaware of its legitimating effects or how the audiences' perceptions can influence their business performance. The four strategies operate as tendencies,

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<sup>29</sup> It is recognised that terms "able-bodied", "healthy" or "normal" take on different meanings in different social and cultural contexts. Yet, such terms serve as necessary analytical categories without which words such as "impaired" and "disabled" would be meaningless when applied to human bodies or persons (C. Smith 2010, p. 45n).

rather than fixed behaviours generating regularities. The visibility, type and severity of impairment significantly shape, but do not determine, individual business activities and legitimacy-building strategies.

Figure 8.2 offers an outline of the four legitimacy-building strategies at the meso-level interaction with customers. A detailed list of strategies adopted by all 43 entrepreneurs is provided in Appendix 8.1.

**Figure 8.2** Legitimacy-building strategies at the meso-level

<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>Revealing-conforming</b>	<b>Revealing-selecting</b>	<b>Revealing-transforming</b>	<b>Passing-conforming</b>
<b>Product</b>	<i>Mainstream product</i>  Examples: PR & marketing, website design, internet services, food production	<i>Disability product</i>  Examples: mobility aid manufacture, rehabilitation services, wheelchair clothing	<i>Disability product</i>  Examples: disability awareness training, disability risk management	<i>Mainstream product</i>  Examples: HR consultancy, gardening, counselling, dog walking
<b>Market</b>	<i>Mainstream market</i>	<i>Disability market</i>	<i>Mainstream market</i>	<i>Mainstream market</i>
<b>Impairment / health condition type</b>	Examples: Spinal Cord Injury, Parkinson's Disease, Stroke	Examples: Spina Bifida, Multiple Sclerosis, Visual impairment	Examples: Leg amputation, Hearing impairment, Cancer	Examples: Depression, Asperger Syndrome, Amnesia, Emetophobia
<b>Impairment / health condition visibility</b>	<i>Visible-revealing</i>  Examples: hand tremor, posture instability, mobility scooter user	<i>Visible-revealing</i>  Examples: lack of eye contact, wheelchair use, white cane user	<i>Visible-revealing</i>  Examples: limping, loud talking, prosthesis, hearing aid	<i>Hidden-passing</i>



### 8.2.1 *Revealing-conforming*

The revealing-conforming legitimacy-building strategy comprised entrepreneurs with visible impairments who sell a mainstream product to the mainstream consumer market; for example, web design services sold to the general population. Particular impairments can be revealing through bodily movement and posture (for instance, limping), gestures and facial expressions (for instance, lack of eye contact) as well as through artefacts utilised to act in the world and to perform tasks (for instance, wheelchairs or hearing aids). In conforming to existing market arrangements and norms, this group typically sought to ‘fit-in’ with the expectations of appropriate appearance and behaviour associated with entrepreneurial roles. Disability is not a defining feature of these entrepreneurs’ sense of self, although it does importantly shape their personal concerns, values, relationships and business practices. For instance, Connie – a freelance website developer, blind since birth – highlighted the challenges she faces in building legitimacy while operating in the mainstream market.

“I don’t want people to think ‘Oh that blind woman, what is her name?’ I want people to think ‘Oh yeah that web developer who is really good, oh yes she is blind’. I don’t want blindness to be the big defining aspect of my identity that people remember, and it usually is. So I would like people to think of me as that kind of slightly off-beat, quite confident, competent person. And I think often at the end of my working relationship with people that *is* what they *do* think, but it takes a lot of hard work to get to that.” [Connie, italics denote respondent emphasis]

Business owners in revealing-conforming group tended to refer to themselves as entrepreneurs, more than other owners, and emphasised commitment to an entrepreneurial role while at the same time understating, or even distancing themselves from, disability in business situations. In some circumstances, these entrepreneurs intentionally concealed their revealing impairments when interacting with important stakeholders in order to be perceived as legitimate. For instance, John – founder of an internet services company, affected by Chronic

Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)<sup>30</sup> – explained how a negative experience of stigma associated with disability and his ethnic background influenced his decision to avoid face-to-face meetings with customers.

“People have always got this perception, especially if you’re disabled, if you’re black, that you can’t be behind a particular [business]. I’ve got *so* many instances when I’ve met people and they can’t believe I actually own the business. They ask me silly questions. There is one chap that I met about three years ago, I’ve been talking to him for a while and he said ‘Listen I’m gonna come down.’ And I actually picked him up from the station. ... And as we drove off the road, he said ‘So is it just you though?’ ‘Yeah!’ So it was almost like, he was so surprised that I actually set the business up myself and it was a successful business. So, you do get that quite a lot.” [John, italics denote respondent emphasis]

Adopting the revealing-conforming strategy at the meso-level has important consequences for entrepreneurs’ capacity to come across as legitimate in the marketplace, and further implications for how they present themselves at the micro-level of interaction. These entrepreneurs must work harder than their non-disabled peers to build legitimacy with non-disabled customers, if they are to acquire their support and access to resources. Concealment of stigma can therefore enable some to ‘fit-in’ with mainstream customer expectations. In contrast, entrepreneurs opting for the revealing-selecting strategy, as elaborated next, find it less challenging to accomplish entrepreneurial legitimacy while operating in the disability-related market.

### 8.2.2 *Revealing-selecting*

Entrepreneurs adopting the revealing-selecting strategy are characterised by selling a mainstream or disability-related product to disabled customers exclusively. Selecting a niche market, for instance, wheelchair users, helps these entrepreneurs to acquire legitimacy by meeting a very specific need in the marketplace. These entrepreneurs’ impairments are not only revealing but often intentionally revealed to customers and others because it is believed to be

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<sup>30</sup> Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a health condition of uncertain cause. Its common effects include severe and debilitating fatigue, painful muscles and joints, disordered sleep, poor memory and concentration. See more at: <http://www.meassociation.org.uk/about/what-is-mecfs/>

beneficial for the business. Having a lived experience of disability provides a source of legitimacy and can be easily comprehended and taken for granted by disabled customers. Drawing on personal insights of particular impairments or health conditions, entrepreneurs can offer bespoke products to disabled customers. At the same time, the visibility of impairment enables entrepreneurs to ‘fit-in’ with the social expectations of appearance and behaviour associated with disability, and thus to be perceived as a legitimate ‘disabled entrepreneur’. For instance, Lewys’ personal experience of inefficient manual handling of wheelchair users helped him acquire credibility with disabled customers purchasing his innovating aid tool.

“I think that counts for a lot, the fact that I’m disabled myself, that’s a positive in terms of sales for the disabled. ...And I say well, when people talk about difficulties they have, like travelling for instance, boarding an aircraft in particular, well I can say ‘Well, yeah I had that problem and that’s one of the reasons I designed the [manual handling aid] for myself.’” [Lewys]

Similarly, Dean’s personal experience of being a wheelchair user with a spinal cord injury (SCI) has helped him acquire legitimacy with a niche group of customers, most of whom have been affected by SCI, purchasing wheelchair clothing from his distribution business. Having a personal embodied insight into the products enabled Dean to come across as credible within that specific market, as explained by one of his customers in the following quotation.

“I’ve actually bought a pair...I looked at the quality and because [Dean] himself had a disability...one, as a wheelchair user, as am I, we’ve got a rapport straight away. And that to me, if you’ve got somebody selling specialised equipment who is a user of the aforementioned equipment and has an insight into disability, it gives a lot more confidence as a potential customer.” [Customer 3, Dean]

To gain customer support, entrepreneurs must be able to demonstrate effectively the utility of their innovative products. Disabled entrepreneurs offering novel disability-related products typically revealed their impairments intentionally in order to attract disabled customers. To do so, these entrepreneurs employ a range of visual material to illustrate the benefits of their inventions. For example, both Lewys and Peter – founder of a company producing a specialist mobility aid –

upload photographs and videos on their business websites and social media to showcase their products. These online marketing tools help entrepreneurs to target their niche markets cost-effectively, as explained by Peter.

“There are so many groups on Facebook, you could be very specific and it’s really good for us. Because it’s such a niche product, we’re not selling to, you know masses. ...Because our product is so specific to a certain disability, we need to be able to hit all those disabilities cost-effectively and Facebook is the way to do that really.” [Peter]

In contrast to the revealing-conforming strategy, discussed above, revealing-selecting strategy has largely positive implications for micro-level interaction with customers and others. Disabled entrepreneurs selecting a niche disability market are more able to take advantage of disability, as a stigmatised social identity, by ‘standing-out’ as different in the marketplace. Disability enables, rather than constrains, them to acquire legitimacy among customers with whom they can establish homophilous ties (Phillips *et al.* 2013). Disabled customers might struggle to find products that would meet their specific needs from the mainstream providers.

### 8.2.3 *Revealing-transforming*

Entrepreneurs adopting the revealing-transforming strategy are those who sell a disability, equality or diversity-related product to the mainstream consumer market. Like the revealing-selecting group, these entrepreneurs have taken advantage of their lived experience of disability to create new ventures with innovative ideas for disability-related products, for instance, online accessibility consultancy. This has enabled them to acquire legitimacy with mainstream *as well as* disabled customers. The revealing-transforming group recognise that by engaging with the mainstream customer, with the intention to challenge existing cultural assumptions and to transform practices in the marketplace, their ventures can be beneficial to society as a whole, including disabled people. Their products tend to be highly innovative or responsive to wider structural and cultural influences, such as the legal framework regulating equal treatment of minority groups in organisations. For example, Rachel – a freelance accessibility consultant

affected by a severe arthritis<sup>31</sup> – describes why she is approached by both disabled and non-disabled clients.

“My clients, there’s lots of reasons they come to me. One is, they’ve had a complaint by someone who’s quoted the Equality Act to them. And another’s that they themselves have a disability or their children have a disability, that’s quite common. Or they know someone with a disability, so they have this kind of interest in life. You know, this kind of awakening that ‘Oh, disabled people exist. This happens. It can happen to anyone.’” [Rachel]

Statutory laws placing equality duties on public sector bodies and organisations have been an important impetus for the emergence and growth of disability-related products in the UK, resulting in the mushrooming of businesses that provide support in the areas of disability support, equality, diversity and accessibility. Yet, the supply of such services has not always been adequate in relation to the growing demand, offering possibilities for disabled entrepreneurs to fill the gaps in the market or to create new markets. For example, Tamara’s personal experience of inadequate support, as a person with a visual impairment, and the recognition that there was a national shortage of qualified rehabilitation workers, prompted her to create a new venture. Tamara’s agency supplies specialist rehabilitation workers to social service authorities which helps to address the shortage, as one of her customers explains.

“[The service provided by the business is] extremely important. We work with lower incidents, I mean deaf-blind is a lower incident disability, and to get the trained workers, the specialist trained workers who know what they do is very very important for the individuals. And the workers are very few out there. And they are in demand. They [the users] are vulnerable and they need that specialist service to fill in. I think they [the business] provide a truly invaluable service. It would be totally chaotic not to have that specialist input. ...And we know there’s a gap in the market for such provision.” [Customer, Tamara]

Entrepreneurs adopting the revealing-transforming strategy attempt to challenge the mainstream market environment by, for instance, advocating the business case for employing a diverse workforce to organisational clients. Disability then

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<sup>31</sup> Arthritis is a term used to describe inflammation within a joint causing pain and mobility difficulties. See more at: <https://www.arthritiscare.org.uk/>

becomes a unique selling point; it appeals to audiences that seek to comply with the law, and those who recognise the benefits of disability-related products and services to their organisation. These entrepreneurs, like the revealing-selecting group, tend to disclose disability intentionally in order to be perceived as experts in their field, and therefore legitimate in the eyes of the mainstream customers. Unlike those adopting the revealing-conforming strategy, these entrepreneurs are more able to avoid the negative consequences of disability disclosure when interacting with non-disabled customers because disability helps them to ‘stand-out’ as different. For example, Sarah – founder of a social enterprise specialising in recruitment services for disabled candidates and inclusive employers – explained how running a disability-related business enabled her to acquire legitimacy with employers, despite the challenges of not being able to meet clients frequently.

“I suppose that I’m lucky in that the work I do is disability-related, so it isn’t so odd to find the owner of the business being disabled. It’s something perhaps they [clients] might have expected. Whereas if I was running, say, the business I used to run, the training business, people would expect you to pop on the train and get down to London for a meeting without any, you know, repercussions.” [Sarah]

Selling a disability-related product to the mainstream market, these entrepreneurs have the potential to disrupt the established market arrangements and norms and, possibly, to transform the expectations associated with both entrepreneurial roles and disability. The revealing nature of their particular impairments is perceived as a power rather than a liability.

#### *8.2.4 Passing-conforming*

While some disabled entrepreneurs reveal their stigmatised social identity to stakeholders because they believe it is beneficial for their business or difficult to conceal, others adopt the passing-conforming strategy. For this group, comprising entrepreneurs with less visible or invisible impairments, it is possible to avoid disability disclosure, to some degree, and pass for “normal” (Goffman 1963). In conforming to the appearance and behavioural expectations associated with entrepreneurial roles, they find it less challenging to ‘fit-in’ with market norms and to succeed in selling a mainstream product to the mainstream consumer

market, compared to those with a more visible impairment. Yet, invisible impairments can be as severe as visible ones in terms of individual restrictions on activities and the capacity to acquire legitimacy with others. Tom – founder of a landscaping business, affected by Asperger Syndrome<sup>32</sup> – explains how medication helps, to some extent, to conceal his condition in social situations.

“If I feel more positive, more confident, that will come across with the customers; that makes the customers more likely to say yes when I’ve given a quote. It allows me to talk my way out of a situation, if there’s a problem, more. Perhaps see further along a little bit because I can have a little bit more of an idea of how people might react to me. It makes me a bit more socially aware. ...The fact that it is a hidden [disability], it is a hidden thing, I can go through life basically saying to everybody as a prefix to my meeting them ‘I’m Aspergic, treat me differently.’ Right? And it doesn’t work. ... It’s just a horrible way of being because it’s just... it’s just so manufactured. I’d rather be an outsider but not ask them to be treated differently.” [Tom]

Similarly, Sophie – a self-employed dog walker with Emetophobia<sup>33</sup> – explains why she tries to pass for ‘normal’ in her interaction with customers so as to avoid potentially negative effects of stigma on business, rather than revealing her condition to customers.

“I’ve not told any of my customers specifically what’s wrong with me because I still think there’s a bit of stigma to mental health, and I don’t want them to think I’m unreliable. And I want them to know that every day I will turn up and I don’t want to give them any doubts. ... I’ve never been confident about my illness. I’ve always been ashamed of it. And I think that’s why I won’t tell customers. I see it as a massive, massive weakness on my behalf.” [Sophie]

Although these entrepreneurs operate in the mainstream market, the severity and partial visibility of their conditions affects, to some degree, their choices of the mainstream product offering. In order to ‘fit-in’, the entrepreneurs operate in specific, niche markets which can better accommodate, or even embrace, their

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<sup>32</sup> Asperger Syndrome is a form of autism, which is a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people. People with the condition experience difficulties with social communication, interaction and imagination. See more at: <http://www.autism.org.uk/>

<sup>33</sup> Emetophobia is a prevalent anxiety disorder. People with emetophobia have a fear of vomiting or seeing others being sick. They may also fear the feeling of being out of control while they are being sick or fear being sick in public which can trigger avoidance behaviours. See more at: [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

difference. For example, Sophie's decision to become a dog walker was intentional in so far as it allows her to work in an environment where she avoids prolonged contact with people. Similarly, Gill – founder of a crafts business who has Asperger Syndrome – finds that being 'different' is something that customers within the creative industries almost expect rather than question.

“Hopefully [I come across] professional and like I know what I'm talking about. ... I think it's kind of a weird one because there is that, almost that expectation that you're going to be a little bit strange and you're going to be a little bit kind of arty sort of [pause]... yeah, there's not that... there's not the same kind of pressures I don't think [pause] as there would necessarily be in other businesses to always be professional and business-like.” [Gill]

To be perceived as legitimate, entrepreneurs must highlight the beneficial aspects while concealing the stigmatising attributes of their social identities (Elsbach 2003, Clair *et al.* 2005, Clarke 2011). Disabled entrepreneurs reveal or conceal their stigmatised social identity to various degrees; this is often shaped, but not determined, by the product offering and whether they operate in the mainstream or disability-related market. Depending on the legitimacy-building strategy adopted at the meso-level (revealing-conforming, revealing-selecting, revealing-transforming, or passing-conforming), disabled entrepreneurs employ different combinations of tactics at the micro-level of interaction with customers and other stakeholders. The next section elucidates legitimacy-building tactics employed by entrepreneurs from the 'back-stage' and the 'front-stage' (Goffman 1959) of their business.

### **8.3 'Back-stage' and 'front-stage': legitimacy-building tactics at the micro-level**

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theatrical metaphor, the power to acquire entrepreneurial legitimacy might be conceived in terms of successfully performing entrepreneurial roles in the 'back' and 'front' regions of the business. The back region is where no member of audience will intrude, for instance a warehouse, whereas the front region is where the audience can observe entrepreneurs' performances, for example, a high street shop. This partly depends on audience type – a customer, an employee or a potential investor – although the focus here is on customers. Depending on circumstances and the type, severity and visibility of



impairment or health condition, entrepreneurs' working practices and performances in the back and front regions of the business vary. Those with severe and visible mobility difficulties, for instance, may prefer to work back-stage (for example, at home) most of the time to effectively balance their work and well-being concerns, or to avoid potentially negative effects of stigma on business. On the other hand, performing in the front-stage of the business (for example, meeting customers face-to-face), may be less challenging for those with hidden or less visible impairments. Back-stage and front-stage performances can have varied consequences for individual capacity to acquire legitimacy.

At the micro-level of interaction with customers and others, participant entrepreneurs were found to employ three clusters of legitimacy-building tactics, whereby a number of tactics have been identified within each cluster (Figure 8.3):

- Running a 'faceless' business from the back-stage;
- Managing social expectations in the front-stage; and
- Regulating feelings and emotions of the self and others, in both regions.

Entrepreneurs adopting any of the four legitimacy-building strategies employ particular combinations of micro-level tactics. Some of the tactics identified within each cluster were employed by entrepreneurs regardless of the strategy adopted at the meso-level. However, some clusters of tactics have been more enabling, or constraining, in acquiring legitimacy, depending on the strategy. Those adopting the revealing-conforming strategy, for instance, tend to employ more, and a wider range of, tactics in the front-stage interaction with non-disabled customers to counter the negative effects of stigma. Entrepreneurs adopting the revealing-selecting strategy, in contrast, could more easily reap the benefits of homophilous ties when interacting with disabled customers in the front-stage. In what follows, each cluster of tactics is elaborated in more detail, before drawing explicit connections between different tactics and the four strategies.

**Figure 8.3** Legitimacy-building tactics at the micro-level

<b>Back-stage tactics</b>	<b>Front-stage tactics</b>	<b>Emotion-focused tactics in the back- and front-stage</b>
1-Concealing stigma from the back-stage 2-Creating a favourable virtual identity 3-Delegating tasks to employees to appear in control 4-Planning for contingencies to counter uncertainty 5-Revealing stigma from the back-stage	1-Commercialising disability identity and expertise 2-Performing normative actions 3-Delegating tasks to employees to make the right impression 4-Taking control to communicate effectively	1-Exploiting sympathy of mainstream customers 2-Generating positive feelings in others 3-Empathising with disabled customers 4-Making people feel at ease around disability

*8.3.1 Running a 'faceless' business from the back-stage*

Running a faceless business from the back-stage refers to a cluster of legitimacy-building tactics employed by disabled entrepreneurs at the micro-level of interaction with customers and others. Entrepreneurs operating their businesses primarily, and intentionally, from the back-stage did so for several reasons: first, to better control impairment effects on working practices, for instance when coping with fatigue; second, to avoid physical barriers in the material culture, such as inaccessible premises; and third, to minimise or avoid the negative effects of stakeholders' stigmatising attitudes on business performance, for instance, failure to acquire resources. In order to operate a successful faceless business – a business operated with minimal or no face-to-face interaction with stakeholders – entrepreneurs employed a range of back-stage tactics.

*Concealing stigma from the back-stage.* Entrepreneurs with visible impairments can benefit from concealment of their stigmatised social identity by operating a faceless business from the back-stage – they can situate themselves physically away from the gaze of important stakeholders. John, who provides internet services to the mainstream market, intentionally avoids meetings with customers to conceal his disability. John became affected by the onset of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in adulthood, causing him tiredness and exhaustion at times. Additionally, he experienced negative attitudes from customers in the past.

Working from the back-stage and reframing the absence of personal contact with customers as a cost-efficiency strategy, John is able to gain credibility and competitive advantage in the mainstream market despite the severity and visibility of his impairment.

“Because of the nature of my business, as I said it’s faceless, I’ve had two clients where we had a meeting and they cancelled [the order] ... [because of that] I’ve kind of learned to tailor what sort of businesses to go for and to pitch to. And if someone obviously wants to set a meeting, I tend to say no. ... He [potential client] called me and said, ‘can I come down to present my proposal?’, and I said ‘no’. ... He asked me to come and visit and I said ‘no’. They’re one of the few companies. And I said to them, ‘the reason I can’t come down’, I didn’t say I was disabled, I said, ‘the reason I can’t come down is because we keep our costs very very low and so that’s the reason why we’re so competitive’. And they gave us a contract.” [John]

*Creating a favourable virtual identity.* To operate a successful faceless business, disabled entrepreneurs use various artefacts and digital and assistive technologies, including internet, telephone, adapted computer equipment and voice recognition software, to address the constraining impairment effects whilst creating a favourable virtual identity. Technology provides possibilities for disabled people to create online ventures and to communicate with customers remotely. For instance, Sarah’s recruitment business is an online facility. Sarah has a degenerative spinal condition that affects her ability to stand or sit for long periods of time. Utilising technology, Sarah can operate her business from home. She typically lies down on a specialist adjustable bed, using a wall-mounted laptop stand suspended above her. Sarah’s neck is fragile due to the nerve damage which also affects her left hand. Because she cannot type very easily, Sarah sometimes uses voice recognition software to communicate online.

“Well, because it’s an online business, in theory I should never really have to meet either stakeholders, either candidates or employers, because it’s an online facility. With candidates mostly it is over the phone or I mean they can register without ever having any contact with me personally at all.” [Sarah]

”I used to really enjoy the face-to-face networking and going out and meeting people face-to-face, and I can’t do that, but I seemed to have managed to transfer those skills to sort of online networking and tried

to make relationships with people through email and phone call and occasionally meeting face-to-face. ... One of the ways I've got over not really being able to do that very easily is that I offer webinars. So, both for candidates and for employers, so that again you know they're hearing my voice even though they're not seeing me, and they can interact by asking questions.” [Sarah]

Dara – a freelance research professional affected by Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS)<sup>34</sup> – epitomises another example of a business operated primarily from the back-stage. In the following quotations, both Dara and Gill explain how they create a favourable virtual identity, using their LinkedIn profiles and other social media platforms, as the main resources for building legitimacy with customers.

“I've put quite a lot of time into that [LinkedIn profile], over the years. It sort of grows very organically and probably needs revising again now... It's been quite useful as a way of 'how do I present myself?' ... [Communication with clients is] almost entirely virtual contact. ... Now because most of my business is conducted online, a lot of people I work with have no knowledge that there is a problem with me. It doesn't affect our relationship, you know, it doesn't affect my work from their point of view, they should have no idea. Some other people that I work with know me in real life better.” [Dara]

“I think just in terms of having kind of face-to-face interactions with people; that's always very stressful for me. And I avoid a lot of that by doing the majority [laughs] of my business online. But I think it's part of the whole presentation. ... The thing that is kind of peculiar to the craft industry I think is that people, they want you not just to be making things but they want you to be blogging; they want you to be on Twitter; they want you to be on Instagram; they want to kind of see [pause] what else you're doing as well as what product you're making.” [Gill]

*Delegating tasks to employees to appear in control.* Entrepreneurs with particular impairments, such as degenerative or fluctuating conditions, reported facing uncertainty in the day-to-day running of the business due to the unpredictable nature of their specific condition. To prevent the risk of losing business, or causing reputation damage, some entrepreneurs have developed ways of accommodating their well-being concerns around business, enabling them to

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<sup>34</sup> Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS) is a collection of heritable connective tissue disorders. Physical manifestations include hypermobile joints and skin anomalies, such as easy bruising, resulting in chronic fatigue, chronic pain and mobility problems. See more at: <http://ehlers-danlos.com/>

come across as legitimate. Delegating tasks to employees, for example in the case of a medical appointment, and explaining the situation to customers is the way Anne – business consultant with a degenerative neurological condition – tries to convey a message of being in control. Almost half (N=19) of entrepreneurs (N=43) who took part in this study employ someone and about a third (N=14) have more than one employee.

“I’ve set up my business to ensure that my business can continue regardless of how unpredictable my health is. ... If I am unable to take calls for a long period of time, [an employee] will ring people back up, give them the option of sending me an email, and people accept that. ... And as long as, I’ve always found, as long as you let people know what is going on and you do your best, people appreciate that. ... And that’s the key, for me it’s about creating, if you like, lots of templates for when things go wrong so that nobody realises things go wrong. [Anne]

*Planning for contingencies to counter uncertainty.* Having a practical system in place to accommodate work around well-being and uncertainty associated with fluctuating conditions was an important concern for several entrepreneurs. For Beverly – a freelance knitwear pattern designer, affected by multiple health conditions – planning for contingencies was crucial for her capacity to meet deadlines in the face of uncertainty.

“Lack of energy [is an issue]. I’ve got to be very careful not to do too much. I’ve got to make sure that deadlines are far enough apart so that I have the slack if I have a bad spell. Because sometimes I’ll be, I just can’t do any work of any description for a week or more, a week or 10 days. Another times, you know, I’m Ok. So I do that.” [Beverly]

*Revealing stigma from the back-stage.* Several of the entrepreneurs have created a successful faceless business, enabling them to avoid potentially stigmatising attitudes of customers and others. Yet, disability comes into play in some circumstances, for example when customers demand a face-to-face meeting. Entrepreneurs were found to adopt different approaches towards revealing disability from the back-stage, with varying consequences for their business relationships. Sarah, John and Michael are all entrepreneurs with severe, visible impairments, but while Sarah offers a disability-related service exclusively, and Michael provides both disability-related and mainstream products, John’s business

caters primarily to the mainstream customer. Accordingly, the three entrepreneurs adopt very different approaches to disability disclosure from the back-stage, varying from a full disclosure to avoid meetings, disclosure when planning a meeting, and a complete avoidance of disclosure.

“...if a potential client says, ‘Oh yes, can you just pop in and have a chat about that?’, and they’re in London, popping in to have a chat is a day out of my working week and another two or three days recovering from that. So then I have to explain ‘Well, would it be possible for us to speak on the phone in the first instance?’ ...And I hope that people understand.” [Sarah]

“When I do business with people, I *never* ever ever let them know that I’m a disabled person, Ok. But if I have an appointment, I’ll let them know I have particular access requirements and I find that works pretty well in 99 per cent of the cases.” [Michael, italics denote respondent emphasis]

“Well, to be honest, the key challenge was actually getting out there and being able to pitch for business. But that was a biggie. And the times that I did manage to get out there, again it was peoples’ attitudes. Because sometimes, you know, I’ve had a couple of occasions where I’ve gone to the premises to find that it’s not accessible and turned back and then I have to ring and give them an excuse because I don’t want to say to them: ‘Oh by the way, I couldn’t make the meeting because I’m disabled’. You see, so you kind of give some excuse and obviously those sort of businesses you lose.” [John]

Performing from the back-stage provides important advantages for entrepreneurs with particular impairments in terms of accommodating their well-being concerns around business. Yet, it can also constrain them from building rapport and developing relationships with customers and other stakeholders, with consequences for business performance. Hence, there is a downside to running a back-stage business. Both Sarah and John recognise the disadvantages of not being able to go out and meet clients face-to-face more frequently.

“It does, I think, definitely put me to disadvantage because people do buy from people and I don’t have many competitors because there aren’t many people who do what I do. But [competitors] can go to all the exhibitions and the seminars and the conferences and they can hold events and they can, you know, schmooze lots of employers and make relationships in that respect, and I can’t do that because I’m just not in a position to be able to do that.” [Sarah]

“...if I’ve been in a position where I could get out more, my business would be about 10 times the size it is now, easily. Yes, so those are the main barriers I’d say.” [John]

Running a faceless business from the back-stage can enable as well as constrain the power to acquire entrepreneurial legitimacy. The next section examines how entrepreneurs control potentially stigmatising aspects of their social identity in the front-stage of the business in order to manage the expectations of important others and to gain their support.

### *8.3.2 Managing social expectations in the front-stage*

Entrepreneurs have been described as skilled cultural operators (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Navis and Glynn 2011, Überbacher *et al.* 2015), able to narratively construct an entrepreneurial identity and, in doing so, to acquire legitimacy with business stakeholders. Yet, to accomplish a legitimate entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurs must also perform a range of *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices competently, involving gestures, facial expressions and the use of artefacts (Clarke 2011). Entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced simply to narrative storytelling. Depending on circumstances, particular impairments and health conditions can pose specific challenges, or present unique possibilities, for entrepreneurs seeking to make a good impression on important others. Those others may not realise, or understand, individual impairment effects; they may be unsure about how to respond when interacting with someone who has a particular impairment. To communicate effectively with others, participant entrepreneurs employed a range of tactics that enabled them to skilfully manage stakeholder expectations, to come across as legitimate and to accomplish entrepreneurial identity.

*Commercialising disability identity and expertise.* Disability can be a unique selling point, helping entrepreneurs to ‘stand-out’ as different in the marketplace and to capitalise on their stigmatised social identity. Entrepreneurs offering a specialist disability-related product, in particular, can present themselves as experts in the field because of their lived experience of disability. To present themselves as legitimate disabled entrepreneurs, the participants were found to make most of their online presence, including business websites, blogs and social

media, employing a combination of images, videos and text to showcase disability expertise and to convey the value of their product to customers. Several participants have successfully commercialised their disability identity.

“When I’m trying to promote the business benefits of employing disabled people, I think I come across as authentic and credible and people seem to listen. ... And the fact that it’s run by somebody who has seen it from both angles, you know, the fact that I’ve been an employer and employed disabled people as well as being a disabled person, I can kind of uniquely almost see it from both angles, and that gives me credibility with those kinds of stakeholders.” [Sarah]

“I am at an extreme advantage, being a disabled person, in that I have the lived experience [of disability], and having a lived experience of something that you’re doing for a job, gives you insider knowledge. And insider knowledge is my unique selling point.” [Anne]

“I build really quick rapport with [disabled customers], a lot of that I’m doing by the phone and they are ringing up cold to ask if they can join the program, or they’ve got a problem. ... And for them to know that I am a blind person completely changes how they approach me. And they find that a really positive thing to talk to another disabled person.” [Linda]

*Performing normative actions.* Disabled entrepreneurs build legitimacy with stakeholders by performing a variety of normative actions – that is, actions undertaken with the intention to conform to the social norms and expectations of appropriate appearance and behaviour in specific situations. Depending on impairment type, severity and visibility, entrepreneurs performed a variety of *non-linguistic* as well as *linguistic* normative actions to acquire legitimacy, encompassing the use (or not) of different artefacts and bodily modifications, such as weight loss.

For Gill, maintaining a socially acceptable intensity of eye contact in face-to-face interaction can be strenuous. People with Asperger Syndrome can experience difficulties with non-verbal communication. Although Gill can successfully conceal her difference by running an online crafts business from the back-stage, in the front-stage situations, for example, when customers visit her shop, Asperger’s can be revealing. Gill uses her hobby of knitting as a way of appearing ‘normal’



during prolonged face-to-face interactions with people, so that lesser eye contact does not come across as indifference.

“The majority of the impact is in terms of social interaction. It’s really, really stressful for me. ... I’m finding it very hard to make eye contact with people [laughs], as you can probably see [knitting while talking]. You do kind of try and mimic normal behaviour and normal ways of speaking and [pause], and learn how to navigate the world that way.” [Gill]

Similarly, Victoria – a business consultant with visual impairment – described how she intentionally performs normative actions, such as dressing in a formal business attire, in order to present herself favourably and to conceal disability when interacting with business stakeholders face-to-face. This enables Victoria to conform, to a degree, to the appearance norms associated with an entrepreneurial role.

“Oh well, meeting clients is the issue as far as going places is concerned. I need to know where I’m going. ... I don’t always let them know in advance [that I am visually impaired]. If I’m going into a networking meeting, I don’t carry a white cane. ... I do that purposefully because there is a judgemental area there. If you meet up with somebody and you’re carrying a white cane you become *the blind person*. ... I want people to see *me*.” [Victoria, italics denote respondent emphasis]

*Delegating tasks to employees to make the right impression.* Selling a mainstream product to mainstream customers in the front-stage can be particularly challenging for entrepreneurs with highly visible impairments. Leonard, previously an outdoor activities company owner, currently works as a business consultant. Born with Spina Bifida, he has severe walking difficulties and is a mobility scooter user. Given the nature of the outdoor activities business, Leonard felt that having a visible impairment did not make the right impression on customers. He subsequently delegated customer service to non-disabled employees to present an appropriate image in the front-stage, while managing the company himself from the back-stage.

“I think particularly from the activities side of the business my disability probably had an effect on that. I think if you were turning up for an aggressive sort of fun day out in the open countryside and

somebody who find it a struggle to walk more than few yards in that environment would probably not come across as being the right person to be saying ‘Right guys, we’re off to do this.’” [Leonard]

*Taking control to communicate effectively.* Communication can be a challenge when creating and managing a new venture, especially for people with sensory impairments. Customers and others may be unaware of impairment effects, or unsure about how to communicate in a way that does not disadvantage a person with visual or hearing impairment. The capacity to take control of the situation, particularly in a group setting, was crucial for participant entrepreneurs in communicating effectively with customers and others. A deaf person, for instance, may be accompanied by a sign language interpreter when meeting a group of hearing people. Someone with vision loss may not pick up on body language, such as facial expressions, and require additional verbal cues when interacting with others. Taking control to communicate, as opposed to leaving people to their own devices, has been effective for some entrepreneurs in managing face-to-face interactions with stakeholders. Anne and Victoria, both people with visual impairments, explain how they take matters into their own hands when communicating with sighted people.

“I don’t expect people to realise that I can’t see. In fact, that is one of the things that I always point out when I’m doing training. Because I don’t look like I can’t see [laughs]. ... People think that my support workers, who will hold my Zimmer frame, are just holding me because I’m unsteady. They don’t realise they’re actually guiding me because I’m registered blind.” [Anne]

“It’s very difficult in a group setting, if I meet with a group of people, to know when one person has finished speaking and another one has gone to start, because I have no visual cues. And someone could be pausing, as opposed to stopping talking. Other people would know, but if you have a visual impairment, you may not pick up on that. I may not pick up on facial expressions. I may not pick up so much on...if somebody is obviously not interested in what you’re saying, you have a lot of visual cues to give that away, I don’t have any of those cues.” [Anne]

“I think as I’ve gone on over the years I’ve learnt that the only person that can sort it [the communication challenges] is me. Because other people don’t know how I see. Other people don’t know some of the

challenges I have. I have to explain them and I have to give them a solution.” [Victoria]

This section has explicated a range of legitimacy-building tactics, *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic, that participant entrepreneurs use in their front-stage business interactions. The entrepreneurs, additionally, employ various emotion-focused tactics, in both the back- and the front- stage, as illustrated next.

### *8.3.3 Regulating feelings and emotions of the self and others*

People engage in emotional labour in their day-to-day interactions within organisational settings. Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labour as ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’. Entrepreneurs use emotional labour as a form of impression management that involves a deliberate attempt to control their own emotional expressiveness in face-to-face interaction with others. This helps them to be perceived as capable of turning a new venture into a successful business (Clarke 2011). How entrepreneurs feel in business situations can therefore differ from the emotions they express. When operating from the back-stage, entrepreneurs do not have to control their emotional expressiveness to the same degree, because their bodily displays are largely concealed. However, to develop good relationships, entrepreneurs must still control how they feel, not only what they express visually, because the onset of feelings, such as anger, can significantly influence their actions. At the same time, entrepreneurs must endeavour to influence the feelings and emotions of important others to gain their support. Clarke’s findings are reminiscent of the insights generated about the emotion-focused tactics used by entrepreneurs in the present study.

*Exploiting the sympathy of mainstream customers.* Disabled entrepreneurs, especially those with highly visible impairments, can be acutely aware of their appearance when interacting with stakeholders, and of the potential consequences of stigma on business performance. They may monitor stakeholders’ reactions when performing in the front-stage to evaluate whether to pursue or abandon the relationship. The reactions and attitudes perceived as stigmatising can be detrimental to business, discouraging entrepreneurs from pursuing the relationship further. Entrepreneurs may have to engage in emotional labour to control how

they feel about others' reactions, and their own emotional expressiveness, to maintain good business relations. How one responds to differential treatment from customers and others necessarily affects their relationships, as illustrated by Dean.

“The wheelchair user [thing] has been a non-issue and in a really nice way actually. Like I go in and I don't think I project myself as a wheelchair user. So I think some people ask for sympathy in the way they are and other people flatly refuse to accept any sympathy in the way they are. And that, you know, makes the difference between how we [wheelchair users] are treated.” [Dean]

Prior to shadowing Dean during his working day, he told me of an incident from several years ago when he became a wheelchair user and was approached by a passer-by who offered to help move his wheelchair into a car. Dean reflected on his behaviour at the time as he refused help and sympathy. He noted that he felt bad afterwards because the passer-by was only trying to help and his reaction may have influenced how the passer-by now perceives disabled people. On the day I shadowed Dean, he had a meeting with a client in Central London. When we arrived at the client's office, housed in a building that was evidently inaccessible, I described the situation in my shadowing notes as follows:

[Client] emerged from behind the door and greeted us with a smile. He went to get a new ramp that they recently bought to help Dean get inside the building. There were two or three high steps leading into the building. The ramp was new to [client] and he struggled to place it on the stairs properly. Despite having the ramp in place, the slope was rather steep and both [client] and Dean had to ask passers-by to help them. [Client] and Dean were both joking and laughing about the situation. [Shadowing notes]

Some entrepreneurs reported to have taken advantage of differential treatment, such as feelings of sympathy, to acquire stakeholder support for their venture. Customers or employees may feel good about helping disabled people and this can provide entrepreneurs with a competitive advantage. Garry, founder of a fitness training company, finds that having the right attitude can help disabled entrepreneurs benefit from sympathy clients hold towards them. As someone with severe impairments and health conditions, Garry's experience of disability has made him abandon previously held attitudes, for instance, refusal of sympathy. Such attitudes, he believes, might have been constraining for his business.

“But actually, I make it [disability] work for the business. When I go to [a client] and I have all these athletes, they like to see me because they think ‘Here’s Garry. I’ve got a bad ankle, I’ve got a bad this. Garry, he takes his leg off and he trains us.’ So they like to see me. ... So, I don’t mind showing my leg off because people like to see me. They like to think, it’s kind of a selling point because this is what the business is. So we use it to sell the business. ... [It’s] little things like, they might have some sympathy for me or they might warm towards me. Or it might make them trust me a bit more. ... I’m very conscious of what I’m like and I make it work for the business. ... So, it can work for the business if you have the right attitude.” [Garry]

As well as regulating one’s own feelings and emotions, entrepreneurs often intentionally seek to influence stakeholders’ feelings, for instance, by using flattery (Nagy *et al.* 2012), to develop and maintain positive business relationships. Entrepreneurs employed a range of legitimacy-building tactics to address the specific challenges arising from disability in order to make others feel at ease around their impairment, to make them feel positive, or to generate feelings of confidence in closing a business deal.

*Generating positive feelings in others.* Ensuring that customers feel positive, and therefore confident in making a purchase, has been important for the entrepreneurs. Some participants sought to generate positive feelings in customers and to develop close business relationships by, for instance, providing a personal service or entertainment. For example, Fred – a PR consultant with mobility difficulties – often approaches meetings with clients very much like a romantic date to create such positive feelings, with the view of closing a business deal. Garry, similarly, wants his customers to feel good about using his training programme. He therefore makes his sessions personal by memorising their names.

“I’m out three or four times a week entertaining people. I spend a lot of money entertaining clients. Because, you know, if they’re spending £30,000 a year on me, I’m going to take them out for dinner, they expect to be entertained. And once again, as a disabled entrepreneur, that’s really important. The social aspect of business is really really key to closing the deal basically. I mean, I want you to leave this meeting with me thinking ‘Ah, Fred is a good guy; he knows what he’s doing, he is charming, he is smiling, he is a gentleman and I want to see him again’. It’s sort of like a date. ... I do go the extra mile in a business situation. ... And once again, being disabled, you know, you want them to know that you’re on the ball, that you know what you’re

talking about and you can do the job, and they feel confident in you.”  
[Fred]

“So we have a class with 36 people. Now, I’ll take the class and I’ll say everybody’s name. I’ll go ‘Well done Paul. Well done Mary. Well done Jane. Well done Eva. Well done John. Work hard Mary. Work hard June.’ Now you might say ‘How does Garry remember all their names?’ ... First of all, saying someone’s name, it gives you an instant connection with them where they feel as if you’re being personal. ... So one of the selling points of the business [is], we have 36 people, but it’s like a personal session because you’re using people’s names.”  
[Garry]

*Empathising with disabled customers.* The lived experience of disability, or personal insight of a particular impairment or health condition, has enabled some entrepreneurs to better empathise with disabled customers. The empathy and genuine interest in the customer well-being helped these entrepreneurs to build trust and acquire legitimacy. For Akaash – a social entrepreneur affected by the Multiple Epiphyseal Dysplasia<sup>35</sup> – showing empathy can be empowering when building relationships with disabled customers. Additionally, the point is well illustrated by one of Dean’s customers.

“I think if person has a disability and they see someone who is suffering. I think the level of empathy and how much a person can relate to the other person is much more than a person who hasn’t suffered that same level of extreme pain. So there’s a bond that develops. ... Then there’s that trust moment that develops and there’s that element of creating that space where a person can really talk about their problems and their issues. ... So, to have that level of empathy is really empowering for the relationship.” [Akaash]

“I’ve had a few problems with [the manufacturer]; they sent me the wrong size and you know I’ve just contacted [Dean] and he was really helpful and got straight on with it and refunded the money, you know, [Dean] just really helped me out, reassuring me really, because of being disabled and being, I’m paralysed from the waist, now paralysed from the shoulders, so you know it’s quite hard to get to trust, to order. [Dean’s] very reassuring, like you know when you have a problem, you feel reassured that he’s gonna get on with it and don’t let you down.” [Customer 2, Dean]

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<sup>35</sup> Multiple epiphyseal dysplasia (MED) is a rare, inherited, skeletal dysplasia caused by a malformation of the growing ends of the long bones. A skeletal dysplasia is a condition of abnormal bone growth or development. The key features of MED are mild-to-moderate short stature and painful joints. See more at: <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/medical-information/conditions/m/multiple-epiphyseal-dysplasia/>

*Making people feel at ease around disability.* For entrepreneurs with highly visible impairments, front-stage interaction with business stakeholders can be especially challenging. Customers and others may not understand the impairment effects, or may be uncertain about how to react appropriately in particular circumstances. Some entrepreneurs, highly aware of their impairment visibility and its potential impact, consciously tried to make others feel at ease.

“I’m not threatening, in any way, shape or form. No one could perceive me as threatening. However, sometimes when I turn up in my very elongated black wheelchair, it’s got a six-foot turning circle and because I’m tall and I’ve got my feeding tube, my pump is making funny noises, and I can’t shake with the right hand because I can’t let it go so I have to shake with my left hand. ... I don’t have any issues with people being taken aback by my feeding tube, because it’s not normal, Ok. It’s not what people expect to see and a lot of facial recognition goes on so having bright yellow and grey plaster on my face obviously has an impact. However, at the end of the day, my attitude is that I am there to do a job, I am very good at this job, I will do it professionally, I will make you feel at ease. But at the same time, I cannot compromise my own principles or ideologies and I have to do things in the way that is right fundamentally and morally for me and my businesses.” [Anne]

This part of the chapter has illustrated how disabled entrepreneurs build and acquire legitimacy at the micro-level of interaction from the back-stage and the front-stage of their business. The forthcoming section synthesises the findings by explicating the relationships between the four legitimacy-building strategies at the meso-level and the three clusters of tactics at the micro-level of interaction.

#### **8.4 Synthesising meso-level strategies and micro-level tactics**

Each legitimacy-building strategy (revealing-conforming, revealing-selecting, revealing-transforming and passing-conforming) has distinct characteristics in terms of product offering, the market environment, and the visibility, type and severity of individual impairment or health condition. However, more than one strategy has been adopted by participant entrepreneurs. This, arguably, increases entrepreneurs’ capacity to succeed in the marketplace as failure of one strategy may be offset by higher success in adopting another.

Entrepreneurs, furthermore, may shift over time from one strategy to another. Dean, for instance, initially adopted the revealing-selecting strategy – selling a

specific impairment-related product to a niche disability market. Building on his previous work experience, he later decided to sell this business and to offer property consultancy services to a mainstream market, adopting the revealing-conforming strategy instead. Dean expressed concerns about the impact of running a disability-related business on his sense of self and family life; he did not want disability to be a defining feature of his social identity. What is more, Dean had set up the previous business out of frustration with the limited consumer choice for wheelchair users. Yet, he eventually realised that the business was not profitable enough, given his family circumstances.

Parallels can be drawn here with studies of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, questioning whether it is advantageous for this group to work within, or without, the ethnic economy (Ram and Jones 2008). In the case of disabled entrepreneurs, future research could examine how operating in mainstream or specific disability-related markets affects business performance. Some insights can be provided here by turning to the linkages between the meso- and micro-level strategies and tactics. Under what conditions is it more enabling or constraining for disabled entrepreneurs to operate a particular business from the back-stage or the front-stage?

It has been shown that running a faceless business from the back-stage can be disadvantageous, to a degree, as it constrains entrepreneurs from building rapport with customers and others in person, with consequences for business performance. Yet, it can also be enabling, especially for disabled entrepreneurs who can avoid potentially stigmatising attitudes of stakeholders. However, these entrepreneurs must be able to create a favourable virtual identity from the back-stage and to learn how to communicate with customers effectively from a distance. In effect, back-stage operation was found to be highly enabling for *most* participant entrepreneurs, regardless of the adopted strategy, and outweighed any constraining effects. Those adopting the revealing-conforming strategy benefited most, although this partly depended on their product offering. Entrepreneurs providing largely online services, such as website domain-name registration, could operate a faceless business more easily than those offering a more personal service, such as marketing or PR.



Managing a business in the front-stage has somewhat different implications for entrepreneurs adopting different legitimacy-building strategies. Those adopting the revealing-selecting or the revealing-transforming strategy are highly enabled in the front-stage, if they can successfully commercialise their disability identity and expertise. Additionally, disabled entrepreneurs selling to a niche disability market are more able to empathise with disabled customers, and thus to achieve legitimacy, while those selling a disability-related product to a mainstream customer can benefit from sympathy, if they have the right attitude. On the contrary, entrepreneurs adopting revealing-conforming or passing-conforming strategies faced higher constraints when operating in the front-stage. Those selling a mainstream product to a mainstream consumer market may have to use more and a wider range of tactics to acquire a legitimate entrepreneurial identity. They must perform various normative actions to meet stakeholders' expectations. They must also try to make non-disabled customers feel at ease around their impairment. Those with sensory impairments must be able to take control to communicate effectively with others. And those with highly visible impairments might have to delegate tasks to employees to avoid stigma. Similarly, entrepreneurs adopting the passing-conforming strategy must work harder to conform to the mainstream market expectations. Although their impairment may be less visible, the impairment effects could still impact on their interaction with others. Finally, those adopting the revealing-conforming strategy may find it harder to 'fit-in' when operating in the front-stage, yet exploiting customer sympathy could also be enabling for this group. The passing-conforming group are able to conceal their stigma in the front-stage, to a degree. Yet, they may have to work harder to do so whilst missing out on some of the benefits associated with disability identity afforded through other strategies.

Figure 8.4 outlines the linkages between strategies and tactics by specifying how those adopting a particular strategy tend to perform in the back- and the front-regions.

**Figure 8.4** Synthesising meso-level strategies and micro-level tactics

STRATEGIES	Revealing & conforming	Revealing & selecting	Revealing & transforming	Passing & conforming
<p><b>Operating from the back-stage</b></p> <p><i>Prominent tactics</i></p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can conceal stigma from the back-stage 2-Can create a favourable virtual identity 3-Can delegate tasks to employees to make the right impression</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must build rapport remotely (mainstream customers may expect face-to-face contact)</p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can create a favourable virtual identity 2-Can commercialise disability identity and expertise 3-Can empathise with disabled customers 4-Can delegate tasks to employees to make the right impression</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must build rapport remotely (disabled customers may prefer it)</p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can create a favourable virtual identity 2-Can commercialise disability identity and expertise 3-Can exploit sympathy 4-Can delegate tasks to employees to make the right impression</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must build rapport remotely (mainstream customers may be understanding)</p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can create a favourable virtual identity 2- Can delegate tasks to employees to make the right impression</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must build rapport remotely (mainstream customers may expect face-to-face contact)</p>
<p><b>Operating in the front-stage</b></p> <p><i>Prominent tactics</i></p>	<p><i>Constraining - HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Must perform normative actions 2-Must make people feel at ease around disability 3-Must take control to communicate effectively 4-Must delegate tasks to employees to make the right impression 5- Must generate positive feelings in others</p> <p><i>Enabling – LOW</i> 1-Can benefit from sympathy 2-Can build rapport in person</p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can commercialise disability identity and expertise 2-Can empathise with disabled customers 3-Can build rapport in person</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must take control to communicate effectively 2-Must generate positive feelings in others</p>	<p><i>Enabling – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Can commercialise disability identity and expertise 2-Can exploit sympathy 3-Can build rapport in person</p> <p><i>Constraining – LOW</i> 1-Must take control to communicate effectively 2- Must generate positive feelings in others</p>	<p><i>Constraining – HIGH</i></p> <p>1-Must perform normative actions 2-Must make people feel at ease around disability 3- Must generate positive feelings in others</p> <p><i>Enabling – LOW</i> 1-Can conceal stigma, to a degree 2-Can build rapport in person</p>

## 8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how disabled people, arguably a stigmatised social group, build and acquire legitimacy with customers and other stakeholders when creating and managing a new venture and, in doing so, accomplish entrepreneurial identity. It has been shown that the entrepreneurs' capacity to 'fit-in' with the appearance and behavioural norms associated with entrepreneurial roles *and* to 'stand-out' as different at the same time is importantly shaped by their products, markets, and the type, severity and visibility of individual health conditions or impairments.

The visibility of impairment, in particular, significantly influences these entrepreneurs' relationships. To acquire and maintain legitimacy, the entrepreneurs perform a range of *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices and symbolic actions to control information about their stigmatised social identity and to make the right impression. These findings contribute to the extant literature on entrepreneurial legitimacy where most studies emphasise the role of linguistic practices, such as narrative storytelling and the use of metaphor, in accomplishing entrepreneurial identity and access to resources and markets.

Defining entrepreneurial identity as a personal power emergent from lower-level powers, rather than as a narrative practice, can enable researchers to theorise how entrepreneurs communicate their concerns, values, beliefs and emotions through a range of embodied *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices. Entrepreneurial identity and the power to acquire legitimacy cannot be reduced simply to entrepreneurs' narrative performances.

## Chapter 9

# Conclusion and implications

### 9.1 Background

The motivation for this research study began with an observation that disability is largely absent from the small business, entrepreneurship, and particularly entrepreneurial identity literature. To address this knowledge gap, the present study sought to examine how the UK-based disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions become entrepreneurs. The dominant view of entrepreneurial identity as a narrative or discursive practice was insufficient in terms of capturing and explaining disabled entrepreneurs' material realities as well as the dynamism of entrepreneurial activities. A novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, defined as a *personal power* rather than a *narrative practice* that the power can motivate, was developed and applied to the empirical material. In contrast to the alternative views, this new conceptualisation can explain both 'who is' and 'how one becomes' an entrepreneur without resorting to determinism or relativism. The study was guided by the following research question(s):

- How do disabled people form entrepreneurial identity?
  - What is entrepreneurial identity?
  - What is disability?
  - How does disability affect the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity, and under what circumstances?

Contemporary studies of entrepreneurial identity highlight the role of narrative or storytelling practices in identity construction (Johansson 2004, Down 2006, Jones *et al.* 2008, Boje and Smith 2010, Hytti *et al.* 2017), to the neglect of embodied *non-linguistic* practices, such as movement and the use of artefacts, and the visible aspects of identity formation, including impairment visibility. The constructionist approach has contributed to a 'disembodied' notion of the entrepreneur – one that

renders embodied properties, such as long-term impairments, invisible in the literature (Kašperová and Kitching 2014). This neglect of embodiment is problematic in the context of researching entrepreneurs with a range of impairments and health conditions. Particular impairments can exert a major influence on the individual's day-to-day and working practices, with implications for entrepreneurial action and identity. Although impairments and health conditions may be fluctuating, degenerative or relatively stable, impairment effects are not fixed and do not *determine* entrepreneurial behaviour. But they *do* shape personal capacities and concerns, enabling or constraining, encouraging or discouraging, venture creation.

A critical realist approach (Sayer 1992, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008, C. Smith 2010, Elder-Vass 2010, 2012) was drawn upon to provide a framework for theorising impairment effects without reducing entrepreneurial identity to the 'impaired body'. A stratified and emergent ontology of personhood and identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Sayer 2011, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) recognises that each person possesses embodied properties, both powers and liabilities, that enable us to flourish or cause us suffering (Sayer 2011). Particular impairments and health conditions may be enabling as well as constraining in the process of venture creation, depending on circumstances.

The body, impaired or otherwise, is a necessary precondition for the emergence of entrepreneurial identity; however, entrepreneurial identity is irreducible to the body. Archer's (2000) stratified conception of personhood and identity provided a framework for distinguishing three hierarchical identity levels – the self, personal identity and social identity – emergent in relation to three analytical orders of reality – natural, practical and social. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, it has been argued in this study that the underlying capacities and concerns that make its emergence possible cannot be reduced to social interaction alone. Human relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts importantly shape action and identity formation.

Critical realism encourages a theory-driven approach (Smith and Elger 2014). The initial conceptual framework was applied to the empirical material to

subsequently elaborate a novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, defined as: *a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace*. ‘Success’ for the purposes of this study is the birth of a new firm or organisation, which following Reynolds and Miller (1992) involves as little as personal commitment and initial sales. Theories of legitimacy, impression management and stigma have been used and developed to explain how disabled entrepreneurs build relationships with customers and others (Goffman, 1959, 1963, Suchman 1995, Clair *et al.* 2005, De Clercq and Voronov 2009, Clarke 2011, Überbacher 2014) and, in so doing, accomplish entrepreneurial identity.

This new conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, as a personal power, can incorporate the effects of disability, as one of many personal powers or liabilities, while avoiding some of the problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies identified in the entrepreneurial identity literature, such as the assumed able-bodiedness. The new framework, however, is intended to apply to *all* entrepreneurs; we are all uniquely embodied and our embodied properties and powers shape our capacities to act in the world and to form sought-after identities.

The study has drawn upon qualitative data from interviews with 43 disabled entrepreneurs, including people with mobility difficulties, sensory impairments, cognitive and learning difficulties, and mental health issues. Three entrepreneurs were shadowed for a period of one working day. Four entrepreneurs facilitated a further 15 interviews with customers, employees and business partners. Moreover, a visual material from entrepreneurs’ online profiles was analysed to provide additional insights. By utilising a variety of data collection methods, it was possible to examine disability effects on the emergence of entrepreneurial identity at multiple levels, including physiological, psychological, social and cultural (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006).

This concluding chapter has two objectives: first, to summarise the key findings and contributions of the thesis; and second, to elaborate the theoretical implications for future research on entrepreneurial identity. The chapter concludes with limitations and suggestions for future research.

## 9.2 Summary of key findings and contributions

The key findings and original contributions to our understanding of the power of entrepreneurial identity, the venture creation process that the power generates, and the external conditions that enable or constrain people in exercising and realising that power, are summarised under six sub-headings.

***Entrepreneurial identity is a personal power – a potentiality, rather than a practice.*** The main theoretical contribution of this study is the novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as *a personal power to create a new venture that succeeds in the marketplace*. As a particular kind of causal power (Bhaskar 2008), entrepreneurial identity is a tendency or a potentiality that may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised or realised but unperceived. Although most people have the potential to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated, to exercise that power because of other countervailing powers – personal, material and socio-cultural – that enable or constrain, encourage or discourage, action. This conceptualisation is very different from the two dominant approaches to identity in entrepreneurship: (1) the personality traits theories that define entrepreneurial identity in terms of fixed and stable characteristics *determining* entrepreneurial behaviour (Miller 2015, Antoncic *et al.* 2015); and (2) the strong social constructionist view of entrepreneurial identity as a linguistic *practice* that is fluid, dynamic, changing and performed primarily through social interaction (Hytti 2005, Essers and Benschop 2007). Entrepreneurial identity is the underlying personal power that generates particular behaviours and practices, rather than the practice itself, although some entrepreneurs may enact their concerns through such practices.

Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity as a *personal power* that may, or may not, be realised because of other countervailing powers offers several advantages over the alternative viewpoints. First, treating identity as a potentiality helps us avoid the charges of biological determinism associated with personality traits theories. People possess embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, that importantly shape their action in the world and identity formation, yet those properties do not determine behavioural outcomes or practices. Second, the new conceptualisation incorporates the effects of

impairment as one of an agent's many powers, or liabilities, that may or may not exert influence on entrepreneurial action, depending on circumstances. Third, the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity as an emergent causal power explains *both* stability and change in identity formation. This is because the emergence of entrepreneurial identity, defined as a power to create a new venture, presupposes lower-level powers, including consciousness, memory and reflexivity, that must be at least temporarily stable to enable entrepreneurs to form interests, to pursue an entrepreneurial role, and to self-narrate as they do.

***Entrepreneurial identity is constituted by three lower-level powers.*** The data analysis generated three core themes – new venture ideas, new venture creation and new venture legitimacy. Moving back and forth between theory and data, entrepreneurial identity was subsequently conceptualised as an emergent personal power constituted by three lower-level powers: (1) the capacity to conceive of a new venture idea; (2) the capacity to commit to venture creation; and (3) the capacity to acquire legitimacy with important business stakeholders. There is a *necessary*, internal relation between the three powers in so far as the emergence of entrepreneurial identity depends on agents' capacity to exercise *all* three simultaneously. One may conceive of a new venture idea, but decide not to pursue it further because of other personal commitments. One may be motivated to create a new venture and be committed to a course of action, but their idea may turn out to be practically inadequate. And, one may be perceived as a legitimate entrepreneur by potential customers, but lack commitment to venture creation. It is the concurrent realisation of *all* three lower-level powers that makes the emergence of entrepreneurial identity possible.

Of course, the three lower-level personal capacities are not the only powers that people exercise in creating and managing a new venture. Other personal powers are also important in entrepreneurship, such as the ability to provide leadership (Sklaveniti 2017), to assess and manage risks (Norton and Moore 2006) and to solve problems (Giroux 2009). Some of these powers may play a significant role in the realisation of entrepreneurial identity; however, such powers are *contingent* rather than *necessary* (Sayer 1992) for entrepreneurial identity to arise. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity does not depend on these contingent



powers. Disability is one such contingent power. Disabled entrepreneurs in this study were all able to exercise and realise the three lower-level powers and to create a new venture, with various degrees of success, but not all disabled people can, or will be motivated to, pursue venture creation.

The realisation of the three lower-level personal powers depends on the external conditions and circumstances that enable or constrain, encourage or discourage, entrepreneurial action and identity formation. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, its emergence involves relations that extend beyond social. The power to acquire legitimacy can only be assumed in society, in relation to other people and social structures. However, the other two lower-level powers are importantly shaped by our relations with *all* three analytical orders of reality – natural, practical and social (Archer 2000). In nature, the physical constraints on bodily powers were found to stimulate participants' embodied know-how and the power to conceive of a new venture idea. In material culture, task ease or difficulty in using artefacts, such as inaccessible transport systems, motivated commitment to venture creation.

This novel conceptualisation contributes to the entrepreneurial identity literature by explicating the connections between the concept of entrepreneurial identity (defined as a personal power) and the venture ideas, motivation and legitimacy concepts. Although some entrepreneurial identity studies do discuss connections with motivations (Fauchart and Gruber 2011, York *et al.* 2016) and legitimacy (Johansson 2004, Navis and Glynn 2011), to different degrees, none have explicitly theorised these concepts, and the relations between them, in terms of lower-level personal powers that must be exercised simultaneously.

***Disability can be both a power and a liability in entrepreneurship.*** As a stigmatised social identity (Goffman 1963), disability was initially assumed to be a liability in entrepreneurship. The empirical material, however, provided novel insights into disability as *both* enabling and constraining, depending on circumstances. The three lower-level personal powers constitutive of entrepreneurial identity are shaped by disability in variable ways, with implications for the individual capacity to create a successful new venture. First,

disability can constrain individual capability to process information and to acquire knowledge, but it can also enable new ways of knowing. For example, mobility difficulties have constrained entrepreneurs' power to move around the natural environment, but have also generated previously unknown embodied know-how, stimulating the power to conceive of a new venture idea and the development of novel products that help extend bodily powers (Archer 2000, Lawson 2010).

Second, disability can constrain and discourage people from exercising the power to commit to venture creation, but it can also encourage and enable commitment to an entrepreneurial role. The onset of impairment, in particular, was found to elicit strong emotions, such as pain, distress and frustration, that importantly motivated the pursuit of venture creation. Third, disability can enable as well as constrain the power to acquire entrepreneurial legitimacy, depending on the product offering, market, and the type, severity and visibility of impairment. The stigma associated with disability (Goffman 1963) was found to generate negative attitudes among customers and others, with consequences for business performance. However, disability was also a unique selling point, enabling entrepreneurs to come across as experts in their field and credible in the eyes of stakeholders.

Disability, like entrepreneurial identity, is a stratified and emergent property, generated by causal powers and mechanisms at multiple levels of reality, including biological, physiological, psychological, social and cultural (Bhaskar and Danermark 2006). At the physiological level, particular impairments and health conditions could be enabling or constraining; for example, by stopping entrepreneurs with chronic fatigue conditions from attending business networking events. Equally, at the socio-cultural level, structural relations could enable or constrain action; for example, where business networking initiatives are designed as a standing-up event, potentially excluding entrepreneurs with physical impairments and health conditions.

***Disability and the power to conceive of a new venture idea.*** At the level of consciousness and self-consciousness, most people have the power to acquire three forms of knowing – embodied, practical and discursive – in relation to the

three analytical orders – natural, practical and social (Archer 2000). Human relations with *all* three orders can generate knowledge and stimulate the power to conceive of a new venture idea. Although the further development of ideas into viable products depends on social interaction, the emergence of a new venture idea cannot be reduced simply to social relations alone. The analysis has shown that new venture ideas can arise from any one type of knowing, independently of the others. In other words, the power to conceive of a new venture idea is not necessarily dependent on social interaction. Of course, we all possess pre-existing knowledge, but it is through a unique combination of pre-existing and ‘newly’ acquired knowledge that ideas emerge.

Disability was found to disrupt *all* three forms of knowing. Visual impairment, for example, could constrain the capacity to process visual information, such as printed guidelines on start-up procedures. Yet, disability could also facilitate new ways of knowing by intensifying individual self-awareness of the three knowledge forms. The onset of impairment, as an environmental import of harm to the body in nature, was an important source of knowledge in the three orders, stimulating the power to conceive of a new venture idea. Vision loss, for instance, has affected Tamara’s taken-for-granted ability to navigate the natural environment safely, generating a ‘new’ embodied know-how that, eventually, prompted her to create a support agency for people with sight loss. Similarly, the onset of physical impairment has generated ideas for products that help extend the bodily powers of people with mobility difficulties. George, for example, acquired a practical know-how in using walking sticks to conceive of an idea for a clip that helps users prevent sticks from falling to the ground.

Archer’s (2000) notion of three knowledge forms – embodied, practical and discursive – and the particular relations between them was applied to the empirical material to illustrate how new venture ideas emergent from any one form of knowing develop into viable products. The transformation involves a number of processes, including: (1) the ‘demonstration’ of embodied knowledge in the practical order; (2) the ‘application’ of discursive knowledge in the practical order; and (3) the embodied ‘incorporation’ and ‘metaphoric’ communication of practical knowledge in the natural and social orders. To illustrate, a new venture

idea arising from practical knowledge (for example, clothing for wheelchair users) may involve several cycles of being communicated to important others and successfully incorporated into embodied practice before it can develop into a viable product.

These findings contribute to prior research suggesting that disability can stimulate innovation and generate creative solutions to existing problems (Cooney 2008, Caldwell *et al.* 2012, Parker Harris *et al.* 2014). Parallels can be drawn with the ethnic minority entrepreneurship literature where ethnic and linguistic diversity was found to be a source of competitive advantage in particular regions (Smallbone *et al.* 2010, Nathan and Lee 2013). The application of Archer's framework, and its elaboration into a cyclical process of knowledge transfer, offers a novel contribution to entrepreneurship and innovation literature. For instance, it resonates with a recent study critiquing linear models of innovation, and theorising innovation instead as an endless circle with interconnected cycles (Berkhout *et al.* 2010).

***Disability and the power to commit to venture creation.*** At the level of personal identity, each of us must attend to our inescapable concerns with physical well-being in the natural order (for example, resting when tired), with performative competence in the practical order (for example, learning how to touch-type), and with self-worth in the social order (for example, providing for a family) (Archer 2000). While we must attend to the three sets of concerns simultaneously, our various concerns in each order 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). How we balance our concerns in the three orders affects the roles and relationships we invest ourselves in, and commit to, in society. This study has illustrated how disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions balance their variable concerns in the three orders. Each of the participant entrepreneurs has achieved a strict balance of concerns and pattern of commitments that makes them a unique person, and a *particular* kind of entrepreneur.

Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying

personal concerns that motivate the power to commit to venture creation cannot be reduced to social interaction alone. The analysis has demonstrated that the motivation for pursuing venture creation can be importantly influenced by personal concerns with well-being in relation to nature (for example, the unpredictability of impairment effects), with performative competence in the material culture of artefacts (for example, the ease of using digital and assistive technologies) *and* by personal concerns with self-worth in society (for example, employer discrimination).

Emotions act as commentaries on personal concerns elicited through our embodied relations with each order – natural, practical and social (Archer 2000). The onset of impairment was found to elicit strong ‘first-order’ emotions, such as pain, frustration and self-pity. Such strong emotions fuelled internal conversation and emotional elaboration, as some of the participants reflected on their concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth to evaluate how they feel about them. The outcome of emotional elaboration was when participants arrived at a unique pattern of concerns and commitments that they can live with, having prioritised their emotions. The power to commit to venture creation was stimulated by the ‘second-order’ emotional outcome of their internal conversation.

The concepts of internal conversation and emotional elaboration (Archer 2000) were drawn upon to theorise the connections between entrepreneurial motivation, the natural, practical and social orders, and venture creation. Three moments or phases of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation and dedication – were employed to explain these connections in terms of three stages: (1) reflecting on personal *concerns* in the three orders (discernment); (2) *considering* venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others (deliberation); and (3) *committing* to an entrepreneurial role (dedication). The outcome of internal conversation was the power to commit to venture creation and, possibly, the emergence of entrepreneurial identity. These findings contribute to recent debates on the entrepreneurial intention-behaviour link (Adam and Fayolle 2016, Kolvereid 2016).

***Disability and the power to acquire entrepreneurial legitimacy.*** At the level of

social identity, the positions we occupy from birth within society's distribution of resources can influence the social roles, relationships and projects we invest ourselves in, and commit to, in a lifetime (Archer 2000). To successfully adopt and perform a particular role, such as becoming an entrepreneur, we must make the right impression on important others (Goffman 1959), for instance customers and finance providers, who have the power to reject us, or grant us support, in the form of resources, such as finance. To acquire legitimacy in the eyes of important others (Suchman 1995, De Clercq and Voronov 2009), we must control information about our appearance and behaviour to meet the expectations associated with entrepreneurial roles. The power to acquire legitimacy enables access to resources and markets, with implications for entrepreneurial identity formation.

The analysis has revealed that stigmatising social identities, such as disability (Goffman 1963), can both enable and constrain legitimacy, depending on: (1) the type of product or service offering; (2) the market in which one operates; and (3) the type, severity and visibility of impairment or health condition. In some circumstances, disability generated discriminatory attitudes among potential customers, with consequence for business performance. This was especially the case for entrepreneurs selling a mainstream product to the mainstream consumer market. Yet, under different conditions, disability was perceived as a unique selling point, enabling entrepreneurs to position themselves as credible experts in their field. For example, the visibility of impairment or health condition has enabled entrepreneurs who sell a specialist disability-related product to the disability market to come across as a legitimate disabled entrepreneur.

At the meso-level of interaction, entrepreneurs adopted four distinct legitimacy-building strategies, intentionally or inadvertently, to 'fit-in' and 'stand-out' in the marketplace: revealing-conforming, revealing-selecting, revealing-transforming and passing-conforming. For example, revealing-conforming group are entrepreneurs with highly visible impairments who sell a mainstream product to the mainstream consumer market. At the micro-level of interaction, entrepreneurs employed a range of legitimacy-building tactics from the 'back-stage' and the 'front-stage' of their business. For instance, 'running a faceless business', one

with limited face-to-face contact with customers, is a particular tactic used primarily by entrepreneurs in the revealing-conforming strategy group.

Studies of new venture legitimacy have emphasised the role of language, including narrative performances, in legitimacy-building processes (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens *et al.* 2007, Holt and Macpherson 2010). The findings in this study contribute to the entrepreneurial legitimacy literature by highlighting the role of *non*-linguistic as well as linguistic practices, and particularly the visibility of personal properties as legitimation mechanisms.

### **9.3 Theoretical implications**

A critical realist-informed (Sayer 1992, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008, Elder-Vass 2010, 2012) conceptual framework for researching entrepreneurial identity distinguishes *entrepreneurial identity* (the personal power to create a new venture) from *entrepreneurship* (the process of venture creation) and from the *external conditions* (natural, material and social) that encourage or discourage, enable or constrain, agents to exercise and realise the power of entrepreneurial identity. The novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity has several theoretical implications for future research.

***Depth ontology: the empirical, the actual and the real.*** Much of what goes on in the process of entrepreneurship may be unperceived by entrepreneurs or directly unobservable by researchers. If our knowledge of phenomena is fallible and theory-laden, then the world must exist independently of our knowledge of it (Sayer 1992, Bhaskar 2008). *Strong* constructionist studies of entrepreneurial identity repudiate the notion of an objective reality, independent of discourse (Gill 2014); the only reality we can have access to is the linguistically mediated one (Elder-Vass 2012). Although most *moderate* constructionists acknowledge there is an objective world that exists outside human consciousness and language, researchers in this tradition are more interested in how entrepreneurs construct the world narratively and how their perceptions of the world influence their actions, than whether their constructions are a 'true' representation of reality (Karp 2006).

However, one can do *both*, acknowledge that entrepreneurs express themselves and make sense of the world in a variety of ways, *and* recognise that some of

those constructions may be more accurate and practically adequate than others (Sayer 1992). From a *critical realist, moderate constructionist* perspective (Kašperová and Kitching 2014), narrative accounts of entrepreneurial identity are crucial in giving voice to under-represented groups of entrepreneurs and enabling researchers to access entrepreneurs' thoughts, concerns, values and beliefs, but such accounts alone cannot provide a full understanding of the underlying powers and mechanisms that generate venture creation. Researchers must engage in further analytical work, through abstraction and retrodution (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), to identify causal powers and mechanisms that may not be directly observable. Researchers' views are fallible too.

Bhaskar's (2008) depth-stratification of the world into three domains – the empirical (experiences), the actual (experiences and events that happen regardless of whether observed) and the real (the underlying causal powers and mechanisms that generate experiences and events) provides a framework for the analysis of phenomena beyond the surface of experiences. It allows for entrepreneurial identity to be theorised as a causal power that exerts influence on the world regardless of entrepreneurs' narrative expressions of it, or researchers' observations, although of course empirical observation helps us to identify the causes that underpin observable practices. Without the ontological depth, the analysis is restricted simply to concrete discursive accounts. Many identity studies do in fact assume at least some personal powers entrepreneurs must possess to self-narrate as they do, although they do not explicitly theorise them. Some studies do theorise the underlying powers and mechanisms, such as 'homophilous ties' and 'personal values' (Phillips *et al.* 2013), however, doing so without the assumption of depth-stratification results in a conflation of such mechanisms with narrative identity work. Homophilous ties cannot simply be created by entrepreneurs through narrative encounters without the prior potential for particular tie formation; even though narrative identity work can be used strategically to develop such ties.

Theorising identity in terms of personal powers (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010), or liabilities, that may or may not be actualised because of other countervailing



powers can also resolve methodological limitations in studies of intersectionality (Dy *et al.* 2014). The concept of intersectionality has been drawn upon to illustrate how multiple social categories of inclusion and exclusion, for instance gender and ethnicity, can simultaneously generate privilege or disadvantage in entrepreneurial identity formation (Essers and Benschop 2007, 2009, 2010). Although structural relations of power may be influenced by multiple discriminatory mechanisms, including sexism or racism (or disablism in the case of this study), such mechanisms may not be actualised in all cases due to countervailing forces; for example, equal opportunities policy (Dy *et al.* 2014).

***A stratified and emergent ontology: from biology to culture.*** The scientific stratification of discovery, observed in the practice of researching causal powers and mechanisms at multiple levels, including biological, psychological, social and cultural, implies that reality is stratified (Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008), that there are emergent non-reducible properties and mechanisms at each specific stratum. The concept of ‘emergence’ is crucial to our understanding of how new properties and mechanisms at a particular stratum arise out of a combination of lower-level properties. Emergence is the appearance of a new causal property (Porpora 2015) or something qualitatively new emergent from a lower-level (Danermark *et al.* 2002).

A stratified and emergent ontology of personhood and identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O’Mahoney 2014) presupposes that identity is constituted by several hierarchical strata that emerge from lower levels but are qualitatively different properties. Social identity (for example, entrepreneurial identity) emerges from personal identity which is emergent from self-consciousness. The self, in turn, emerges from the body (Archer 2000). The different identity strata are importantly intertwined, but irreducible to each other. Each stratum possesses its own independent powers. Entrepreneurial identity (a power to create a new venture) thus cannot be reduced simply to its lower-level powers, such as the sense of self or the body. At the same time, higher-level properties can react back on its lower-level parts so that the emergent entrepreneurial identity potentially transforms personal identity.

By utilising a stratified ontology, it was possible to explain the effects of impairment (a lower-level property) on entrepreneurial identity without resorting to biological determinism. The entrepreneurial identity literature does not distinguish different identity strata in terms of emergent, hierarchical personal powers. Much of the research focuses on entrepreneurs' narrative sense of self in relation to other people, while under-theorising the body and personal concerns, generating a 'disembodied' notion of the entrepreneur (Kašperová and Kitching 2014) and one that takes insufficient account of what matters to people as moral human beings, vulnerable to suffering as well as able to flourish (C. Smith 2010, Sayer 2011). Studies that do distinguish 'the self', 'personal identity' and 'social identity' often conflate these levels; for example, into 'self-categorization' in relation to social groups (Vesala *et al.* 2007, Vesala and Vesala 2010, Mills and Pawson 2012). However, self-categorisation as an entrepreneur differs from personal concerns that shape motivations and from commitment to venture creation that leads to a particular course of action, although self-categorisation can shape individual actions.

By assuming a stratified and emergent ontology, researchers can engage in deeper, multi-level analyses of causal powers and mechanisms. The concept of emergence facilitates inter-disciplinary research by bridging disciplines that study different identity strata (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014). There is much between biology and culture that shapes our action and identity formation.

***The mind-body problem: embodied properties, powers and liabilities.***

Contemporary approaches to entrepreneurial identity, informed by social constructionism, have emerged in reaction to the strong essentialist notion of a lone entrepreneur, possessing a set of fixed and stable characteristics, such as propensity to risk-taking, determining entrepreneurial behaviour. Most studies rightly reject biological determinism associated with entrepreneurial personality theories (Down and Warren 2008, Phillips *et al.* 2013) and the idea that entrepreneurial identity is fixed and stable (Hytti 2005). However, these developments have generated some unintended consequences whereby researchers have either resorted to a form of social determinism instead, or have under-analysed the effects of the body and embodied properties, such as particular

impairments and health conditions, on identity formation (Kašperová and Kitching 2014).

Assumptions about how to theorise the relationship between mind and body affects how researchers conceptualise ‘the self’ and other personal powers. Most contemporary studies assume that the sense of self is inextricably linked with the social context and emergent primarily through our relations with other people. Entrepreneurs are believed to construct a sense of self in a narrative dialogue, as they position themselves in terms of similarity with, or difference from, others (Jones *et al.* 2008). The constructionist approach challenges the existence of ‘the self’ as a mind (Down 2010), associated with the stereotypical view of an entrepreneur as a rational profit maximiser (Stanworth and Curran 1976), and argues that the self, and the mind itself, is socially constructed (Down 2010). Constructionist studies, however, are underpinned by a number of problematic assumptions about the mind-body relationship, such as able-bodiedness, that were shown to limit our understanding of entrepreneurial identity (chapter 3).

A stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010, Marks and O’Mahoney 2014) helps to overcome the problem of mind-body dualism and the issue of biological determinism by theorising ‘the self’ as emergent from ‘the mind’ which is emergent from ‘the body’. Although the three properties are importantly intertwined, each possesses its own irreducible powers and liabilities. The body exerts important influence on consciousness and the sense of self, but the self cannot be reduced to the body. By adopting a stratified and emergent ontology, researchers can examine bodily effects explicitly without resorting to biological determinism.

***The structure-agency problem: analytical dualism and morphogenetic sequence.*** Critical realism encourages retroductive thinking (Sayer 1992, Danermark *et al.* 2002); that is, asking what makes phenomena, such as entrepreneurial identity, possible objects of study. What are the conditions that enable the emergence of entrepreneurial identity? The study of entrepreneurial identity should involve *both* explanations of the *processes* of becoming an entrepreneur as well as the *powers* and *conditions* that generate becoming. By

focusing primarily on the processes and practices (Leitch and Harrison 2016, Down and Reveley 2004), contemporary studies tend to overemphasise the role of agency in entrepreneurial identity formation to the neglect of analysing the structural conditions that enable or constrain entrepreneurial practices. On the other hand, studies of the dominant enterprise discourse overemphasise the structure (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, 2009). Scholars that do acknowledge both entrepreneurs' practices and the structural relations of power that shape them typically conflate structure and agency by treating entrepreneurs and the contexts in which they operate as mutually constitutive (Hytti 2005, Essers and Benschop 2007, Down and Warren 2008, Jones *et al.* 2008).

Although structure and agency are 'inextricably intertwined' that does not make them analytically inseparable. By means of analytical dualism (Archer 1995, 2000), researchers can examine independent properties and powers of *both* structure and agency *as well as* their interplay. Analytical dualism assumes that structure and agency operate over different time periods, through a morphogenetic sequence of structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration (Archer 1995) so that: (1) structure necessarily pre-dates the actions which reproduce or transform it; and (2) structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions (1995: 15). By utilising analytical dualism, both the dynamism of entrepreneurial processes and the temporarily stable conditions of action can be effectively theorised.

Social structures, such as entrepreneurial roles, are the product of human activity. However, once emergent from that activity, roles endure over time, despite changes in personal circumstances of role occupants, and provide objective conditions for any future rounds of activity to occur (Archer 2000). Social roles, of course, can be variably defined as there may be a range of diverse role expectations (Kemp and Holmwood 2012). Hence, while conflationism simply states the theoretical interdependence of structure and agency, analytical dualism provides an account of how structures and agents interlink over time. By acknowledging the causal powers of structures, such as the pre-existing role array, researchers can explain how particular agents conditioned by particular structures can accomplish entrepreneurial identity and, in so doing, reproduce or transform

the structure.

***Contextualising entrepreneurs in nature, material culture and society.*** One of the key arguments of this thesis has been the claim that the emergence of entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced to social relations alone. There is now a wide consensus that entrepreneurs are not special individuals, isolated from their contexts, but that entrepreneurship is very much embedded in society and shaped by social relations of power (Watson 2008, Essers *et al.* 2010, Achtenhagen and Welter 2011). Entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity – defined as a public role one commits to in society (Archer 2000). What is missing from constructionist accounts, however, are entrepreneurs’ relations with the wider natural and practical context within which they operate as embodied agents (Kašperová and Kitching 2014, Kašperová *et al.* forthcoming). Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity solely as a linguistic practice, performed in the social context alone, has consequences for researchers’ ability to theorise the powers of *all* three orders – natural, practical and social – as enabling and constraining conditions of action.

Studies 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.* 2009) as well as incentivising 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 (Down and Reveley 2004), 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).

#### **9.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

The original contribution of this research study is a novel, critical realist-informed (Sayer 1992, Archer 1995, 2000, Danermark *et al.* 2002, Bhaskar 2008, Elder-

Vass 2010, 2012, Marks and O'Mahoney 2014) conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, one that applies to *all* entrepreneurs whilst being inclusive of disabled people and people with long-term impairments and health conditions. The study was experimental in terms of researching the experiences of entrepreneurs with a range of impairments and health conditions, including physical and sensory impairments, cognitive and learning difficulties and mental health conditions. Capturing the heterogeneity of disability has been a strength in terms of providing insights about the variable effects of different impairment types on the emergence of entrepreneurial identity, but also a limitation. To fully understand the effects of disability on entrepreneurial identity, further research is needed to examine in more depth how particular impairment and health condition types may be enabling or constraining in different contexts.

Employing a variety of qualitative methods, including entrepreneur and stakeholder interviews, shadowing field notes and online visual material, has enabled a multi-level analysis of identity formation (Marks and O'Mahoney 2014), and strengthened the practical adequacy of the theoretical framework (Sayer 1992). A more in-depth analysis, however, will require an even more intensive approach (Sayer 1992); for example, by studying concrete cases (Easton 2010) of entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions. On the other hand, a more extensive approach, one that tends to involve quantitative methods, could also be utilised in future studies. For example, disabled entrepreneurs' legitimacy-building strategies and the extent of perceived constraints and enablements in their access to markets could be examined through survey methods. The rest of this section sets out a number of suggestions for future research on entrepreneurial identity.

*Disability-entrepreneurship interdisciplinarity.* Entrepreneurship research can benefit from greater theoretical integration between disciplines and across multiple levels of analysis by utilising critical realism (Blundel 2007). Considering the heterogeneity of impairments, health conditions and experiences of disability, future research could examine how specific conditions, or impairment types, affect the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity. For example, this study did not cover deaf entrepreneurs' experiences of venture

creation in a largely hearing world. What might be the specific challenges, or possibilities, for this group in creating and managing a new venture in particular contexts? Additionally, future studies could examine more explicitly the business support needs of disabled people and the specific policy implications for supporting entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions.

*A stratified and emergent ontology of identity.* Critical realism provides a novel approach to researching entrepreneurial identity that highlights the role of underlying powers and mechanisms that make entrepreneurship possible, rather than narrative practices that such powers generate. A stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer 2000, C. Smith 2010) opens new avenues for researching identity formation as a multi-level phenomenon where the body, the sense of self, personal concerns, and commitment to roles and relationships, *all* exert distinct influence on entrepreneurship. This approach is more inclusive in terms of its capacity to accommodate elements of both dominant alternatives in the literature, entrepreneurial personality theories and social constructionism, while avoiding some of their problematic assumptions and reductionist tendencies. A stratified and emergent ontology of identity is relevant in researching all entrepreneurs, not only disabled entrepreneurs.

*The lens of embodiment.* The effects of embodied powers and liabilities, such as particular impairments and health conditions, are perhaps more pertinent in researching disabled entrepreneurs. This study has responded to Hughes and Paterson's (1997) call for incorporating impairment in the conceptualisation of self and identity. Researching the impaired body can help us explicate "how the environment is acutely felt within fleshly world, while bodies do not fail to tell of disabling social structures" (Lourens and Swartz 2016). *All* entrepreneurs, however, are uniquely embodied and their particular embodied powers and liabilities shape their capacities, concerns and motivations in relation to particular contexts. The experience of pregnancy, for example, has specific effects on entrepreneurial practice (Rouse and Kitching 2017). An interesting avenue for future research may be a study into the effects of ill-health or impairment onset on entrepreneurs' concerns with well-being and the motivation for business exit.

*The powers of nature, material culture and society.* Theorising reality in terms of three analytical orders, the natural, the practical and the social (Archer 2000), opens new possibilities for researchers to examine entrepreneurship processes beyond social and cultural interaction. The extant entrepreneurial identity literature has demonstrated the role of language in identity formation, the effects of social structural relations of power, and the cultural effects exemplified in the dominant enterprise discourse (Hamilton 2006, Jones *et al.* 2008, Down and Warren 2008, Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, Achtenhagen and Welter 2011, Essers and Tedmanson 2014). Researchers could look more explicitly at human relations with *all* three analytical orders. The powers of nature – for example, climate and environmental disasters – and the powers of the material culture – for example, buildings, transport systems and technologies – potentially shape entrepreneurship in important ways. Future research in this area could generate novel insights; for instance, in the area of innovation in the built environment and its potential to create more inclusive spaces.



## Appendices

## Appendix 1.1 Published paper: Embodying entrepreneurial identity

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### Structured Abstract:

**Purpose** – The paper proposes a novel conception of *embodied* entrepreneurial identity. Prior studies conceptualise identity primarily in terms of narrative or discourse. Critiquing the limited focus on linguistic practices, we build on the literature by highlighting the role of the non-linguistic. The implications for researching one particular group – entrepreneurs with impairments – are considered.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Entrepreneurial identity is conceptualised as a unique constellation of concerns emergent from the embodied practices of agents committed to new venture creation and management. This new conception draws principally on the embodiment literature, Archer’s identity framework and Goffman’s ideas on the presentation of self, impression management and stigma.

**Findings** – The entrepreneurial identity literature is underpinned by a number of problematic assumptions that limit understanding of the meaning, formation and influence of identity on action. The body is often an absent presence; it is presupposed, implicit or under-theorised as an influence on identity, producing a *disembodied* notion of the entrepreneur. Consequently, entrepreneurs are treated as an homogeneous group in terms of their embodied properties and powers, rather than as uniquely embodied individuals. Studies typically assume an able-bodied, as opposed to a *differently-abled*, agent. Entrepreneurs with impairments are largely invisible in the literature as a result.

**Originality/value** –The approach highlights the role of the body and embodied non-linguistic practices, such as movement, posture, gestures and facial expressions in the formation of identity. Recognising entrepreneurs as differently-abled agents, possessing particular embodied properties and powers, is crucial for understanding identity and action.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial identity, Embodiment, Non-linguistic practices, Impairment, Narrative, Discourse

**Article Classification:** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Investigating organisation and management phenomena through an identity frame has provided a novel conceptual lens for revitalising established areas of research (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008). Identity is at the centre of meaning and decision-making, motivation, action and commitment, loyalty, stability and change (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Early notions of identity had a tendency towards biological reductionism; identity was treated as an entity with stable qualities derived from characteristics such as sex, which determine behaviour. Such strong essentialist views are now widely recognised as wrong and misleading (Somers, 1994; Sayer, 1997; O'Mahoney, 2012). Contemporary organisation scholars tend to conceptualise identity in processual and relational terms, emphasising the role of language and discourse in the formation of identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). Entrepreneurial identity has been described as a dynamic, fluid and often contradictory process (Hytti, 2005), constituted by a range of narrative and discursive practices performed in relation to the social environment (Down, 2006; Watson, 2009). Studies are typically concerned with how entrepreneurs narratively construct and negotiate their identities (Warren, 2004), and in doing so present themselves as legitimate to important business stakeholders in order to access resources and market opportunities (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001).

While we agree that strong essentialism is always wrong, *moderate* forms of essentialism are necessary for the social sciences (Sayer, 1997; Elder-Vass, 2012; O'Mahoney, 2012). The essentialist notion of the self recognises that human beings possess properties and powers that influence their actions (O'Mahoney, 2012), including the capacity to form particular identities (Smith, C. 2010). Without such essential properties and powers, there could be no persons or selves; even scholars treating identity in terms of narrative and discursive practices necessarily presuppose the existence of agents possessing the powers to perform such practices or to be shaped by them. We contribute to the entrepreneurial identity literature by critiquing studies' privileging of linguistic practices to the neglect of non-linguistic practices, such as bodily movement, posture, gestures and facial expressions. Identity is of course *expressed* through narrative and shaped by discourse, but it is irreducible to neither.

From our realist, moderate constructionist viewpoint, social objects exist independently of, and prior to, their identification by researchers (Bhaskar, 1978, 1979; Archer, 1995; Sayer, 1992). Entrepreneurial identity, as a real social object, is therefore distinct from any particular *conception* of it. This prior, independent existence is what makes it a possible object of study although, of course, it also means we might *misperceive* and *misunderstand* it. We conceptualise entrepreneurial identity as a set of concerns emergent from the embodied practices of agents committed to new venture creation and management. Accounts that reduce identity to linguistic practices are incomplete without reference to a non-discursive reality (O'Mahoney, 2012). Agents cannot simply describe themselves as entrepreneurs and expect to have their narratives accepted by important others. Our contribution to the literature is to emphasise the role of the body and embodied non-linguistic practices in the formation of identity.

We use the term *identity formation*, drawing on Smith, C. (2010) and Archer (2000), to refer to the human capacity to create, negotiate, maintain and transform identity in relation to three *analytical* orders of reality: the natural, the practical and the social. This expands the notion of identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008, 2009) framed by Watson (2008: 130) as "a coming together of inward/internal self-reflection and outward/external engagement—through talk and action—with various discursively available social-identities". For Watson, identity work

involves other people telling us who we are and occurs in the context of institutional, cultural and discursive influences impinging on our sense of self. Identity work crucially highlights the interplay of social structure and agency, but for Watson, this occurs *only* in the social environments, through narrative and discursive practices. In contrast, we recognise that identity shapes, and is shaped by, embodied practices not only in the social context, through dialogue with others, but importantly also in relation to agents' natural and practical environments.

The paper draws extensively on the wider social science literature on embodiment – the idea that persons and selves cannot exist without the material body (Turner, 1984; Burkitt, 1999; Archer, 2000; Shilling, 2003; Smith, C. 2010). This may sound self-evident, yet the entrepreneurial identity literature typically takes the body for granted. Studies under-theorise the body and its influence on identity, with the effect of treating entrepreneurs analytically as *disembodied*, as lacking particular embodied properties and powers. Scholars, for instance, typically assume implicitly that entrepreneurs are able-bodied as opposed to differently-abled agents. With a few exceptions (Rouse, 2008, 2009; Clarke, 2011; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012), studies of entrepreneuring using the lens of embodiment are rare.

Critiquing and building on prior studies, our aim is to develop a novel conception of entrepreneurial identity, one that takes human embodiment seriously, and to consider the implications for research. We conceptualise entrepreneurs as *differently-abled* agents to illustrate how being embodied in a particular way shapes identity. Our conception in no way implies that identity constitutes a set of stable characteristics or behaviours. Like others (Watson, 2008), we recognise the dynamic processes of identity formation. We simply argue that agents' embodied properties and powers necessarily influence such processes; the power to form identity cannot be restricted to narrative or discourse. Although the proposed conception is intended to apply to all entrepreneurs, we discuss the implications for one particular group – entrepreneurs with impairments.<sup>[1]</sup> Embodied properties and powers, such as those associated with particular types of impairment, may present specific challenges or opportunities that would not have existed otherwise. By examining the potential effects of impairment on entrepreneurial activities, we elucidate the value of theorising identity through the lens of embodiment.

The paper is organised as follows. We first draw on the embodiment literature and the work of Archer and Goffman to develop a conception of entrepreneurial identity that takes embodied practice as a necessary precondition for the emergence of identity. We then critically review the entrepreneurial identity literature to show how the neglect of embodiment both reflects and reinforces several problematic assumptions, shaping empirical inquiry and thereby limiting understanding of entrepreneurial identity. And finally, we discuss the theoretical and methodological implications of the new framework for studying entrepreneurial identity before concluding the paper.

### **Embodying entrepreneurial identity**

One of the powers of human beings is the capacity to form identities (Smith, C. 2010). Identity has been theorised extensively in the social sciences (Mead, 1938; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Giddens, 1991; Burkitt, 1999; Archer, 2000; Jenkins, 2008), with scholars often referring to two interdependent, but contradictory, aspects of personhood: the sense of self, or uniqueness as an individual; and the sense of sameness or group affiliations. In this interplay of internal self-identification and external engagement (Watson, 2008), each person is uniquely embodied and their body necessarily influences their identity, at particular points in time and space. We draw on the embodiment literature (e.g. Turner, 1984), Archer's (2000) notion of identity and Goffman's (1959, 1963) ideas of

presentation of self, impression management and stigma to elaborate a novel conception of embodied entrepreneurial identity.

### *Embodied self*

Adopting the concept of embodiment, which frames the self as a unity of mind and body, scholars increasingly argue that who we are cannot be separated from how we are embodied (Turner, 1984; Burkitt, 1999; Archer, 2000; Shilling, 2003; Jenkins, 2008; Smith, C. 2010). Embodiment thinking seeks to overcome the Western philosophical tradition of mind-body dualism, which maintains the existence of two distinct realms – mind and matter. Embodiment studies have highlighted the role of the material body in conceptions of identity and personhood. Whilst the self cannot be reduced to the body, we could not be persons or selves *without* bodies enabling us to be active agents in the world (Burkitt, 1999). The cognitive processes constitutive of identity formation such as perception, reason, memory and language are embodied and grounded in the action of the physical body (Varela *et al.*, 1991; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Burkitt, 1999; Gibbs, 2003, Farnell and Varela, 2008). Embodiment is integral to sense-making (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2011) and sense-giving (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012); we reflect on who we are as embodied agents (Crossley, 2006) and communicate to others through our embodied practices, including but also extending beyond the use of language. Bodily movement in particular is an important meaning-making resource (Farnell and Varela, 2008). Through movement, human beings communicate their conscious states such as beliefs, intentions and emotions, both purposefully *and* inadvertently. The practical action of embodied agents is central to Archer's (2000) conception of identity which we expand upon in the next section.

### *Embodied practice and the emergence of identity*

Agents possess embodied properties and powers that influence their action in relation to the three orders of reality: the natural, the practical and the social (Archer, 2000). How we are embodied enables and constrains our practices, such as walking into the wind (natural order), using human-made artefacts like computers and cars (practical order), performing social roles and communicating effectively with others (social order). Archer distinguishes three levels of identity, emergent from consciousness – the self, personal identity and social identity – which are intertwined but irreducible to each other.

*Self, or the sense of self*, is the most fundamental of human powers (Archer, 2000). It is what makes each of us a unique human being. The self emerges through our embodied relations with the natural environment independently of, and prior to, the development of linguistic competence. It arises at a very early stage of life as babies acquire awareness of themselves as materially embodied beings, separate from other physical objects in their environment, able to act causally on the material world. Archer emphasises the primacy of embodied practice as a source of the self. Human beings acquire practical knowledge that is non-linguistic before learning how to speak and continue bodily, non-linguistic, learning in relation to the natural environment throughout life. Thus, for the sense of self to emerge, embodied practices are more important than language acquisition; individuals acquire a sense of self even if they lack the capacity to speak. The formation of the self continues in relation to the practical environment as we learn how to use various human-made artefacts, and finally, through linguistic interaction. Whilst embodied practice is crucial for the emergence of the self, embodied memory is necessary for the continuous sense of self over time. Here, procedural embodied memories derived from the exercise of tacit bodily skills are more resilient than

declarative or verbal memories and endure for a lifetime.

*Personal identity*, emergent from the sense of self, refers to the specific *constellation of concerns* that makes each of us a particular person (Archer, 2000). It encompasses what we care about most in our interactions with our natural, practical and social environments. Each person has a distinct set of concerns which shape, and are shaped by, embodiment in relation to each order of reality. Unlike the sense of self, which is held to be universal to all human beings, personal identity is an achievement, realised through an 'internal conversation'; it occurs only in maturity, and is not attained by all. Emotions fuel internal conversations and act as commentaries on agents' concerns. Thus, in the natural order, fear emerges from anticipation of known dangers, such as fire, as a commentary on our 'physical well-being'. In the practical order, joy or frustration emerge from the use of artefacts and act as commentaries on our concern with 'performative competence'. And in the social order, emotions such as pride or shame emerge in relation to other people as commentaries on our concern with 'self-worth'. To survive and thrive, we need to attend to our concerns in all three orders of reality simultaneously, although individuals will set their own priorities as to which concerns matter most. It is the balance that we strike between our various concerns that gives us our strict personal identity.

*Social identity* refers to the relationships and roles we are committed to in society; it can be seen as a sub-set of personal identity (Archer, 2000). While personal identity regulates our relations with all three orders of reality, a social identity can only be accomplished through social interaction. Social identity arises from our *involuntary* position at birth within society's distribution of resources, and from *voluntarily* identifying with particular social roles we feel we can invest ourselves in and become committed to. Archer emphasises that social identities emerge when agents voluntarily personify a particular social role which then becomes part of their personal identity. Yet, to achieve a desirable social identity, agents must meet the expectations of important others associated with the roles they wish to occupy. Being an entrepreneur is one such social role. We draw on Goffman (1959, 1963) next to elaborate how social expectations and embodiment influence agents' capacities to accomplish a desirable social identity.

#### *Embodied practice in the social order*

Social roles, such as entrepreneur, prescribe appropriate behaviours and appearances that reveal 'information' to others about the social identity of role occupants (Goffman, 1959). To adopt and perform a social role successfully, agents must conform to some degree to the behavioural and appearance norms associated with the role in order to satisfy the expectations of others (Goffman, 1959). Social roles shape but do not determine personal identity and behaviour; individual role incumbents are active agents capable of interpreting role requirements and acting upon them flexibly. Agents' ability to control information about their embodied practices and to make the right impression on others is crucial for their sense of self because to have a feeling of bodily integrity – the self being safely 'in' the body – is related to social approval (Giddens, 1991).

Social identities are formed, in part, *intentionally*, through the impressions we consciously make on others, and, in part, *unintentionally*, by virtue of being embodied in a certain way, involuntarily signalling particular meanings to others. These others reinforce or challenge such meanings through their actions. Agents possess the capacity to perceive, emote about, reflect and act upon their bodies, and to transform their body image, with the intention of achieving desirable social identities. Such reflexive embodiment (Crossley, 2006) involves a range of non-linguistic practices, including bodily movement, posture, gestures, facial expressions and the use of various artefacts *as well as* linguistic performance. At the same time, people are often unaware of the

impressions their embodied practices make on others inadvertently or how this impacts the capacity to attend to their concerns. The visibility of ‘undesirable’ or stigmatising bodily attributes, such as particular types of impairment, and agents’ variable capacity to control such information in social interaction, influences others’ perceptions and reactions. Depending on circumstances and social relationships, the stigma associated with such undesirable attributes can affect individual capacity to achieve sought-after social identities and their related benefits (Goffman, 1963).

### *Embodied entrepreneurial identity*

Building on the previous section, we conceptualise entrepreneurial identity as a set of concerns emergent from the embodied practices of agents committed to new venture creation and management in relation to their natural, practical and social environments. Particular embodied properties and powers continuously influence entrepreneurial identity. Agents’ concerns in relation to the natural environment, such as the capacity to walk, necessarily influence their performative competence in the practical environment, for instance, the ability to use a computer or to drive a car, and ultimately, their capacities in relation to the social environment, such as communicating effectively and building legitimacy when interacting with important business stakeholders. Agents have to invest themselves in, and be committed to, the social role of an entrepreneur and to convince powerful stakeholders, including customers, finance providers, employees and others that they are legitimate actors in order to attain an entrepreneurial identity and the associated benefits. Entrepreneurs need both to ‘fit in’ with social norms *and* to ‘stand out’ as a rule-breaker in terms of their novel product offering (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009). This depends on their capacities to perform various embodied practices, non-linguistic as well as linguistic, in relation to all three orders of reality. Entrepreneurial identity cannot be reduced to linguistic performances.

### **‘Disembodied’ entrepreneurs in the identity literature**

The dominant approach in the entrepreneurial identity literature is to conceptualise identity as a dynamic process constituted by a range of narrative or discursive practices, performed in relation to the social environment. This social constructionist approach to identity, according to Down (2010), overcomes mind-body dualism by challenging the existence of the self *as* a mind and by arguing that the self, and the mind itself, are socially constructed. Down recognises the biological basis of the self, but considers this of limited use to explain the social and economic significance of identity. The studies we review typically lean towards a strong constructionist view although, in some cases, there are elements of a more moderate approach. We follow Elder-Vass (2012) in defining strong constructionism as the view that the only reality we can have access to is a linguistically mediated one. Strong constructionism can be distinguished from more moderate forms which are essential to a robust conception of embodied entrepreneurial identity. Moderate constructionism permits variation in agents’ linguistic expressions but does not reduce identity to such practices. Agents may express themselves in a variety of ways while retaining a specific set of concerns, although such concerns are of course dynamic and vary over time. In what follows, we set out the key features of entrepreneurial identity studies before critiquing their assumptions.

Scholars agree that entrepreneurial identity is not formed in isolation but in relation to significant others (Warren, 2004; Down and Reveley, 2004; Down, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Watson, 2009). Identity is constructed and reconstructed dialogically, through stories or narratives (Hytti, 2005; Johansson, 2004; Warren, 2004; Essers and Benschop,

2007, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Down, 2006; Down and Warren, 2008; Watson, 2009; Reveley and Down, 2010; Smith, R. 2010). Entrepreneurs narratively construct and negotiate their identities in order to present themselves as legitimate and credible to a range of important business stakeholders. To the extent they succeed, this enables entrepreneurs to access resources and market opportunities (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Martens *et al.*, 2007; Navis and Glynn, 2011).

Entrepreneurial identity, studies suggest, is formed by various discourses and discursive resources, including the enterprise discourse (Watson, 2009). Down (2010: 70) defines the discourse of enterprise as "...all the ways of talking about enterprise; the character of the entrepreneur and the moral expectations we have of enterprising acts... The discourse of enterprise will tend to prescribe what are legitimate acts and narratives for people who define themselves as entrepreneurs. We would want a very convincing narrative to be persuaded that an actuary, vicar or soldier was an entrepreneur: the discourse frames what is possible." People draw upon and reproduce, but also resist, the enterprise discourse (Cohen and Musson, 2000; Warren, 2004; Hytti, 2005; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; Watson, 2009; Iyer, 2009; Anderson and Warren, 2011; Díaz García and Welter, 2013). Agents are often powerfully constituted by the discourse of enterprise (Warren, 2004; Essers and Benschop, 2007; Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011), empowered as entrepreneurs (Anderson and Warren, 2011), or excluded from it (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008).

These studies reject strong essentialist views that conceive identity as determined by biological characteristics - we agree. Down and Reveley (2004), for instance, contrast themselves with psychological traits theorists who focus solely on individual personality characteristics to explain why people become entrepreneurs. The search for *the* entrepreneurial personality has contributed to the 'mythical status of entrepreneurs' as special people (Mitchell, 1997), a status reinforced by media representations of entrepreneurs as heroic individuals (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Anderson and Warren, 2011) or other stereotypes, such as the norm of the male entrepreneur (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011). Entrepreneurial identity has instead been conceptualised as an emergent, dynamic, inconsistent and paradoxical process (Hytti, 2005; Essers and Benschop, 2007, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Down and Warren, 2008). For instance, when medical doctors take on entrepreneurial functions, contradictions may arise between their role as a medical professional and their emergent entrepreneurial identity (Hytti, 2005). Both the role and the social meaning of the term 'entrepreneur' is dynamic and changes over time (Down, 2010). But while we agree that identity is dynamic, agents' embodied properties and powers may limit their ability to attain a particular social identity such as that of an entrepreneur.

Taking the materiality of human embodiment for granted, most entrepreneurial identity studies necessarily, though perhaps unintentionally, reproduce mind-body dualism. The serious neglect of the body in the literature produces a *disembodied* conception of the entrepreneur, one that pays limited attention to agents' embodied properties and powers and their variable capacity to accomplish a particular identity. This has a number of adverse consequences for theorising entrepreneurial identity. While we do not subscribe to *strong* essentialism, a degree of essentialism is necessary for the notion of the self and the idea that agents are capable of resisting discourse (O'Mahoney, 2012). Women entrepreneurs, for instance, often resist the masculine connotations of entrepreneurship (Essers and Benschop, 2007). Some studies illustrate that the body influences identity formation, but do not theorise its role explicitly (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011) or, alternatively, reduce the body to a discursive construct (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008), with the consequence that entrepreneurs' embodied properties and powers are seriously under-theorised as an influence on identity. A number of studies do



acknowledge embodiment to a degree. Down and Reveley (2004), for instance, highlight the role of non-linguistic practices, such as the ability to use particular technologies in relation to the practical environments, but they do not theorise how the body and embodied knowledge might influence such practices and the identities emergent from them. Haynie and Shepherd (2011) illustrate the devastating impact of injury on personal identity when the sense of self is closely linked to a career one is unable to retain as a result of impairment. While pointing out, importantly, that impairment can motivate entrepreneurial activities as well as shape experiences of it, they explore injury as a 'traumatic life event' rather than as a cause of impairment that materially affects embodied practices and identity formation.

The entrepreneurial identity literature is underpinned by a number of problematic assumptions that limit understanding of the meaning, formation and influence of identity on action. First, the body is an absent presence (Shilling, 2003) in most studies; it is always present in the interviewee/researcher interaction, but never a focus of investigation. Scholars therefore fail to explore explicitly the materiality of the body and its effects on entrepreneurial identity. Second, by taking the body for granted, entrepreneurs are treated implicitly as an homogeneous group, sharing identical properties and powers, rather than as uniquely embodied agents. In some respects, this mirrors the omission identified by studies of female and ethnic minority entrepreneurs that claim research has typically presupposed a white, male entrepreneur. Third, entrepreneurs are typically assumed to be able-bodied, equally capable of starting and operating a business, rather than differently-abled agents.<sup>[2]</sup> Treating able-bodiedness implicitly as a stable attribute of entrepreneurs, studies paradoxically commit the very flaw of essentialism they reject in others. Entrepreneurs who do not fit the stereotypical image of an able-bodied person are largely invisible in the literature as a result. Recognising entrepreneurs as differently-abled is crucial for understanding identity and action.

### **Implications of embodied entrepreneurial identity**

We have emphasised that human embodiment is a necessary precondition for the emergence of entrepreneurial identity as a particular set of concerns in the natural, practical and social environments. How we are embodied significantly shapes, and is shaped by, what we care about. Each person has a unique set of concerns, arising from their embodiment, which makes them a particular person. Creating and managing a business, and being committed to performing that social role successfully, as defined by the individual in relation to their concerns, is what makes one a particular entrepreneur. But what are the theoretical and methodological implications of this new conception of embodied entrepreneurial identity for future research?

Although our framework applies to all entrepreneurs, we focus on one group – entrepreneurs with impairments – to elucidate how being embodied in a particular way shapes entrepreneurial identity. We begin by unpacking the concept of 'impairment' as a real social object, with particular properties and powers, capable of producing material effects, regardless of what we call it or how we observe it (Williams, 1999). Impairments have real effects on entrepreneurs' embodied practices and, therefore, on their identities. The capacity to create and operate a business may be influenced by multiple dimensions of impairment: by origin, type, severity, duration, and by whether impairments are a stable, long-term condition, degenerative or impose fluctuating or recurring restrictions on activity (Boyd, 2012). Diversity of impairments is usually overlooked in social research, especially in surveys that simply distinguish disabled and non-disabled respondents in binary terms, implicitly treating disabled people as an homogenous group (Pagán, 2009). Of course, impairments do not have determinate effects; much depends

upon how entrepreneurs, and their stakeholders, adapt to their conditions. But what might be the implications of recognising the effects of diverse impairments on entrepreneurs' capabilities and practices, and hence their identities?

### *Theoretical implications*

Identity formation involves a range of embodied linguistic *and* non-linguistic practices, which enable and constrain entrepreneurs to act in particular ways. While the studies reviewed predominantly emphasise the linguistic, more explicit consideration of non-linguistic practices can produce new insights into the effects of embodiment on entrepreneurs' capacities, concerns and actions. Researchers must attend to embodied properties and powers, including impairments and their effects in relation to the natural *and* practical as well as social environments (Archer, 2000), as each entrepreneur prioritises different concerns in each order of reality. In the social environment, building relationships with new customers, attracting investors and retaining employees are crucial for business creation and sustainability. In the practical order, driving a car or using various technologies may be as important as relationship building and will enable action in the social order. In the natural environment, the capacity to walk or to see and hear will inevitably shape day-to-day practices, with consequences for identity formation.

The three orders of reality (Archer, 2000) is an analytical distinction only, yet a powerful one for recognising how entrepreneurs' powers in the natural and practical orders might shape their capacities and concerns in the social order. The distinction between the three orders can help us to identify those concerns we usually take for granted when researching entrepreneurship. It can help us to avoid the assumed able-bodiedness and to consider how entrepreneurship might be done differently by differently-abled agents. Sensory, physical and cognitive impairments necessarily shape entrepreneurs' embodied knowledge and practices in terms of movement, using artefacts and technologies, and communicating with stakeholders, in very different ways. Individual experiences will of course vary with social context; some settings are more favourable to entrepreneurs with particular kinds of impairment than others. Understanding how particular impairments influence entrepreneurs in their natural and practical environments can provide new insights into their concerns and practices in their social environments. We discuss several examples to illustrate the potential effects of impairment on new venture creation and management.

While many people are constrained at start-up by their specific impairments and associated discriminatory practices (Boylan and Burchardt, 2002), others are motivated to pursue market opportunities they may not have discovered otherwise. Disabled people, studies suggest, are more likely to become self-employed than the population generally although this varies with type of impairment (Boylan and Burchardt, 2002; EMDA, 2009; Pagán, 2009). Acquiring an impairment as a result of accident or ill-health may force some to pursue a career change and motivate start-up (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011). People born with severe impairments may seek self-employment because of employment discrimination. Self-employment can offer an alternative source of income and provide the flexibility to fit paid work around other personal concerns or to help overcome negative labour market attitudes (Pagán, 2009).

Particular impairments might be stigmatising (Goffman, 1963) and shape entrepreneurs' attempts to present themselves as legitimate actors. All entrepreneurs have to access resources and markets in order to create and sustain a business. To do so, building and maintaining working relationships with powerful stakeholders is essential. Entrepreneurs make impressions on others both intentionally and unintentionally (Goffman, 1959). Narrative practices can help them to make the right impression with

stakeholders and be perceived as legitimate actors (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Non-linguistic practices, including the use of artefacts such as settings, props and dress, and bodily cues like expressiveness and gestures might influence entrepreneurs' ability to achieve support for novel ventures (Clarke, 2011; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012). Entrepreneurs with impairments may need to exert greater effort to achieve legitimacy (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009; Clarke, 2011) and to present a credible professional identity (Clarke, 2011), in order to 'fit in' and 'stand out' at the same time (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009). These entrepreneurs may not 'fit in' with the stereotypical image of an able-bodied entrepreneur, and 'stand out' unintentionally for the wrong reasons - for their impairment - with implications for their capacity to negotiate an entrepreneurial identity in interaction with significant stakeholders. The visibility of impairment is likely pose particular challenges. Entrepreneurs with highly visible impairments such as severe cerebral palsy may organise their business activities so as to minimise face-to-face contact with stakeholders, for example, by choosing to work at home. In contrast, entrepreneurs with 'hidden' impairments, such as chronic fatigue syndrome or dyslexia, might not experience the same pressures to minimise stakeholder contact – they may, of course, face different constraints on action arising from their impairment.

### *Methodological implications*

Conflating entrepreneurial identity with linguistic practices, in our view, produces an impoverished and disembodied conception of the entrepreneur. Researchers should perhaps attend to three issues in addition to entrepreneurs' narrative and discursive practices: first, to study entrepreneurs' embodied properties and powers and the concerns they give rise to; second, to examine stakeholder perceptions of entrepreneurs' bodily appearance and capabilities; and, third, to explore how entrepreneurs interpret, and respond to, stakeholder reactions to their embodiment.

Methods such as interviewing can capture individuals' embodied, reflexive, lived experiences of starting and running a business. People with impairments might be particularly conscious of their embodiment in so far as it constrains their activities (Leder, 1990) and therefore better able to discuss their embodied properties and powers, and their likely effects, in a research interview. Entrepreneurship researchers rarely explore physical capabilities, including the use of artefacts, and the consequences for identity and action. Technology, for instance, plays an important role in human interaction; artefacts such as computers and telephones shape identities (Sandelowski, 2002). In the social order, respondents might reflect on how stakeholders react to their embodiment, and how such reactions affect their identity. To elucidate what is often taken for granted in narrative expressions of entrepreneurial identity, researchers need to tease out how embodiment shapes, and is shaped by, respondents' unique constellation of concerns. Asking entrepreneurs questions about the impact of their own bodies on their activities in the natural, practical and social orders can make their embodied concerns visible (Seymour, 2007).

Practices are often habitual, performed pre-reflexively without conscious deliberation. Ethnographic methods, including observation and videotaping, may be particularly useful to discover how entrepreneurs, as embodied agents, interact with their natural, practical and social environments. While some have used these methods to research entrepreneurial identity, studies did not focus specifically on impairment (Clarke, 2011) or on the body and embodied practices (Down, 2006). Entrepreneurs may be unaware of the effects of their embodiment on powerful stakeholders. Interviews with stakeholders, and observations of entrepreneur-stakeholder interaction, could provide novel and richer insights into the role of body in the formation of entrepreneurial identity.

Watson (2008) provides an insightful account of the identity work of two managers, illustrating how they are 'read' by significant others in terms of their social identities, including gender and managerial identities. Although Watson implies that managers' particular embodied properties and powers influence how others perceive them, and how individuals think they are perceived by others, he under-theorises the influence of embodiment.

## Conclusion

Human embodiment has largely been taken for granted or under-theorised in the entrepreneurial identity literature, limiting the scope and value of research. Prior work incorporates several problematic assumptions. Researchers typically treat entrepreneurs as an homogeneous group in terms of their embodied properties and powers, and assume they are able-bodied, rather than differently-abled, agents. We have critiqued the literature for its strong constructionist tendencies to conceptualise entrepreneurial identity primarily in terms of narrative and discursive practices. This line of thinking has produced a *disembodied* conception of the entrepreneur, although perhaps unintentionally. Identity cannot be reduced to linguistic performances. From our realist, moderate constructionist viewpoint, embodied linguistic *and* non-linguistic practices, such as movement, posture, gestures and facial expressions play a significant role in the formation of identity, with important consequences for action.

Drawing on the wider social sciences literature on identity, embodiment, impression management and stigma, we have proposed a new conception of entrepreneurial identity, as a unique constellation of concerns emergent from the embodied practices of agents committed to new venture creation and management. Embodiment enables as well as constrains agents' capacities, and shapes their concerns, in relation to their natural, practical and social environments. Entrepreneurs' capacities and concerns in the natural and practical order necessarily influence what they are capable of, and care about, in the social order. Their concerns exist and generate effects regardless of whether or not these are expressed linguistically in research interviews. Entrepreneurial identity, defined as a set of concerns, is communicated through non-linguistic as well as linguistic action.

The embodying of entrepreneurial identity has wider implications for the study of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial cognition research, for instance, acknowledges the embodied nature of cognitive processes (Mitchell *et al.*, 2011; Grégoire *et al.*, 2011); studying entrepreneurial orientations, motivations and decision-making without reference to the body will be incomplete. Categories such as 'mumpreneurs', male, female, ethnic minority, older and disabled entrepreneurs are of course socially and culturally constituted. That these particular identities emerge from embodiment is self-evident, but the materiality of such embodiment and its effects on identity is usually left implicit. Studies should theorise the influence of entrepreneurs' embodied properties and powers, whatever they may be, on identity. Entrepreneurs reason, sense, feel and act through their bodies in relation to their particular environments; accounts of identity will be incomplete without reference to embodiment. We have discussed the theoretical and methodological implications for studying one particular group – entrepreneurs with impairments – to elucidate how being embodied in particular ways shapes identity and, in turn, influences action. Researchers must attend explicitly to entrepreneurs' *and* stakeholders' embodied non-linguistic and linguistic practices in order to capture processes of identity formation and transformation.

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[1] Entrepreneurs with impairments are the focus of the lead author's doctoral research.

[2] We recognise that terms like 'able-bodied', 'healthy' or 'normal' take on different meanings in different social and cultural contexts. Yet, we also recognise that such terms serve as necessary analytical categories without which the words like 'impaired' would be meaningless when applied to human bodies or persons (Smith C., 2010: 45n.)



### Appendix 5.1 Research design matrix

<b>Research Questions</b> <i>What do I need to know?</i>	<b>Rationale</b> <i>Why do I need to know this?</i>	<b>Data collection</b> <i>What data do I need?</i>	<b>Data analysis</b> <i>How will I analyse the data?</i>
What are disabled entrepreneurs' concerns with well-being in nature, with performative achievement in the material culture and with self-worth in society?	Conceptualising personal identity as a set of concerns in the three orders – natural, practical and social – what are disabled entrepreneurs' specific concerns? Personal concerns motivate commitment to social roles, such as being an entrepreneur. Gaining insights into personal concerns, and their emotional commentaries, can help explain how entrepreneurial identity emerges in relation to all three orders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entrepreneur interviews</li> <li>2. Field notes</li> <li>3. Shadowing observation notes</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of transcripts, using existing concepts, including concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth</li> <li>• Identifying new themes and concepts emerging from data (within-case analysis)</li> <li>• Comparing and contrasting similarities and differences across cases (cross-case analysis) to identify new relationships</li> <li>• Analysis of field and observation notes to identify concrete concerns that may not have been expressed (e.g. dependence on support workers, physical barriers in nature and material culture)</li> </ul>
How do disabled entrepreneurs build and acquire legitimacy with important stakeholders, including customers, employees and others?	To perform an entrepreneurial role, agents must be able to control information about their appearance and behaviour to make the right impression on important stakeholders. Coming across as a legitimate entrepreneur enables access to resources and markets. Acquiring legitimacy can help agents accomplish entrepreneurial identity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entrepreneur interviews</li> <li>2. Stakeholder interviews</li> <li>3. Field notes</li> <li>4. Shadowing observation notes</li> <li>5. Visual material from online profiles</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of entrepreneurs' and stakeholders' accounts of impression management</li> <li>• Analysis of field and observation notes related to legitimacy issues (e.g. how entrepreneurs present themselves in person)</li> <li>• Analysis of other visual information related to legitimacy issues (e.g. how entrepreneurs present themselves online)</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Maxwell, J.A. (2013) *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London: Sage, pp. 117.

## Appendix 5.2 Data collection matrix

Data collection stage	Examples of the types of information needed
Entrepreneur interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Biographical data</i>: education, work history, start-up motivations, type and onset of disability</li> <li>• <i>Embodied self</i>: perceptions of self, strengths / weaknesses, self-identification as an entrepreneur, self-identification as a disabled person, disability effects on the sense of self and day-to-day practices, barriers / challenges in creating and running a business</li> <li>• <i>Personal identity</i>: concerns in the three orders, working pattern, disability effects on business practices, importance of business, advantages / disadvantages of self-employment, role of artefacts such as technology, relationships with family, friends and business stakeholders, business / financial support, welfare support, values and beliefs, business performance, competition</li> <li>• <i>Social identities</i>: commitments to roles and relationships, relationships with stakeholders, disability disclosure, impression management, legitimacy-building strategies, customer feedback, attitudes and reactions to disability, disability as enabling / constraining in venture creation and management</li> </ul>
Stakeholder interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Biographical data</i>: education, work history, current employment, disability</li> <li>• <i>Negotiating identity</i>: initial encounters with and first impressions of business / entrepreneur, frequency of interaction, type of interaction (e.g. face-to-face, online)</li> <li>• <i>Motivations</i>: motivation for purchasing from, working for, or collaborating with entrepreneur / business</li> <li>• <i>Business impact</i>: impact of entrepreneur / business on the customer, employee, business partner, including changes to performance, income, processes, structures, practices and values, impact on the sector and wider social / cultural context</li> </ul>
Entrepreneur shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Relations with nature</i>: disability effects on well-being and day-to-day practices (e.g. walking, moving, standing, communicating, learning), working pattern (e.g. hours per week), emotional displays (e.g. distress)</li> <li>• <i>Relations with the material culture</i>: use of assistive and digital technologies (e.g. mobility aids, computers), use of status artefacts (e.g. dress, awards) emotional displays (e.g. frustration), physical barriers in the build environment (e.g. transport)</li> <li>• <i>Relations with society</i>: interactions with stakeholders (e.g. movement, posture, facial expressions, gestures), visibility of disability, emotional displays (e.g. anger), linguistic and non-linguistic impression management practices, legitimacy-building strategies</li> </ul>
Online visual material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal and business profiles</i>: images and videos of entrepreneurs, disability disclosure, product offering, testimonials from customers, personal and business values, educational achievements</li> </ul>

## Appendix 5.3 Interview topic guide for entrepreneurs

### **PERSONAL & BUSINESS BACKGROUND**

*I would like to start by asking you several questions about your personal and business background.*

**1. What did you do before starting your own business?**

*Prompts:* education, employment history, disability

**2. Why did you start a business / become self-employed?**

*Prompts:* unemployment, flexibility, opportunity recognition, fitting work around life-style, fitting work around disability

**3. Did you face any barriers / challenges when setting up the business?**

*Prompts:* disability, obtaining finance, regulation / admin, competition, finding suitable employees, attitudes, accessibility issues – e.g. information, premises, transport

**4. When did the business start trading?**

**5. What is the legal status of your business?**

*Prompts:* private limited company, sole proprietorship, partnership, PLC, CIC, charity

**6. Are you the sole owner?**

**7. What do you do within the business / your position?**

*Prompts:* owner, owner manager, director

**8. What products / services do you offer?**

**9. Overtime, have there been any changes in the business since you started?**

*Prompts:* products / services, suppliers, employees, customers, legal status

**10. Where is your business based? Do you operate from a single /multiple site(s)?**

*Prompts:* work from home, rented space, café

**11. What is your working pattern? How is your usual working week?**

*Prompts:* working days, hours per week, 9 to 5 or more flexible

## **BUSINESS PERFORMANCE & CHALLENGES**

*Now I'd like to ask you several questions about your business performance and any challenges at the moment.*

### **12. How is the business doing at the moment?**

*Prompts: turnover, profits*

### **13. Do you have any employees?**

*Prompts: How many? What are their jobs?*

### **14. Who are your customers?**

*Prompts: Individuals or businesses? What sector? (public, private, charity) How do you find them? Geographical distribution? (local, national, international)*

### **15. Who are your competitors?**

*Prompts: How is your business doing in comparison?*

### **16. Do you face any barriers / challenges in running / managing the business?**

*Prompts: disability, obtaining finance, regulation / admin, competition, finding suitable employees, attitudes, accessibility issues – e.g. information, premises, transport*

### **17. How do you overcome any barriers / challenges?**

### **18. Thinking about your business performance, what are your strengths / weaknesses in managing the business?**

*Prompts: managing relationships with clients, marketing...*

### **19. How important is your business to you in relation to any other concerns?**

## **IMPACT OF DISABILITY / IMPAIRMENT ON PRACTICES**

*I would like to ask you some specific questions about your disability / impairment and how it affects your day-to-day activities as well as your business practices.*

### **20. What is your disability / impairment?**

*Prompts: type (symptoms), origin (acquired or born with) duration (long or short term), permanence (constant or intermittent and recurring), severity (degree to which it limits activities), progressiveness (degenerative, improving or stable)*

### **21. How does your disability / impairment affect your activities in general?**

*Prompts: getting around, using artefacts, relationships*

### **22. What influence, if any, did your disability / impairment have on your decision to start a business?**

### **23. How does your disability / impairment affect day-to-day running of your business?**

*Prompts: getting to work, working hours, using various artefacts, meeting and communicating with customers and others, managing employees, attracting investors, any changes over time?*

### **24. What are the main advantages of running your own business / being self-employed?**

*Prompts: flexible hours, being your own boss, fitting disability around work, lifestyle, job satisfaction*

### **25. Are there any disadvantages in running your own business / being self-employed?**

*Prompts: working from home, work/life balance, uncertainty, long working hours, stress*

## **RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

*Now I'd like to ask some questions about your relationships with different stakeholders and how your impairment might influence these relationships.*

### **26. How is your relationship with your employees?**

*Prompts:*

- How did you recruit your employees? Did you face any barriers in recruiting?
- In your interactions with employees, do you intentionally try to make a particular impression in order to build your relationship? [e.g. dress, setting, mode of communication]
- And in your view, what impression do you make on your employees, intentionally or unintentionally?
- Do you tell your employees about your [hidden] impairment?
- Generally, how do your employees react to your impairment?
- Did you ever experience negative reactions from employees to your impairment?

### **27. How is your relationship with your customers?**

*Prompts:*

- Do you meet your customers face-to-face?
- When interacting with customers, do you intentionally try to make a particular impression in order to build your relationship? [e.g. dress, setting, mode of communication]
- How important is it for you / business to make the right impression on your customers?
- And in your view, what impression do you make on your customers, intentionally or unintentionally?
- Do you ever seek feedback from your customers?
- Do you tell your customers about your [hidden] impairment?
- Generally, how do your customers react to your impairment?
- Did you ever experience negative reactions from customers to your impairment?

### **28. Tell me about your family and friends.**

*Prompts:*

- How did your close family and friends react when you became disabled [if impairment acquired in course of life]?
- How was the reaction of your close family and friends to your decision to set up a business?

### **29. Is there anyone else who is important to your business?**

*Prompts:* ADP, Access to Work, business support, personal support (e.g. PA), other entrepreneurs, other networks

## **FINANCING THE BUSINESS**

*I'd like to ask some questions about how you finance your business.*

**30. Did you seek any financial support when starting a business, and currently?**

**31. What type of finance did you seek / apply for?**

*Prompts:* bank loan, overdraft, grant

**32. What was your experience of approaching finance providers?**

*Prompts:* How did they perceive you? Did you tell them about your impairment? How did they react to your impairment?

**33. Did you experience any difficulties in obtaining finance?**

*Prompts:* accessing information, inadequate business plan, bad credit rating, previous debts, afraid of losing benefits, rejected for risky product / service idea

**34. What are your future plans for the business?**

*Prompts:* grow / remain the same size, increase / same / lower the number of employees, increase turnover / profit, develop new product / service

**35. Could I finish by asking how old you are?**

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

## RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

### **Working title**

How disability affects business start-up and management in the UK

### **Purpose of the research**

All self-employed people need access to resources and market opportunities in order to start and operate a business successfully. This study looks specifically at how people with long-term health conditions and disabilities build relationships with customers, employees and finance providers, to gain the access.

### **Relevance of the study**

Disabled people are more likely to become self-employed than the working population as a whole, yet they are under-represented in business research and policy. The study examines individual motivations for entering self-employment, the barriers to accessing resources such as information, advice and finance, and the experiences of business support.

### **Outcomes**

All study participants will receive an executive summary of the findings. This will include a set of recommendations for policy makers and support organisations, and practical implications that may be of value to existing and aspiring entrepreneurs. The findings will be available in accessible formats and disseminated through conferences, publications and other channels.

### **How you may be able to help**

Taking part in the study involves a face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour. You will be asked several questions about



your personal and business background, motivations for becoming self-employed, any barriers you may have faced in setting up and running a business, and your experiences of interacting with customers and others. With your permission, I will audio record the interview so that I do not have to make many notes. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.

### **Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity**

Your responses will be treated confidentially. Once the audio-recording of the interview is transcribed, all references to people / organisations will be anonymised and any identifiable information changed so that no individuals / organisations can be recognised. The data will be stored securely on the Kingston University server and the audio-recording erased on completion of the study. Some of your anonymised quotes may be used in publications, but at no time will your actual identity be revealed. I will credit those who wish to be acknowledged.

### **Contact**

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### Appendix 5.5 Personal characteristics of participant entrepreneurs

N	Pseudonym	Age <sup>1</sup>	Ethnicity	Impairment type(s) <sup>2</sup>	Specific impairment(s) / health condition(s)	Impairment onset <sup>3</sup> & severity <sup>4</sup>	Activity limitation(s) <sup>5</sup>	Impairment visibility <sup>6</sup>
1	Akaash (M)	37	Asian British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Multiple epiphyseal dysplasia (progressive)	Congenital Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving)	Less visible (slowness of movement)
2	Alan (M)	Early 50s	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Multiple sclerosis (progressive)	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving)	Hidden
3	Anne (F)	Early 50s	White British	Long-term condition, physical & sensory impairment	Neurological condition (progressive), visual impairment	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, lifting, carrying, hand & arm use), communication (receiving & producing non-verbal & written messages)	Highly visible (wheelchair user, lack of eye contact)
4	Ben (M)	30	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Friedreich's ataxia (progressive)	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, hand & arm use), communication (producing spoken & non-verbal messages)	Highly visible (wheelchair user, postural imbalance, reduced speech clarity)
5	Beverly (F)	63	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment, learning difficulty	Fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic hypoglycaemia, migraine	Acquired Severe	Mobility (lifting, carrying, hand & arm use), learning & applying knowledge (thinking & calculating)	Hidden
6	Clara (F)	63	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Muscular dystrophy (progressive)	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (mobility scooter user)
7	Colin (M)	40	White British	Long-term condition, physical	Stroke, restless legs syndrome	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving) Communication (speaking)	Highly visible (limping, cane user,

				impairment				speech impediment)
8	Connie (F)	48	White British	Sensory impairment	Blindness	Congenital Severe	Communication (receiving & producing non-verbal & written messages)	Highly visible (lack of eye contact, guide dog)
9	Dara (F)	38	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Ehlers-Danlos syndrome	Congenital Moderate	Mobility (changing body position, standing)	Less visible (stiffness when standing up)
10	David (M)	46	White British	Physical impairment	Chronic fatigue syndrome, chronic polyneuropathy	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
11	Dean (M)	39	White British	Physical impairment	Lower limb paralysis	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
12	Dominic (M)	31	White British	Cognitive impairment	Brain injury, short and long-term memory loss	Acquired Severe	Learning & applying knowledge (remembering, calculating), general tasks & demands	Hidden
13	Fiona (F)	Late 40s	White British	Long-term condition	Multiple sclerosis (fluctuating)	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving)	Hidden
14	Fred (M)	50	Asian British	Physical impairment	Stroke	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (mobility scooter user)
15	Gaby (F)	58	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Chronic migraine (episodic) back pain, damaged nerve due to neck injury	Acquired Severe	Mobility (lifting, carrying, moving objects)	Hidden
16	Garry (M)	52	White British	Long-term condition, physical & sensory impairment	Kidney failure (progressive), lower limb amputation, hearing impairment	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing), communication (receiving spoken messages)	Highly visible (limping, left lower limb prosthesis, hearing aid user, talking loudly)
17	George (M)	25	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Multiple sclerosis (progressive)	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (limping, cane user, postural instability)
18	Gill (F)	38	White	Long-term	Asperger syndrome	Congenital	Communication (conversing with	Less visible (lack of

			British	condition		Moderate	many people, producing body language)	eye contact)
19	Harry (M)	47	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment, mental health condition	Fibromyalgia & rheumatoid arthritis, depression	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (lifting, carrying, hand & arm use)	Hidden
20	Irene (F)	29	White British	Mental health condition	Bipolar II disorder (episodic)	Congenital Moderate	General tasks & demands (carrying out daily routine)	Hidden
21	James (M)	Early 40s	White British	Physical impairment	Upper limb salvage surgery following osteosarcoma (bone cancer)	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (lifting, carrying, hand & arm use)	Less visible (shorter right upper-limb)
22	John (M)	56	Black British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Chronic fatigue syndrome	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving)	Highly visible (limping, cane user)
23	Lena (F)	33	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Friedreich's ataxia (progressive)	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, hand & arm use), communication (producing spoken & non-verbal messages)	Highly visible (wheelchair user, postural imbalance, reduced speech clarity)
24	Leonard (M)	55	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Spina bifida	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (limping, posture imbalance, mobility scooter user)
25	Lewys (M)	60	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Muscular dystrophy (progressive)	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
26	Linda (F)	60	White British	Sensory impairment	Blindness	Acquired Severe	Communication (receiving & producing non-verbal & written messages)	Less visible (lack of eye contact)
27	Lisbeth (F)	Late 30s	White British	Long-term condition	Epilepsy (episodic)	Acquired Moderate	General tasks & demands (carrying out daily routine)	Hidden
28	Matthew	52	Mixed	Long-term	Meniere's disease,	Congenital	Mobility (walking & moving,	Highly visible

	(M)		ethnic group	condition, physical & sensory impairment, learning difficulty, mental health illness	sleep apnea, spinal condition (degenerative), dyslexia, hearing impairment, anxiety, paranoia	& acquired Severe	standing), learning & applying knowledge (reading, writing), communication (receiving spoken messages)	(wheelchair user, hearing aids user)
29	Michael (M)	60	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Multiple sclerosis (progressive)	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, hand & arm use)	Highly visible (wheelchair user, reduced movement in the upper right limb)
30	Neil (M)	48	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Multiple sclerosis (progressive)	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
31	Oliver (M)	53	White British	Physical impairment	Upper limb paralysis	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (lifting, carrying, hand & arm use)	Less visible (lack of movement in the left upper limb)
32	Pauline (F)	53	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment, cognitive impairment	Spina bifida, hydrocephalus, short-term memory loss	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing), learning & applying knowledge (remembering, calculating)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
33	Peter (M)	39	White British	Physical impairment	Partial paralysis in all four limbs	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, hand and arm use)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
34	Philip (M)	68	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Parkinson's disease (progressive), cancer	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, hand & arm use), communication (producing spoken & non-verbal messages)	Highly visible (limping, cane user, postural instability, slowness of movement, reduced speech clarity)
35	Rachel (F)	39	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Rheumatoid arthritis (progressive)	Congenital Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving, sitting)	Less visible (slowness of movement)
36	Richard (M)	Late 30s	White British	Long-term condition, physical	Osteoarthritis (progressive),	Acquired Moderate	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Less visible (slowness of

				impairment	Haemophilia			movement)
37	Samuel (M)	54	White British	Physical impairment	Spina bifida	Congenital Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)
38	Sarah (F)	53	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Spinal condition (degenerative)	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing, maintaining a sitting position)	Less visible (slowness of movement)
39	Sophie (F)	36	White British	Mental health condition	Emetophobia	Congenital Moderate	Interpersonal interaction (physical contact in relationships)	Hidden
40	Tamara (F)	Early 40s	White British	Sensory impairment	Macular degeneration (progressive)	Acquired Moderate	Communication (receiving & producing non-verbal & written messages)	Less visible (lack of eye contact)
41	Tom (M)	34	White British	Long-term condition	Asperger syndrome	Congenital Moderate	Communication (starting & sustaining conversation, conversing with many people), interpersonal interaction (relating with strangers)	Hidden
42	Victoria (F)	62	White British	Sensory impairment	Macular degeneration (progressive)	Acquired Moderate	Communication (receiving & producing non-verbal & written messages)	Less visible (lack of eye contact)
43	Wesley (M)	64	White British	Long-term condition, physical impairment	Cancer, leg amputation	Acquired Severe	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)	Highly visible (wheelchair user)

**Key note:**

(1) Age at the time of the interview, conducted between 2013 and 2015.

(2) *Impairments* are problems in body function or alterations in body structure – for example, limb paralysis or blindness (WHO/WB 2011). Following the Disability Rights Commission guidance on disability data collection in the UK, ‘impairment types’ comprise physical impairments (for example, mobility issues), sensory impairments (for example, blindness), mental health conditions (such as, depression), learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia), cognitive impairments (for example, autism) and long-standing illnesses or health conditions (such as, cancer) (White 2009).

(3) Most disabled people experience the onset of impairment or health condition in adulthood, for instance through an injury or ill health, while only a small proportion are born with a health condition / impairment or become disabled during a childhood (Burchardt 2003). For the purposes of this study, the former refers to those who ‘acquired’ impairment during their working life while the latter are those with ‘congenital’ conditions. The onset of impairment can have significant social and

economic consequences (Burchardt 2003). People with congenital and acquired impairments may differ in their experiences of adapting to disability and disability identity, with consequences for individual self-esteem and well-being (Bogart 2014).

(4) Impairments can be distinguished by *severity* or the level of restriction imposed on the individual capacity to undertake 'normal' day-to-day activities. Some impairment types may have no impact while others may impose moderate or severe restrictions on working practices (Kitching 2014). *Severe* restrictions are those where one or more impairment types impose multiple activity limitations. *Moderate* restrictions are those where one or more impairment types impose fewer activity limitations.

(5) *Activity limitations* are difficulties in executing tasks or activities, including difficulties with learning and applying knowledge, general tasks and demands, communication, mobility, and interpersonal interactions (WHO/WB 2011). The International Classification of Functioning (see: <http://apps.who.int/classifications/icfbrowser/>) was employed to categorise activity limitations experienced by the study participants.

(6) Impairments can be distinguished by their *visibility* effects on face-to-face interactions with business stakeholders and others. *Highly visible* impairments are those that are easily noticeable because of visual bodily cues or artefacts that reveal disability, for example, a wheelchair. *Less visible* impairments are those noticeable in some circumstances, for example, when a person speaks to reveal a speech impediment. *Hidden* impairments are conditions that are not immediately noticeable by an observer (Matthews and Harrington 2000), for example cancer.

### Appendix 5.6 Business characteristics of participant entrepreneurs

N	Pseudonym	Year started	Legal form	Sector	Product / service <sup>1</sup>	Market <sup>2</sup>	Size <sup>3</sup>	VAT registration	Geographical location
1	Akaash	2014	Private limited by guarantee	Business consultant / social entrepreneur	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	London
2	Alan	Start-up	N/A	Disability employability services	Disability	Mainstream	0	No	East of England
3	Anne	1999	Sole proprietorship	Disability equality / support consultancy	Disability	Mainstream & disability	6	No	North West
4	Ben	2010	Sole proprietorship	Disability business consultancy	Disability	Mainstream & disability	0	No	London
5	Beverly	1995	Sole proprietorship	Crafts	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	Scotland
6	Clara	1980	Sole proprietorship	Web Design / branding services	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	East of England
7	Colin	2007	Private limited by shares	Disability learning / employment service provider	Disability	Mainstream & disability	24	Yes	Yorkshire & the Humber
8	Connie	2014	Private limited by shares	Accessibility consultancy	Disability	Mainstream	1	No	London
9	Dara	2012	Sole proprietorship	Research services	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	Scotland
10	David	2010	Sole proprietorship	Artist / educational workshop provider	Mainstream & disability	Mainstream	1	Yes	East Midlands
11	Dean	2009	Private limited by shares	Business consultancy	Mainstream & disability	Mainstream	0	No	South East
12	Dominic	Start-up	N/A	Product design services	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	London
13	Fiona	2009	Community interest company	Business consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream	10	Yes	Scotland
14	Fred	2010	Private limited by shares	Marketing consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream & disability	1	Yes	London



15	Gaby	2012	Sole proprietorship	Counselling services	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	South West
16	Garry	2006	Private limited by shares	Specialist fitness training / manufacture of training equipment	Disability	Mainstream & disability	14	No	North West
17	George	2007	Private limited by shares	Product design consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream	2	Yes	London
18	Gill	2007	Sole proprietorship	Crafts	Mainstream	Mainstream	1	No	Scotland
19	Harry	2014	Sole proprietorship	Gardening services	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	East Midlands
20	Irene	2014	Private limited by shares	HR consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	North West
21	James	2006	Private limited by shares	Public speaking / broadcasting / consultancy	Mainstream & disability	Mainstream	0	Yes	East of England
22	John	2000	Private limited by shares	Internet / digital marketing	Mainstream	Mainstream	22	Yes	East Midlands
23	Lena	2006	Sole proprietorship	Disability equality consultancy	Disability	Mainstream	0	No	Yorkshire & the Humber
24	Leonard	2013	Sole proprietorship	Business consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	West Midlands
25	Lewys	2007	Private limited by shares	Manufacture of mobility support aids	Disability	Mainstream & disability	2	No	Wales
26	Linda	2000	Private limited by shares	Disability support / consultancy	Disability	Mainstream & disability	0	Yes	South East
27	Lisbeth	2012	Private limited by shares	Disability employability services	Disability	Mainstream & disability	0	No	Yorkshire & the Humber
28	Matthew	2008	Private limited by shares	Disability equality consultancy	Disability	Mainstream	0	No	London
29	Michael	1998	Private limited by shares / charity	Arts retail / manufacture of mobility equipment	Mainstream & disability	Mainstream & disability	7	No	Wales
30	Neil	Closed now	Private limited by shares	Timber manufacture & trade	Mainstream	Mainstream	Not known	Yes	Yorkshire & the Humber
31	Oliver	2011	Sole proprietorship	Writer	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	London
32	Pauline	2014	Community interest company	Community service provider	Mainstream	Mainstream & disability	0	No	East of England

33	Peter	2007	Private limited by shares	Manufacture of mobility support aids	Disability	Disability	10	Yes	West Midlands
34	Philip	2011	Sole proprietorship	Research consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream	1	No	London
35	Rachel	2010	Private limited by shares	Accessibility consultancy	Disability	Mainstream	0	No	South East
36	Richard	2011	Private limited by shares	Manufacture of organic toiletries	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	London
37	Samuel	2013	Sole proprietorship	Writer	Disability	Mainstream	0	No	South West
38	Sarah	2011	Private limited by guarantee	Disability recruitment services	Disability	Mainstream & disability	3	No	West Midlands
39	Sophie	2010	Sole proprietorship	Dog walker	Mainstream	Mainstream	0	No	East Midlands
40	Tamara	2002	Private limited by shares	Rehabilitation services	Disability	Mainstream & disability	12	Yes	Scotland
41	Tom	2008	Sole proprietorship	Gardening & landscaping services	Mainstream	Mainstream	4	Yes	East of England
42	Victoria	2010	Community interest company	Business consultancy	Mainstream	Mainstream & disability	3	Yes	East of England
43	Wesley	1990	Private limited by guarantee	Marketing / disability consultancy	Mainstream & disability	Mainstream	2	Yes	Yorkshire & the Humber

**Key note:**

(1) ‘Mainstream product/service’ refers to products/services in general, for example marketing services. ‘Disability product/service’ refers to specialist products/services related to particular impairments or health conditions (for example, clothing for wheelchair users) and disability (for example, disability equality training).

(2) ‘Mainstream market’ refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products or services where the buyers are customers in general. ‘Disability market’ refers to a meeting of people for selling and buying products or services where the buyers are disabled customers or customers disabled by association, for example carers.

(3) Size refers to employment size, or the number of employees excluding the owner.

## RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

### **Working title**

How disabled business owners build relationships with customers and others

### **Purpose of the research**

All business owners need access to resources and market opportunities in order to start and run a successful business. This study looks at how disabled business owners and those with different impairments and health conditions build relationships with customers, employees and others to gain and maintain their support.

### **Outcomes**

All study participants will receive an executive summary of the findings. This will include practical recommendations which may be of value to policy-makers, enterprise support organisations, existing business owners as well as aspiring entrepreneurs.

### **How you may be able to help**

Taking part in the study involves a face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour. You will be asked several questions about your background and your relationship with the case study business owner. With your permission, I will audio record the interview to ensure accuracy of your answers and so that I do not have to take many notes.

### **Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity**

Your responses will be treated confidentially. Other than me, nobody else will have access to the information from our meeting. Once the audio-recording of the interview is transcribed, the text will be anonymised so that no individuals / organisations can be identified. The data will be stored securely on the Kingston University server and the audio-recording erased on completion of the study. Some of your anonymised quotes may be used in publications, but at no time will your actual identity be revealed. I will credit those who wish to be acknowledged.

### **Contact**

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## Appendix 5.8 Interview topic guide for customers

### **INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE FOR B2B CUSTOMERS**

*Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. Can I first remind you what the study is about and answer any questions you may have? I am looking at how business owners build relationships with important stakeholders, including customers like yourself, in order to start and manage a business successfully. More specifically, I'm interested in whether and how disability affects business practices and relationships.*

*Today, I'd like to talk to you about your relationship with [the business] and I have a set of questions about your work background, your experience of the products / services that you buy from the business, and how your relationship developed over time. Just to reassure you, anything we talk about will be confidential – besides me, nobody else will have access to the information from our meeting. The information will be anonymised so that your identity and identity of any individuals / organisations you mention will not be revealed.*

### **WORK & BUSINESS-ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND**

*Can I start with some background questions about your work?*

#### **1. What do you do?**

*Prompts: current role, nature of business*

#### **2. And when did you start your business / working for the organisation?**

*Prompts: year started*

#### **3. What products / services does your business / organisation offer?**

*Prompts: sector, customers*

#### **4. Can you tell me how big is the business / organisation?**

*Prompts: number of employees*

#### **5. And how is the business / organisation doing at the moment?**

*Prompts: performance, competition*

### **PRODUCTS & SERVICES**

*I have a number of questions about the products / services that you buy from [the business].*

#### **6. What do you buy and how frequently?**

*Prompts: regular or one-off customer*

#### **7. When did you first buy from [the business]?**

*Prompts: year, was this switching from another supplier – why?*

#### **8. And how did you first hear about [the business]?**

*Prompts: online search, word-of-mouth, advertising*

#### **9. Who do you mainly deal with in the business? Do you deal with the owner?**

*Prompts: owner, other employees*

**10. And could you describe how you typically communicate with [the owner] and [others]? And how does this work for you?**

*Prompts:* In person, via email, phone, Skype, Could you put a percentage on this? Would you prefer more personal contact?

## **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

*I also have a few specific questions about your initial experience of [the business] and how your relationship developed over time.*

**11. Thinking back, what attracted you initially to buy from [the business]?**

*Prompts:* demand, reputation, service / product quality, price, after-sale service, location, recommendation

**12. Did you consider any other product / service providers at the time? And why yes / no?**

*Prompts:* researched online, got quotes from different businesses

**13. And was there anything in particular that influenced your decision to buy from [the business]?**

*Prompts:* business (professional website, marketing material, premises), owner (behaviour, appearance, knowledge / experience, disability)

**14. What were your initial impressions?**

*Prompts:* Of the business and the owner

**15. Has there been any change over time in the products / services that you buy from [the business]? Why?**

*Prompts:* increased / decreased purchase, increased prices, special offers, disability effects

**16. Does [the owner] keep in touch with you in any other ways to maintain your relationship?**

*Prompts:* newsletters, promotional offers, follow up calls, feedback

**17. Could you give me any examples of a situation when you felt that the business exceeded your expectations?**

*Prompts:* prompt delivery, good customer service

**18. And can you think of any situations when the business didn't meet your expectations?**

*Prompts:* What was the problem? Have you ever thought of switching?

## **CLOSING QUESTIONS**

**19. How important are the products /services you buy from [the business] to your business / organisation?**

*Prompts:* minor / significant, intention to buy in future

**20. Has there been any change in how your business /organisation operates as a result of working with [the business]?**

*Prompts:* changes to processes, practices, structures, performance

**21. Would you recommend their products / services to others? And why yes / no?**  
*Prompts: service / product quality, price, customer service*

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

## Appendix 5.9 Shadowing template

Contact initials:

Date of shadowing:

Duration of shadowing:

Place(s) of shadowing:

<b>Key dimensions</b>	<b>Specific areas of focus</b>
<i><b>Actors</b></i>	Who is involved? (e.g. entrepreneur, customers, employees) Personal characteristics of shadowees? (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity)
<i><b>Activities &amp; events</b></i>	What are people doing? (e.g. meeting a client) How are they doing it? (e.g. face-to-face, telephone) What kind of event is it? (e.g. formal meeting, ad hoc meeting)
<i><b>Goals</b></i>	What are people trying to accomplish and why? (e.g. start a new project)
<i><b>Feelings</b></i>	What is the mood of the group / individuals involved? (e.g. anxious, happy) How does the shadower feel about the group / individuals?
<i><b>Space</b></i>	What is the physical space / setting like? (e.g. office layout, location)
<i><b>Objects</b></i>	What artefacts are present? (e.g. dress style, AT & digital technologies, business cards, cars)
<i><b>Impairment</b></i>	What is the shadowee's impairment? (i.e. type, severity) How does the impairment manifest itself? (i.e. visibility) How do stakeholders react to impairment? (e.g. speak louder)

<b>Embodied practices</b>	<b>Specific areas of focus</b>
<i><b>Movement &amp; spatial behaviour</b></i>	How shadowees move and behave in space? (e.g. walking, lifting, bodily proximity, use of artefacts)
<i><b>Postures</b></i>	What postures do shadowees display? (e.g. standing, sitting, leaning)
<i><b>Touch &amp; bodily contact</b></i>	How tactile are the shadowees? (e.g. hand-shaking)
<i><b>Gestures</b></i>	What gestures do shadowees display? (e.g. pointing)
<i><b>Facial expressions</b></i>	What facial expressions do shadowees display? (e.g. eyebrow, eye, lip movement - smiling, frowning)
<i><b>Appearance</b></i>	How do shadowees appear? (e.g. dress, physical attractiveness)
<i><b>Linguistic practices</b></i>	What do shadowees say and what resources do they use to say it? (e.g. storytelling, metaphor, jargon, short / extensive answers, concealment, deceit)
<i><b>Speech</b></i>	How do shadowees say things? (e.g. tone, speed, loudness, speech impediment, accent)
<i><b>Use of artefacts</b></i>	What artefacts do shadowees use? (e.g. assistive and digital technologies)
<i><b>Interpersonal communication</b></i>	How is the shadowees' interpersonal communication? (e.g. do they ask for help with tasks or carry them out independently)
<i><b>Setting</b></i>	<p>What are the settings? (e.g. urban/rural, wealthy/poor, office, home, factory)</p> <p>How are the settings laid out? (e.g. furniture, equipment, decorations, tidy/messy)</p>



### Appendix 5.10 Stages of coding

<b>Stage 1 coding</b> <b>Existing concepts</b>	<b>Stage 2 coding</b> <b>Core emergent themes</b>	<b>Stage 3 coding</b> <b>Concepts developed through abstraction</b>
<p><i>The self</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embodiment</li> <li>• Self-consciousness (self-identified disabled, self-identified entrepreneur)</li> <li>• The onset of impairment</li> <li>• Impairment effects</li> </ul>	<p><i>New venture ideas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceiving of, and developing ideas for products / services</li> <li>• Disability disrupts the embodied sense of self and personal concerns</li> <li>• Disability can be a source of new venture ideas</li> </ul>	<p><i>The power to conceive of a new venture idea</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New venture ideas emergent from three knowledge forms</li> <li>• Impairment disrupts embodied knowing &amp; stimulates ideas</li> <li>• Impairment disrupts practical knowing &amp; stimulates ideas</li> <li>• Impairment disrupts discursive knowing &amp; stimulates ideas</li> <li>• New venture ideas develop into viable products / services through knowledge transfer</li> </ul>
<p><i>Personal identity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The onset of impairment</li> <li>• Concerns with physical well-being</li> <li>• Concerns with performative achievement</li> <li>• Concerns with self-worth</li> <li>• Internal conversation</li> <li>• Emotional elaboration</li> <li>• Emotions in the natural order</li> </ul>	<p><i>New venture creation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facing barriers in the labour market</li> <li>• Fitting work around disability</li> <li>• Motivation to create a new venture</li> <li>• Advantages / disadvantages of self-employment</li> </ul>	<p><i>The power to commit to venture creation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The onset of impairment triggers internal conversation</li> <li>• Impairment affects well-being &amp; motivates venture creation</li> <li>• Impairment affects performative achievement &amp; motivates venture creation</li> <li>• Impairment affects self-worth &amp; motivates</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions in the practical order</li> <li>• Emotions in the social order</li> <li>• Three stages of internal conversation – discernment, deliberation, dedication</li> </ul>		<p>venture creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal conversation as a lens for theorising transition from motivation to behaviour</li> <li>• Discernment - reflecting on various concerns</li> <li>• Deliberation - considering venture creation as a way of prioritising / subordinating concerns</li> <li>• Dedication - commitment to venture creation</li> </ul>
<p><i>Social identity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial role</li> <li>• Impression management</li> <li>• Stigma</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Legitimacy strategies</li> <li>• Fitting-in and standing-out in the marketplace</li> <li>• Conforming to environment</li> <li>• Selecting environment</li> <li>• Manipulating environment</li> </ul>	<p><i>New venture legitimacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facing difficulties in building relationships with business stakeholders due to disability</li> <li>• Managing disability disclosure in different ways</li> <li>• Disability can provide legitimacy</li> </ul>	<p><i>The power to acquire legitimacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impairment visibility</li> <li>• Revealing-conforming strategy</li> <li>• Revealing-selecting strategy</li> <li>• Revealing-transforming strategy</li> <li>• Passing-conforming strategy</li> <li>• Back-stage tactics</li> <li>• Front-stage tactics</li> <li>• Emotion-focused tactics</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 7.1** Forthcoming article: Identity as a causal power: contextualising entrepreneurs' concerns

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### **Abstract**

We propose a critical realist-informed conception of entrepreneurial identity – a personal power to create a new venture. Although most people have the power to become an entrepreneur, not everyone can, or is motivated to, realise that potential. Other countervailing powers – personal, material and socio-cultural – can constrain, or discourage, action. Utilising a stratified ontology, we contextualise entrepreneurial identity within three analytical orders – natural, practical and social. We distinguish personal identity, the set of concerns in the three orders that motivate action, from social identity, the public roles we commit to. While entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying concerns that motivate commitment to an entrepreneurial role cannot be reduced to social interaction alone. The concept of internal conversation enables us to theorise the connection of entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour. We draw on qualitative data from three UK-based disabled entrepreneurs to demonstrate the value of our framework.

### **Keywords**

entrepreneurial identity, disability, entrepreneurial motivation, context, internal conversation

## Introduction

People's relationship to the world is one of 'concern' (Sayer, 2011). People do not simply think and act; we evaluate relationships, practices and events in relation to what we care about and what we perceive enables us to flourish, or holds us back. People, therefore, pursue particular roles and relationships to further their concerns (Archer, 2000). One of those concerns may be to accomplish entrepreneurial identity – defined as a personal power to create a new venture. Central to our conception of entrepreneurial identity are personal *concerns* that motivate action rather than the narrative *practices* that such concerns can generate (author ref). We draw upon qualitative data from a study of disabled entrepreneurs to support a novel conception of entrepreneurial identity that demonstrates the connections between motivation, context and behaviour.

In this paper, we adopt a critical realist ontology (Bhaskar, 2008) to 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 (author ref). This makes our conception of entrepreneurial identity very different to the constructionist approaches that define it in terms of narrative practice (Díaz García and Welter, 2013; Down, 2006). Narrative performances are quite distinct from the concern to establish oneself as an entrepreneur, or a particular type of entrepreneur, although enacting narrative performances might be one means by which entrepreneurial identity is accomplished in practice. Constructionist approaches, we argue, have reached an impasse in terms of their ability to explain why the entrepreneurs they study self-narrate as they do. This is a major gap in our understanding and levels of theorising.

The conceptual framework presented in this paper permits deeper explanations. As a causal power (Bhaskar, 2008), entrepreneurial identity is a potentiality, rather than a fixed characteristic of entrepreneurs determining behaviour (Chen et al., 1998), or a dynamic and fluid process (Leitch and Harrison, 2016) enacted through narrative and discursive practices (Anderson and Warren, 2011). Although most people have the power to become an entrepreneur not everyone can, or is motivated to, exercise and realise that potential because of various countervailing powers that enable or constrain, encourage or discourage, agents. Personal concerns that motivate venture creation are of course distinct from the power to create a new venture. Our specific focus is to illustrate how entrepreneurial identity is realised through the connection of motivation, context and behaviour.

Utilising a stratified and emergent ontology of personhood and identity (Archer, 2000; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010), our conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity has three 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 cannot be reduced to social relations alone. Second, we distinguish personal identity, a set of concerns in the three orders that makes each of us a unique person, from social identity, the public roles in which we can invest ourselves and be committed to. Being an entrepreneur is one such social identity. Third, we argue that personal concerns are necessarily embodied. People have properties – both powers and liabilities – by virtue of their variable embodiment that motivate them to attend to particular concerns, to perform particular practices and to commit to particular social roles.

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, 2009). Personal identity, however, is much broader 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 nature (for instance, resting when tired), with performative achievement in the material culture (for example, learning how to drive a car) and with self-worth in society (for example, working to support a family) (Archer, 2000). It is how we prioritise and balance our various concerns in the three orders that makes one a unique person, and a particular kind of entrepreneur.

Interview data from a UK study of disabled entrepreneurs is analysed using this conceptual framework, supporting our novel conception of entrepreneurial identity. We draw on original data from three entrepreneurs, Sarah, Garry and David, who have created new ventures following the onset of impairment or a long-term health condition in adulthood. Our specific focus is to illustrate how their concerns with physical well-being, performative achievement and self-worth, motivate venture creation and commitment to an entrepreneurial role. We employ Archer's (2000) concept of *internal conversation*, or self-talk, to theorise the linkages between entrepreneurial motivation, context and behaviour. We show how embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, enable as well as constrain personal capacities which, in turn, shape concerns in *all* three orders – natural, practical and social. The three sets of concerns have implications for entrepreneurial motivation and the capacity to commit to venture creation.

We start with a review of the entrepreneurial identity literature; identifying gaps related to the effects of personal powers, nature and material culture, on entrepreneurial motivation. Next, we present our theoretical framework, linking personal concerns that motivate venture creation, context and entrepreneurial behaviour. We then describe our methodological approach, and report findings that illustrate the value of our approach. The paper concludes by summarising our theoretical contributions and implications for future research.

### **A review and critique of prior research: identity constructed in society**

Most entrepreneurial identity studies reject the notion of a lone entrepreneur, isolated from the wider context. Studies highlight the role of the social environment in shaping entrepreneurial identity (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 the 'constructionist approach', two related streams of literature are dominant with varying emphases on the agency-structure relationship. 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 and cultural interaction. But what is missing from constructionist accounts are entrepreneurs' relations with the wider natural and practical context within which they operate as embodied agents (author ref). Conceptualising entrepreneurial identity solely as a narrative or discursive practice has serious limitations for researchers' capacity 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

behaviour; *and* (2) the 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 typically under-theorise the influence of nature and material culture 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 incentivising 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, arguing 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'. But in emphasising constructed 'meanings' as opposed to the actual embodied 'doings' of entrepreneurs, the authors under-play the material effects of place on the capacity to act and to form sought-after social identities, including being 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 and liabilities*

Constructionist studies rightly reject biological determinism associated with personality traits theories (Down and Warren, 2008; Reveley and Down, 2009). Studies in this tradition, however, reduce entrepreneurial identity to linguistic practices and under-theorise the effects of embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions (Author ref), on entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour. In contrast, our conception of entrepreneurial identity as *concerns* emergent from embodied properties, highlights that human embodiment shapes, but does not determine, behaviour. Equally, impairment effects can significantly impact on entrepreneurial motivation regardless of whether entrepreneurs narratively express their concerns with physical well-being to a researcher. All entrepreneurs are enabled and constrained, in different ways, by their embodied properties, both powers and liabilities.

Where the connection between motivation and behaviour is theorised, studies highlight that entrepreneurs' behaviours are shaped primarily through how they perceive themselves in relation to others (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Gruber and MacMillan, 2017). Although such studies assume an agent motivated to pursue venture creation, entrepreneurial motivation arises exclusively through social relations.

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 explicating personal identity and entrepreneurial identity as two distinct identity strata, enabling 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 in the three orders, the consideration to pursue 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 viewpoint (Archer, 2000; Bhaskar, 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 or a tendency 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 theorise the underlying causal powers – personal, material and socio-cultural – that generate becoming.

Entrepreneurial identity, we argue, is a particular kind of causal power – a 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 a human capacity to maintain or transform one's sense of self, as a unique person, in relation to the wider context 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 work and re-work their social identities, but only up to a point (Author ref).

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, both powers and liabilities, that shape identity formation and action (Archer, 2000; Smith, 2010). Particular impairments, for example, can be both enabling as well as constraining, depending on conditions and powers of nature, material culture and society influencing our action. Personal embodied powers and liabilities importantly 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 other 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 that people commit to in their life-time (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 can act flexibly in a role to accommodate their various concerns. Each person will personify an entrepreneurial role in different ways 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. Hence, personal identity importantly shapes individual motivation to pursue, and commit to, 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 may be regarded as 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 or ill-health (natural order) can motivate venture creation (social order). 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* is a 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 fully formed. That is when a person motivated to pursue venture creation commits to an entrepreneurial role and acts on it.

A traumatic event, like 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). The event can generate strong first-order emotions, such as 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 have changed their approach over time from ‘emotion-focused coping’ aimed at alleviating distress (for example, by drinking excessively), toward ‘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, the authors show that people experience significant emotional change during a career transition triggered by the onset of impairment.

As 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 situation in the world, 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 distinct stages of internal conversation that help explain 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 may change over time as we continually re-evaluate our situation.

## 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), the three 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 impairment that affects their mobility. Garry’s activities are also limited by hearing loss. All three had severe impairments in terms of having effects on their 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 selected entrepreneurs all provided rich commentaries on their internal conversations, including their concerns and emotional elaborations over time, supporting our theoretical assumptions.

**Table 1.** Entrepreneurs’ personal and business characteristics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<i>Sarah</i>	<i>Garry</i>	<i>David</i>
<b>Impairment(s)<sup>1</sup></b>	Degenerative spinal condition	Kidney failure Right leg amputation Hearing impairment	Chronic polyneuropathy Chronic fatigue syndrome
<b>Activity limitation(s)<sup>2</sup></b>	Mobility (walking & moving, sitting, standing)	Mobility (walking & moving, standing) Communication (receiving spoken messages)	Mobility (walking & moving, standing)
<b>Impairment stability</b>	Degenerative	Degenerative	Stable
<b>Age</b>	55	53	44
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	White British	White British
<b>Sector</b>	Specialist recruitment agency for disabled candidates	Specialist fitness training company for injured	Disability artist / creativity workshop organiser
<b>Year started</b>	2011	2006	2010

<b>Employment size</b>	4	14	1
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*Note:*

<sup>1</sup>Impairments are problems in body function or alterations in body structure – for example, paralysis or blindness (WHO/WB 2011).

<sup>2</sup>Activity limitations are difficulties in executing activities – for example, walking or communicating messages (WHO/WB 2011).

We focus on just three entrepreneurs to allow an in-depth analysis of the process of identity formation, as participants transitioned from entrepreneurial motivation to behaviour. This involves moving from (1) having particular concerns in the three orders; to (2) considering venture creation; to (3) committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role. The three entrepreneurs in the analysis 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. Our 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 organization 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. Because episodic memory is importantly tied to our bodies' experiences of the world, it tends to be a long-term memory and its recall has a quality of "reliving" of visual, kinesthetic and spatial impressions (Wilson, 2002). Participants' accounts of their 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).

#### *Data analysis*

We employed abductive and retroductive forms of inference (Danermark et al., 2002) to analyse the data. This involved a number of stages. Abduction is 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 develop theories about the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity, for example, conceptualising concerns that motivate venture creation, rather than simply presenting entrepreneurs' narrative practices. Retroduction is about asking what makes phenomena, such as entrepreneurial identity, possible objects 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.

Furthermore, our specific focus is on how personal concerns in the three orders – natural, practical and social – shape the motivation to pursue, and to commit to, venture creation. This conceptual framework facilitates our analysis, particularly in terms of interpreting three dimensions: first, participants' concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth in the three orders; 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. Interview transcripts were interpreted using our conceptual framework. For example, we interpreted negative employment experiences and the loss of dignity as concerns with self-worth in the social order that motivated career change. Experiences of pain or fatigue were interpreted as concerns with well-being in the natural order.

Our approach helps overcome some of the weaknesses in constructionist analyses of entrepreneurial identity. First, by emphasising narrative accounts, researchers risk reducing the study of entrepreneurial identity to descriptions of entrepreneurs' linguistic performances. Second, 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 view of identity as emergent and stratified encourages researchers to examine how the underlying causes, such as feelings of pain or frustration using artefacts, shape entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour. It encourages multi-level analyses that can explain the effects of the body, impaired or otherwise, on identity formation.

We used NVivo 11 to organise, code and analyse the interview transcript data. All coding was conducted by the lead author. 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 'dignity', 'family', 'attitudes to disability', 'having purpose in life' and 'making a difference' that the three entrepreneurs reported as important to them. We now turn to presenting the study findings.

### **Commitment to venture creation and the emergence of entrepreneurial identity**

Entrepreneurial identity presupposes an agent motivated to pursue new 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 business stakeholders – but commitment *is* necessary for entrepreneurial identity to emerge. Without commitment, entrepreneurial identity cannot emerge. This section elaborates on 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 or a long-term health condition as an event generating internal conversation, although of course disability was not the only influence on identity formation.

*Concerns in the three orders and consideration to pursue venture creation*

Embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions, can *both* enable and constrain human capacities to act in the world, with consequences for personal concerns in *all* three orders – natural, practical and social. This section elucidates how entrepreneurs' 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 in the natural order can encourage agents to consider an entrepreneurial role. Mobility difficulties, for instance, may prompt people to re-evaluate whether to stay in employment or to pursue alternative ways of working. Each participant reported concerns with physical well-being, such as coping with pain, fatigue, mobility difficulties and the unpredictable effects of impairment. Interviews with Sarah, Garry and David illustrate how the impairment or health condition constraints they face prompted them to consider career change and venture creation. 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 an employed management position following the onset of impairment.

“[I am] 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 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 anymore. I literally couldn't work like that.” [David]

Concerns with well-being not only influenced participants' working practices but also generated reflections on their various other concerns in relation to well-being. Consideration of new venture creation arose as each decided they could not continue in their careers. Although our specific focus is on the onset of impairment or ill-health, 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.

*Concerns with performative achievement.* Personal concerns with performative achievement in the practical order, pertaining to task ease or difficulty, can influence 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 the material culture. Sarah's spinal condition restricts her from sitting for long periods of time. Many organisational settings 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 hearing impairment has consequences for his ability to use a telephone and 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 physical limitations 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]

Interactions with the material culture of human-made artefacts can both enable and constrain working practices and generate consideration of venture creation. The emergence of entrepreneurial identity would likely have been impossible for the three entrepreneurs without the help of artefacts and technologies, or support from others. Access to the material culture of artefacts enabled them not only to get back into work, or 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 in the social order can crucially influence individual consideration to create a new venture. Judgements of approval or disapproval associated with social norms 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 interest to narrative practices rather than the concerns that generate such practices. The three entrepreneurs sought to create a venture as a way of realising their concerns pertaining to their social standing. Sarah’s prior experience in diversity training has been an impetus for creating a social enterprise. Garry’s extreme experience of ill-health prompted him to create a fitness training service to support people with injuries and impairments. David re-evaluated his career in the corporate sector to eventually become an artist working with young people.

“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 conscience whilst looking after myself...I’m a great believer that you can kind of give something back.” [David]

This section has illustrated that there is a necessary relation between personal embodied properties, concerns, and the 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 and health conditions. Concerns with performative achievement influenced the sought-after 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 the 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, or a long-term health condition, 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 commitment. Emotional elaboration drives internal conversations and helps us to prioritise our concerns and commit to particular social roles. Sarah, Garry and David all experienced 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. The three moments are indicative of three stages of the entrepreneurial motivation-behaviour continuum. We conceptualise these 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 this preliminary stage, 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, such as frustration or self-pity. Entrepreneurs reflected primarily on how disability powerfully disrupted their activities and relationships, reminiscent of Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) emotion-focused coping strategy aimed at alleviating distress. Sarah, Garry and David had to review their concerns with well-being and 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 their specific impairment effects around working life. Again, Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) problem-focused coping strategy, aimed at addressing the underlying problem, is evocative of Sarah's, Garry's and David's moments of deliberation.

"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 fully formed (Archer, 2000). Having deliberated over concerns with well-being and working life, this is the moment when Sarah, Garry and David commit 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 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 points. First, the onset of impairment or a long-term health condition, as harm to the body, can elicit strong first-order emotions, such as frustration or self-pity. Second, these emotions emergent from 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 livable 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 an unconditional commitment to his new venture.

## Conclusion and implications

This paper has sought to present a critical realist-informed (Archer, 2000, 2003; Bhaskar, 2008; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010) conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity, as a lens for theorising the connection between motivation, context and venture creation. Our conceptualisation is informed by two key features of realist ontology. First, we have theorised entrepreneurial identity as a causal power that exists independently of its narrative expression by entrepreneurs, or its conceptualisation by researchers. Second, we have utilised a stratified and 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. We have drawn on in-depth, qualitative interview data from three UK-based disabled entrepreneurs to demonstrate the value of our conceptual framework. The framework, however, is intended to be applicable to *all* entrepreneurs, whatever their embodied properties and powers.

We have conceptualised entrepreneurial identity as a particular kind of causal power: a personal power to create a new venture. As a causal power (Bhaskar, 2008), entrepreneurial identity is a potentiality or a tendency, rather than a fixed characteristic determining behaviour (Chen et al., 1998), or a dynamic and fluid process (Leitch and Harrison, 2016) enacted through narrative and discursive practices (Anderson and Warren, 2011). Causal powers 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. This is because of other countervailing powers, personal, material and socio-cultural, that constrain or discourage, action.

Utilising a stratified and emergent ontology of identity (Archer, 2000; Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014; Smith, 2010), we have contextualised entrepreneurial identity within three analytical orders: the natural, practical and social. We have distinguished two identity strata: personal identity, the set of concerns in the three orders that makes each of us a unique person; and social identity, the public role(s) that we invest ourselves in and commit to in society. Although entrepreneurial identity is a type of social identity, the underlying capacities and concerns that make its emergence possible cannot be reduced to social interaction alone. Our personal concerns are of course embodied, emergent from our variable powers and liabilities, such as particular impairments and health conditions, that shape what we care about and motivate the roles and relationships we commit to in society.

The concept of internal conversation (Archer, 2000) has been used to theorise the connection between entrepreneurial motivation, the natural, practical and social contexts, and venture creation in terms of three stages: reflecting on personal concerns in the three orders (discernment); considering venture creation as a way of prioritising some concerns over others (deliberation); and committing oneself to an entrepreneurial role (dedication). It is only at the stage of dedication that, having mulled over their various concerns, and having considered venture creation, our study participants acted on those concerns that matter to them most to become a *particular* kind of entrepreneur.

The paper has several theoretical implications that might inform future research on entrepreneurial identity. First, to explain the conditions that make the emergence and formation of entrepreneurial identity possible, researchers must explicitly theorise entrepreneurs' relations with nature and the material culture of artefacts *as well as* relations with the propositional culture of discourses. The powers of nature and material culture both enable and constrain, motivate and discourage, venture creation. Agents may



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 some concern in relation to nature. For instance, studies in the area of environmental entrepreneurship highlight the pursuit of activities for ecological benefit (e.g. York et al., 2016).

Second, to fully explain entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour, researchers cannot ignore personal embodied properties, such as particular impairments and health conditions. Constructionist studies under-theorise such personal powers, although they implicitly assume that agents must possess at least some powers to resist dominant enterprise discourses (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Mallett and Wapshott, 2015). All entrepreneurs are uniquely embodied and their particular embodiment has variable implications for their concerns in the three orders, the consideration of venture creation, and the capacity to commit to an entrepreneurial role. Our framework challenges the simplicity of the disabled / non-disabled binary and theorises entrepreneurs as an heterogeneous group in terms of embodied properties, powers and liabilities.

Third, our novel conceptualisation of entrepreneurial identity explicates the linkages between motivation, context and venture creation, contributing to recent debates on the entrepreneurial intention-behaviour link (e.g. Adam and Fayolle, 2016; Kolvereid, 2016). The constructionist literature tends to under-theorise these links, or implicitly assumes them. Studies that do theorise influences on entrepreneurial behaviour restrict their focus to motivations that arise from how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). We have drawn attention to three stages of internal conversation (Archer, 2000) to explain the transition from entrepreneurial motivation to behaviour: discernment (reflecting on concerns in the three orders); deliberation (considering venture creation) and dedication (commitment to an entrepreneurial role). We have shown that the onset of impairment or a long-term health condition can stimulate agential motivation to pursue venture creation and fuel the capacity to commit to an entrepreneurial role.

Our focus on just three entrepreneurs with particular impairments and health conditions has enabled us to conduct an in-depth analysis of identity formation over time. All entrepreneurs, however, are uniquely embodied and their particular embodied properties may generate different concerns with well-being, performative achievement and self-worth, with implications for entrepreneurial motivation and the type of venture created. Future studies could examine more explicitly how different embodied powers of persons shape the three sets of concerns in nature, the material culture and society in different ways, and motivate business exit as well as venture creation. Deeper examination of processes involved in balancing, prioritising and subordinating various concerns could offer new insights into how entrepreneurs resolve or reconcile conflicting concerns.

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### Appendix 8.1 Legitimacy-building strategies

<b>Legitimacy-building strategy</b>	<b>Entrepreneur pseudonym</b>	<b>Product / service offering</b>	<b>Impairment / health condition &amp; key activity limitation(s)</b>
<b><i>Revealing-conforming</i></b> <i>(people with visible impairments selling a mainstream product / service to a mainstream market)</i>	Neil	Manufacture/retail – wooden components for construction	Multiple Sclerosis – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	Fred	Public relations & marketing services	Stroke – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	George	Business consultancy – sustainable product design	Multiple Sclerosis – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	Philip	Business consultancy – small business / entrepreneurship	Parkinson’s Disease – tremor, mobility difficulties
	Dean	Business consultancy – social media and marketing	Spinal Cord Injury/Paraplegia – mobility difficulties
	Connie	Website development	Visual impairment – blindness
	Leonard	Outdoor leisure activities	Spina Bifida – mobility difficulties
	John	Internet services & digital marketing	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	Clara	Digital & print design	Muscular Dystrophy – mobility difficulties
	Fiona	Business consultancy – charity sector	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome – fatigue, mobility difficulties
Victoria	Business consultancy – business start-up / innovation	Visual impairment – loss of central vision	
<b><i>Revealing-selecting</i></b> <i>(people with visible impairments selling a mainstream or disability-related product / service to a disability market)</i>	Pauline	Community services for disabled & disadvantaged	Spina Bifida – mobility difficulties
	Colin	Training for people with learning difficulties	Stroke – mobility difficulties, speech impediment
	Akaash	Disability leadership charity	Multiple Epiphyseal Dysplasia – mobility difficulties
	Alan	Business consultancy for disabled people	Multiple Sclerosis – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	Peter	Manufacture & retail of mobility aid	Spinal Cord Injury/Quadriplegia – mobility difficulties
	Ben	Disability networking services	Friedreich’s Ataxia – mobility difficulties
	Michael	Manufacture & retail of wheelchair accessories	Multiple Sclerosis – fatigue, mobility difficulties
	Lewys	Manufacture/retail – mobility aid	Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy – mobility difficulties
	Dean	Retail – wheelchair clothing	Spinal Cord Injury/Paraplegia – mobility difficulties
<b><i>Revealing-transforming</i></b> <i>(people with visible impairments selling a disability-related product /</i>	Matthew	Disability risk management for organisational clients	Multiple conditions affecting learning and mobility
	Wesley	Accessibility consultancy for organisational clients	Bowel Cancer/Right leg amputee – mobility difficulties
	Samuel	Freelance writer on disability & difference	Spina Bifida – mobility difficulties
	James	Inspirational speaker / TV presenter / inventor	Bone Cancer/Upper limb impairment – mobility
	Lewys	Manufacture/retail – mobility aid	Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy – mobility difficulties

<i>service to a mainstream market, or to both mainstream and disability markets)</i>	Sarah	Recruitment service disabled candidates & employers	Progressive Spinal Condition – mobility difficulties
	David	Disability arts & education workshops for schools	Progressive Neurological Condition – fatigue, mobility
	Lisbeth	Recruitment service for disabled candidates & employers	Epilepsy – seizures
	Anne	Disability consultancy for individuals & organisations	Multiple conditions affecting vision and mobility
	Rachel	Accessibility consultancy for organisational clients	Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis – mobility difficulties
	Tamara	Rehabilitation services organisational clients	Visual impairment – loss of central vision
	Linda	Disability consultancy for individuals & organisations	Visual impairment – blindness
	Garry	Disability/injury fitness training for individuals & orgs.	Multiple conditions affecting hearing and mobility
	Lena	Disability awareness consultancy	Friedreich’s Ataxia – mobility difficulties
<b><i>Passing-conforming</i></b> <i>(people with less visible / invisible impairments selling a mainstream product / service to a mainstream market)</i>	Dominic	Consumer product design	Head injury – amnesia / communication difficulties
	Harry	Gardening services	Fibromyalgia/Depression – mobility difficulties
	Beverly	Crafts business – knitting patterns design	Arthritis/Migraine – mobility difficulties
	Tom	Landscaping / gardening services	Asperger Syndrome – communication difficulties
	Dara	Academic research / transcription services	Ehlers Danlos Syndrome – mobility difficulties
	Richard	Manufacture/retail – organic toiletries	Osteoarthritis – mobility difficulties
	Sophie	Dog walking	Emetophobia – social anxiety
	Gaby	Counselling	Exertion Migraine – sensitivity to light/sound
	Irene	HR consultancy	Bipolar II Disorder – episodes of depression
	Gill	Crafts business – yarn dying	Asperger Syndrome – communication difficulties
	Oliver	Manufacture/retail of salt	Left arm paralysis – mobility difficulties

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